

DELEGATED

AGENDA NO.

REPORT TO PLANNING COMMITTEE

DATE: 31 May 2007

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE
DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Reserved matters application for residential development comprising 176 no. dwellinghouses and associated means of access and landscaping Former Stockton and Billingham College site, Finchale Avenue/The Causeway, Billingham

Application 07/0858/REM

Expiry date: 21 June 2007

SUMMARY

Outline planning permission for residential development on 3.2 hectares of land previously occupied by the buildings of Stockton and Billingham College located on the corner of The Causeway and Finchale Avenue, Billingham was granted on 22nd September 2006. It was assumed at that time that the site could accommodate approximately 160 dwellings. The site has been acquired from Morrisons by Yuill Homes and it has submitted an application for reserved matter approval for the erection of 176 No dwellings houses together with associated means of access and landscaping. The development includes an element of affordable housing. A previous similar application was withdrawn in order that applicant could address concerns over various matters relating to layout, design, access and landscaping.

The resubmitted application has attempted to address these concerns. It is supported by a Design and Access Statement, a tree survey, a sales and marketing report and photographs of similar development elsewhere provided by the applicant.

The site had been left derelict following the demolition of the college building with brick rubble and building foundations left in place, but since acquisition of the land the site has been remediated in preparation for the new development.

Limited concerns about the proposal have been made by local residents (2 letters) with primary concern about the lack of open space, parking and that high-rise development may occur. In respect of open space, a legal agreement was signed at the outline stage for a financial contribution in the form of a commuted lump sum (£112,000) to be used to carry out improvements to the adjacent John Whitehead Park. A further contribution of £50,000 towards the provision pedestrian linkages from the site to local amenities including the Town Centre was also agreed at that time.

The principle of housing development on the site was established with the outline approval. This application provides the details of how the site is to be laid and

developed. Though at a slightly higher density than originally envisaged, given its sustainable location, adjacent to the town centre this aspect of the development is acceptable. The form and layout of the site is also appropriate for its location and seeks to ensure a good quality peripheral treatment particularly along its important road frontages.

It is unlikely to give rise to a significant highway concerns notwithstanding the final views of the Head of Technical Services are not yet known. Similarly in respect of the landscape treatment. These matters will be dealt with in an update report that will be presented to members.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that subject to the views of the Head of Technical Services, the application be approved subject to conditions covering the following matters:

- ***Development carried out In accordance with the approved plans;***
- ***Implementation and management of the approved landscaping***
- ***Tree protection***
- ***Any other relevant matters including meeting highway/landscape concerns***

The Proposal has been considered against the policies below and it is considered that the scheme accords with these policies and there are no other material considerations which indicate a decision should be otherwise.

***The following policies were relevant in this decision:
Stockton on Tees Local Plan policies GP 1, HO 4, HO11
Planning Policy Statements 1 and 3, Policy Guidance Note 13***

BACKGROUND

1. The application relates to a 3.2 hectares site forming land previously occupied by the buildings of Stockton and Billingham College located on the corner of The Causeway and Finchale Avenue, Billingham. On the opposite corner is John Whitehead Park. North of the demolished area the land remains in open space use and includes a running track. Open space in council ownership is located to west with the existing Community Centre occupying the frontage onto the Causeway. To the south on the opposite side of The Causeway, are residential flats.
2. The site had been left derelict following the demolition of the college building with brick rubble and building foundations left in place. Morrisons had bought the site and sought to develop it as a retail store but permission for that use was refused in 1998 and the appeal dismissed. The site owner secured instead last year, outline approval for housing (application No 06/1983/OUT).
3. The outline permission reserved all matters of detail for future approval, apart from the means of access onto Finchale Avenue though that was conditioned to require the provision of two means of access. The application was supported by a Transport Assessment (TA) and a letter submitted by the applicants planning consultant setting

out the planning case. The TA assumed a housing density of about 50 dwelling per hectare (dph), which equates to approximately 160 dwellings being erected on the site. It concluded that there are no highways or transport reasons why planning permission should not be granted.

4. The outline permission was subject to a Section 106 legal agreement requiring the payment of two sets of commuted lump sums - £112, 000 to be used to carry out improvements to the adjacent John Whitehead Park and £50,000 towards the provision pedestrian linkages from the site to local amenities including the Town Centre.
5. The site has been bought from Morrisons by Yuill Homes and it submitted a reserved matter application seeking to implement the outline approval. The application (06/3524/REM) proposed the erection of 176 No dwellings on the site. However, it was withdrawn in February 2007 to address concerns on to various matters relating to layout, design, access and landscaping. A revised application has now been submitted which seeks to resolve the concerns previously raised.

THE PROPOSAL

6. The revised application (07/0858/REM) still proposes the erection of 176 dwellings which equates to a density of 55 dwelling per hectare in the form of relatively small 2 and 3 bedroomed houses served by two accesses of Finchale Avenue. The houses are mix of two, two and half and three storey houses and consist of 6 No house types. The 176 dwellings include 18 No “affordable houses” provided in two blocks to satisfy the condition of the outline that 10% of the dwellings would be affordable. The properties are to be sold on a shared ownership basis. The revised scheme seeks to provide a layout that takes the form of strong outward facing perimeter blocks onto the two primary frontages of The Causeway and Finchale Avenue retaining and supplementing the trees along both road frontages including additional trees extending the avenue of trees further north along Finchale Avenue. Some trees on the site (which are protected by a temporary Tree Preservation Order) will need to be removed to facilitate the development. A survey of trees is provided as part of the planning submission. The replacement trees, which are of a high specification, are to mitigate the loss of trees within the site. As well as trees to the front the boundary treatment include 1.2m high “bow top” railings, again as part of the applicant’s aim to provide a high quality finish to the important road frontages.
7. Internally, the layout consists of a series of squares with built in traffic calming and differing surface materials, including to differentiate between adopted manoeuvring areas and parking bays. The squares are further enhanced with the strategic positioning of trees and ornate grilles offering protection against vehicles reversing etc.
8. The design philosophy employed is explained in a Design and Access Statement accompanying the application. It is stated the layout follows largely “Home Zone” principles and has been the applicant claims been successfully used elsewhere. Home Zones “are residential streets in which the road space is shared between drivers and other road users with the wider needs of residents (including people who walk and cycle, and children) in mind. The aim is to change the way that streets are used and to improve the quality of life in residential streets by making them places for people, not just for traffic”.

9. The layout is designed to provide market housing that is affordable as possible, some modestly sized but having what is claimed as useable gardens and the provision of parking spaces rather than garages in many cases. The applicant states this higher density approach is appropriate for a site that is located on the edge of the Town centre but it is not at the expense of a high quality design and appearance, which remains the applicant's key objective. It proposes a similar range of houses types utilised by the developer in a current development in Longbenton in Newcastle that recently received a RICs award as the best regeneration housing scheme in the region.
10. The application is further supported by a sales and marketing report to demonstrate that "affordability" is a major factor in housing choice in Billingham. Accordingly, the type of housing proposed is of the size and at the cost most in demand in the area. Other additional information provided includes photographs of similar development elsewhere provided by the applicant and sketch elevation of the street scene to the Causeway indicating the treatment given to the important corner with Finchale Avenue.
11. The development is substandard in car parking spaces (by 31 spaces) and the applicant acknowledges this, but justifies the lower than standard provision on the basis of the site's sustainable location and low cost tenure housing mix. A Departure from Standard has been applied for.

THE CONSULTATIONS

12. Local residents and occupiers have been individually notified of the application. The application has also been advertised on site and in the local press. Two emails have been received as a result of this publicity.
13. Gil Smith of 2 Finchale Avenue comments "I am concerned that there will not be enough parking spaces and a lack of green land bearing in mind the number of houses planned for the site."
14. Mrs Hilda Harrison of 12 Roseberry Flats, The Causeway is not against houses on the site but objects to any high rise buildings i.e. flats as "we already look out on high rise buildings at the back which blocks sunlight and is unattractive and we have already just got rid of the 'le ronde' building and we don't want any more traffic noise than there is already is to the back and front. And we should be entitles to some privacy."
15. CPRE: comments:

"We welcome the opportunity to comment on this Planning Application.

We welcome the development of new housing on part of this site, in the heart of an established community centre and close by many local existing services. However we believe it would be appropriate to incorporate more greenspace within the build, especially as this site development will mean the loss of significant green playing fields.

The range of housing types gives a variety to the site however we do have concerns with the road layout. Many of the access roads look small and maze-like, with potential passing place problems where roadside parking occurs. We do not see internal

community green space within the site and we strongly believe that shared community recreation infrastructure should be incorporated within the development. Billingham has a very clear community identity which needs to be supported and facilitated.

We would expect some agreement for the developers to create this landscaping/ recreation space within the development as part of any planning approval and would like to see a greater commitment to increasing tree cover around the site, not just at the periphery. We would expect some major commitment towards a lower carbon footprint for this significant housing site.”

16. A number of statutory bodies have been consulted and no objections or response has been received from:

- Corporate Director Children, Education And Social Care
- Northumbrian Water Limited
- Development Plans Officer
- Care For Your Area
- Tees Forest
- Northern Gas Networks
- CE Electric UK

17. Urban Design – Engineers: Views are awaited but it is understood there is no fundamental objection to the layout though certain discussions are ongoing. Confirmation has been received that the Transport Assessment submitted with the outline permission is satisfactory in terms of the increase in numbers of dwellings now proposed and that the harm to the highway network identified by the TA is mitigated by the work to the Roseberry Road/Wolviston Road junction which a £25K contribution from the developer will partly fund

18. Urban Design – Landscape: views awaited

19. The Environmental Health Unit has no objection in principle but recommends conditions to check for contamination and restrict hours of construction.

20. Environment Agency: no objection but repeats previous recommendations regarding that conditions be imposed to deal with possible water pollution concerns.

PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

National Planning Policy

21. National Planning policies are set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG) and the newer Planning Policy Statements (PPS).

22. Relevant to this application are:

PPS 1 “Delivering Sustainable Development”

PPS 3 “Housing” (advises that most additional new housing should be on previously developed land within urban areas to minimise the amount of Greenfield land developed)

PPG 13 "Transport" (promotes more sustainable transport choices and greater accessibility by all forms of transport with housing located principally within the urban areas)

23. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan for the area comprises the Regional Spatial Strategy, the Tees Valley Structure Plan 2004 and the Stockton Borough Local Plan 1997. Bearing mind the principle of the proposed development has been established through the grant of permission for residential purposes, only policies within the local plan dealing with detailed concerns such as design and access are relevant

Stockton Borough Local Plan

24. Policy GP1 is the general policy and sets out ten criteria that all development proposals need to be assessed against. These criteria are as follows: -

- i. The external appearance of the development and its relationship with the surrounding area.
- ii. The effect on the amenities of the occupiers of nearby properties.
- iii. The provision of satisfactory access and parking arrangements.
- iv. The contribution of existing trees and landscape features.
- v. The need for a high standard of landscaping.
- vi. The desire to reduce opportunities for crime.
- vii. The intention to make development as accessible as possible to everyone.
- viii. The quality, character and sensitivity of existing landscapes and buildings.
- ix. The effect upon wildlife habitats.
- x. The effect upon public rights of way.

25. Policy HO4 requires the provision of affordable housing to an agreed extent for housing developments exceeding 2 hectares.

26. Policy HO11 requires all new residential development to be designed and laid out to a high quality standard with open space and a satisfactory degree of privacy and amenity for both the new dwellings and the occupiers of nearby properties.

MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

27. In light of the comments received, the consultation responses, planning policy and the planning history of the site, a number of planning issues are considered material to the consideration of this application.

Principle of Development

28. Outline planning to redevelop this former college site for housing has been granted. That has established the principle of residential development on the site.

29. Accordingly, development of this site for housing is acceptable in principle from a land use standpoint.

Density of Development

30. For the purposes of the Transport Assessment that accompanied the outline application a density of development of 50 dwelling per hectare (dph) was assumed in line with the guidance range of 30-50 dph in the then extant PPG3 (replaced since April by PPS3). This equated to the site being developed for some 160 dwellings. The detailed layout now submitted for approval proposes 176 dwellings, a density of 55 dph. The applicant's Planning Consultant argues that this is appropriate "as the location of the site adjacent to the town centre, public transport services and recreational facilities means that (a) car usage may be expected to be lower than is case on more peripheral sites and (b) private space requirements in gardens are less. As a result, a higher density is both appropriate and achievable." He also states that the new PPS3 advocates a more flexible approach, under which local circumstances and conditions can be more readily taken into account.
31. The applicant's case has merits. The site is in a very sustainable location that permits higher density development though this is usually in the form of flatted development. The developer does not propose any such development in this case. It seeking approval for an urban rather suburban type of housing development appropriate not only for its location but also for because the smaller house types have greater affordability for residents of Billingham. The development does not provide any significant open space provision within the site, which in other developments would have lowered the overall density of housing. Instead, as agreed at the outline stage, a significant contribution (£112,000) is being made to improving John Whitehead Park, which adjoins the site to the east. In these circumstances, given the need for the type of housing proposed and its location, and that it will not have any significant implications in terms of traffic generation following a review of the original Transport Assessment, the higher density now proposed is acceptable.

Layout and Design

32. The higher density with its number smaller house types and gardens did originally lead to concerns that spaces around dwellings were significant below what was acceptable. Occupants of the dwellings could have suffered a potential loss of privacy, as separation distances would have been below the accepted norm. It was partly these concerns that lead to the withdrawal of the previous application. In the new layout separation distances have been improved, particularly back to back (though some plots still retain small rear gardens). Distances front to front – opposite sides of the road are lower for what would normally be expected in traditional housing estates, partly because of the small front garden areas which vary in length from 1.5m to 4.0m and in surface treatment. Some will have hard surface treatment whilst larger front gardens will remain soft planting. The applicant justifies this as part of the overall design philosophy seeking to move away from more traditional gardens, partly to make more efficient use of land and partly by customer preferences for easy maintained rear enclosed areas. This is claimed to be an increasing feature in the design of urban housing scheme and its introduction is particularly appropriate given the immediate availability of very substantial informal and formal areas open space in the immediate vicinity.

33. The development is more urban in nature than in other traditional housing development. In this location a more urban feel to residential is considered appropriate and the layout and housing form and design that seeks to achieve that concept without compromising on quality. The scheme as now revised is acceptable, though subject to the Head of Technical Services being satisfied on the technical aspects of the street layout in terms of junction design and road widths etc.

Access and Parking

34. The outline permission required the provision of two means of access to serve the site off Finchale Avenue, the position and design of which were to be agreed. This reserved matter application shows two such access points and the views of the Head of technical Services are awaited as to whether these are satisfactorily located and designed. His views on the reduced level of parking provision proposed are also awaited.

Open Space and Landscape

35. The views of the Head of Technical Services (Urban Design – Landscape) are still awaited. However, the resubmitted scheme has sought to address previous concerns regarding replacement tree planting and landscaping details have been provided showing the retention with supplementary planting of a tree lined frontage to both The Causeway and Finchale Avenue. In granting outline planning permission an informative was attached indicating precisely the Councils wish for a high quality landscape treatment to the important road frontages. Whilst the views of the landscape architect are awaited, the revised submitted scheme appears to satisfy these concerns.
36. As well the need for good quality frontage treatment the site backs onto open space areas to the north and west. The originally scheme failed to properly address the boundary treatment in this area. The revised scheme now shows a treatment comprising feature brick pillars and close boarding together with additional screen planting to soften the impact and provide an attractive outlook facing onto the retained open space areas.

Residual matters

37. The Environment Agency and the Environmental Health Unit have raised the possibility of the land being contaminated given that the site is previously developed land and also that the site's drainage is satisfactory. These same concerns were raised at the outline stage and appropriate conditions were imposed to secure testing for contamination and proper remediation of the site should it be necessary. These conditions remain in force, as do conditions over the hours of working, maintenance of the adjoining retained open space and facing materials. Details of facing bricks and roof tiles for the houses are provided and are considered satisfactory and acceptable.
38. In respect of the neighbour concerns, Members will note no high-rise development is proposed. The concern about the lack of open is noted but in lieu of providing on site open space (0.6 hectares would be required) a significant financial contribution is being made to improve facilities at the adjacent John Whitehead Park. A large area of open space is also retained to the north of the site. Parking is slightly below

standard but is justified given its location next to the Town Centre. CPRE's comments are noted and are largely answered by the comments set out above. For clarity, the development does not involve the loss of any playing fields.

CONCLUSIONS

39. The principle of housing development on the site was established with the outline approval. This application provides the details of how the site is to be laid and developed. Though at a slightly higher density than originally envisaged, given its sustainable location, adjacent to the town centre this aspect of the development is acceptable. The form and layout of the site is also appropriate for its location and seeks to ensure a good quality peripheral treatment particularly along its important road frontages.
40. It is unlikely to give rise to a significant highway concerns notwithstanding the final views of the Head of Technical Services are not yet known. Similarly in respect of the landscape treatment. These matters will be dealt with in an update report that will be presented to members.
41. On balance it is considered approval can be recommended subject to the views of the Head of Technical Services.

Director of Neighbourhood Services and Development

Contact Officer: Peter Whaley - Telephone No. 01642 526061

Financial Implications:

None

Environmental Implications:

See report

Human Rights Implications

The provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights 1950 have been taken into account in the preparation of this report.

Community Safety Implications

None

Background Papers:

Application files 06/1983/OUT, 06/3524/REM, 07/0858/REM

Ward and Ward Councillors:

Billingham Central Ward

Councillor B Woodhouse
Councillor Ann McCoy