

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT FORUM (DMF) BRIEFING NOTE FOR MEMBERS

Time / Date of meeting: 18:00pm 24/09/2024

Venue: Council Chamber, EHDC offices, Wallfields, Hertford

Reference: 3/24/0966/OUT

Address: Land west of the A10, Buntingford

Proposal: Outline planning application for development of up to 600 dwellings (C3), elderly accommodation (C3), Mixed Use Local Centre (including flexible use E, F and Sui Generis), First School, informal and formal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from the A507 and pedestrian bridge over the A10, with all matters reserved except access.

Case Officer: Steve Fraser-Lim

Background:

The above application was submitted on 28th May 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 summarised below and can be viewed on the Council's website: [ePetition - Impact of 600 houses Land west of A10 3/24/0966/OUT - East Herts District Council](https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-and-building/development-management-forum/3/24/0966/OUT)

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 Description / Designations:

The site comprises agricultural fields and hedgerows, bounded by the A10 to the east, Baldock Road A507 to the South and Throcking Lane to the north. Buntingford and the town settlement boundary is situated on the opposite side of the A10 to the east. The site is subject to the following designations:

- The site within the 'Rural Area Beyond the Greenbelt'
- A historic Landfill is located in northeast corner of the site
- The farmhouse at How Green Farm (grade II listed) is situated on the opposite side of the A10, to the southeast of the site
- The site is within the area covered by the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan
- The south west corner of the site is within / adjacent to land within flood zone 2/3 and identified as being at risk of surface water flooding
- The site is within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone
- Two public rights of way cross the site
- The site is designated as grade 2 Best and Most Versatile agricultural land
- The site is within the Cherry Green Arable Plateau landscape character area

Planning history background

The land has historically been in agricultural use with limited planning history. However it should be noted that a current undetermined planning application has been submitted for development of employment land, situated on the opposite side of the A507 Baldock Road, to the south of the site (ref: 3/24/1255/OUT).

In addition an appeal decision was recently allowed by the Planning Inspectorate, following a Public Inquiry, in connection with an outline planning application for development of 350 dwellings, with up to 4,400 sq m of commercial and services floorspace (Use Class E and B8) and up to 500 sq m of retail floorspace (Use Class E) and other associated works, on land on the East side of the A10, to the south of the site (planning application ref: 3/23/1447/OUT; Inspectorate Ref: APP/J1915/W/24/3340497).

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 regarding the impacts of an application of this size on the historic character of both the nearby settlement of Throcking and the landscape plateau which is of significance locally;
- Impact of traffic from the proposals upon nearby rural roads in Throcking and Cottered, well as potential mitigation measures;
- Impacts on the natural environment in terms of a site underlain by chalk and its benefits to local nature recovery;
- Adequacy of sewage treatment infrastructure, which currently is insufficient to serve the recently expanded local community;
- The lack of sustainable public transport both within the plans and currently available in Buntingford;
- As part of the call for sites, consideration should be given as to whether this location would be better preserved as a site to promote nature as part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and how this can be incorporated into the planning application in order to retain important environmental features;
- Due to scale, the proposed application is incongruous and if there is to be permission granted for development the parish council seeks the opportunity to discuss a significant reduction in size of any development considered on this site and limited to areas where building is already present;
- If East Herts is to grant permission there is a considerable need for improvements to road and services infrastructure which should be a pre-requisite and improved before planning applications are considered in the Buntingford Community Area. Changes to the road network layout to handle the expected increase in traffic in an area with high car ownership and no access to rail links and to ensure the roads in the smaller settlements are not overloaded would be imperative;
- If S106 contributions become available these should be for: extra indoor space for the community and improvements to existing spaces for community sports or social activity; more green spaces and local nature recovery; improving sustainable travel such as cycle paths, better footpaths and a continuing focus on green initiatives to improve air quality and road safety by reducing traffic speed to 20 mph through Cottered and Throcking and local settlements,