

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5TH APRIL 2017: EXTRACT FROM MINUTES:

123. 16/01662/OUM – LAND ADJACENT 67 MILDENHALL ROAD, FORDHAM

Andrew Phillips, Senior Planning Officer, presented a report (R255, previously circulated) which sought outline approval for 79 dwellings (five self builds) with access and layout to be agreed at this stage. The developer was seeking to provide 40% affordable housing and a large area of open space (seeking to give it to the Parish Council, with access for school children).

It was noted that the application had been brought before the Planning Committee due to the Council's Constitution and the size of the development.

The application site was an open field with mature planting that defined the edges, with the public highway defining the southern boundary. There was a variety of building heights in the area, ranging from single to two storey.

A number of illustrations were displayed at the meeting, including a map, an aerial photograph highlighting the application site, the layout and design of the proposal, and indicatives relating to highway safety and parking, and the S106 and contributions.

Members were reminded that the main considerations in the determination of this application were:

- Principle;
- Highway Safety and Parking;
- Design of the Proposal; and
- S106 and Contributions.

The Senior Planning Officer said that Members were well aware of the Council's current position regarding the ability to demonstrate an adequate 5 year supply of land for housing and the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development, and he would therefore not go into this in detail.

The Committee noted that site was adjacent to the established development framework of Fordham. The emerging Local Plan was seeking to

increase the residential development in this area to 30 dwellings, but as the Plan was in its early stages very limited weight should be given to it.

The scheme would lead to a substantial increase in the housing stock in the Fordham area, providing housing for both the open market and affordable housing for local people. No objections had been received from the County Council in respect of the impact of the proposal on the local schools or road system.

The proposal was considered to be acceptable in principle, but the application would still have to be judged against all other relevant policies.

With regard to highway safety and parking, the County Council Transport Team and Local Highways Authority had no objections. With adequate visibility splays and the main spine road built to adoptable standards, it was considered that the proposal would not have any detrimental impact upon existing vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians or future occupants within the development.

Speaking of the design of the proposal, the Senior Planning Officer said that the gross density of the scheme was 11.3 dwellings per hectare, with approximately 50% given over to public open space. The layout had been designed so that dwellings would face roads and/or public open space.

The creation of such an oversized public open space being offered to the Parish Council was a huge benefit, as it changed half the site from private land to public open space. It was reiterated that if the Parish Council did not want the public open space, then it would need to be offered to the District Council and then to a management company. The public open space and included water drainage would need to come with a suitable maintenance contribution, so as not to put a drain on the public purse. Additional money would also be sought as the developer had not provided a clear idea of what the public open space would be and future pitches would add to the cost of the open space.

Negotiations would need to take place to ensure the right balance of affordable housing, education contributions and open space. The development would be liable to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The public open space would need to include SUDs; the maintenance contributions and ownership would form part of the S106 Agreement.

It was noted that Mr John Pryke, a resident of Fordham, was unable to attend the meeting but had asked for a statement to be read out in his absence. Therefore, with the agreement of the Chairman, the Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement on behalf of Mr Pryke:

'As a resident of Fordham, I am asking the Planning Committee to refuse this application on the following grounds:

The committee would have read the comments of Fordham Parish Council, which I totally agree with, but do not consider they go far enough.

In the already adopted plan Local Plan of 2015, this site FRD3 was shown as having 10 dwellings in spite of the land owner wanting more.

In the new draft local plan, it is shown as frontage development.

The application as proposed will extend housing into the open countryside which is so valuable in this part of the village. It shows 5 access points onto Mildenhall Road, crossing a cycle way and part of the route to school for many children.

The increase in traffic will be enormous and the roads in the village will be under even more pressure than they are now (approx 700 vehicles per hour at peak time).

This road is used by traffic to and from Mildenhall plus the A11 and A14. It is well known that landowners and developers are taking advantage of the situation while a new local plan is being prepared on the dubious grounds that the ECDC cannot demonstrate it has sufficient land supply for the next 5 years.

They should be made to wait until the new plan is approved which will be in accordance with the wishes of the community.

The application shows very little parking for residents and visitors in spite of the latest revision, which I believe, will result in parking on the Mildenhall Road.

I ask that the committee refuse this application in its present form and suggest a future application for frontage development only as shown in the new draft local plan with one access point from Mildenhall Road and the dwellings to be served by an access point behind the boundary hedge.

The committee may not be aware but there will no doubt be an application by Gladmans for up to 100 houses on the same road. If this application is approved, it may well be difficult for the committee to refuse that application.

Fordham is facing unprecedented levels of development which is simply unsustainable for a community of 2500 people. The village centre road is unable to cope with the current level of traffic and the remaining infrastructure will not be able to cope i.e. School etc.

Already approved outside the local adopted plan (and since 2015) are 37 dwellings in Station Road. The proposals to come to this committee in addition to this one, are up to 100 in Mildenhall Road, 150 at Scotsdales Garden Centre, Soham Road and a further 16 off the Soham Road.

This will be a total of 380 plus new homes for a village with inadequate road structure and other infrastructure. This is simply not sustainable.

I realise that you are only able to consider the applications before you but i ask you once again to refuse this application as it stands and follow the proposal in the draft local plan.'

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Stewart Moffat, applicant, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- He was a Fordham resident and the owner of the site;

- He thanked Officers for a pragmatic and balanced report;
- He wanted to ensure that the land would benefit people and he felt the development would create a benefit for the whole community;
- The proposal was for 79 dwellings;
- All interested parties wanted a larger scheme and this project would provide a unique opportunity to provide public space in Fordham that would be the equivalent of four large football pitches;
- The remainder of the site would be low density and have 40% affordable housing;
- The public open space would represent a huge benefit to the village and the Parish Council had been consulted on its usage;
- There were concerns about ongoing costs;
- The forest site would give children a chance to go out into the fresh air and discover creepy crawlies etc;
- The County Council was seeking a contribution for education, but it was difficult to see how this would be viable.

Mr Moffat then responded to comments and questions from the Committee.

Councillor Beckett asked whether the affordable housing included the self build element. Mr Moffat replied that self build would be private housing and the Senior Planning Officer confirmed that affordable housing would be 40% of the whole 79 dwellings.

The Chairman noted that the applicant was donating a wooded area to the school and asked if the school had lost some of its recreation ground. Mr Moffat said the land had been lost during the expansion of the school.

At this point the Chairman informed the Committee that Parish Councillor Malcolm Roper was unable to attend the meeting and had requested that a statement be read out in his absence. Therefore, with the agreement of the Chairman, the Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement on behalf of Parish Councillor Roper:

'Mr Chairman and Committee Members I am Malcolm Roper the Vice Chairman of Fordham Parish Council and I apologise for not being able to speak to you directly at this meeting due to a family funeral.

The application before you is of great concern to the Parish Council.

Firstly and most seriously is the blatant misleading comment in paragraph 7.12 of the Planning Statement prepared by Howes Percival on behalf of the applicants.

There were at the request of the applicants in committee meetings at the Village Hall. At no time did Members express any views or opinions in respect of support or welcome of the open space and accept the need to increase the housing numbers to ensure the viability of the scheme. Members just asked questions about the proposals and mainly about the open space on offer.

To have done so would have been seen as predetermination and Members would not have been able to vote when the application came before the Parish Council.

Also paragraph 7.13 is suggesting that the Parish Council is unlikely to support the loss of affordable housing and public open space if on offer. The Parish Council has no appetite to take on any more open space due to the doubtful need and costs. It already has a substantial recreation Ground.

Frontage development of 30 dwellings with 40% affordable homes would be preferred.

I ask the Committee to disregard both those paragraphs.

In 2016 the Chairman made a public statement concerning growth in Fordham following the Parish Conferences regarding the new Local Plan. The advice given at the conference for Fordham was 20% growth. The Chairman's statement proposed that Fordham Parish Council should adopt a strategy which continues to have low growth in the village with the aim of a total of 240 new homes which should mainly be affordable homes for the residents of Fordham. This is 129 more homes than in the approved Local Plan of 2015.

The Parish Council recognise that development is required in its village but it should determine where development is most suitable to take place and not be determined by developers and speculators, after all we are part of this community.

This is a greenfield site and currently used for agricultural purposes. The proposal encroaches into the open countryside. The Parish Council has always resisted development of this field for this reason, which was also recognised by the Inspector, Mr Hetherington, for the 2015 adopted Local Plan who only included a small part of this field in that plan FRD3. Therefore it is contrary to the adopted Local Plan and the current draft Plan which shows only frontage development on this part of Mildenhall Road.

It is contrary to the local built form.

The Parish Council is not against development on this site and would support a frontage development as shown in the draft Local Plan which would link up the village. There are more appropriate sites elsewhere with developers and landowners on these sites.

The transport assessment by MTC Engineering states that the proposal would generate an extra 467 vehicles daily. MTC used TRICS to calculate the additional traffic generated by this development. What it does not take into account is that this is a designated lorry route from the A11, A14, and A142. An increase of this size would simply be unsustainable at peak times through the village.

The census shows that 5.5% of the residents will walk, 3.5% will cycle and 2.9% will use public transport. What is omitted is that 88.1% will use their cars.

If the Committee approve this application it will create a precedent for the Gladman Land application soon to come before you on the opposite side of the Mildenhall Road. With planning approval already granted since 2015 on other sites elsewhere in the village for 58 homes and proposals for 150 homes on the garden centre and 16 for the extension to Rule gardens this would bring the number of new homes near to the target of the Chairman and if the Committee approves this application as it stands then it would bring the total over the target at 303 and if Gladman Land are successful the total would be 403, well above the wishes of this community.

To summarise, the Parish Council ask you to refuse this application as it is shown but suggest that if an application for frontage development only with 16 – 30 homes and one access point were submitted this would be considered favourably by the Parish Council and meet the Chairman's target of 240 homes.

Thank you for listening to this statement.'

Councillor Bill Hunt enquired whether the statement was a formal response from Fordham Parish Council. The Chairman asked Councillor Huffer if she was able to shed any light on the matter and she replied that the statement had not been compiled or approved by her. She was not sure where it had come from, but it did not represent the views of the whole Parish Council. The Legal Services Manager was then asked for an opinion and she drew Members' attention to page 2 of the Officer's report which stated that the Parish Council had concerns regarding the proposal.

The Chairman said the problem arose in that current practice was not uniform for parish councils. Councillor Roper was often delegated to express views, and in

the absence of anyone being able to confirm otherwise, the statement would be accepted as a view expressed by Fordham Parish Council.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Julia Huffer, a Ward Member for Fordham Villages, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- Fordham was a wonderful village with lots of facilities but teenagers were not catered for;
- There had been a delegation of youngsters who wanted the site to happen and this would be an opportunity for them to engage with the community;
- Parish Councillor Roper was inaccurate in saying that there was no appetite for the scheme, a large percentage of the Parish Council would support it;
- The landowner was being very generous in donating the land for the benefit of the whole village;
- At present there was nothing in the village for young people to do, so here was the chance to do something about it;
- She was giving the proposal her total support.

Councillor Beckett asked if this development would help to adjoin the built form and join the village together. Councillor Huffer advised that the school had been extended and it needed to be filled with children

Councillor Tom Hunt asked Councillor Huffer whether a vote was taken on the proposal. She replied that there was a vote, but many of the Parish Councillors did not see things from a young person's point of view. It was very close (5-4) and the Parish Council voted against the scheme.

Referring to the Transport Assessment Team's request for a condition requiring the developer to provide six one day travel vouchers to the occupiers of the new dwellings, the Chairman asked the Senior Planning Officer if this was standard practice. The Senior Planning Officer replied that he had never seen it used in a scheme of this size.

Councillor Bill Hunt declared himself to still be muddled as to why County Education was asking for a contribution when the extension to the school had already been built. The County Council had a duty to provide education in this District and the school could cope.

The Planning Manager informed Members that the education contribution was an ongoing matter and she would be having a meeting with County Education next week to discuss the matter.

Councillor Rouse said he was not pleased with the County Council asking for a retrospective contribution to education. He appreciated Councillor Huffer's input to the discussion and thought this application had the potential to be an attractive scheme for Fordham. It would create an area of parkland and could offer something for all ages, and he was minded to support the proposal.

In proposing that the Officer's recommendation for approval be supported, Councillor Tom Hunt thought that the Parish Council had an obligation to find a way to make the scheme work. CIL would cover funding and the 40% level of affordable housing could be reduced and a contribution made to address this. The scheme would provide 79 dwellings and there was no significant local opposition; this was an opportunity not to be missed.

Councillor Bill Hunt declared his total support for the proposal, saying it would go a long way towards uniting Fordham.

Councillor Bovingdon seconded the motion for approval, expressing his thanks for the application and the landowner's view of it being for the benefit of the village.

The Chairman agreed, saying the scheme was unique in that it was offering such a huge area for play and recreation; the landowner was to be commended and celebrated. There was a certain amount of disquiet regarding the development, but it should be remembered that there was a national housing crisis. Members were to be commended for being open minded in their approach to this application.

Councillor Beckett said that as a Committee, it should be possible to send out a message that this scheme would be in keeping with its rural location and close to amenities, all of which would enhance and help the village. Members did not want to see applications that took advantage; this application was what the Committee was looking for.

Councillor Cox agreed that it was an excellent scheme but urged caution regarding what might be put in the open space.

There being no further comments, Members returned to the motion for approval, and when put to the vote,

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Planning Manager be given delegated authority to approve planning application reference 16/01662/OUM subject to the completion of a S106 Agreement and the conditions as set out in the Officer's report.