

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 2ND JULY 2007

REPORT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MANAGER

(Author: Nick Moys, Principal Planning Officer (Major Projects))

SHIPDHAM: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, LAND OFF MILL ROAD

Applicant: BUCKFASTLEIGH LIMITED

Reference: 3PL/2006/1234/F

Summary – This report concerns a planning application for residential development in the village of Shipdham. It is recommended that the application is approved.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report concerns an application for full planning permission for residential development on land off Mill Road, Shipdham. The development proposed includes the erection of 24 dwellings, a new access and estate road, and associated landscaped open spaces. The development would include 3, 4 and 5 bedroom properties, in a range of sizes, and 7 units of affordable housing. Since its submission in August 2006, the application has been subject to amendments relating to proposed off-site highway works, the layout and design of the houses and landscape/ecological measures. The application is supported by a number of technical reports, including a Design & Access Statement, a Transport Assessment, a Contamination Report, a Landscape Impact Assessment, an Ecology Survey and Impact Assessment, and a Reptile, Amphibian and Water Vole Survey.

1.2 The application site is located close to the centre of the village of Shipdham. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character. The site extends to approximately 1.3 hectares in total, and includes an existing residential property, Molecatchers Cottage, and a larger area of vacant land. Historic uses of the site include gravel extraction, and use as a timber yard and as a tip for builders' waste. The site includes a number of preserved trees and adjoins the village conservation area.

1.3 Photographs and a video of the site and its surroundings will be available at the committee meeting.

2. KEY DECISION

2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

3.1 The following Council priorities are relevant to this report:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well planned place to live and work

4. PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 Outline planning permission was granted in 2004 for the erection of five dwellings on land to the rear of Molecatchers Cottage.

4.2 Planning permission was sought in January 2006 for the development of the site for 42 dwellings. This application was subsequently withdrawn.

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 Shipdham Parish Council has objected to the application due to concerns about highway safety. Particular concerns are raised about the junction of Mill Road and the A1075, and the narrowness of existing footways along Mill Road. Further comments are awaited on the applicant's latest proposals for off-site highway improvements.
- 5.2 The local member, Cllr Hewett, has expressed concerns about the traffic implications of the proposal, whilst acknowledging the strategic need to accommodate additional development in the village, and applauding the developer's willingness to amend his proposal to accommodate local concerns.
- 5.3 The Highway Authority has objected to the application on the ground that Mill Road is not suitable to cater for the additional traffic likely to be generated by the development because of the substandard nature of the junction with the A1075 and the limited footway provision. Further comments are awaited on the applicant's latest proposals for off-site highway improvements.
- 5.4 Norfolk County Council has raised a strategic planning objection to the application because of the scale of the development proposed. In the event that permission is granted, the County Council has requested that financial contributions be made to local education and library services.
- 5.5 The Environment Agency has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions requiring detailed proposals for surface water drainage and contaminated land to be submitted and agreed.
- 5.6 The Council's Tree & Countryside Officer has raised objections to the application due to concerns about the impact of the development on existing trees and the removal of a double banked and hedged track.
- 5.7 The Council's Contaminated Land Officer has raised no objection subject to conditions requiring further site investigation.
- 5.8 Recent proposals for the redevelopment of this site, including the current application, have engendered a good deal of local interest. At the time of writing, 14 letters of objection have been received, raising concerns principally about increased traffic, the scale of the development, wildlife impact, residential amenity and local drainage problems.

6. POLICY

- 6.1 The application site falls within the Settlement Boundary for Shipdham, as defined in the Breckland District Local Plan. Relevant Local Plan policies include Policies HOU.4, HOU.13, HOU.15, HOU.16, ENV.6, ENV.10, ENV.20 and TRA.5. The guidance set out in *Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance for Norfolk* is also relevant.
- 6.2 At a national level, policies set out in PPS 3 *Housing*, PPS 7 *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, PPS 9 and PPG 13 *Transport* are particularly relevant.

7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The principal issues raised by the applications concern: i) the extent to which the proposals would accord with local and national planning policy relating to housing development, ii) the likely impact of the development on the character of the area, iii) the effects of the development on local ecology, and iv) highway safety.
- 7.2 **Policy**

It is considered that the development of the site for housing accords in general terms with relevant local and national planning policy. The proposal would involve the redevelopment of a brownfield site for housing, in a location close to existing facilities and services, albeit at a density lower than that generally envisaged by PPS 3. This lower density of development can be justified in this instance, however, by the need to pay regard to local character and other physical constraints. Whilst Local Plan Policy HOU.4 permits only small scale developments in villages like Shipdham, it is considered that greater weight must be given to national policy, as set in PPS 3, and the need to accommodate new housing in appropriate locations. In this respect it should be noted that Shipdham has, during the course of the preparation of the LDF, been identified as a potential local service centre and therefore as being suitable for further development.

7.3 **Local character**

It is considered that the proposed development would generally relate well to the character and appearance of the area. Particular attention has been focussed by the developer on the design of the development. The development would include a wide range of house types, creating variety and visual interest. The development would be broadly traditional in design, with elements of local vernacular buildings incorporated. Within the centre of the development, the dwellings would be linked together to give visual continuity to street scenes and to create semi-private mews courtyards. These elements would help both to create a sense of place and reduce the visual impact of parking areas. A looser pattern of development is proposed around the outside of the site to reflect the patterns of existing development and to reduce the impact on neighbours. The proposed dwellings have been designed to minimise overlooking of neighbouring dwellings.

7.4 **Ecology**

In common with much vacant and overgrown brownfield land, the application site has considerable local ecological and wildlife interest. Although not subject to any wildlife designations, the site includes a number of mature trees, hedgerows and a stream with an associated area of wet scrub woodland.

7.5 The proposed development includes a number of measures designed to enhance the wildlife value of the site. These include the creation of managed wildlife area adjacent to the existing stream, and proposals for extensive new landscaping throughout the development. Existing trees around the perimeter of the site would be retained, and revisions to the site layout and the construction of roads have been made to reduce the impact of development on root protection areas. Further comments on these details are awaited from the Council's Tree & Countryside Officer. Great crested newts have been identified within the site, and proposals to mitigate the impact of the development on this protected species are currently awaited.

7.6 The development would have some negative impacts, however, most notably as a result of the removal of trees and hedgerows adjacent to an old track to make way for the new access road. In support of the proposal, the applicant suggests that this loss would be outweighed by the overall benefits of the development through the creation of a managed wildlife area and new landscaping. It is also argued that the access road has been positioned so as to make best use of the site and to meet highway requirements.

7.7 **Highway safety**

The proposed development has given rise to considerable concerns in relation to highway safety. Objections have been raised by the Parish Council, the Highway Authority and local residents. It is considered that in its present condition, Mill Road is not suitable to cater for any significant increase in traffic. Existing footways in the vicinity of the site are very narrow and the junction of Mill Road and the A1075 is narrow and has very limited visibility.

- 7.8 Extensive discussions and negotiations on this matter have taken place during the course of the current application, involving representatives of the developer, and the District, County and Parish Councils. In response to the concerns raised, proposals for off-site highway improvements have been submitted. These proposals include three new mini roundabout junctions, the widening of existing footways, traffic calming measures, improvements to local highway signage and the provision of 'keep clear' road markings adjacent to the village school. As an alternative to these improvements, the applicant has offered a financial contribution of up to £48k to be spent on local highway improvements. Provided that the necessary agreement can be reached with the County Council, and subject to the views of the Parish Council, these proposals appear to offer significant improvement to the local highway network. The views of the Highway Authority and the Parish Council on the proposed improvements are awaited and will be reported verbally.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Subject to the satisfactory resolution of the outstanding issues relating to off-site highway improvements and trees, it is recommended that planning permission be granted subject to conditions and a legal agreement requiring affordable housing, contributions to local services and the management of the proposed wildlife area.