

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 4TH FEBRUARY 2008

REPORT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MANAGER

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

WRETHAM: PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, STONEBRIDGE CAMP

Applicant: BERES DEVELOPMENTS LTD

Reference: 3PL/2007/1569/F

Summary – This report concerns a planning application for the residential development of a former military camp on the edge of Wretham. 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 at Stonebridge Camp, East Wretham. The development proposed includes the erection of 27 dwellings, a new access and estate road, and an area of public open space. The application is supported by a number of technical reports, including a Planning Statement, Sustainability Statement, Consultation Statement, Design & Access Statement, Ecological Survey, Flood Risk Assessment, Transport Assessment and Site Investigation Desk Study.
- 1.2** The application site is located on the southern edge of Stonebridge, East Wretham, and extends to approximately 1.6 hectares. The site was formerly used as a military camp, and includes a large number of now disused buildings and hardstandings. The site is adjoined to the north by established housing, and elsewhere by open countryside.
- 1.3** A draft section 106 agreement is currently under preparation. The agreement will include the following obligations: i) provision of 8 affordable dwellings, ii) provision of public open space and play area, and iii) financial contributions to schools and library services, traffic management proposals, improved bus stop facilities and improvements to the Village Hall.

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. CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1** Wretham Parish Council is supportive of the principle of developing the site for housing. Some concerns have been expressed in relation to access/parking and layout/design issues. Financial contributions to local services are requested.
- 4.2** The Highway Authority has raised concerns about the general accessibility of the site and the likely impact of additional turning movements on traffic flows on the A1075. However, no objection has been raised, subject to a number of minor layout revisions, and provided that financial contributions are made to traffic management measures on the A1075 (£15,000) and public transport facilities (£3,000).
- 4.3** Norfolk County Council has requested that financial contributions be made to local education (£65,864) and library (£1,350) services.
- 4.4** The Environment Agency has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions relating to surface water drainage.
- 4.5** Norfolk Landscape Archaeology has requested that a condition be attached to any permission granted requiring a programme of archaeological work.
- 4.6** Natural England has asked that further information be provided in relation to the use of the site by bats.
- 4.7** Norfolk Police have made comments on the layout of the proposed car parking areas.
- 4.8** No representations have been received from members of the public in relation to the application. Prior to the submission of the application, the views of the Parish Council and local residents were sought at a series of public meetings/presentations. The response to this consultation has generally been positive, with a preference being expressed for a relatively low density scheme incorporating affordable housing and a central open space.

5. POLICY

- 5.1** The application site falls outside the Settlement Boundary for Stonebridge, as defined in the Breckland District Local Plan. Relevant 'saved' Local Plan policies include Policies HOU.4, HOU.6, REC.2, ENV.6 and TRA.5.
- 5.2** At a national level, policies set out in PPS 3 *Housing*, PPS 7 *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, PPS 9 *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*, and PPG 13 *Transport* are particular relevant.
- 5.3** At the regional level, the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy contains a number of regional policies relevant to the proposal. These policies include SS1, H1, H3, and ENV7.

6. ASSESSMENT

6.1 The principal issues raised by the application concern: i) the extent to which the development would accord with relevant planning policy relating to housing development in rural areas, and ii) the impact of the development on the character of the area.

6.2 Policy

6.3 The application site lies outside the Settlement Boundary for Wretham, as defined in the Local Plan, and accordingly the proposal would conflict with local and national planning policies which generally seek to resist new housing developments outside towns and villages. Notwithstanding this conflict, a number of factors would support some form of development of this site. These factors are considered in more detail below.

6.4 National policy, as set out in PPS 3, prioritises the re-use of brownfield site, particularly those containing vacant or derelict buildings and that were previously publicly owned. The site is previously developed, and although outside the defined development boundary, is well related physically to built up form of village. The site was previously identified for commercial use in a Development Brief approved by the Council. No suitable commercial uses have been forthcoming, despite efforts by the applicants to market the land for such purposes.

6.5 PPS 3 also requires local authorities to maintain at least a 5 year supply of deliverable housing land. Currently the supply of housing land in Breckland falls below this target. The proposed development would help to address to some extent the current shortfall.

6.6 Whilst the issues of land supply and brownfield redevelopment generally support the principle of housing development here, the situation in relation to policy on sustainable development is less clear. PPS 3 stresses the importance of ensuring that new housing sites meet various criteria relating to transport links, building communities and access to jobs and services. PPS 7 further qualifies this by indicating that only small scale development will normally be appropriate in rural settlements with limited services.

6.7 The current proposal for 27 dwellings exceeds what can reasonably be considered to be small scale development in the context of the existing settlement. To this extent, the proposal would conflict with national policy. However, in support of the application, it is argued that a smaller scheme would not be viable, given the costs associated with redeveloping brownfield site of this sort and the community benefits being offered. A financial breakdown submitted with the application appears to support this contention.

- 6.8** A number of community benefits are proposed to help to create a more sustainable development, including affordable housing, public open space, transport improvements and a contribution towards improvements to the Village Hall. It is also proposed that the development would be constructed to a high environmental standard (Sustainable Homes Code Level 4). These elements of the proposal would offset to some extent the lack of services available locally, and, given the level of local support for the development, suggest that the proposal has the potential to help enhance the local community, another important measure of sustainability in PPS 3.
- 6.9** The accessibility of the site should also be considered in the context of PPS7 and PPG13. Wretham is served twice daily by Konnectbus Service 11A which provides a commuter (journey to work) service to the towns of Thetford and Watton. National Cycle Route 13 also passes the site and provides the opportunity to link into Thetford. Within Wretham there are a limited number of services which support the community, including a public house and a well-used village hall.
- 6.10** Overall, it is considered that the arguments for and against the proposal in policy terms are finely balanced. On one hand, the location of the site outside the Settlement Boundary and the scale of the development give rise to conflicts with policy. However, the scheme would meet many of the objectives of national policy in respect of the re-use of brownfield land, housing land supply, high quality design, sustainable construction and building communities. Given the level of local support for the development, it is considered that the balance of arguments falls in favour of the development. Whilst there is some risk of a precedent being set for other developments outside allocated areas, it is considered the combination of factors present here are unlikely to be repeated.
- 6.11 Local character**
- 6.12** The application site occupies prominent location on the edge of the village. Although the land has does benefit from some existing screening, in its present disused condition, it does not make a positive contribution to the appearance of the locality. Whilst the site has been well maintained by the current owners, in the absence of a viable use, it is likely that its condition will deteriorate over time. The proposed development offers an opportunity to enhance the character of the area.
- 6.13** It is considered that the proposed development has been sensitively designed, taking into account the rural character of the area and edge of village location. Existing boundary screening would be retained, and a new landscaped open space would be created along the site frontage. The proposed houses would be grouped around a central green space, giving the scheme a strong visual identity, as well as providing a local recreational facility. The scheme would have a spacious character, with a relatively low density of 17 DPH. The proposed houses would be simple in form and of traditional design, using external materials to reflect local character and create a varied street scene. The new estate road would be designed to reflect the rural situation of the site.

6.14 Other issues

6.15 The Highway Authority has raised some concerns about the accessibility of the site and the impact of additional traffic. However, given the previous use of the site, it is considered that it would be difficult to substantiate an objection on this basis. Visibility splays would be provided in accordance with normal standards. Parking provision has been increased in the light of concerns raised by the Highway Authority and Parish Council. Financial contributions have been offered towards traffic management measures through the village and improvements to public transport facilities.

6.16 In response to concerns raised by Natural England, additional wildlife surveys have been undertaken.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That planning permission is granted, subject to:

- i. conditions relating to external materials, access and parking, landscaping and boundary treatment, archaeology, drainage, site investigation and wildlife mitigation; and
- ii. a section 106 agreement requiring affordable housing, public open space, sustainable construction, and financial contributions towards schools, libraries, transport initiatives and improvements to the Village Hall.