

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL (VIEWING) SUB-COMMITTEE

10 September 2008

Attendance:

Councillors:

Jeffs (P)
Huxstep (Vice Chairman) (in the Chair) (P)

Barratt (P)
Baxter (P)
Busher (P)
Fall (P)

Johnston (P)
Lipscomb
Pearce (P)
Ruffell (P)
Tait

Deputy Members

Councillor Read (Standing Deputy for Councillor Lipscomb)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Cook

Officers in Attendance:

Mr J Hearn (Team Manager, DC East)
Mrs A Swain (Planning Officer)
Mr B Lynds (Planning and Projects Barrister)
Mr N Culhane (Highways Engineer)
Mr S Dunbar-Dempsey (Open Space Project Officer)

1. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Sub-Committee met at Arlebury Park, Alresford, where the Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 50 local residents and representatives of the applicant.

2. **LAND EAST OF NEW FARM ROAD, NEW FARM ROAD, ALRESFORD**
[\(Report PDC759, Item 4 refers\)](#)

The Chairman (Councillor Jeffs) declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of Item 4, as his wife was the Chair of the New Alresford Town Council Planning Committee, which had commented on the application. Councillor Jeffs confirmed that he had no involvement whatsoever in the Town Council's deliberations. In addition to this, and by way of personal explanation, Councillor Jeffs declared that he had predetermined the

application. He therefore withdrew from the body of the Committee, sat in the public gallery and did not speak or vote on this item.

Councillor Huxstep, as the Vice-Chairman, assumed the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

At its meeting on 20 August 2008, the Planning Development Control Committee had agreed to refer determination of the above application to the Viewing Sub-Committee, given the complexity of the application, and to assess in further detail issues regarding access, construction traffic, overlooking and the topography of the site.

In accordance with Members' wishes stated at the 20 August 2008 meeting, the Sub-Committee had been provided with a copy of the Local Plan Inspector's Report (2005) which related to the site. In summary, Mr Hearn explained that the Inspector had decided that the cutting did not warrant RT.1 designation. The Inspector had concluded that the site had some ecological value as indeed did most suburban gardens, but in terms of a wildlife habitat it was unexceptional. This had been confirmed by The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre. In recommending the deletion of RT.1 status, the Inspector stated that "part of the land could be utilised more effectively for residential use whilst retaining the significant trees at the top of the embankment."

Immediately prior to the public meeting, the Sub-Committee viewed the site from;

- the proposed access on Bridge Road,
- the process pedestrian/cycle and emergency vehicle access from the New Farm Road bridge,
- the rear garden of Barian, South Road,
- the rear garden of 2 South Close,
- the rear garden of 3 South Close,
- the rear garden of Glenholm, New Farm Road,
- the rear garden of Emmaus, New Farm Road,
- the rear garden of 25 De Lucy Avenue,
- the rear garden of 11 De Lucy Avenue, and
- the rear garden of 5 De Lucy Avenue.

Ward Councillors Cook and Jeffs (in accordance with his interest, as declared above) accompanied the Sub-Committee on this visit, together with officers.

At the public meeting, Mr Hearn introduced the application to the Sub-Committee.

He explained that the site comprised the former railway cutting between Bridge Road and New Farm Road, Alresford.

The cutting ran behind the properties served by De Lucy Avenue, South Close and South Road and had become substantially overgrown, with mature tree

growth along the tops of the banks which abutted the rear gardens of the surrounding roads.

At the Bridge Road end, the former bridge had been removed approximately 15 years ago and the cutting filled to facilitate a pair of houses on the west side and two pairs of houses on the east side which fronted each side of the road. To the east of these, beyond the newer houses, the filling of the cutting had been continued to provide an extension of the Perins School playing fields.

At the New Farm Road end, the bridge above the cutting was of sufficient width to allow only two vehicles to pass above the deep cutting, with little or no footpath provision.

The application sought to reconfigure the profile of the cutting by widening the cutting and, with the spoil, filling in the bottom to create a shallower cutting with steeper sides. At its deepest end, near New Farm Road, the floor of the cutting would be raised by 4 metres. The walls of the steepened cutting would be retained by "gabion" baskets, laid in ribbons above each other to form terraces. The gabions would be filled with chalk and faced with flint, with a top soil section to sustain planting which would cascade to the lower terrace.

Within this reconfigured cutting, the application proposed 24 dwellings that comprised 6x four bed detached houses, a terrace of 4x three bed townhouses, 6x two bed semi-detached houses and an apartment block that contained 2x three bed and 6x one bed apartments. The density of the scheme was 34.7 dwellings per hectare and the proposal included the provision of eight affordable housing units, which were all contained in the apartment block.

The ground floors (and basements) would be cut into northern bank and the four terraced houses would be cut into the south bank, concealing some of the visual depths of the buildings. The ground floors of the buildings had heavy masonry bases with a high thermal mass. The south facing windows of the buildings were tilted to maximise the benefit of direct natural sunlight.

The site was served by an access road leading down from Bridge Road, past the new houses on the previously infilled land. The access road passed along the south side of the cutting and continued up to New Farm Road where its use would be limited (by the provision of collapsible bollards) to pedestrians, cycles and emergency vehicles only. The application also proposed a walkway, on the east side of the New Farm Road bridge parapet, to join the footpaths each side of the bridge, which negated the current need for pedestrians to walk in the road to cross the bridge.

The application proposed a central area of open space. The terraces were set across the width of the cutting and the end dwelling on the south side included an undercroft, to allow the access road to continue westwards to the apartment block. The apartment block was also set across the width of the

cutting and separated from the New Farm Road frontage by another area of open space.

The detached and semi-detached houses and three of the town houses all had integral garages, whilst the apartments featured parking in the form of a basement car park for ten cars, plus cycle and bin storage areas.

Mr Hearn highlighted the proposed heights of the new development relative to the existing, surrounding buildings and explained that the constraints of the site had resulted in the proposed non-traditional design. It was the officers' view that a traditional design of housing, whilst reflecting the character of surrounding buildings, would have appeared incongruous in the steep sided cutting. However, the applicant had proposed the use of traditional materials, such as brick and timber cladding and slate or metal roofs.

Members also noted the environmental credentials of the scheme. Mr Hearn advised that it would have been environmentally non-sustainable and very disruptive to neighbours, in terms of lorry traffic, to fill the cutting. The applicant had submitted the innovative scheme which was one of the first in the District to comply with Level 4 on the Government's Code for Sustainable Homes.

In response to questions, Mr Hearn explained that the registered social landlord (Hyde Housing Association) had requested that all of the proposed eight affordable dwellings be provided together in the end apartment block, as these benefited from a shared central combined heat and power unit to provide electricity and heating. He continued that the proposed affordable housing apartments were located between the existing properties Glenholm and Emmaus, at the New Farm Road end of the cutting. At its closest, the apartment would be 1 metre from the boundary of Emmaus. However, officers considered this was acceptable given that this part of the block was only 2.5 metres from the top of the cutting to the eaves. Members noted that the height of the block was staggered and rose away from the boundary and that there was a condition requiring balcony screens to prevent overlooking.

Beneath the central open space area, the applicant had proposed a foul water storage tank, gravity fed from the development. This would be electronically pumped to the existing main sewer on Bridge Road. In response to concerns regarding drainage, Mr Hearn explained that the proposed access would be a permeable surface leading to a sustainable urban drainage system (SUDS).

Mr Hearn concluded his presentation by advising that it was the officers' recommendation that the scheme be approved, subject to the conditions set out in the Report and an additional condition, which required the applicant to submit their structural engineer's report regarding the stability of the site.

During the public participation element of the meeting, Mr Fleming (a local resident), Mrs Jeffs (New Alresford Town Council) and Councillor Cook (a Ward Member) spoke against the application. Mr Gardiner (the applicant's agent) spoke in support.

In summary, Mr Fleming highlighted the number of objections raised against the application from local residents; that the development was out of scale with the surrounding area; the design was inappropriate; that the apartment block would affect the character of the area; the detrimental effect on the wildlife habitat of the cutting; that the proposal would be intrusive to existing and new residents; and that there was no requirement for the development (given the availability of alternative sites in the area). He therefore recommended that the application be rejected.

Mrs Jeffs explained that, whilst the Town Council agreed that the site could be developed, it concurred with the Architects' Panel's finding that the application would be dark and damp. They questioned its sustainability, as they suggested that its location would result in more lighting and heating than normal. She suggested that this could have been alleviated if the buildings were elevated more above ground floor parking. The lack of light would also adversely effect small gardens to the extent that they would provide little amenity to future residents. It was the Town Council's view that the site could not sustain the number of proposed dwellings and that the area was prone to sustained power cuts, which were likely to affect the electric sewage pump. In conclusion, Mrs Jeffs highlighted the number of objections against the scheme and recommended that it be rejected by the Sub-Committee.

Councillor Cook (as a Ward Member) thanked the Sub-Committee for visiting the site and explained that previous applications to develop the site had been refused. He considered that the current application would harm the ecology of the site and questioned officers' reliance on the applicant's ecological survey. He also questioned the traffic survey and the sustainability of the proposal, given its location in a renowned frost pocket. He highlighted that most of the letters of support came from non-local addresses and raised concerns regarding residents' loss of privacy. He also reiterated the conclusions of the Architects' Panel in that the outlook of the development was poor, that the open spaces were too small, and that the heights appeared poorly planned.

In conclusion, Councillor Cook recommended that the application be refused and it was in any case premature, given the on-going Local Development Framework process.

Mr Gardiner emphasised the considerable amount of time the applicant had committed to overcoming the difficulties of the site. He explained that virtually all of the larger trees at the tops of the embankments would be retained and that the innovative design maximised solar gain. Mr Gardiner also highlighted that, for the most part, only the equivalent of a single storey of the new development would be visible from surrounding properties.

In response to the above comments, Mr Hearn explained that both Natural England and Hampshire County Council had considered the ecological issues of the application and had raised no objection.

He also stated that the comments of the Architects' Panel had surprised officers, as it appeared as though the consequences of their comments would require the land to be filled in. During debate, a Member raised concern about the applicant's calculations that the development would require no spoil to be transported into the site.

With regard to the sustainability of the site, Mr Hearn explained that raising the floor of the cutting by 4 metres would have effects regarding frost and the need to constantly light ground floor rooms. The Sub-Committee therefore agreed an additional condition regarding levels.

Members raised concerns regarding the amenity of the proposed dwellings to future residents. In response to these, Mr Hearn explained that, although part of the proposed private garden areas would be shaded during part of the day, the applicant had provided balconies which, in combination with the gardens, provided an acceptable level of private amenity space.

Members also noted that the views from the new development mostly comprised the surrounding landscaping of the gabion walls.

In response to comments, Mr Dunbar-Dempsey explained that the applicant had proposed a planting programme to mitigate any ecological losses connected with the clearance of the cutting floor. The vast majority of the significant trees at the tops of the cutting were to be retained and some of these were protected by tree preservation orders.

Following debate, Members agreed that the wording of the landscape conditions (Conditions 18 and 19) should be strengthened.

Mr Culhane stated that, in response to earlier comments from Hampshire County Council, the applicant had altered the proposed main vehicular access from New Farm Road to Bridge Road. Given this alteration, he explained that it would not be possible to sustain a highways reason for refusal. He added that the development was only likely to add an additional 20 vehicle movements in and out of the development per day. A review of accident survey data had demonstrated that there had been only one in Bridge Road in the last three years.

Members commented on the proposed provision of play areas and noted that, whilst the Council had not required their inclusion, there was adequate space and sufficient over-looking for a toddlers' play area on the open space to the west of the apartment block and a possibility of a further play area on the open space in the centre of the site, although this site could be compromised by the foul water tank beneath.

The Sub-Committee also noted that the roof material had yet to be decided. Mr Hearn stated that slate was aesthetically the better choice but could not be sourced locally. Metal roofs were more sustainable as they could be recycled.

During discussion, Members also raised concerns regarding light and noise pollution from the site.

Following their discussion, the Sub-Committee agreed the additional condition recommended by officers relating to the applicant's submission of their structural engineer's report. Furthermore, Members agreed additional conditions relating to levels and a strengthening of Conditions 13 (regarding construction traffic) and 18 and 19 (landscaping).

Members also agreed that, if approved, the Section 106 Legal Agreement should be amended to require the applicant to achieve Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

However, at the conclusion of debate, whilst Members appreciated the innovative design solutions that the applicant had proposed for the site, they considered that there were failings in scheme which could not be overcome by the above amendments. Members had considered that the application would lead to a cramped form of development with insufficient amenity space and which would result in the unacceptable loss of greenery in the cutting to the detriment of the character of the area.

Therefore the Sub-Committee agreed to not grant planning permission and delegated authority to the Head of Planning Control (in consultation with the Vice-Chairman) to agree detailed reasons for refusal, based on its views as set out above.

In addition the Sub-Committee also agreed the standard reasons as a consequence of refusing the application, relating to failure to provide public open space payment and the provision of affordable homes.

RESOLVED:

That delegated authority be granted to the Head of Planning Control (in consultation with the Vice-Chairman) to agree detailed reasons for refusal based on the Sub-Committee's concerns that:

- i) The proposed development would result in a cramped form of development with insufficient amenity space which would lead to an unacceptable loss of greenery in the cutting to the detriment to the character of the area.
- ii) The proposal is contrary to Policy RT4 of the Winchester District Local Plan Revised 2006 in that it fails to make adequate provision for public recreational open space to the required standard, and would therefore be detrimental to the amenities of the area.
- iii) The proposal is contrary to Policy H5 of the Winchester District Local Plan Review in that it fails to make adequate provision for Affordable Housing to the required standard.

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and concluded at 4.25pm.

Chairman