

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT FORUM (DMF) BRIEFING NOTE FOR MEMBERS

Time / Date of meeting: 3:30pm, 31/07/2024

Venue: Council Chamber, EHDC offices, Wallfields, Hertford

Reference: 3/24/0294/OUT

Address: Land north of Hare Street Road, Buntingford

Proposal: a) Outline approval for a residential development for around 200 new market and affordable homes, including self-build and custom build homes, new public open space, new ecological areas and other public realm, new pedestrian, cycle and vehicular networks within the site, potential pedestrian connections to The Causeway and Aldridge Way, and associated drainage and SuDs infrastructure. With all matters reserved for later approval.

b) Full planning approval for the construction of new Medical Centre, car parking area, related drainage and SuDs infrastructure, with associated access to Hare Street Road and enabling works to the existing highway, as defined on the Land Use Parameter and Detailed Access Plans. Pre-application advice in relation to a hybrid planning application for development of 200 houses (submitted in outline) and a medical centre (full details submitted).

Case Officer: Steve Fraser-Lim

Background:

The above application was submitted on 15th February 2024. Neighbour consultation letters and letters to statutory consultees have been sent out and a range of consultation comments have been received, including the petition which is the subject of this Development Management Forum (DMF). The petition is appended to this briefing note.

DMF Procedure:

The purpose of the DMF is a meeting where residents can present their views to councillors, planning officers and the applicant early in the planning application process prior to a decision on the planning application. The aim of the forum (as set out in the website link below) is to allow early, constructive discussion of the planning issues raised by residents and to explore the scope for building consensus and resolving concerns.

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-and-building/development-management-forum>

The Forum is an informal meeting and the forum does not determine the application. The decision on planning applications is determined by the Council's Development Management Committee or through delegation to officers.

Development Management Committee (DMC) and Local/County Council Members can use the meeting to listen and observe the discussions between residents, stakeholders and the developer team in order to:

- improve their understanding of the development, its background and the planning policy position and the relevance of the key planning policies and guidance. *[For DMC Members – this will enable them to gain a greater understanding of the planning context in advance of any subsequent planning committee].*
- understand the planning issues ‘most’ important to local people.
- hear from the applicants and observe a presentation of the scheme.
- direct questions towards the developer as to how they have sought/are seeking to address the issues raised by the public, stakeholders or the planning authority as part of the planning process.

Members can seek advice from planning officers with regards to the processes and the planning policy background, and the content of any consultation responses submitted as part of the planning application. They are advised not to ask planning officers for a formal or binding view on the proposals.

Members should not use the Forum to undertake negotiations or appear to put undue pressure on the officers in relation to any future decision on the scheme. Members are however entitled to question developers, residents or planning officers to fully understand issues presented at the Forum.

Members of the Development Management Committee should be aware that if they wish to participate in any future Development Management Committee Meeting to determine the application, they should approach the debate within this DMF meeting with an open mind and avoid having a predetermined view on the application.

Site Designations:

- The northern part of the site is in proximity to Buntingford Conservation Area
- The group of trees along the northern boundary of the site with The Causeway is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) (152-G4).
- The site is identified as an Area of Archaeological Significance.
- The site is outside of but adjacent to the Buntingford settlement boundary, within the East Herts District Plan 2018.
- The site is adjacent to designated open space (allotments).
- The site falls within the ‘rural area beyond the green belt’ within the East Herts District Plan 2018 and comprises grade 2 agricultural land.
- Site is included within the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA).
- The site is within the area of the adopted Buntingford Neighbourhood Local Plan.

Planning history background

The land has historically been in agricultural use with limited planning history. However, planning permission was granted for 160 dwellings and allotments to the west of the site, following an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in January 2014 (ref: 3/13/1000/FP). This application included change of use of part of the current proposal site to a cemetery

accessed from The Causeway. The housing and allotments have since been constructed, but not the cemetery, which has since been provided on an alternative site.

Most relevant planning policies

The site is not specifically allocated for any use or development within the District Plan 2018 and is outside of but adjacent to the Buntingford Settlement Boundary. As such the site is within the 'rural area beyond the greenbelt'. The overall District Plan strategy (policy DPS2) seeks sustainable housing development within settlement boundaries or on allocated sites. Policy BUNT1 of the district plan states that the strategy for the town is to focus on the delivery of existing sites with planning permission and to ensure that the impacts of development can be mitigated and managed within the overall infrastructure of the town.

The following District Plan policies and guidance would also be relevant as part of any future application proposals:

- Policy DPS4 Infrastructure Requirements states that healthcare facilities will be required to support future housing development in the district.
- Policy CFLR9 states that new development should be planned and located to promote healthy communities, including infrastructure such as healthcare facilities, footpaths, cycle routes and open spaces to live healthy and active lives. It requires that new health facilities are accessible to all and located where there are choice of sustainable travel options.
- Policy DES1 states that significant development proposals will be required to prepare a masterplan as part of a collaborative process involving key stakeholders.
- Policy DES2 Landscape Character states that development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the districts landscape.
- Policy DES4 requires a high standard of design, including: promoting local distinctiveness; efficient use of land which responds to site context; are adaptable over time; incorporate sustainable design principles; and make well designed provision for ancillary elements such as car / cycle parking and waste storage.
- Policies CC1 and CC2 of the District Plan and the Sustainability SPD set out how developments must demonstrate commitments to the principles of sustainable design, including energy efficiency measures, efficient supply of heat and power, and incorporation of on site low / zero carbon forms of energy generation.
- Policy NE2 requires that proposals achieve a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), through application of a mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation. In addition, the Environment Act 2021 requires that new applications from February 2024 achieve a BNG of at least 10%.
- The adopted Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the Development Plan. The NP considers that the landscape around Buntingford as being one of the most highly valued in the district. The NP supporting policy text emphasises the desirability of conserving and respecting the valley setting of Buntingford. The NP policies (ES1 and HD2) and supporting text recommend that future development of Buntingford is carried out in such a way that the landscape views across the Town are not adversely affected. This requires that building on higher ground is limited in height and that any further housing is developed within the valley setting.

Key Issues:

The issues / comments which have been identified as part of the petition to be discussed at the DMF are summarised as follows:

- Concern that the proposed planning application to move the town's only medical centre from the centre of the local community to an out-of-town site at the top of a steep hill would mean that primary health care provision would no longer be easily accessible for the vast majority of residents who live in the town.
- The location of the proposed site would mean that most journeys to and from the site (including those currently made on foot or by bike) would need to be made by private car journey due to the increased distance needed to travel and the steep gradient on the hill leading up to the site. The site is not easily accessible by public transport either as options are very limited.
- The proposal for around 200 houses would add even more vehicles to local roads. There is a serious concern that a large increase in local traffic would have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of residents through increased road danger, air and noise pollution and would put further strain on the current road infrastructure that struggles to cope with existing traffic levels.

The site sits outside of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan boundary in a position on the eastern plateau above the Rib Valley. It is of concern that the plan for a two-storey medical centre and around 200 houses would not 'respect the valley landscape or consider the visual transition between urban and rural' as noted in the BCA Neighbourhood Plan.