

Application No: 12/4771C

Location: Higher House Farm, KNUTSFORD ROAD, CRANAGE, CW4 8EF

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings as described within the Planning Application submission and erection of 11no. family dwellings change of use from Haulage Yard to Residential.

Applicant: Merepark Developments

Expiry Date: 12-Mar-2013

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve with conditions and subject to S106 Agreement

MAIN ISSUES

- **Principle of Development**
- **Character and Appearance**
- **Landscape Impact**
- **Ecology**
- **Highway Safety and Traffic Generation.**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Residential Amenity**
- **Open Space**

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The site lies in the open countryside to the north of Holmes Chapel on the A50. It lies on the eastern side of the A50 opposite an established residential housing site referred to as the former Cranage Hospital site.

The site measures 0.44 hectares in size and hosts Higher House Farm, which has previously been used as a haulage depot. The site hosts a number of brick built and portal framed buildings and associated hard standing as well as the main Higher House Farm residence.

The northwestern corner of the site is given over to garden used for Higher House Farm. The main dwelling is situated centrally within the site frontage and sides onto Knutsford Road. There is a traditional brick built barn positioned just to the southeast of the dwelling and is positioned directly in front of the vehicular access serving the site.

1. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission to redevelop the site by demolishing the existing buildings on the site and erecting 11 no. family homes. The existing dwelling referred to as Higher House Farm would be retained.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

There is an extensive planning history for the site relating to the former use of the site as a haulage depot. There have been applications more recently to operate a private hire vehicle from the main residence but no more applications relevant to this application.

3. PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan Policy

PS8 Open Countryside
NR4 Non-statutory sites
GR1 New Development
GR2 Design
GR3 Residential Development
GR4/5 Landscaping
GR9 Accessibility, servicing and provision of parking
GR14 Cycling Measures
GR15 Pedestrian Measures
GR17 Car parking
GR18 Traffic Generation
NR1 Trees and Woodland
NR3 habitats
NR5 Habitats
H2 Provision of New Housing Development
H6 Residential Development in the Open countryside
H13 affordable Housing and low cost housing
E10 Re-use and redevelopment of existing employment sites

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework
Interim Planning Statement: Affordable Housing (Feb 2011)
Strategic Market Housing Assessment (SHMA)
Relevant legislation also includes the EC Habitats Directive and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

4. OBSERVATIONS OF CONSULTEES

Jodrell Bank

No objection subject to incorporation of electromagnetic screening measures

Environmental Health

No objection, subject to conditions restricting hours of construction / piling, compliance with the submitted noise mitigation scheme and submission of a contaminated phase II survey.

Highways

The Strategic Highways Manager (SHM) considers that the replacement of the existing haulage yard with the proposed 11 residential units will have advantages in terms of traffic generation. Whilst the SHM acknowledges the concerns of the Parish Council regarding the access and its proximity to Needham Drive, he considers that the site access already operates safely and the traffic generation from the proposed development will not have a material impact which could be considered to create a specific hazard. The SHM would advise that this does not constitute a sustainable reason for refusal. However, the SHM requires more detail to be submitted with regard to the junction design with a plan detailing the radius kerbs and paving as well as detailed visibility splays. He also recommends the 200% parking provision required should be increased to 300% for the larger 4/5 bed properties.

United Utilities

No objection, subject to the site being drained on a separate system, with only foul drainage connected into the public foul sewerage system.

Environment Agency

No objection

5. VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Object - Conflicts with Local Plan which is in use currently. Over development of site although brown field site in open countryside. .Extensive landscaping should be shown. No affordable homes included or 2 /3 bedroom properties. The access from A50 does not conform with policies set down and is on a red route. The exit/entrance opposite Needham Drive is concerning. Heights of dwellings not in keeping with location.

6. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

One representation has been received supporting this application on the following grounds:

- The proposal is based on a Brownfield site
- There is good walking access to Holmes Chapel without crossing the A50, so sustainability is excellent
- Site access and egress is safe

- The house designs are pleasing and in keeping with neighbouring houses
- The plan will contribute to the requirement for 5 years worth of building land

7. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- Design and Access Statement
- Planning Statement
- Ecological Survey
- Contaminated Land
- Amended Plans

8. OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The site lies in the open countryside as designated in the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review, where policies H6 and PS8 state that only development which is essential for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, essential works undertaken by public service authorities or statutory undertakers, or for other uses appropriate to a rural area will be permitted.

However, one of the NPPF's 12 key principles is to '*encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed*'. This is reiterated in para 111 of the NPPF. This states that Planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (Brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value. This proposal seeks to redevelop an existing brownfield site previously used a haulage depot.

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF states that "*due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with this framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)*". Policies PS8 and H6 do not contain the exception as laid down in paragraph 111 and as such, in this case the NPPF takes precedence.

Also of relevance is Local Plan Policy E10. Policy E10 states that '*proposals for the change of use or redevelopment of an existing employment site or premises to non-employment uses will not be permitted unless it can be shown that the site is no longer suitable for employment uses or there would be a substantial planning benefit in permitting alternative uses that would outweigh the loss of the site for employment purposes.*' The policy further states that in determining whether the site is no longer suitable for employment uses, account will be taken of its location; adequacy of employment site supply in the area; attempts to sell or let the premises; and the need for the proposed change of use.

The cessation of the haulage use, and the applicant's assertion that the properties can only be filled by offering rents below the market level, indicate that there is a potential case for the site no longer being suitable for employment uses and that there is already an adequate supply of employment floorspace in the borough.

The buildings are of an age and configuration that would not lend themselves well to modern commercial / industrial practices and therefore re-use. In addition, there is no clear evidence to support the development of employment floorspace in this area (office and industrial) on anything but the smallest scale. The nearest centre, Holmes Chapel, does not play a very strong role in terms of employment floorspace, with the vast majority of East Cheshire demand directed at the key nodes of business activity in the larger settlements of Crewe, Winsford, Congleton and Knutsford. The locational disadvantages of this site, and the lack of profile of the area as an employment location, are such that any new development will serve a predominantly local market. This view is supported by the slow take up on new developments in the area in recent years. Existing space is currently adequately serving the local market, and there is already a significant supply. As such, it is considered that there is no longer a need for employment floorspace at this site and as such, the proposal would comply with Policy E10.

Another of the core principles of the NPPF is that Local Planning Authorities should:

“proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made to objectively identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth.”

With respect to sustainability, the site is located approximately 800 metres to the north of Holmes Chapel along the A50, adjacent to the existing residential development on the former Cranage Hospital site. Whilst it does not meet all of the distances specified within the former North West Regional Development Agency’s Sustainability toolkit, it scores a medium. Owing to its position close to Holmes Chapel, the site would benefit from the key services and amenities offered within this service centre. Additionally, there is a bus stop located just 70 metres from the site, which would give residents the choice to access the wider area using public transport. Thus, whilst the site is not as sustainably located as a site that more centrally positioned, it does not perform badly. Owing to the small-scale nature of the proposals, and the fact that it is accessible, it is not considered that a refusal could be sustained on these grounds.

Given the factors addressed above, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in principle. The proposal is therefore in compliance with the relevant local plan policies, where they are consistent with the advice within the National Planning Policy Framework and also national guidance.

Design and Layout

Following negotiations with the applicant, the scheme has been amended to reduce the impacts of the development on the wider area. To assist this, a former garage and office building (which were shown as being retained) will now be demolished so that a more coherent and consolidated scheme can be taken forward.

As amended, the proposed dwellings would be laid out so as to follow the boundaries of the site. There would be a row of properties forming a cul-de-sac towards the northern corner of the site set behind the existing Higher House Farm property (which would be retained) and a

further cul-de-sac travelling at right angles travelling towards the back of the site. The proposed dwellings would predominantly back onto the site boundaries. The ridge heights of the dwellings have been reduced by approximately 1.6 metres, so as to prevent them from appearance intrusive within their setting. They have also been shifted slightly further away from the site boundaries and gables have been changed to hips on end plots to help soften the transition with the adjacent open countryside. As such, it is considered that the scheme would not have any significantly greater harm to the character and appearance of the area than the currently buildings and authorised uses at the site.

The existing barn, which fronts the access to the site, would be replaced with a row of 3 cottage style properties. These would be modest in terms of their size and scale and would be traditional in terms of character. As you travel further into the site, the units would become larger providing a gentle transition. The layout minimises the potential for noise and disturbance to future occupants from the busy main road, and the layout would create a sense of enclosure and community as well as natural surveillance of the parking areas and public realm within the development.

To turn to the elevational detail of the scheme, the properties are traditional pitched roofed dwellings which incorporate many features such as gables and window head details that are typical of many farmhouses and traditional cottages in the vicinity. There are many substantial properties and farmhouses in the vicinity. As amended, it is considered that the proposed dwellings would be appropriate for the site and in keeping with the character of the surroundings.

Highway Safety.

Policy GR9 states that proposals for development requiring access, servicing or parking facilities will only be permitted where a number of criteria are satisfied. These include adequate and safe provision for suitable access and egress by vehicles, pedestrians and other road users to a public highway.

In the light of the previous use of the site as a haulage depot, the Strategic Highways Manager (SHM) has concluded that the proposal will not result in an unacceptable level of traffic generation to and from the site. Whilst the SHM acknowledges the concerns of the Parish Council regarding the access and its proximity to Needham Drive, he considers that the site access already operates safely and the traffic generation from the proposed development will not have a material impact which could be considered to create a specific hazard. The SHM. would advise that this does not constitute a sustainable reason for refusal. However, the SHM requires more detail to be submitted with regard to the junction design with a plan detailing the radius kerbs and paving as well as detailed visibility splays. This has been requested and a written update will be provided to members.

With respect to parking provision, the SHM also recommends 200% parking provision be required with this increased to 300% for the larger 4/5 bed properties. Including garage accommodation, this provision would be met.

Trees and Landscape

There are some lengths of established Leylandii hedgerow around the boundary of the site and a small number of trees in the vicinity. However, taking into account the Brownfield nature of the majority of the site, subject to submission of a landscape scheme, the council's Landscape Officer does not have any significant issues on landscape grounds. This detail can be easily secured by condition.

Residential Amenity

The surrounding development comprises a farm complex to the north side and residential properties to the west forming part of the former Cranage Hospital site. However, these are all positioned well in excess of the minimum separation distances advised within the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance Note on space between new dwellings.

Within the development itself, the properties have been arranged and the windows positioned and designed so as to prevent any direct overlooking and ensure that the proposed occupants benefit from an adequate standard of residential amenity both in respect of light and outlook. Due to the close relationship that some of the proposed dwelling would share, some of the plots will require the removal of permitted development rights for extensions and openings to preserve and consider future amenity. The quantity of private amenity space for each unit is acceptable.

With respect to traffic noise from the adjacent A50, the application is supported by a noise mitigation scheme which is acceptable to the Council's Environmental Protection Unit. Subject to the submitted mitigation scheme being conditioned, the proposal would be acceptable in terms of noise impacts from the adjacent road. The scheme is therefore found to be in accordance with Local Plan Policy GR6 and SPG2

Ecology

The application is supported by an ecological assessment undertaken by a suitable qualified and experienced ecologist. The council's ecologist has examined the assessment and commented that no evidence of bats was recorded during the survey of the additional buildings to be demolished. Confirmation from the applicant's ecologist that no potential exists for barn owls has also been received. As such, the Council's Nature Conservation Officer has confirmed that species protected by law do not present a constraint on the proposed development.

Affordable Housing

The proposed development will provide 3 affordable units (2 social / affordable rent and 1 for intermediate tenure) within the proposed 11. This provision accords with the Interim Affordable Housing Statement requirements that developments of this scale should provide a minimum of 30% affordable housing within the scheme and of which 65% should be social rented and 35% should be intermediate tenure. Subject to this, it is considered that the proposal would comply with Local Plan Policy and the provisions of the Affordable Housing Interim Planning Statement.

Open Space

According to the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance, developments of 7 or more family dwellings will generate a requirement for public open space and children's play space.

The necessary level of off-site provision is calculated by assessing the existing provision within an 800m radius against the population demand existing and arising from the new development. In this case, there is provision within 800m provided on the existing former Cranage Hospital site across the A50.

Given that this scheme is very small it is deemed to be impractical to provide the open space on site, and therefore consideration needs to be given to financial contributions to off-site works at this local facility. A further update on this matter will be provided to Members when the Greenspaces officer has confirmed the exact requirements. Given that this is likely to require financial contributions, this will need to be secured by way of a s106 agreement.

9. CONCLUSION

In summary, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in principle, as it would see the 'effective use and redevelopment of Brownfield site' in accordance with the NPPF. Although it would result in the loss of an existing employment site, it is considered that the premises are no longer required for employment uses. The submission of revised plans has addressed concerns regarding the impact on the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would be acceptable in terms of its impacts on residential amenity. The proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of design and layout, ecology and subject to updates, acceptable in terms of highways and open space. Consequently, it complies with the relevant local plan policies and accordingly is recommended for approval.

10. RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to the completion of a S106 agreement in respect of the Heads of Terms as set out below that authority be given to the Head of Planning and Policy to grant approval subject to the imposition of the following:

Heads of Terms for Legal Agreement

- 1. Financial contributions towards public open space and CYPP and ongoing maintenance of the facilities to be determined.**

And the following conditions:

- 1. Standard**
- 2. Amended Plans**
- 3. Delivery of 3 affordable units (2 social / affordable rent and 1 for intermediate tenure)**
- 4. Materials**
- 5. Landscaping**
- 6. Implementation of Landscaping**
- 7. Boundary Treatment**
- 8. Removal of Permitted Development Rights for extensions**
- 9. Obscured glazing and removal of permitted development rights for openings**

- 10. Contaminated Land Condition (Phase II)**
- 11. Jodrell Bank Electromagnetic Screening Measures**
- 12. Submission / approval and implementation of access drawings**
- 13. Submission / approval and implementation of visibility splays**
- 14. Provision of parking**
- 15. Compliance with submitted noise mitigation.**
- 16. Construction Hours restricted**
- 17. Breeding bird survey of works are carried out within the bird nesting season**
- 18. Details of drainage to be submitted**
- 19. Details of pile driving**
- 20. Surfacing Materials**
- 21. Details of existing / proposed and finished levels**

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