

Date: 20th March 2019
Reference: 019-22

By email: planningpolicy@scambbs.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

LAND AT FEN DITTON: REPRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF [REDACTED]

Introduction

This Statement has been prepared by Cheffins on behalf of [REDACTED] to promote land on the west side of Ditton Lane at Fen Ditton in the Council's 'Call for Sites' consultation. This is with a view to securing an allocation for residential and associated development in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The location of the site is shown on the site location plan, which accompanies this representation.

Land at Fen Ditton owned by [REDACTED] has previously been promoted and considered in the District Councils past SHLAA exercise. It is important to note that the land that is now being promoted has been reduced considerably in extent and a much lower level of development is now proposed, partly in response to the Councils 2013 assessment conclusions.

Background

Although the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan has only recently been adopted (September 2018), we believe there have been several changing planning circumstances since the preparatory and assessment work which informed the current Plan, including Green Belt review work. Those changing circumstances which particularly influence north east Cambridge are significant and include:

- Publication of the joint North East Cambridge Area Action Plan by the District and City Councils;
- Government funding for the relocating the Waste Water Treatment Works in north Cambridge;
- Opening of the Cambridge North railway station and extension of the guided busway;
- Upgrading of the A14 and planned improvements to the A10;
- Progression of the Chisolm Trail – a long distance cycling/pedestrian route; and
- Planning proposals for Cambridge East – north of Newmarket Road – 'Wing' for 1,300 dwellings and associated facilities.

Current Development Strategy

The current development strategy was one which evolved through sequential consideration of:

- I. Focussing growth at Cambridge as the most sustainable location in the district;
- II. Then considering 'Edge of Cambridge' locations, including some inner Green Belt release sites;
- III. New settlements (Northstowe, Waterbeach, Bourne Airfield etc); and
- IV. Some more rural development at key rural centres.

We support that strategy and believe it remains valid today. It is for this reason, combined with the changing circumstances affecting North East Cambridge described above, that we consider Fen Ditton to be an appropriate location for growth based on further review of the inner Green Belt boundary.

It is very clear that North East Cambridge is changing and will continue to change as an area of focussed growth for some years ahead. We believe this suggested site can successfully contribute to that growth via the next local plan period.

Partners:

M W Hamilton Ltd, E W Lee Ltd, J G L Low Ltd, M Wolshe Ltd, P G M Cloydon Ltd, N R Harris Ltd, W King Ltd, S J Lewis Ltd, C M B Ashton Ltd,
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Summary of Site Proposal

Our clients are proposing a site located north of Fen Ditton High Street, west of Horningsea Road/Ditton Road and east of Green End.

The site amounts to some 17ha of agricultural land as shown on the enclosed Site Location Plan.

We suggest that site can accommodate some 250 dwellings including affordable housing and a self-build/custom build zone. Such a development would include associated public open space, landscaping, access roads, footpaths & cycleways and local services/facilities as appropriate. What is now proposed is significantly different to that which was considered by the 2013 SHLAA exercise.

The development area could potentially include a new primary school/nursery site.

Existing Planning Status

The site currently lies within the Cambridge Green Belt as defined in the Adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan.

A larger potential development site, including additional land east of Horningsea Road, was actively promoted through the local plan process leading to the currently adopted Local Plan over the period 2012 to 2016. This promotion is now concerned only with a smaller potential development area focussing on land west of Horningsea Road only. [REDACTED] also includes an extensive area of arable land east of Horningsea Road (which does not form a part of this promotion).

Green Belt

Paragraph 163 of the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered through the preparation or updating of Local Plans and therefore the principle of allocating the site for residential development through reviewing current Green Belt boundaries as a part of this process is acceptable.

We do not consider that development at the site would have significant impact on the openness of the wider Green Belt or the reasons for including the site within it. The Council should be mindful that development at the site would be relatively minor in scale and extent and would be contained within the landform defined by the A14 to the north. Therefore, a modest level development would not affect the overall openness or value of the wider Green Belt in this location. It is also the case that much land within the area can be retained as Green Belt including land north of the promotion site (i.e. between it and the A14) and the River Cam corridor.

The land we suggest removing from the Green Belt would be limited to a location lying in between the High Street (to the south), Green End (to the west), Horningsea Road (to the east) and an existing east-west agricultural track (to the north). All of those are firm physical features on the ground at present.

Views over the site would not be significantly changed once the site was developed – this would be particularly so if northern periphery of the site was subject to landscaping and generous public open space provision. Overall, adverse landscape impacts can be suitably controlled through:

- Appropriate master planning and housing density;
- Height and form of any housing;
- Generous public open space provision;
- Open buffer zones between Fen Ditton and new development areas;

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- Strategic landscaping in green corridors, within the site and on the periphery; and
- Sensitive surface water drainage strategy embracing SUDs.

Whilst we appreciate that national and local planning policies encourage the use of brownfield sites, it is inevitable that greenfield sites will be required for residential development to meet the Council's housing requirement over the Plan period. Given the limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the highly sustainable location of the site, we consider that the allocation of the site for residential development is appropriate.

Section C: Land ownership

The site forms a small part of [REDACTED] and is in the freehold ownership of [REDACTED]

Section D: Site details

The site is located in the Cambridge Green Belt and any allocation for residential development at the site would require removing the site from the Green Belt, possibly as part of wider expansion area or as a stand-alone Green Belt exclusion to specifically facilitate a modest level of residential growth.



Section E: Recent and current land uses

The site comprises tenanted agricultural land in arable use. One small field (south eastern part) is a small paddock.

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Section F: Proposed future uses

The site is being promoted for residential-led development which would inevitably include land for access/roads, landscaping and public open space.

The benefits of the proposed development are wide-ranging and will promote the social, economic and environmental objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework. The site is located in a sustainable location, adjacent to existing developed areas and close to existing and planned major developments in the North East Cambridge area.

Site capacity

Assuming a 60% coverage of the gross site area (17ha) and a maximum of 25dph we estimate, at this stage, that the site could potentially accommodate around 250 dwellings. We have suggested a modest density due to the nature of the adjacent Fen Ditton settlement.

We suggest that any planning policy which relates to residential development at the site makes it clear that this is an indicative capacity and that this capacity should be informed by masterplanning, landscape, visual impact and transport assessment exercises.

Section G: Suitability – Site features and constraints

In our view, and putting aside the current Green Belt designation, there are no *significant* constraints at the site, which could prevent residential development at the site being delivered. We have outlined other constraints which will need to be considered when developing the site.

Access

Vehicular access to/from the site would be taken from Horningsea Road where there are a number of options given the extensive site road frontage. The site frontage is sufficiently long to allow more than one vehicular access point and multiple pedestrian/cycleway connections.

New footpath and cycleway connections would be provided, particularly a link to the Chisolm Trail. These connections would allow dedicated, safe and easy access to local community facilities and beyond, into Cambridge for employment, education and leisure/recreational purposes.

Biodiversity

The site comprises arable land and in itself, does not appear to have any high biodiversity value with the possible exception of boundary hedgerows and trees. This would be subject to an assessment as part of any planning application, particularly the hedgerows, and any development at the site would have the potential to incorporate potentially significant natural capital off-setting to compensate for local off-site losses through other developments.

Contaminated land

The site comprises greenfield land, in agricultural use, which is very unlikely to be contaminated.

Flood risk and drainage

The site is in Flood Zone 1, which is at the lowest risk of flooding. As such, residential development is appropriate in this location. Any planning application would be accompanied by a detailed Surface

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Water Drainage Strategy which would outline how surface and foul water would be managed. The topography of the site indicates that surface water would drain towards the west and north of the site and thence to the River Cam to the west.

The provision of an appropriate SUDs strategy has the potential to introduce biodiversity, landscape and recreational benefits to this area. The site lends itself to a Green Infrastructure approach incorporating multi-functional green corridors.

Heritage

The site itself does not include any heritage assets, including listed buildings or conservation areas, which could restrict the scope and extent of development at the site.

It is acknowledged that the site lies adjacent to the Fen Ditton Conservation Area which includes a number of listed buildings. The essential rural character of the Conservation Area can be maintained, in our opinion, through sensitive masterplanning, landscape enhancements and appropriate buffer zones in some areas. Land in between the village Conservation Area and the proposed development site can be kept permanently open through appropriate uses.

Indeed, at present there is already some land uses which can continue to act as a buffer zone. For example, the Parish Council own a recreation ground (donated to it by the █████ in the past) immediately south west of the proposed development area which already forms a natural buffer. In addition, the landholding promoted includes a small paddock at the south east corner and this too could form a natural buffer zone between new development and Fen Ditton village.

Landscape impact

By restricting the site to the area now proposed and leaving a significant area between the site and the A14 to the north we do not believe this would result in significant adverse landscape impacts. This is particularly the case when combined with a sensitive master planning approach.

All of the land east of Horningsea Road would remain undeveloped under this concept thereby protecting the rural landscape character of this zone, including wider views.

Services and utilities

The site is located adjacent to existing roads serving Fen Ditton and north Cambridge generally and it is considered that connections can be made to existing services – including electricity, gas, telecommunications and water. Localised network improvements may be required.

Public rights of way

There are no public rights of way on the site.

Topography

The site is generally flat with no significant changes in levels. This means that development would not be prevented in whole or part.

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Section H: Availability

The site is within the sole ownership of [REDACTED] who is actively promoting it for residential development. Therefore, it is available for development now.

We consider that the Fen Ditton area, and the North Cambridge area generally, is an attractive location which residents and house purchasers will favour particularly given the nature of the area and planned changes nearby which will bring enhanced local services and transport means. As such, we consider that there would be healthy occupier demand to locate at this site.

We are not aware of any legal constraints which could delay or prohibit development on the site.

Section I: Deliverability

The site is within the sole ownership of the promoter and it is considered that development at the site could be delivered within five to ten years subject to scale. The site is greenfield land and there are no significant constraints at the site which could prohibit delivery within this period.

Section J: Viability

Given the character and nature of the site, we do not consider that there would be any issues associated with viability or deliverability of the site.

Section K: Supporting evidence

We have attached a Site Location Plan to this representation, which we trust will inform the assessment of the site's suitability for development.

Response to Previous Assessments

The 2013 SHLAA Assessment considered this site as Site SC159 covering an area of 17.19 ha. Putting aside the current Green Belt designation the disadvantages of the site expressed at that time included:

- The scale of development in relation to Fen Ditton village;
- Effect on the rural character of the landscape;
- Effect on views to Cambridge from the north;
- Potential merging of communities; and
- Impacts on Fen Ditton heritage assets.

In response to those points we would emphasise that:

- The scale of development and its area extent has been significantly reduced;
- Rural impacts can be addressed through a sensitive 'character area' approach to masterplanning;
- Where appropriate, view corridors can be maintained through new development areas. Such areas can form multi-use space for recreational/pedestrian routes, landscape features and SUDs facilities;
- It is not envisaged that the new development area would merge with the existing community in built form terms and thus we do not see this as problematic; and
- Existing heritage assets and their settings can be protected through, for example:
 - Bold approach to strategic landscaping;

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- o Clear permanent use of open buffer land (both existing and proposed open land) between existing and new development;
- o Sympathetic master planning and architectural design for new proximate 'edge' development; and
- o Appropriate housing density and building heights for the new built 'edge'.

The situation here is very similar to the allocation of land at Northstowe (>5,000 dwellings) directly adjacent to the Longstanton Conservation Area. The planning context is shaped by a public open space buffer zone between the two areas to protect the heritage assets. The potential impacts of Northstowe would be far greater than a modest residential development of 250 houses at this promotion site. There is no reason why a similar approach to Northstowe/Longstanton cannot be adopted at Fen Ditton.

Conclusion

In summary, we believe that this an appropriate location for growth because:

- NE Cambridge is a clear focus for change, growth and new investment. Land at Fen Ditton can make a further contribution to this area;
- The 'Edge of Cambridge' has been recognised as the second most sustainable option for further growth and we therefore consider that the authorities should re-examine the potential for Inner Green Belt release on a modest scale;
- This area is very well connected with good transport links (existing and proposed) embracing road access, bus services and pedestrian/cycleway links;
- The site itself is relatively constraint-free in our opinion. Site-specific matters, including landscape and heritage impacts, can be appropriately addressed through a sensitive approach to masterplanning and land use; and
- The site is in single ownership and we believe it is suitable, available and deliverable.

We consider that the site is suitable for a modest scale residential development that can be delivered promptly. We therefore commend this representation to the Council.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to discuss this representation further.

Yours faithfully



Ian Smith
Director of Planning



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