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Response to Planning application from Hertfordshire County Council (T and CP GDP Order 2015)

Director of Planning

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AW

District ref: 6/2023/2418/OUTLINE
HCC ref: WH/19404/2023
HCC received: 21 December 2023
Area manager: Manjinder Sehmi
Case officer: Senober Khan

Location

Former Hook Estate and Kennels, Coopers Lane Road /Firs Wood Close, Northaw EN6 4BY

Application type

Outline

Proposal

Outline planning application with all matters reserved except for primary means of access for C2 (extra care) dwellings, ancillary community facilities, landscaping, and access from Coopers Lane Road

Recommendation

Notice is given under article 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 that Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority recommends that permission be refused for the following reasons:

The Highway Authority under the current submission cannot support the proposals due to the application has failed to demonstrate a satisfactory policy and design-led approach to the visibility splays and accessibility of the proposed development contrary to Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) and the principles of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.

Brief description in support of proposed development by the applicant:

A Transport Assessment (TA) dated 27 November 2023 has been submitted to support an outline planning application for the proposed redevelopment.

The outline planning application is proposed with all matters reserved except for primary means of access for up to 150 C2 (extra care) dwellings (including 30% affordable housing), ancillary community facilities, extensive landscaping, and access from Coopers Lane Road. The development would be supported by appropriate car and cycle parking provision and electric vehicle charging points.

An element of a retirement village is to ensure that residents can meet their day-to-day needs on site, reducing the requirement to leave their home environment.

It is anticipated that ancillary on-site facilities will likely include:

1. Access to 24-hour support services and staff.
2. Consulting room.
3. Bar and restaurant.
4. Community area.
5. Swimming pool.
6. Allotments.
7. Electric golf buggies for on-site transport.

Other facilities could include a gym, spa and treatment rooms, hairdressing facilities, croquet lawn, putting green and nature walks.

It is also anticipated an on-site electric village transport service will be available to residents, which will provide access to Potters Bar, Northaw and other places of interest within the surrounding area. Grocery and medical appointments will be co-ordinated where possible, reducing the need for trips to and from site.

It is anticipated that due to the resident's partial independence, it is possible that the residents will own a car to allow them to drive.

A pre-application scoping exercise has been undertaken with Hertfordshire County Council Highways (HCC), including a meeting on the 30 June 2022. As such, much of the assessment scope and methodology has been agreed, including trip rates, trip distribution and traffic flow data.

The application site is located directly north of Coopers Lane Road which provides the vehicular access to the proposed development site.

It should be noted that although Coopers Lane Road is subject to the national speed limit within the vicinity of the Site, speed surveys undertaken in June 2022 demonstrate that vehicle speeds are well below the national speed limit.

The speed surveys provided data showing that the 85th percentile speed along Coopers Lane Road over an average weekday in the northwest bound direction was 42 mph and, in the southeast bound direction was 43 mph.

The development site is located circa two kilometres from Potters Bar town centre and circa 1.3 kilometres from Northaw Village.

The Site is in a location that is not readily accessible by a range of modes of transport. Provision for pedestrians to the wider area is via existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW), with cyclists also able to use the available PRoW and cycle on Coopers Lane Road, if they are confident.

There are no existing bus stops/buses that are readily accessible to the Site.

It is acknowledged that the Site may not be considered a sustainable location in terms of its accessibility by non-car modes of transport. Thus, the development of the Site has been carefully considered in terms of both land use and transport measures to ensure suitability and compliance with local and national policies.

The existing access to the public highway network is suitable in its current form to accommodate additional vehicular movements.

The Site is accessed via Firs Wood Close, which is a two-way single carriageway private road owned by Northaw Park providing access to several residential properties and to Hook Lane, another private residential street. It is subject to an advisory speed limit of 20mph. It is a cul-de-sac circa 350 metres in length and is circa 5.5 metres in width. A footway runs along the western side of the carriageway and street lighting commensurate with the location is provided.

Coopers Lane Road is a two-way single carriageway road. The speed limit is derestricted, prohibiting drivers to a maximum of 60 mph.

In accordance with Manual for Streets 2, based on the 85th percentile speeds, visibility splays of 109.7 metres and 108.8 metres to the west and east respectively are required at the Firs Wood Close junction with Coopers Lane Road.

The Site Access Visibility Splay drawing demonstrates that the required visibility splays can be achieved within the highway boundary in both directions. Drivers would therefore be afforded an appropriate level of inter-visibility with other motorised and non-motorised users, thereby enabling manoeuvres to be undertaken safely.

During the latest five-year period a total of three injury accidents were recorded within the study area, two of which resulted in slight injuries and one in serious injuries. One slight accident occurred on Coopers Lane Road at its junction with Woodgate Avenue, the accident was attributed to driver error. One slight and one serious accident occurred on Coopers Lane to the north of the Coopers Lane Road junction, both accidents were attributed to driver errors.

The PIA analysis has not demonstrated any accident clusters on the local highway network surrounding the Site. The data indicates there are no existing road safety issues associated with the local highway network in the study area surrounding the Site.

The development proposal is for the provision of up to 150 C2 (extra care) dwellings, the accommodation schedule is as follows:

- 25 x 1-bedroom flats.
- 85 x 2-bedroom flats.
- 25 x 3-bedroom flats.
- 15 x 2-bedroom bungalows.

The development is intended to serve as an extra care retirement community with residential units set within a managed development.

It is anticipated that a total of circa 56.5 staff will be employed at the Site, although not all staff will be on site at any given time. Staffing levels onsite are anticipated to be circa 25 during peak times (7:00am to 7:00pm).

The following shift patterns are anticipated:

- Care Staff 07:00-14:00, 14:00-21:00 and 21:00-07:00
- Reception staff 07:00-15:00, 15:00-22:00 and 22:00-07:00
- Kitchen Staff / housekeeping / maintenance 09:00-19:00

Most staff shift patterns are outside the highway networks morning and evening peak hours of operation.

A Framework Travel Plan has been prepared for the proposed extra care residential community which sets out initiatives and measures to be provided before the development is occupied, to influence future staff, residents and visitor travel behaviour at the outset and therefore minimise single occupancy car journeys.

Key travel plan measures for residents and staff will be:

- Reducing the need to travel through the provision of an array of on-site community facilities for residents.
- The provision of an electric village transport service for both residents and staff, to provide residents with flexibility to access local off-site facilities and amenities as required and to enable staff to access the Site without needing to travel by private car.

Other measures are outlined within the Framework Travel Plan.

Electric Village Transport Service

Residents and staff will also be able to use an electric village transport service that will be based on-site and will provide the opportunity to reach nearby facilities and amenities such as shops, local churches, healthcare appointments etc. in nearby towns and villages including Potters Bar.

While details are being finalised, it is expected that the scheme will be provided with one wheelchair accessible eight-seater electric vehicle with driver, and one smaller vehicle added to the fleet over time as the village is fully occupied.

The village transport scheme will be a key initiative to reduce the need for residents to own a private car for occasional trips and support the less mobile residents. The electric vehicle can accommodate multiple residents for example a trip to the supermarket, should they desire.

The provision and retention of an electric village transport service will be secured via planning obligation. The funding of the service will be covered by the service charge to residents and will therefore guarantee its provision in perpetuity.

In addition, the electric village transport service will be used to accommodate staff journeys to/from work. At the planning stage the staff have not been recruited and their location is not known. However, due to the nature of the work involved and the associated salaries that typically accompany this type of work, the staff are likely to be recruited from the local area.

The route of the electric village transport service will therefore need to be developed as part of the detailed travel plan, to cover as many staff as practically possible who wish to use the service and to cater for the typical requirements of the residents. The provision of the electric village transport service for staff journeys will provide an alternative to the private car and minimise vehicle movements to and from the Site in the morning and evening peak hours.

The provision of village transport services at retirement villages, such as that proposed is common practice.

The provision of ancillary community services and facilities within the scheme will reduce the need to travel to access day to day facilities and services.

Due to the nature of the proposals, residents of the Site will not need to leave the retirement village (the Site) to meet their everyday needs (convenience shopping, leisure etc.); however, it is recognised that residents may on occasion wish to leave the Site for several reasons, including for leisure.

Car parking for residents, employees and visitors will be subject to a reserved matters application. It is anticipated that this will be provided in accordance with WHBC's parking standards as appropriate. Regard will also be had to other C2 developments of a similar nature.

The indicative proposal currently provides a total of 151 parking spaces for use by residents, staff, and visitors. The parking provision equates to a provision of circa one space per dwelling, but also includes for staff and visitor parking requirements.

In addition, it is proposed to retain 20 existing parking spaces for use by existing residents of Firs Wood Close.

The 151 parking spaces is considered appropriate to serve the proposed 150 extra care units, staff, and visitors. This is supported by information provided by Rangeford Villages to the applicant. Rangeford Villages is an experienced developer and operator of extra care retirement villages within the UK and is a member of ARCO (Associated Retirement Community Operators), The UK sector body for retirement communities.

Rangeford Villages experience is that a parking ratio of one space per extra care unit helps to encourage new residents to make the initial move, without having to give up their car and feel like they will lose their independence. Once the residents have settled in, many of them realise they do not require a car due to the availability of the ancillary facilities and subsequently sell their car and are no longer require a parking space, reducing their costs.

The Internal layout will be subject to a reserved matters application; however, the indicative Masterplan layout has put the residents at the heart of the design, prioritising walking routes for the residents and routes that can be used by golf buggies and mobility scooters for the less mobile, to ensure the residents are able to safely navigate the site and readily access the on-site community facilities available to them.

The trip generation for the 150 extra care residential dwellings at the Site has been based on the TRICS database for similar development sites, in terms of size and location.

150 extra care residential units at the Site would be expected to typically generate a total of 33 and 18 two-way morning and evening peak hour vehicle trips respectively.

The proposed development would be expected to generate minimal trips by non-car modes. It is however, anticipated that a good proportion of the car driver / car passenger trips would be undertaken by the proposed bespoke electric village transport service, replacing both resident and staff car / car passenger trips, thereby minimising the vehicular trip generation of the development.

The development would have a negligible residual impact on the operation of the local transport networks.

The local highway network would readily be able to accommodate the vehicular trips that would be generated by the development, based on the worst-case assessment scenario in both the current and future year scenarios.

From this is it clear that the development would not result in a severe residual impact on the local highway network in NPPF terms and that the development would not be expected to adversely affect highway safety.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Transport Assessment establishes that the land located at the Former Hook Estate and Kennels, Firs Wood Close, Northaw, is acceptable to serve the proposed development of up to 150 C2 (extra care) dwellings with ancillary community facilities, extensive landscaping, and access from Coopers Lane Road.

It has also been concluded that the impact of the proposed development of up to 150 C2 (extra care) dwellings would not have a severe residual impact on the local highway network in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF. Furthermore, the development will provide a safe means of access to the Site.

Highways comments:

The submission is an outline planning application with all matters reserved except for primary means of access for up to 150 C2 (extra care) dwellings consisting of 25 x 1-bedroom flats, 85 x 2-bedroom flats, 25 x 3-bedroom flats and 15 x 2-bedroom bungalows, with 151 parking spaces and retain 20 existing parking spaces for use by existing residents of Firs Wood Close, all accessed from Coopers Lane Road.

The proposed car parking provision and layout is the responsibility of the LPA to determine the level and suitability of the car parking proposals, however, it is essential that it is operated in efficient and safe manner to minimise the impact on the local highway network which is the responsibility of the HCC HA.

The HA has reviewed the TA and whilst the HA would acknowledge the proposal is not expected to have any significant impact on the operation of the local highway network and on most of the other issues assessed in the TA, however there are a number of issues for concern that the HA has and are listed below in the following comments:

Whilst reference is made that the access road, Firs Wood Close is subject to an advisory speed limit of 20mph, is 350m in length (relatively straight) and circa 5.5m in width, with a footway which runs along the western side of the carriageway, however clarification is required that the footway is continual and does run along the whole length of Firs Wood Close, from its junction with Coopers Lane Road (increased traffic generation and turning movements at the access bellmouth) to the developments sites access, if not then how does the applicant intend to ensure all pedestrians will be able to access the site safely.

Furthermore, how will the advisory speed limit of 20mph be safeguarded/enforced given the relatively significant increase in vehicle trip generation as a result of the proposed development, combined with the road being relatively long and straight. From the proposed site plan drawing no.SK23 rev R2, it appears raised table/level crossing points are proposed within the site boundary which are welcomed and also operate as traffic calming features.

Coopers Lane Road is derestricted, prohibiting drivers to a maximum of 60 mph, speed surveys were undertaken which showed 85th percentile speed along Coopers Lane Road over an average weekday in the northwest bound direction was 42 mph and, in the southeast bound direction was 43 mph.

In the TA it states that "speed surveys were undertaken on Coopers Lane Road in the vicinity of its junction with Firs Wood Close in 2022" however no raw data and details have been provided on when the surveys were undertaken, the period over which they were undertaken, and the methodology used. Speed survey should be undertaken via an ATC, 24/7 for at least a week preferably 2 weeks to support the 85th percentile use.

Consequently, in the TA it states that “In accordance with Manual for Streets 2, based on the 85th percentile speeds, visibility splays of 109.7 metres and 108.8 metres to the west and east respectively are required at the Firs Wood Close junction with Coopers Lane Road.”, it should be pointed out that using MfS is not appropriate, Coopers Lane Road is not in an urban/outer urban surrounding, it is in a rural setting and therefore DMRB should be used for sight line/visibility splay requirements which for 60mph speed limit is 215m and 43mph it is 120m.

Notwithstanding, the alignment and layout of Coopers Lane Road at the sites main vehicle access is effectively straight and whilst the 85th percentile of vehicle speeds are around 43mph (to be verified), there is nothing in the layout of the road preventing drivers from safely travelling at the speed limit of 60mph, therefore the HA would raise safety concerns given there will be a significant intensification of use/turning movements at the existing vehicle access that has substandard visibility splays as demonstrated in the above paragraphs, therefore visibility splays should be commensurate to the 60mph speed limit as appropriate.

Design guides for visibility splays are based on vehicles travelling at the legal speed limit set for the road and not those travelling below the speed limit, given vehicles can travel legally at 60mph, and some over (await to see speed survey data) so there can be no relaxation of the required visibility splay distances. Visibility splays should be compliant with the DMRB/NHCC highway design guide.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how visibility splays, even the MfS distances, can be achieved let alone the DMRB distances. The site access visibility splay drawing no. JNY11265-RPS-0100-005 rev B shows that visibility splays of 110m can be achieved however there are trees within the splay area which effectively restrict the visibility due to where the tree trunks are sited and so the drawings appear to be misleading. In the TA it does not clarify if the foliage/trees within the splay areas will be removed.

In respect of the site’s accessibility, the TA states that “the Site is in a location that is not readily accessible by a range of modes of transport”, the HA view is that the site can only be accessible by vehicle mode of transport. Walking or cycling to and from the site would therefore be neither particularly appealing nor safe for both the tenants and staff.

The revised NPPF -July 2021 promotes accessibility by sustainable means including bus, cycling, and walking. National and local policies promote that housing should be delivered in the most sustainable locations where connectivity is maximised, the need to travel by car is minimised, and safe and direct walking and cycling routes are provided.

To mitigate against the inaccessibility of the site by non-car modes of transport in the TA it states “It is also anticipated an on-site electric village transport service will be available to residents, which will provide access to Potters Bar, Northaw and other places of interest within the surrounding area.”, ‘anticipated’ is not acceptable, any mitigation proposals need to be addressed and provisioned now and satisfactorily to deal with the issue of means of access and accessibility.

The TA however does then state:

Residents and staff will also be able to use the provision of an electric village transport service for both residents and staff, to provide residents with flexibility to access local off-site facilities and amenities as required and to enable staff to access the Site without needing to travel by private car.”

While details are being finalised, it is expected that the scheme will be provided with one wheelchair accessible eight-seater electric vehicle with driver, and one smaller vehicle added to the fleet over time as the village is fully occupied.

The village transport scheme will be a key initiative to reduce the need for residents to own a private car for occasional trips and support the less mobile residents. The electric vehicle can accommodate multiple residents for example a trip to the supermarket, should they desire.

The provision and retention of an electric village transport service will be secured via planning obligation. The funding of the service will be covered by the service charge to residents and will therefore guarantee its provision in perpetuity.

The Travel Plan has been commented on by the Active & Safer Travel Team, please see attached document. (not possible to attach to this document on DEF, see additional email)

The HA views the provision and usage of an electric transport service as comparable to a bus service and so would be acceptable to mitigate against the sites isolated location and inaccessibility by non-car modes. However, should this application be granted, also acknowledged in the TA via a planning obligation conditioned, the HA would recommend conditioning the service must be in full operation prior to occupation of any of the units, with details such as which locations in Potters Bar town centre pick up/drop offs will be and the times which should also cater for visitors too, the terms to be finalised and agreed with the HCC, and as suggested in the TA, the condition to be in perpetuity of the development.

The onus is on the applicant to provide detailed explanation, information, plans that demonstrate how all the aspects of the proposals including visibility splays. accessibility by sustainable modes is compliant with the appropriate guidance's and policies.

Recommendation:

The Highway Authority under the current submission cannot support the proposals due to the application has failed to demonstrate a satisfactory policy and design-led approach to the visibility splays and accessibility of the proposed development contrary to Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) and the principles of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.

Signed

Senober Khan

23 January 2024