

## BRIEFING NOTE

### **Land south-east side of Collier Row Road, Collier Row, Romford**

#### **1 Description of the site and surrounding area**

- 1.1 The site lies to the south-east of Collier Row Road and to the east of the Northgate Industrial Park, and it is roughly opposite The Oaks Centre which is situated on the opposite side of the road. To the north-east of the site is further sporadic development along the south side of the road including Sungate Nursery. The whole of the site is situated within the Green Belt.
- 1.2 The purpose of this note is to advise Members that pre-planning application discussions regarding the site are currently on-going and a planning application is likely to be submitted shortly.
- 1.3 Members are invited to make observations or seek any points of clarification on the proposals.

#### **2 The Application Site**

- 2.1 The 3.97 hectare site is within various separate ownerships and includes a variety of uses including 5 dwellings, a nursery, various vehicle related uses including open storage, a boarding cattery and boarding kennels, and the Wellgate Community Farm.

#### **3 Description of Development**

- 3.1 The proposed development is to demolish all of the existing buildings, with the exception of some buildings within the community farm site, and to construct 88 detached dwellings in two phases, plus provide new buildings and additional land to serve the farm, and the provision of a playing field.
- 3.2 The houses would be constructed to Code for Sustainable Homes level 6 (zero carbon) and if built it would be the largest zero carbon homes development within the country so far. The architect for the scheme is ZEDfactory Ltd., which is well known for the BedZED zero carbon development in Beddington, south London.
- 3.3 The proposed housing mix is 85 x 4 bedroom dwellings, and 3 x 5 bedroom dwellings all in private sale tenure.
- 3.4 The Wellgate Community Farm is a partner in the development, and would gain a new building which would include a classroom and additional land including a small field to the rear of the site. This would be funded through the profits from the housing development.

- 3.5 The proposed development would secure the future of the farm which has strong links with the local community including the Marks Gate area. Without the enabling development there is concern that the future of the farm would not be secured.
- 3.6 The applicant will submit a development appraisal with the planning application in order to seek to justify that the quantity of proposed housing is necessary in order to make the development viable and fund the improvements to the farm.

#### **4 Planning Policy Context**

- 4.1 The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt wherein policy CM3 of the Local Development Framework: Core Strategy states that the Green Belt will be protected and maintained in accordance with national policy. National policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 2: 'Green Belts' which states that new development is inappropriate within the Green Belt unless it is related to agriculture or forestry, or essential facilities for outdoor recreation. The proposed development would therefore be inappropriate within the Green Belt.
- 4.2 The guidance states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and permission should only be granted for such development if there are very special circumstances which outweigh this harm.
- 4.3 Wellgate Community Farm is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (of local importance) (SINC) in respect of which the policy CR2 of the Local Development Framework: Core Strategy states that the Council will seek to preserve or enhance the Borough's natural environment including all sites of ecological value. The part of the site the subject of the proposed residential development however, falls outside the SINC.
- 4.4 The quantum of built development in terms of both footprint and volume would be increased as a result of the development, though the amount of hard standing would be reduced in comparison with the existing situation. The proposed development would be in closer proximity to the Collier Row Road frontage than the existing development.
- 4.5 The proposal, as a major residential development within the Green Belt, must be referred to the Mayor of London. The applicant has sought pre-application advice from the Greater London Authority and made some changes to the scheme in response to this advice. The advice is that the amount of development should be the minimum necessary to secure the benefits, and that the existing undeveloped parts of the site should remain open. In addition it states that priority should be given to maintaining the openness of the site and the

benefits to the community farm over the provision of affordable housing. In other words if it is not viable to provide a proportion of affordable housing within the development that is being proposed, the development of a larger housing development in order to secure a proportion of affordable housing would not be supported as this would adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt.

## **5 Conclusion**

- 5.1 The applicant states: "The rationale for this development is to create an exemplar of sustainable design that integrates green technology, well designed buildings and spaces, landscape design and an appropriate mix of uses that ameliorates the current harm and ties the site back into its context."
- 5.2 The applicant's intention is that the development would be integrated with the local community and the farm, and he hopes to attract residents who are committed to a low carbon lifestyle. It has been proposed that electric cars would be included with the houses which would be chargeable from the renewable energy generated on the site.
- 5.3 The benefits of the development include the following: Improvements to and securing the future of the community farm; tidying up a site which incorporates a number of inappropriate and unsightly developments; and providing a landmark zero carbon development. It should, however, be noted that the Government has a target that all new housing should be zero carbon by 2016 although it announced in the budget its intention to make changes to this standard which will mean it will be easier to build a zero carbon house in 2016 than it is currently.
- 5.4 These benefits must be weighed against the negative impacts of the development including that it would be, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and result in a substantial loss of openness to the Green Belt. Keeping land permanently open is one of the primary purposes of Green Belt policy. The scheme will also be likely to generate a demand for a significant number of school places and it would normally be expected that developers contribute £6,000 per unit to pay for this. In this instance it is unlikely that the developer would be able to fund this quantum of contribution. Neither is the scheme proposing any affordable housing. Once the application is submitted with full details including the development appraisal it will be necessary for the Council to make an assessment as to whether the benefits amount to the very special circumstances which are required in order to justify the proposed development.

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