

UTT/13/1190/OP (TAKELEY)

(Referred to Committee by Cllr Jones. Reason: Local interests believe that officers may not give sufficient weight to the community benefits from the application)

PROPOSAL: **Erection of 4 no. dwellings with all matters reserved**

LOCATION: **Land adj Belstock, Cricketfield Lane, Molehill Green, Takeley**

APPLICANT: **Mr A Salmon**

AGENT: **Mr James Salmon**

GRID REFERENCE: **TL 496 - 819**

EXPIRY DATE: **15 July 2013**

CASE OFFICER: **Miss S Wellard**

1. NOTATION

1.1 Outside Development Limits, Countryside Protection Zone

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

2.1 This application relates to an area of land of 0.19 hectares located within the village of Molehill Green. The land is currently vacant, although records appear to indicate that it has previously been used as allotment gardens. The land is accessed from Cricketfield Lane, a single unmade track which provides access to the cricket ground to the east of the plot. There is a single dwelling also accessed off this track called Bellstock. There are dwellings to the west of the plot which line Broxted Road, and dwellings to the south which are accessed from School Lane. There is agricultural land to the north of the site.

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 This is an outline application for the erection of four detached dwellings with all matters reserved.

3.2 Design and Access Statement says that the dwellings will be of differing sizes, from a small 1 ½ storey dwelling adjacent to Belstock up to two storeys in an arcadia style. The dwellings are anticipated to be below 8 meters in height. The scheme would provide 2 x 2 bed and 2 x 3 bed dwellings.

3.3 The site would be accessed from Cricketfield Lane which is 3.8m in width. A new private drive to serve the dwellings would be located off Cricketfield Lane into the site and a turning head provided to enable vehicles to turn.

3.4 The area of land hatched in blue on the location plan will provide parking provision for use by the adjacent cricket club. It would be laid out providing space for 20 vehicles and would be surfaced appropriately.

4. APPLICANT'S CASE

- 4.1 Design and Access Statement, dated May 2013 – Whilst all matters are reserved gives a brief description of the anticipated layout, scale and appearance of the proposed dwellings, landscaping and access.
- 4.2 Supporting Planning Statement, dated May 2013 - A comprehensive Planning Statement has been submitted with the application. This provides details of the site and its context, the proposed dwellings, relevant planning policies including the NPPF, the sustainability of the site and village services, overview of relevant planning permission that have been granted in Uttlesford, and the relevance of the five year land supply.
- 4.3 Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Preliminary Ecological Appraisal), dated May 2013 – The survey identified that the site comprises a field (partial short mown sward) that is used for car parking. Given the recent use of the site, and context of its location immediately adjacent to residential gardens, a cricket green and arable land, the site is not considered to present a notable or significant variety of habitats, and therefore presents limited potential to provide habitat for protected species. The site is not considered to present habitat for protected species and no further survey works to determine presence/absence are considered necessary nor appropriate in this instance.

5. RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

- 5.1 DUN/0106/72 Site for dwelling. Refused 19.06.1972
- 5.2 UTT/0453/80 Outline application for one three bedroom detached bungalow and garage. Refused 02.06.1980

6. POLICIES

6.1 National Policies

- National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

6.2 Uttlesford District Local Plan 2005

- Policy S8 Countryside Protection Zone
- Policy H3 Infilling with new houses
- Policy H10 Housing Mix
- Policy GEN2 Design
- Policy GEN1 Access
- Policy GEN8 Vehicle Parking Standards
- Policy GEN7 Nature Conservation

7. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS

- 7.1 No comments received

8. CONSULTATIONS

Thames Water

- 8.1 With regard to surface water drainage it is the responsibility of a developer to make proper provision for drainage to ground, water courses or a suitable sewer. Thames Water would advise that with regard to sewerage infrastructure we would not have any objection to the above planning application.

Essex County Council Highways Authority

- 8.2 The Highway Authority has no objections to this proposal as it is not contrary to the relevant transportation policies contained within the Highway Authority's Development Management Policies, adopted as County Council Supplementary Guidance in February 2011 and Uttlesford Local Plan Policy GEN1.

Natural England

- 8.3 This application falls within or is in close proximity to Elsenham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, given the nature and scale of this proposal, Natural England is satisfied that there is not likely to be an adverse effect on this site as a result of the proposal being carried out in strict accordance with the details of the application as submitted. We therefore advise your authority that this SSSI does not represent a constraint in determining this application. Aside from the comments on designated sites above, we would expect the LPA to assess and consider the other possible impacts resulting from this proposal on protected species, local wildlife sites, local landscape, biodiversity enhancements

8.4 Airside OPS Limited

The proposed development has been examined from an aerodrome safeguarding perspective and does not conflict with safeguarding criteria. We therefore have no objection to this proposal. We would, however, make the following observation: The proposed development is situated in a location that was within the expanded airport boundary for the development of a second runway in accordance with the extant Government White Paper 'The Future of Air Transport' (2003). Although BAA's planning applications for the second runway and associated development were withdrawn following the Coalition Government's decision to withdraw the previous policy support for further runway development, the Government has since set up the Airports Commission (AC) to inform a review of government aviation policy, including the need for and location of additional runway capacity to serve London and the South East. At the end of this year, if the AC considers that additional runway capacity is required, it will short list the most credible options for further studies. This could well include options for additional runway capacity at Stansted. The prospect that the Government will support further runway development at Stansted in the near future cannot therefore be discounted and if that were the case the development site could be within the land required for further development. In conclusion, if permission were to be granted, we consider that an informative should be added to the permission drawing attention to the Government's review of aviation policy and the prospect that further development at Stansted could be supported which could directly or indirectly affect the application site.

8.5 Affinity Water

You should be aware that the proposed development site is located within an Environment Agency defined groundwater Source Protection Zone corresponding to the Causeway Pumping Station. This is a public water supply, comprising a number of Chalk abstraction boreholes, operated by Affinity Water Ltd. The construction works and operation of the proposed development site should be done in accordance with the relevant British Standards and Best Management Practices, thereby significantly reducing the groundwater pollution risk. It should be noted that the construction works may exacerbate any existing pollution. If any pollution is found at the site then the appropriate monitoring and remediation methods will need to be undertaken.

9. REPRESENTATIONS

9.1 The occupiers of 25 neighbouring residential properties notified via letter. Consultation period ended 12 June 2013.

2 letters of support received;

- Mole Hill Green Cricket Club supports this application as it will lead to the provision of land for car parking for the Cricket Club. This is much needed to secure the future of the club as we currently only have an informal arrangement with the landowner to park on the land next to "Belstock". The proposed housing will be of benefit to the area which has been blighted with threat of airport expansion for many years. The benefits of the proposals will be significant to the Cricket Club and the area as a whole and should in our opinion be approved.

9.2 Uttlesford Area Access Group - The Design and Access Statement should clearly indicate that the houses will be built to meet the Lifetime Homes Standard.

10. APPRAISAL

The issues to consider in the determination of the application are:

- A The principle of the development of this site (ULP Policy S8, H3, NPPF);
- B Access to the site (ULP Policy GEN1);
- C Vehicle Parking Standards (ULP Policy GEN8 and ECC Parking Standards);
- D Design (ULP Policy GEN2 & SPD Accessible Homes and Playspace);
- E Nature Conservation (ULP Policy GEN7)

A The principle of the development of this site

10.1 The site is located outside of any development limits as defined within the Local Plan, but within the Countryside Protection Zone (CPZ) surrounding Stansted Airport. Local Plan Policy S8 relates to the CPZ and specifies that planning permission will only be granted for development that is required to take place there or is appropriate to a rural area and that there will be strict control on new development. In addition, if new buildings or uses would promote coalescence between the airport and existing development in the countryside or it would adversely affect the open characteristics of the zone, development will not be permitted.

10.2 Whilst there is a strong local policy objection against residential development in the countryside, the Council is currently unable to demonstrate a five year land supply of deliverable sites for residential development. In such circumstances the NPPF specifies that "Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites".

10.3 Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states;
'Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date (permission should be granted) unless;

- *Any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against policies in this Framework taken as a whole, or*
- *Specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.'*

10.4 The NPPF encourages sustainable development.

- 10.5 Molehill Green is considered to be sustainable in terms of its location. The applicant has provided a comprehensive supporting statement detailing public transportation links and details of services and facilities in the nearby area. The site is within walking distance to the centre of the village where there are shops and services. There are also bus stops within walking distance to enable travel to neighbouring villages and towns and to Stansted Airport where there is ease of access to London and beyond.
- 10.6 In terms of environmental sustainability, it is acknowledged that development on any greenfield site would have an impact on the landscape character of the area. Paragraph 17 of the NPPF requires that planning decisions should take account of the different roles and character of different areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving communities within it. Planning should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 10.7 The application site lies in a rural location on the edge of a small loose knit collection of dwellings known as Molehill Green. The dwellings are generally arranged in a linear pattern either side of the road. The existing dwelling known as 'Bellstock' is an exception to this general pattern, situated behind 'School Villas' and accessed off a single track lane.
- 10.8 The proposal would create a backland form of development that would be out of character with the existing layout of development in this settlement. Development in this location would alter the linear form of development and have an adverse impact on the character of the locality. The existing built form provides a clear boundary between the urban and rural. The erection of new buildings would promote coalescence between the airport and existing development in the countryside and would adversely affect the open characteristics of the zone. The adverse impact of the development on the character of the countryside in this location would outweigh the need for additional housing in the district in this instance.
- 10.9 The applicant has referred to a previous application that was recently approved for a new dwelling on School Lane (UTT/12/6120/OP). Whilst it was considered that the site was sustainable, that application differed from this insofar as the new dwelling was to be located between two existing dwellings and would maintain the linear form of development that is present in the village.
- 10.10 There is no specific Local Plan policy on infilling outside of development limits, however opportunities for sensitive infilling of small gaps in small groups of houses but close to settlements are generally considered to be acceptable if the development would be in character with the surroundings and have limited impact on the countryside in the context of existing development. This site cannot be considered as a small gap in a group of houses. It forms the edge of the settlement and clearly denotes the edge of the open countryside.
- 10.11 The Supporting Planning Statement states that this sort of market housing is a necessary requirement in the village as the area has suffered in recent years due to threat of airport expansion. BAA purchased houses in the area in the 1980s and these are predominantly rented out which has caused a lack of community. Whilst this may be the case, it is not considered that the erection of 4 dwellings will rectify this situation. Development in a countryside location, especially within the protected Countryside Protection Zone, should not be promoted for this reason as it would encourage further development in an area which is not suitable for residential development.
- 10.12 The Supporting Statement also states that the proposal would provide improvements to the cricket club by way of the formation of a formal parking area. Whilst it does not

have an existing formal parking area, the cricket club already uses this access track and the land on which the residential development is proposed to park. It is unclear how the provision of four new dwellings will form any additional benefit in comparison to the parking that is available for the club as it stands. This is not considered to be a significant benefit which would overcome the significant detrimental impacts of the proposed development on the countryside.

- 10.13 This development could set a dangerous precedence for other such residential development in Molehill Green. There are other similar sites that could be put forward for development which would also affect the existing character of the village. The lack of five year land supply and other reasons in support of the application as outlined in the Supporting Planning Statement, if used frequently to justify development in the Countryside Protection Zone would over time be significantly harmful to the open character of the area and increase coalescence between the airport and existing development. This concern was noted by the Inspector in the dismissal of an appeal for the stationing of a caravan at The Hoppit, on School Lane in Molehill Green (UTT/0537/12/FUL, appeal ref. APP/C1570/A/12/2178405).

B Access to the site

- 10.14 Access is a reserved matter however the Supporting Planning Statement says that the site is accessed off the existing single lane track and that a new access road to the dwellings would be provided within the site. Cricketfield Lane is an unadopted single-track lane which currently provides access to Bellstock, to the cricket pitch and to the rear of some of the dwellings that front School Lane to the south.
- 10.15 This is a non-classified and a non-through road and Essex County Council Highways Authority do not have any objection to the proposal.
- 10.16 A vehicle turning area would be provided within the site. The number of dwellings proposed is not excessive and therefore, although the access is narrow, the development could be accommodated without have any harmful impact on the main road network.

C Vehicle Parking Standards

- 10.17 Whilst layout is a reserved matter, the indicative drawings demonstrate that there is ample space within the site for the parking of vehicles off road. Locally Adopted Parking Standards require that dwellings of up to 3 bedrooms should have provision for the parking of two vehicles off road. The Supporting Planning Statement says that there would be adequate space within each plot to enable two vehicles to park off-road. This provision would comply with current local adopted parking standards.

D Design

- 10.18 Appearance, scale and layout are reserved matters. Indicative details have been provided which show 4 dwellings, 2 x 2 bedroom and 2 x 3 bedroom, arranged as a mix of detached and semi-detached buildings. The dwelling adjacent to Bellstock would be 1 ½ storey and the remaining buildings would be two-storey.
- 10.19 The indicative layout demonstrates that this number of dwellings could easily be accommodated within the site. The density equates to approximately 20 dwellings per hectare which is relevantly low but appropriate in this village location. The proposal accords with Policy H10 which requires developments on sites of 0.1 hectares and above or 3+ dwellings to include a significant proportion of market housing

comprising small properties of 2 or 3 bedrooms. All our properties fall within this requirement.

- 10.20 Whilst indicative only, each plot would have more than adequate private amenity space to accord with the requirements of the Essex Design Guide.
- 10.21 Landscaping is another reserved matter however the Supporting Planning Statement says that dense planting would be proposed on the boundary between the site and cricket pitch and along the front boundary to enhance the overall appearance of the development.
- 10.22 Impact on neighbouring residential properties – The number of dwellings proposed could easily be accommodated on the site and provide an ample amount of private amenity area. The dwellings would be located to the side of Bellstock and to the rear of the rear gardens of dwellings frontage School Lane. The dwellings could be situated and designed to ensure there would be no adverse impact on the amenities of any neighbouring residential property by way of causing any loss of light or privacy or by being unduly overbearing.

E Nature Conservation

- 10.23 Policy GEN7 of the Local Plan states that development that would have a harmful effect on wildlife will not be permitted unless the need for the development outweighs the importance of the feature of nature conservation. Where the site includes protected species, measures to mitigate and/or compensate for the potential impacts of development must be secured.
- 10.24 In addition to biodiversity and protected species being a material planning consideration, there are statutory duties imposed on local planning authorities. Section 40(1) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 states “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.” This includes local authorities carrying out their consideration of planning applications. Similar requirements are set out in Regulation 3(4) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994, Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Regulation 9(5) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Recent case law has established that local planning authorities have a requirement to consider whether the development proposals would be likely to offend Article 12(1), by say causing the disturbance of a species with which that Article is concerned, it must consider the likelihood of a licence being granted.
- 10.25 The tests for granting a licence are required to apply the 3 tests set out in Regulation 53 of the Habitats Regulations 2010. These tests are:
- The consented operation must be for “preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment”; and
 - There must be “no satisfactory alternative”; and
 - The action authorised “will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range”.
- 10.26 An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Preliminary Ecological Appraisal), dated May 2013 has been submitted with the application which summarises that the survey identified that the site comprises a field (partial short mown sward) that is used for car parking. Given the recent use of the site, and context of its location immediately

adjacent to residential gardens, a cricket green and arable land, the site is not considered to present a notable or significant variety of habitats, and therefore presents limited potential to provide habitat for protected species. The site is not considered to present habitat for protected species and no further survey works to determine presence/absence are considered necessary nor appropriate in this instance.

- 10.27 Essex County Council Ecology comments are still awaited with regards to the findings of the submitted survey and these comments will be reported in the Committee meeting.

11. CONCLUSION

The following is a summary of the main reasons for the recommendation:

- A Whilst the site is considered to have a reasonably sustainable location, it is considered that the proposal would have a significantly harmful impact on the rural character of the area and would adversely affect the open characteristics of the countryside protection zone.
- B Access and parking can be provided without harm to the safety of the main road network.
- C The proposal could be designed to have no adverse impact on the amenity of any neighbouring residential property.

RECOMMENDATION – REFUSAL

Reason

1. By reason of its nature and location, the proposal would create a backland form of development that would be out of character with the existing linear layout and form of development in this settlement. This site denotes a clear definition between urban and rural and such development would have a significantly adverse impact on the rural character of the locality. The erection of new dwellings would promote coalescence between the airport and existing development in the countryside and would adversely affect the open characteristics of the zone. The proposal is contrary to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and Policy S8 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).