

Brick Lane, Mepal

20/00630/FUM

Application for 55 dwellings, new access, estate roads, driveways, parking areas, open space, external lighting, substation, and associated infrastructure (Site south and west of The Bungalow Brick Lane Mepal Cambridgeshire)

1 East Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan 2015

This is the Local Plan currently in force, against which this application needs to be judged. This site is not within the development envelope for the village of Mepal, and the 'Village Vision' for Mepal in the Local Plan states:

"Outside the development envelope, housing will not normally be permitted – unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as essential dwellings for rural workers, or affordable housing. Housing schemes outside the development envelope will be assessed against Policy GROWTH 2 and other Local Plan policies as appropriate."

Policy GROWTH 2 states:

"Outside defined development envelopes, development will be strictly controlled, having regard to the need to protect the countryside and the setting of towns and villages. Development will be restricted to the main categories listed below, and may be permitted as an exception, providing there is no significant adverse impact on the character of the countryside and that other Local Plan policies are satisfied."

The only category within GROWTH 2 into which this development would fall is 'affordable housing exception schemes' which are governed by Policy HOU 4.

Policy HOU 4 provides a list of criteria for affordable housing exception sites, as follows:

- There is an identified local need which cannot be met on available sites within the development envelope (including allocation sites), or sites which are part of community-led development.
- The site is well related to a village which offers a range of services and facilities, and there is good accessibility by foot/cycle to those facilities.
- No significant harm would be caused to the character or setting of the settlement and the surrounding countryside.
- The scale of the scheme is appropriate to the location and to the level of identified local affordable housing need.
- The scheme incorporates a range of dwelling sizes, types, and tenures appropriate to the identified local need; and

- The affordable housing provided is made available to people in local housing need at an affordable cost for the life of the property.

The application fails to meet these criteria, for the following reasons.

- i. The village of Mepal offers a number of amenities appropriate to its size, such as a primary school, village hall, public house, church, and small shop. However, access to the nearest GP practice—in the neighbouring village of Sutton—on foot or by bicycle requires crossing the busy A142, a main road on which traffic volumes have increased very considerably in recent years. The A142 between Ely and Chatteris was recently the subject of a County Council safety study whose findings recommended a package of safety improvement measures of some £5M in value, very few of which have as yet been implemented.
- ii. The scheme's 55 dwellings would increase the size of the village by more than ten per cent. This is a significant increase for a small and well-established village, and is inappropriate to the location. The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) says at Para 71: "Entry-level exception sites should not be larger than one hectare in size or exceed 5% of the size of the existing settlement." This site fails this definition.
- iii. The scheme goes far beyond meeting identified local affordable housing need. A housing needs survey carried out in September 2019 for the neighbouring larger village of Sutton identified some 51 households in need of affordable housing who either live in or have local connections with that village. *Pro rata* for the size of Mepal, this would correspond to some 15-20 households, well beyond the size of this development. The applicant states that there are 11 families on the council's lists with local connections, and 83 of the total 530 households on the list have indicated a wish to live in Mepal. However, this does not take into account the other multiple preferences households will have selected, and certainly cannot be used to suggest that Mepal is the first or even second preference of those 83 families.

2 Sutton Neighbourhood Plan 2019

The site falls within the area addressed by the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan. Although the parish boundaries have subsequently been redrawn there has been no change to the boundaries of the Neighbourhood plan area. The plan does not allocate this site for housing.

Policy NP7 states:

"Housing development must contribute to meeting the needs of the village. Planning proposals will be supported where development provides a mix of housing types and sizes that reflects the needs of local people, particularly

in the need for two bedroomed dwellings as well as the needs of an ageing population looking to downsize into homes suitable for lifetime occupation.”

This application goes far beyond meeting the needs of the village or of local people, and pays insufficient regard to this policy.

Policy NP2 states:

“All development proposals will be expected to retain existing features of landscape and biodiversity value (including trees, woodland, hedgerows, the open nature of meadowland and verges) and, where practical to do so, provide a net gain in biodiversity through, for example:

- the creation of new natural habitats;
- the planting of additional trees and hedgerows; and
- restoring and repairing fragmented biodiversity networks.

Where loss or damage is unavoidable the benefits of the development proposals must be demonstrated clearly to outweigh any impacts and the development shall provide for appropriate replacement planting on site together with a method statement for the ongoing care and maintenance of that planting. Where a new access is created, or an existing access is widened through an existing hedgerow, a new hedgerow of native species shall be planted on the splay returns into the site to maintain the appearance and continuity of hedgerows in the vicinity.”

It is not clear that the application pays sufficient regard to the requirements of this policy for retention of existing features, replacement planting, or net gain in biodiversity. We also note that the site is within the impact risk zones for the Ouse Washes SPA/SSSI.

3 Other matters

Residents have expressed to us a number of concerns about the application, including:

1. The cramped nature of the proposed development.
2. The unsuitability of Brick Lane as an access to the site.
3. The additional pressure on the A142 junction.
4. The lack of adequate public transport to meet the needs of the development, or the village more widely.
5. The limited space within the development for parking of vehicles.
6. The prohibition on parking of works vehicles within the development.
7. The need for changes to the proposals to mitigate against noise.

8. The history of inadequate sewage capacity in Brick Lane and elsewhere in the village.

The district council's Environmental Health Technical Officer (Domestic) has noted that the application relies on closed windows and trickle ventilation to achieve target internal sound levels, and that the local planning authority will not find this acceptable. The officer has advised that acceptable sound levels need to be achieved across the site with partially opened windows.

Cambridgeshire County Council Highways have stated that the roads within the proposed development are not laid out to an adoptable standard and that the layout currently proposed is potentially unsafe for road users. The district council will not collect domestic waste from unadopted roads unless an indemnity is provided by the developer. Such an indemnity would have to be provided in perpetuity if the plan is approved with roads which are not laid out to an adoptable standard.

We note that the Transport Assessment Team is awaiting further information including up to date accident data.

4 Conclusion

For all the reasons given above, we believe the current application does not conform to the requirements of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan or the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan, and raises a number of concerns for existing Mepal residents which remain to be addressed.

We therefore cannot support the application as it stands.

Cllr Lorna Dupré
Cllr Mark Inskip
District councillors for Mepal

July 2020