

Houghton Regis Town Council
Planning Committee
6th January 2020 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: D Dixon-Wilkinson Chairman
J Carroll
D Jones
S Thorne
K Wattingham
T Welch

Officers: Debbie Marsh Corporate Services Manager
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 9

Apologies: Councillor: M S Kennedy

Also present: Councillors: Y Farrell
T McMahon
S Goodchild Central Bedfordshire Council

1111 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Kennedy.

1112 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

CB/19/03578/FULL, 8 Stubbs Close – The applicants addressed the committee in support of their application.

Members of the public addressed the committee and raised concerns regarding the application CB/19/04182/FULL – Land adjacent to 134 High Street.

- The access track was owned by existing residents not Central Bedfordshire Council
- Property was out of keeping with the area
- Access to the proposed building would be only available through conservation land containing trees with TPO's (Tree Preservation Orders)
- Protected species living in greenery (bats)
- The property would be sited on conservation land
- Loss of heritage site due to the possible destruction of tunnels situated on the land
- Loss of privacy to existing properties and lack of privacy of the new build
- Damage to the environment
- Building site would be too close to existing properties
- Plans would involve the removal of tree tops
- Turning circle would be too tight for vehicles which would go across a neighbour's land
- Access road too tight for larger vehicles
- Protected land should not be given over to developers
- Track road was also used for pedestrian access

- The residents were not correctly notified of the application for the proposed property
- Concern that Central Bedfordshire Council have not considered any of the concern's residents have previously put forward.

11113 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Welch declared an interest in CB/19/04059/FULL, Land of Sundon Road as a tenant of the Housing Association redeveloping the site.

11114 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 16th December 2019 for consideration.

Resolved To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2019 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

11115 PLANNING MATTERS

(a) The following planning applications were considered:

Non - Delegated

CB/19/02130/FULL Demolition of existing residential dwelling and erection of 121 dwelling including the creation of a new vehicular access, recreational open space, parking infrastructure and associated landscaping and ancillary works
The Gates, Land East of Bedford Road, Bidwell
Members received a report from the Town Councils planning consultant.

Application Ref. CB/19/02130/FULL, 121 dwellings at The Gates, East of Bedford Road, Bidwell

Amended Plans

1.1 The amended plans seek to address some of the issues raised with the original submission with the following changes:

- the red line (showing the outline of the application site) plan has been amended along the northern boundary to ensure that the disputed land is not included,
- the footpath/cycleway that extends through the green space along the eastern boundary has been increased to 3m in width,
- the layout has been amended to ensure
 - all back-to-back distances are design guide compliant,
 - the layout around Keepers Cottage has been amended to reduce the number of plots and reduce any perception of overbearing impact,
 - the site access has been widened to 7.3m in width,

- the landscaping along the central avenue/road has been enhanced with the inclusion of more trees,
- soft landscaping details have been amended,
- the house types and flat blocks have been amended to add further design details, adding variation including additional chimneys, addition of bay windows in prominent locations and a review of materials across the site.

Discussions over s.106 are proposed separately.

1.2 Earlier in 2019, the Committee considered the original proposal, raising objections to the scheme for the following reasons:

- The layout of the buildings adjoining the Bedford Road frontage should be changed so that these homes face the road reflecting the layout of the original hamlet and with respect to the setting of the adjoining listed building,
- The dwellings facing Bedford Road should be designed to reflect the materials and scale of the hamlet,
- The children's play area should be relocated elsewhere in the site to avoid placing close to a road and not adjoining a pond for reasons of safety,
- The spine road through the estate should be re-designed to reduce traffic speeds, reduce the lengths of straight carriageway and use the resulting design to introduce more landscaping into the street scene and reduce the appearance of a dense urban setting

1.3 Further the Town Council noted it would review its objections if an amended scheme which addressed these concerns and would look for a s.106 contribution being negotiated towards nearby service, shopping and community facilities and a bus service to connect the site with the facilities in the town centre.

1.4 **Recommendation:** the amended scheme addresses some of the concerns raised previously but not all. Therefore, the Town Council objections as follows:

- The layout of the buildings adjoining the Bedford Road frontage adjoining the listed building should be changed so that these two homes face the road reflecting the layout of the original hamlet,
- The children's play area should be relocated elsewhere in the site to avoid placing close to a road and not adjoining a pond for reasons of safety,
- The spine road through the estate should be designed with speed reduction measures such as pinch points,
- a s.106 contribution should include provision of nearby service, shopping and community facilities and a bus service to connect the site with the facilities in the town centre.

1.5 The safety issues – traffic speeds and a play area adjoining a SUDS pond, and the appearance of the development in relation to the adjoining listed building remain the principle concerns.

Considerations

2.1 Policy: The site, fronting Bedford Road and extending onto land at the rear is not included in the Masterplan Area for Houghton Regis North development and under the current Local Plan (2004) is within a green belt designation. However, the application site will be enveloped by the HRN Masterplan proposals with new development around and a landscape belt carrying the current right of way immediately to the east, with housing beyond.

2.2 On balance, the current green belt designation has little relevance. Ordinarily the green belt designation in the adopted local plan would require a high bar of justification to be demonstrated to enable development, then usually only a limited range of types – infill, required in connection with agriculture etc. The approval of the HRN development since 2012 will in the near future leave it as an ‘island’ and the purposes identified for green belt in the National Planning Policy Framework – to prevent settlements merging, to protect open countryside, have very limited application.

2.3 Design and layout: The key points regarding the amended scheme remain:

- Concern over the elevations and appearance from the Bedford Rd frontage,
- Safety issues over the location of the children’s play area,
- traffic speeds and safety on the estate main access road.

Annex: Report July 2019

1. Description

1.1 Bidwell is a small group of mostly homes and farm buildings either side of the Bedford Road, currently separate from Houghton Regis, located at the foot of the hill north of the town centre. The site is situated on the eastern side of Bedford Road, with a frontage onto the road and includes the paddocks at the rear which extend to the southern edge of the Rugby Club. A footpath / right of way (Chiltern Way) runs north-south along the eastern boundary. There is a small row of terraced houses fronting Bedford Road north of the site and the Red Cow Farm, a grade II listed building to the south.

1.2 The site is not included in the Masterplan Area for Houghton Regis North development and under the current Local Plan (2004) is within a green belt designation. The proposed Local Plan (the Examination period has recently concluded, and the Inspectors’ conclusions are awaited) contains one allocation for development at Bidwell – HAS28 in the Small / Medium Allocations, for 40 homes on the Bidwell Gospel hall site.

1.3 The Design & Access Statement supporting the application illustrates that the HRN Masterplan proposals will see Bidwell including the application site, enveloped by new development; immediately to the east of the site will be a landscape belt carrying the current right of way with housing beyond.

1.4 The site is just over 4ha in size, a gentle slope to the north, currently with a house and various out-buildings. There are trees and hedges on the site mostly along its boundaries and between the house and Bedford Road, otherwise the site comprises rough-grazing / pasture.

1.5 The proposal is wholly residential, demolition of the existing buildings and 121 new homes made up of a mix of houses and flats:

Private Dwellings (Total 85);

7 x 4 Bed Houses; 46 x 3 Bed Houses; 23 x 2 Bed Houses; 9 x 2 Bed Flats.

Affordable Dwellings (Total 36);

1 x 4 Bed House; 6 x 3 Bed Houses; 10 x 2 Bed Houses; 13 x 2 Bed Flats; 6 x 1 Bed Flats.

1.6 The balance between private and affordable dwellings accords with the Central Beds requirements. The affordable dwellings are in two groups: one near the boundary with the rugby club and the other on the southern edge.

1.7 The site would be served by a single road access point from the Bedford Road frontage with pavements either side, leading to a spine road connecting to a number of cul-de-sacs. The scheme includes two areas of open space, one with a play area adjoining an attenuation pond on the Bedford Road frontage next to the access road, the second a ribbon of grass and planting along the eastern boundary retaining the hedgerow and trees plus an access pathway.

1.8 There are 236 car parking spaces shown, a mix of allocated / on-plot spaces and unallocated / visitor parking. A Travel Plan report accompanies the application which highlights the walking / footpath opportunities, cycling and bus stops / routes close to the site. The location of the development means that access to local school(s), community facilities, shops and Houghton Regis centre would be the most important to facilitate to avoid unnecessary car-based journeys. The Design & Access Statement describes the facilities available in Houghton Regis, those which will be provided within the HRN development, and the excellent (car-based) connections northwards to the A5 dual carriageway and southwards to Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

2. Planning Policy

2.1 The Planning Statement supporting the application balances three policy matters: the requirement to determine applications in accordance with the adopted local plan (2004), the anticipated matters which the draft Central Beds Local Plan will need to embrace before that can be adopted, and thirdly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) support for sustainable development.

2.2 The recent Local Plan Hearings have given rise to a considerable number of issues which, it is likely, the Inspectors will require further work by Central Bedfordshire to produce evidence or justification, and which may itself involve a period of further consultation.

2.3 This is unlikely to affect the progress of the Houghton Regis North 1 and 2 developments, where sites are already commenced with levelling and infrastructure being installed.

2.4 The Statement with this application also refers to the HRN Framework (2012) which guides the HRN development, however as stated above Bidwell is not included in the Framework area.

3. Issues

3.1 **Policy:** Ordinarily the current green belt designation in the adopted local plan would require a high bar of justification to be demonstrated to enable development, then usually only a limited range of types – infill, required in connection with agriculture etc. However the approval of the HRN development in 2012 and the subsequent reserved matters approvals for its implementation, around Bidwell, which will in the near future leave it as an ‘island’ between HRN and Houghton Regis means that the purposes identified for green belt in the National Planning Policy Framework – to prevent settlements merging, to protect open countryside, have very limited application.

3.2 It should be noted that other applications for development between Houghton Regis and Bidwell have been approved –

CB/17/02512/OUT

Outline Application: Residential development of up to 1.03ha of the site with formation of two accesses, sustainable urban drainage and associated landscaping
Land South of the bungalow, Bedford Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6JS

CB/19/00668/OUT

Outline application for the erection of 7 detached dwellings with associated access, turning and parking.
Land East of Bedford Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Beds LU5 5ES

CB/18/00067/OUT

Outline Application: Formation of a new access to serve existing residential development and a residential development of up to 24 dwellings together with an enhanced footpath link and associated landscaping
Highfield Barns, Bedford Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6JP

3.3 On balance, the current green belt designation has little relevance or justification. However, the development will have little in the way of local community facilities, schools or retail opportunities until the development on HRN progresses, and a S.106 agreement is recommended to contribute towards these and to support public transport into Houghton Regis.

3.4 **Scale and Density:** The design and layout achieve 121 dwellings on a little over 4ha, a density of approximately 30 to the hectare which is in the medium / high range, more akin to an urban setting rather than a village or hamlet. There is no specific policy in the Local Plan in relation to Bidwell and its future development except the site at Gospel Hall, but NPPF paragraph 122. States

Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account:

- a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;*
- b) local market conditions and viability;*
- c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;*
- d) the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and*
- e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.*

3.5 Reference to an area's prevailing character and setting is a consideration but with the exception of the listed building adjoining to the south there is little to justify major changes to the scale or density. However, some issues regarding design and layout may affect the overall number of houses on the site.

3.6 **Layout & Design:** The main concerns are with the southern part of the site fronting Bedford Road. This part of Bidwell still retains characteristics of a small hamlet and the site frontage should reflect this. The dwellings nearest the Bedford Road frontage present the side elevation / gable end to the road and should be re-designed so the front elevations are fore-most and would be more in keeping with older houses nearby. This front elevation should have design features which reflect the simplicity of the local vernacular.

3.7 A major part of the scheme's appearance from Bedford Road is the pond and open space with houses placed around it on two sides and the estate spine road on the third. However, placing the children's play area next to the pond and the spine road raises concerns over safety and the play area should be relocated elsewhere in the site. The pond and open space is the main landscape feature and the rest of the site lacks planting with the houses presenting an 'urban' appearance which would be relieved with more landscaping.

3.8 The purpose of the two footpath connections shown leaving the site on the eastern boundary should be clear, e.g. links to proposed facilities in new development.

3.9 the scheme as it stands makes no mention of traffic calming / speed restrictions on the spine road, and this should be incorporated to help reduce traffic speeds as a safety feature for pedestrians, cyclists and children. The scope for road bends and narrows would also allow more new planting.

3.10 In order to justify being considered 'sustainable' the scheme should show electric charging points for dwellings and parking spaces, with solar panels and water heating panels incorporated in the house designs.

CB/19/04059/FULL Demolition of existing site buildings and proposed residential redevelopment comprising 30 dwellings and associated infrastructure
Land off Sundon Road Houghton Regis
For: Mr. A Slevin

Comments: no objections

- CB/19/03640/FULL New substation and hardstanding
Bidwell Farm Bedford Road LU5 6JQ
For: Bidwell West (Works Ltd)
- Comments: no objections**
- CB/19/03578/FULL Rear and side extension, conversion of garage, raising of
roof and dormer extension
8 Stubbs Close, LU5 5SN
- Comments: no objections**
- CB/19/04237/VOC Variation of Condition 24 to planning permission
CB/15/00297/OUT 1,850 residential (C3) dwellings &
mixed-use changes to approved plans
Land West of Bidwell (HRN2), Houghton Regis
For: Bidwell West (Works Ltd)
- Comments: no objections**
- CB/19/04220/OUT Outline application for Residential Development for up to
100 dwellings will all matters reserved, except access
Bury Spinney, Thorn Road, LU5 6JQ
For: Mr S J Worts
- Comments: Objections for the following reasons:**
- Summary**
The Town Council wishes to raise strong objections on grounds of incompatibility with the Houghton Regis North (HRN) Framework, inadequate access, inappropriate development and lack of supporting facilities.
- Within the HRN Framework**
Although the application uses Framework material in its support, this nonetheless does not override the need for a proper comprehensive planned approach to the area. In the view of the Town Council, piecemeal development of the type proposed would be severely prejudicial to the balanced provision of a range of housing, open space green infrastructure and community facilities.
- It is believed that there has been interest in the development of this site for some time; earlier discussions could find no justification for releasing what was part of the Green Belt.

The approved HRN Framework which does not justify piecemeal, premature development potentially prejudicial to an overall approach.

In addition it would be misleading to argue that the public consultation around HRN in some way can be applied to the current proposal. This scheme has not had any public scrutiny or consideration in its own right. The success of HRN overall will include a comprehensive approach to the landscaping, green network and open spaces layout, none of which will be achieved through piecemeal development.

Emerging Neighbourhood Plan

The work to prepare a neighbourhood plan for Houghton Regis embraces the HRN Framework as well as examining a range of other factors. Piecemeal and premature development of the sort envisaged within the current application would be contrary to emerging issues regarding green infrastructure, a range of housing provision (see below), integrating HRN developments with the existing settlement and access pattern, and provision of facilities.

The Town Council views as a priority the integration of HRN developments with the existing settlements of Houghton Regis and Bidwell. Although not directly adjoining these settlements, taking a piecemeal approach as with the current application will not contribute to this priority.

Access

The developments within HRN will be served by highway, pedestrian and cycle access arrangements to modern standards capable of supporting modern traffic including heavy vehicles - removals, refuse, emergency - as well as day-to-day car movements. The application proposes use of the lane through Thorn which is inadequate in terms of width and construction, lacking both footways and suitable cycle access and is therefore contrary to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Town Council is also concerned about the proposed access from the site onto the Lane in terms of sight lines and safety accessing and exiting the site.

It is likely that Thorn Road will be part of the HRN2 layout but not as an access road supporting residential development to this degree.

A Range of Housing

The price and types of housing currently available locally strongly suggest that the policies to provide a proportion of affordable housing should be upheld. The current application does not show the required level of affordable housing in accordance the Council's Affordable Housing Guidance Note for Central Bedfordshire (South Area) Adopted April 2016 and paragraphs 50, 72 and 73 of the NPPF and should be refused.

Developments within HRN will need to be part of the mechanism which contributes to the provision of a range of housing as well as education and leisure facilities and services. In isolation the development would have an unmitigated and unacceptable impact on existing local infrastructure.

Conclusion

The proper planned approach to HRN is very important to achieve a balanced expansion of Houghton Regis with a range of residential development within a framework of green and open spaces supported by appropriate community facilities.

CB/19/04254/FULL Erection of double garage plus fencing and walls
Highfield Barns, Bedford Road, LU5 6JP

Comments: No objections

CB/19/04251/FULL Single storey rear extension
3 Milton Way, LU5 5UF
For: Miss R Rideout & Mr D Glenister

Comments: No objections

CB/19/04182/FULL Erection of new dwelling
Land adjacent, 134 High Street
For: Nextgen Properties Ltd

Comments: The Town Council strongly objects to the scheme as proposed, for the following reasons:

- **Inappropriate development in the setting of the Conservation Area;**
- **Overdevelopment, the proposed development appears cramped for the site;**
- **Concerns over the loss of trees that are protected;**
- **Lack of parking provision;**
- **Lack of an adequate Environmental Impact Assessment;**
- **Lack of suitable Archaeological Assessment, desktop study not sufficient;**
- **Lack of Conservation Area application;**
- **Due to the proposed location of refuse collection, this would cause the refuse lorry to stop on a pedestrian crossing which could lead to harm of pedestrians and other road users.**

Whilst not a planning matter, the access road is still not in the ownership of the applicant, therefore there is no access.

CB/19/04114/PADM Demolition of garage block
University Technical College of Central Bedfordshire,
Parkside Drive, Kingsland Skills Centre, LU5 5PY
For: Central Bedfordshire Council

Comments: No objections

CB/19/04208/FULL New works to include 1) removal of existing bungalow roof and construction of new first floor and roof 2) Construction of a 2-storey extension to rear and south elevation 3) Removal of existing garage and construction of new double garage 4) Construction of new single storey porch area to front elevation.
51 Cemetery Road, LU5 5DA
For: Aimee Shepherd

Comments: No objections

(b) The following decision notices were noted:

Permissions / Approvals / Consents

CB/19/00547/FULL Proposed garden fence (retrospective)
46 Bidwell Hill, LU5 5EP

CB/19/01602/FULL (Retrospective) New substation and hardstanding
Land to West of Houghton Regis, Watling Street

Refusals:

None received.

Withdrawals:

CB/19/02870/RM Reserved Matters: Following Outline CB/15/00297/OUT
(1850 dwellings and mixed class use) matters for access,
landscaping, layout and scale for 160 dwellings on phase
CA2 Upper Thorn Green
Land to West of Houghton Regis, Watling Street

CB/19/03347/FULL Single Storey Side Extension
29 Dellmont Road, LU5 5HU

11116 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES/LOCAL PLAN– UPDATE/PROGRESS

Woodside Link – No substantive update to report.

A5 M1 Link – No substantive update to report.

All Saints View – Members raised concerns regarding damage to the grass verge by the Village Green, caused by contractors parking their HGV's on the verge. It was noted that the Town Clerk was in contact with the Contract Manager to address the issue.

Linnere – Members were advised that a representative from Linnere would be attending the Planning meeting in February.

Bidwell West – No substantive update to report.

Kingsland – No substantive update to report.

Windsor Drive – No substantive update to report.

Section 106 Monies – No substantive update to report.

Resolved: To note the information

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.32pm

Dated this 27th day of January 2020

Chairman