

**Parish: BILDESTON****Location: 45 - 51 Wattisham Road, Bildeston, IP7 7EG****Proposal: Erection of 8 No. affordable dwellings, with associated access and gardens****Applicant: Orwell Housing Association Ltd****Case Officer: Ben Elvin/Graham Chamberlain      Date for Determination: 21/09/09**

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## **THE SITE**

1. Wattisham Road is a rural lane linking Bildeston and Wattisham. The site is located approximately 200m from Bildeston High Street and 120m from the boundary of Bildeston Conservation Area. The site is visible from the Conservation Area as Wattisham Road rises up away from the High Street. This results in the site being relatively elevated. There is a right of way to the rear of the site, therefore there are public views of the front and rear. The site abuts the countryside, being separated by a hedge and trees.
2. The site currently comprises of four houses arranged in two semis. The properties appear to be inter war local authority housing. The site is still within the ownership of Babergh District Council.
3. The four houses are orientated to front the road following its curve. This gives good interaction between the dwellings and the public realm. The houses are set back from the road enabling the site to contribute to the sense of openness along Wattisham Road.
4. The character of Wattisham Road is defined by its transition from the historic core of Bildeston to the countryside, with predominantly 20<sup>th</sup> Century Housing along it. The architecture and layout of the dwellings in Wattisham Road therefore have a rural influence, a historic influence (from the Conservation Area) and a 20<sup>th</sup> Century influence. The appearance of the buildings is defined by simple architecture, a standard orientation and layout and a spacious feel due to front gardens.

## **THE PROPOSAL**

5. The proposed development would comprise 8 affordable dwellings, with an associated access road and garden areas. The development would be arranged into 3 blocks. Units 1 - 3 would be a 'bungalow' with accommodation in the roof (providing flexible accommodation - being wheel chair adaptable) and two 2storey dwellings (1 3bed and 1 2bed). The second block would be a two storey, 3bed dwelling and two 2bed flats (Units 4 - 6). Units 7 and 8 would be two 2bed dwellings.
6. The original submission attempted a modernist approach with an irregular form, large windows and timber cladding. Following discussion the applicants agreed to amend the scheme to a more simple approach which better reflects the surrounding context. Revised plans have been submitted and re-consultation is currently taking place.

## RELEVANT HISTORY

7. There is no relevant planning history.

## NATIONAL GUIDANCE

8. **PPS1** Delivering Sustainable Development
9. **PPS3** Housing

## PLANNING POLICIES

10. The Development Plan comprises the East of England Plan, adopted 2008, saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

### East of England Plan - 2008

- **ENV7** Quality in the Built Environment
- **SS1** Achieving Sustainable Development

### Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006

- **CN01** New Development
- **EN09** Conservation of Energy/Sustainable Construction
- **HS02** Housing in villages
- **HS03** Non-sustainable and Sustainable villages
- **HS27** Density
- **HS28** Infilling
- **HS32** Open Space
- **TP15** Parking

**The relevant documents can be viewed via the internet. Please see Page 4 for details.**

## CONSULTATIONS

11. The following observations were received in connection with the original plans. At the time of writing re-consultation is currently being undertaken on the amendments. (The comments below have been received in respect of the original scheme).
12. Bildeston Parish Council - Strongly supports the application
13. Local Highway Authority - No objection subject to conditions
14. BDC Environmental Health (Land Contamination) - No comments received at time of writing.
15. Footpaths Officer (SCC) - No objection.

## REPRESENTATIONS

16. One letter of objection:
  - The proposed development will comprise both privacy and security
  - The car park will result in noise and disturbance to the occupants of No. 43 Wattisham Road

- The number of houses change the density of the site and therefore the character of the location
- The proposed buildings will be closer to the boundaries
- There would be a lack of off street parking

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Principle of Development**

17. The proposal is for the erection of 6 houses and 2 flats within the Built up Area Boundary of Bildeston. Bildeston is a sustainable village as identified in Policy HS02. Therefore an infill scheme above 3 dwellings is acceptable in principle under Policies HS02 and HS03.
18. The site has already been developed and further development is acceptable.

### **Design and Impact on Character**

19. Policies HS28 and CN01 of the Local Plan require all new development to be of an appropriate scale, form, design and finish (including architectural detailing) which respects and reflects the surrounding context, maintaining local distinctiveness. Policy ENV7 of the East of England Plan states that all new development should be of high quality and based on a robust site appraisal. Planning Policy Statement 3 in Paragraph 10 states that planning authorities should deliver well designed high quality housing; this is echoed in Planning Policy Statement 1 which places design towards the centre of the planning system (Paragraph 34) stating that development which fails to improve the quality and character of the area should not be supported.
20. The design of new housing is therefore an important planning consideration. In particular, given the guidance in Policy ENV7 of the East of England Plan, the starting point in identifying what could be acceptable development on this site is to assess the context and 'de-code' the immediate area of the site, identifying the predominate character and those positive aspects which can be enhanced. Officers have undertaken this exercise and are of the opinion that the following design principles should be reflected in the scheme:
  - Wattisham Road is spacious in character with front gardens, gaps between houses and views in between the houses out into the countryside. This contrast with the centre of the village which has a tighter pattern of development. The spacious feel is typical of an edge of village location. This should be safeguarded and incorporated into the scheme.
  - The land slopes up away from Bildeston High Street, the existing built form has regard to this slope. The development should respect the topography.
  - There is a view out of the Conservation Area up towards the site, this should be safeguarded. The development should not unduly stand out or jar with existing built form as that could harm the view along Wattisham Road from the Conservation Area.
  - The development in Wattisham Road is predominantly frontage development enabling the houses to interact with the street. The development should therefore have a strong frontage.
  - There is a subtle curve in the street, the existing development relates well to this. The proposed development should curve with the road enabling the buildings to frame the street scene.
  - The architecture is simple, using traditional simple forms and materials (render, brick, tiles to the roof).
  - The buildings are generally of a two storey scale with a relatively constant plot width and depth. This gives rhythm to the development in Wattisham Road.

21. The amended scheme incorporates a number of the design principles identified above:
- The buildings would rise up the slope following the contours of the land,
  - They would relate well to the road (by fronting the street) giving active edges, a strong building line and natural surveillance of the public realm.
  - The dwellings would complement the scale to the buildings surrounding the site.
  - The sense of openness would be retained with front garden space.
  - Landscaping will break up the site and help integrate it with the countryside.
  - The plot widths would become narrower but this is to be expected due to the intensification of development, but this is, in part, mitigated by the complementary scale and orientation and the retention of gaps between the three 'blocks'. The development will not appear cramped in an area characterised by spaciousness.
22. The bungalow would jar with the scale of development by virtue of its wider frontage and lower ridge. It would also be close to the side boundary of the site. However the positive aspects of the scheme, in part, mitigate for this. On balance, the bungalow is considered to be acceptable.
23. The revised scheme presents simple architecture based on the surrounding development. The windows, doors, form and materials will have continuity, but there are subtle differences between the units which will add variety. The scheme therefore complies with Policy CN01 as the scale, form and appearance is acceptable.
24. The houses will fit comfortably on the site. There is room for sufficient parking, garden spaces and landscaping. The design is not contrived and there is no harm to neighbour amenity. The living conditions for future occupants will be acceptable. The proposal is not an over development and therefore complies with Policy HS28.
25. The density proposed is 34 dwellings per hectare (dph). The existing density is 17dph - this broadly fits the character of the area which is low (given a spacious feel to Wattisham Road). Although the density would almost double and this is just over the government national indicative minimum, there are no symptoms of over development, and therefore the proposal is considered to be an acceptable use of land adhering with Policies HS27 and HS28 of the Local Plan.

### **Sustainability**

26. Policy EN09 states that development should be designed to a high sustainable development standard and Policy EN13 states that proposals must incorporate measures for the conservation and efficient use of water. This is reiterated in PPS1 and its supporting document on climate change. The proposal would result in the demolition of four houses. This would result in the loss of embodied energy. However this does allow a more efficient use of the land. The applicants also proposed to meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 or 4 (this is a requirement for affordable housing). The achievement of this code level will satisfactorily address energy and water efficiency. The development is also located in close proximity to village services, which could help to sustain them. On balance, the proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development adhering to Policy EN09 of the Local Plan and national guidance in PPS1.

### **Affordable Housing**

27. The application is for 8 affordable homes. As the site is within the BUAB, it is not a rural exceptions site; therefore there is no policy justification to require that all of the units remain as affordable houses for rent. Policy HS09 requires 35% of the development to be secured as affordable (as Bildeston has a population of less than 3000 people - 1011people) as the application is a windfall site within a rural settlement. As the Council owns the land, a unilateral undertaking will be prepared to secure 35% of the development as affordable.

### **Impact on Residential Amenity**

28. Policies HS02 and HS28 require new housing developments to maintain a reasonable standard of residential amenity. Amenity in this instance normally refers to loss of light, over bearing and over looking. It can also refer to the amenity of future occupants of any dwelling as well, therefore other issues such as noise, the provision of private amenity space and the general conditions afforded future occupants need to be considered.
29. There will be no impact to the rear or front of the site (north and south) as there are no residential properties. The only potential impact would be to No 43 (western boundary) and Manse (eastern boundary).
30. The properties have been carefully located so that there is no unreasonable over looking of the rear elevations of these properties or their private amenity space (patios). There will be some oblique over looking of the gardens of the Manse and No 43 but this is not unreasonable and has been minimised by the orientation of the properties and their location within the building line. The development proposes no side windows in the east or west elevations. The distance and orientation also ensures there will be no loss of light.
31. The Manse is on higher ground than the development, Plot 8 will not, therefore, appear overbearing. There is also a significant gap between the properties.
32. Plot 1 is on higher ground than No 43 and will be located close to the sites boundary. However, its presence within a building line and the single storey design (with first floor accommodation in the roof void) would ensure there is no unreasonable overbearing impact.
33. The car parking and maneuvering space will be located next to the rear garden of No 43. However it is located away from the dwelling at No. 43, therefore there will be no unreasonable loss of amenity by way of noise and disturbance. It is acknowledged that there will be an impact, but Officers are of the opinion this is reasonable.
34. The relationship between the properties is satisfactory; none of the future occupants would have sub standard accommodation by way of loss of light, over looking and overbearing. Plots 3 and 4 may have disturbance from cars entering and exiting the site. However, on balance, this is not considered reason in itself to refuse the application.

### **Highways and Parking**

35. Policies HS02 and HS28 require new residential development to safeguard highway safety. Policy TP15 requires all types of development to adhere to the relevant parking standards.
36. Eight houses are proposed with 16 parking spaces - two spaces will be allocated to each dwelling. This meets the parking standards. The Local Highway Authority have no objection to the parking or the access arrangements. There is also sufficient space for off road maneuvering.

### **Open Space**

37. Policy HS32 requires that developments which will provide 1 unit or more should either provide a financial contribution towards the provision or upgrade of open space nearby (via a 106 Legal Agreement) or provide a public open space equal to 10% of the gross site area. No public open space is being provided, therefore a contribution is required. The land is currently within the ownership of Babergh District Council, and a unilateral undertaking will be required to secure this.

## **Other Issues**

38. Land Contamination - As the proposal is for residential development, the scheme will result in a sensitive end user. A contaminated land assessment has been submitted. At the time of writing this report comments were awaited from the Environmental Health Team.
39. Biodiversity/Ecology - The site has not been identified as having a history of protected species (although there are records across the road). The site is not a priority habitat within the Biodiversity Action Plan. Although demolition is proposed, the buildings are not 'high risk' (listed, pre 1900, rural farm buildings) and are therefore unlikely to house protected species. A protected species scoping survey is not required, due to the low risk of protected species being present. An informative note would however be added to any permission in case protected species are found during works.
40. Servicing - Policy EN21 requires that there should be the provision of adequate and accessible storage and recycling facilities in all appropriate developments to enable easy collection and disposal of waste. Space for 3 bins would be provided for each of the 8 units proposed.

## **REASONS FOR APPROVAL**

41. Subject to the attached conditions, the development will have no adverse impact on the character of the area, the street scene, neighbour amenity or highway safety. The proposal will provide sufficient affordable housing and open space. The development therefore adheres to saved Policies CN01, EN09, HS02, HS03, HS27, HS28, HS32 and TP15 of the Babergh Local Plan Alt 2 (2006).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- (1) That subject to no new material planning issues arising from the additional consultation the Solicitor to the Council be authorised to secure a Planning Obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to provide:
  - 35% Affordable Housing
  - Financial Contribution towards open space.
- (2) That, subject to the completion of the Planning Obligation referred to in Resolution (1) above to the satisfaction of the Solicitor to the Council, the Chief Planning Control Officer be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:
  - Standard time limit
  - Materials and detailing to be agreed
  - Landscaping to be agreed and safeguarded for five years
  - Levels to be submitted and agreed
  - As recommend by the Local Highway Authority
  - Remove PD rights for windows in the east and west elevations of the development.
- (3) That in the event of the Planning Obligation referred to in Resolution (1) above not being secured, the Chief Planning Control Officer be authorised to refuse planning permission for the following reason:
  - Absence of affordable housing and open space contrary to saved Policies HS32 and HS09 of the Babergh District Local Plan Alt 2 (2006).