

Appendix 4

Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting of 31 August 2017

Members were shown photographs of the application site. The Planning Consultant advised that the application sought full planning permission for the redevelopment of the site, providing 100 dwellings and 568 square metres of commercial and community space. The site had been allocated for development under Policy LA29 of the LALP which set out a provision of up to 80 dwellings and 2,000 square metres of commercial floor space at the site. The scheme therefore proposed a significant uplift to the number of dwellings provided for in the LALP, and a significant reduction in the amount of commercial space. However, in respect of the latter, there was more attractive commercial space available elsewhere in the District (e.g. at the Discovery Park), with better connections to the public transport and highway networks.

The site contained a number of listed buildings which were in a significant state of disrepair. The renovation costs involved were considerable, and the applicant had gone to a lot of trouble to devise sensitive plans for these buildings. The new buildings were of a scale and form to be expected. The applicant had taken a structured approach to the layout of the development, with a less dense form of development as buildings moved away from the road and closer to the countryside.

KCC Highways had raised no objections. Concerns had been raised about visitor parking provision and how it related to the dwellings. Concerns had also been raised about the number of vehicular movements which were predicted to be around 60 two-way movements during peak hours. However, this was not a significant number in the context of Eastry which was a large and busy village.

A Viability Assessment had been submitted and independently assessed. The applicant had originally proposed to make no affordable housing contribution but, following advice from the Council's assessor that house values had been underestimated, and further negotiations, a revised offer of 10% affordable housing had been made, as well as contributions towards play space and SAMMS (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategies for protected areas).

In summary, the Committee was advised that the site, which had been allocated for development since 2002, would deliver 100 dwellings without the strategic infrastructure issues of other sites in the District. Whilst the level of affordable housing provision was disappointing, it was not surprising given the costs involved in renovating/repairing the listed buildings. Overall, the scheme was well designed, and it was considered that, on balance, the benefits outweighed any negative factors.

Councillor Gardner expressed concerns that 30% affordable housing would not be delivered, and conjectured that this was because the applicant had paid too much for the site. Granting planning permission would send out the wrong message to applicants that affordable housing did not matter. He proposed that the application should be refused on this basis. He also raised concerns about the advice received from Southern Water that there was a lack of capacity in the foul sewage network. Councillor Conolly questioned how much reliance could be placed upon the Viability Assessment which was now two years out of date.

The Chairman advised that the applicant would be required to submit drainage details which would then need to be approved by Southern Water. He also pointed out that some of the figures submitted with the Viability Assessment were now three years old. The Planning Consultant clarified that the Viability Assessment had been submitted the previous year and reviewed in October 2016. It was as a result of the Council's independent assessment that the absence of affordable housing provision had been challenged. He appreciated the concerns raised about drainage. Nevertheless, these could be addressed by conditions. Surface water would be disposed of by way of a sustainable drainage system which would not feed into the foul sewage network. In respect of foul sewage, it was for Southern Water to ensure that there was suitable off-site capacity.

In response to Councillor Butcher, the Planning Consultant clarified that the Chapel would be renovated for commercial or community use. There was a policy requirement for some commercial space at the site, and it was easier to convert the Chapel for commercial purposes than it was for residential. It was clarified that the conversion of The Range would be the most costly part of the scheme.

Councillor Bond expressed unease that Southern Water would not carry out any infrastructure upgrades until schemes were complete or nearly so. Schemes such as Whitfield often had an immediate detrimental impact on the drainage network. Further information was needed on this and the increased flood risk.

The Chairman wondered whether the sewerage infrastructure could be incorporated into a legally binding Section 106 agreement to ensure it was in place by a certain time. He also expressed reservations about the lack of any phasing plan to ensure that the renovation of the listed buildings was carried out. The renovation/preservation of these historic buildings was probably the most important reason for developing the site after all. Councillor Eddy agreed that the low level of affordable housing provision was disappointing, particularly in a semi-rural area like Eastry. He also supported proposals for further clarification on drainage, details of the proposed conservation of the listed buildings and Eastry Parish Council's views on additional traffic.

In response to Members' queries, the Planning Consultant confirmed that a phasing plan had been submitted which indicated that the renovation of the listed buildings would happen in the second phase of the development. A phasing plan could be incorporated into the Section 106 agreement, and could restrict occupation to the listed building works. Suitable trigger points would need to be considered. Following discussions with the developer, KCC Highways had indicated that it was satisfied with the traffic information provided. Requesting more information would therefore be unreasonable. The layout of the site had largely been dictated by the position and reinstatement of The Range building. In respect of drainage, it was not standard procedure to include such matters in a Section 106 agreement. Finally, a reduced time limit could be placed on the development to ensure that the Viability Assessment remained relevant and to achieve the early delivery of housing.

RESOLVED: That, notwithstanding the Officer's recommendation, Application No DOV/14/00240 be DEFERRED for the following information: (i) An updated Viability Assessment and an independent review of that Assessment; (ii) Clarification from Southern Water on whether there is an increased flood risk; (iii) Clarification from Southern Water regarding what drainage infrastructure is required; (iv) Details of the phasing plan for the listed buildings; and (v) Clarification on the design of the housing in front of the hospital and its association with that building.