

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE DATE: 3rd February 2016

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APPLICATION REF. NO:	13/00940/RM1
STATUTORY DECISION DATE:	31st December 2015
WARD/PARISH:	MIDDLETON ST GEORGE
LOCATION:	Land off Sadberge Road, Middleton St George, Darlington
DESCRIPTION:	Erection of 234 dwellings including landscaping, open space, highway improvements and associated works.
APPLICANT:	Miller Homes Ltd and Story Homes Ltd

APPLICATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Middleton St George is a large village located some five miles (eight kilometres) east of central Darlington and two miles (three kilometres) from the A66 (T). Teesside Airport lies two miles (three kilometres) south west of the site and Yarm is six miles (ten kilometres) away, also to the south west. The separate village of Middleton One Row lies over a mile (two kilometres) south of Middleton St George.

The application site is located on the Northern edge of the village and may be referred to as the “Gladman Site” after an outline planning application was approved at a Public Inquiry last year.

The site comprises two agricultural fields in arable use (some 10.4 hectares) separated by a hedge line on the eastern side of Sadberge Road, south of the A67. The eastern site boundary is a field boundary beyond which is a Local Nature Reserve (The Whinnies) and the south western boundary is the route of a former railway line (the former Stockton-Darlington Railway), which is now used as a walkway/cycleway.

The proposal is for full planning permission for the erection of 234 residential dwellings with associated landscaping, open space and highway access.

The development is described as having the following main elements:

- Residential development on 7.21 ha of the site with a broad range of densities from 27 to 32 dwellings per hectare and a mix of dwellings and house types, from 2-5

bedrooms. A mix of market housing, from first time starter homes to family homes is proposed as well as a financial contribution towards social housing.

- Public open space on some 3ha, including formal footpaths amenity areas and meadow grassland for recreation and biodiversity. Landscaped buffer along the Eastern boundary and within the North West corner of the site.
- As part of the above area of public open space (at the South East corner) there is a balancing pond for surface water storage and to control water run-off with associated grassland;

PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

The following policies of the development plan are relevant:

Borough of Darlington Local Plan 1997:

- E2 – Development Limits

Darlington Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2011:

- CS1 – Darlington’s Sub-Regional Role and Locational Strategy
- CS4 – Developer Contributions
- CS10 – New Housing Development
- CS11 – Meeting Housing Need

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012 is also relevant. The above policies are considered to be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Documents

Planning Obligations SPD, January 2013

The Local Planning Authority is required to plan positively for housing development to meet the needs of its area. The Council has completed an Objectively Assessed Need study, compliant with the National Planning Framework (2012) that demonstrates that the current housing need is estimated to be over 11,000 dwellings during the period 2011 to 2036. The adopted Core Strategy does not provide sufficient new dwellings in the plan period to meet this need and in such circumstances the Council has recognised through policy CS10 the need to consider positively new and additional development sites that are located on the edge of town or on the edges of or within the larger villages. The application falls within this policy context and subject to site specific considerations is considered to be compliant with both the NPPF and policy CS10.

Members will be aware that outline planning permission was granted on this site last year after a Public Inquiry and that as a result the principle of residential development has been established and the only material planning considerations that fall to be considered as part of this application are those associated with the detailed layout of the site such as highway matters, design,

landscaping and site layout. Issues such as sustainability, impacts on infrastructure or loss of open space have been fully addressed at the outline planning/Public Inquiry stage.

As part of the outline planning approval, the applicants entered into a Section 106 Agreement which related to the provision of affordable housing (or a financial contribution towards), a financial contribution towards extending the local school, a financial contribution towards improving the local Trunk Road network as well as local open space provision and footpath links.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

Letters were sent to occupiers of neighbouring properties advising of the proposal and a site notice was displayed.

Approximately 50 objections have been received from local residents and the points raised are summarised below:

- *Traffic levels are already high – this development will result in a large increase.*
- *This many houses not needed to clear the housing shortfall.*
- *The road network is of a poor standard.*
- *The location of the proposed access point is dangerous.*
- *Bus services in the area are inadequate.*
- *The proposed density of dwellings is too high.*
- *There would be noise and disturbance during construction.*
- *There is no capacity in the local school.*
- *Adjacent Nature Reserve will be harmed from noise, dust and light pollution etc.*
- *Access to site is opposite village allotments which cause increased traffic congestion within a busy area.*
- *The Doctor's surgery is not large enough.*
- *Details are not provided of how infrastructure will be improved to cope with the revised population. Flooding is a problem – this will be exacerbated by loss of greenfield soakaway land.*
- *Local shops and services will not cope with more families.*
- *There would be a harmful impact on ecology and habitat – especially on the adjacent nature reserve.*
- *There is no need for more housing.*
- *There are many houses for sale and rent in the area.*
- *Previous developments have been on brownfield sites not greenfield. .*
- *Middleton St George has already seen a lot of development in recent years.*
- *There are brownfield sites available in Darlington.*
- *There are problems with sewerage and drainage in the area and the proposal will make this worse.*
- *Development will have detrimental impact on the old Stockton to Darlington railway line which is a bridleway and which forms a natural edge to the village.*
- *The development will expand the village into a town / part of Darlington conurbation.*
- *The proposal is not in keeping with the area.*
- *The land forms an important part of the open character of the area.*
- *The proposed are of green space in the development is too small.*
- *The site is outside of development limits.*
- *There are a number of inaccuracies contained within the Design and Access Statement*

- *The site is contaminated with lead glazed pottery*
- *The proposal would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.*
- *There is no need for the development (a five year supply of land has been identified).*
- *The Making and Growing Places Preferred Options Development Plan Document 2013 does not support additional houses in this area.*
- *The development of the site was not supported by the SHLAA*
- *Supporting statement does not detail how the proposed development will improve the facilities within the villages.*
- *NPPF states that planning decisions should be guided by local opinion.*
- *Proposal is contrary to the local Neighbourhood Plan currently in preparation.*

School Place Planning Officer -

A feasibility study has concluded that St George's Church of England Academy can be expanded by 105 places subject to planning approval. Therefore the expected pupil yield from the houses on the proposed development could be accommodated at an expanded St George's Academy. Education Services will be seeking a section 106 contribution as per the DBC Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (Planning Obligations SPD) 2013.

Middleton St George Parish Council. – Want to be assured that the Stockton to Darlington Railway route will be preserved and that the sewage and surface water disposal systems are adequate to cope with this development.

Durham County Archaeologist – Satisfied with submitted report.

Environment Agency – No objections – proposals in line with comments made on previous outline planning application.

Lead Flood Risk Authority – Comments awaited on submitted details relating to surface flood flow paths.

Northumbrian Water – No objections but requests surface water disposal condition.

Environmental Health – No objections in terms of contaminated land issues.

Sustainable Transport Officer – No objections to the submitted proposals.

Northern Gas – No objections.

Ecology Officer – No comments relating to on site proposals but concerned relating to off site impacts at The Whinnies.

Highways Engineer Darlington – Comments awaited on amended plans.

Highways Agency – No objections

Planning Policy – See note above under Planning Policy Background.

Urban Design Officer – Content with the overall site layout.

PLANNING ISSUES

The principle of residential development of this site has been established through the granting of outline planning permission in January 2015. The relevant planning matters that need to be considered as part of this reserved matters application include design/appearance of the development, layout of the dwellings and roads and landscaping/open space within the development site. How the above factors impact on local residents and the wider environment also needs to be considered.

Design/Appearance – The proposed dwellings are those designed by typical large sized house builders and consequently are grouped into the familiar “house type” of which in this instance number approximately 22 different types. Their designs include some semi-detached affordable homes but are predominantly detached, some with hipped roofs, others with two storey dormers to the front or sides. Certain locations within the layout adopt “significant” or “gateway” designs which stone cladding or render within the elevational treatment instead of the predominant red facing brick/render combination.

Layout – Tied in with the above is the layout of the dwellings within the site. The use of private access drives to a substantial number of dwellings has enabled a more varied layout to be adopted, particularly around the edges of the development which tend to be more publically visible. This together with landscaping and open spaces (see below) has resulted in a layout which in the main avoids monotony. In particular the southern edge of the site where it abuts the popular walking/cycle route along the old Stockton to Darlington Railway avoids the problem of high boundary fencing and the issue of garden rubbish finding its way onto adjacent land. There is a cycle/pedestrian connection to this route at the eastern end of the site. The overall layout has been examined by the Highways Engineer who is satisfied with the proposed road layout, private drive provision, turning heads etc, car parking provision and main site access onto Sadberge Road. A 20 MPH speed limit is proposed for the internal road layout.

Landscaping/Open Space – An intrinsic part of the character of the layout is the quality of new landscaping and open space provision. Substantial tree planting is proposed along the western boundary and the northern boundary with the A67 in an attempt to screen the new development from overt public view as well as acting as a noise barrier for the new dwellings adjacent. A number of open spaces are proposed throughout the development where there are significant variations in the road layout and these are punctuated by dwellings designed in a manner to emphasise the different character of the locality. A young person’s play area is proposed within the central open space area. Nearly 3 hectares of open space is proposed for the eastern side of the site where it abuts the Whinnies Nature Reserve. This will incorporate the Sustainable Drainage balancing pond for the site and act as a barrier between the new development and the sensitive landscape associated with the Nature Reserve.

The applicants have addressed the sustainability issues within the design of the dwellings as required by paragraphs 96 and 97 of the NPPF in terms of thermal efficiency, energy efficiency and reducing waste and promoting recycling. The Sustainable Urban Drainage System to be provided off site is in accordance with the requirements of the Water Authority and Environment Agency.

There are very few dwellings existing immediately adjacent the site so direct impacts of the development will be limited. The main site access however comes out onto Sadberge Road quite close to the vehicular access to a pair of dwellings on the opposite side of the road.

The Highways Engineer has studied the overall layout and has asked the developers to undertake certain works to reduce the impact of the new access on nearby residents and whilst there will be some detrimental impacts from the passage of motor vehicles entering and leaving the site, these are not considered to be severe enough to warrant refusing planning permission in this instance.

The impact of the development on the wider environment was extensively examined at the Public Inquiry in 2014. The Inspector's conclusions on these impacts are a material consideration in assessing the current detailed planning application and are précised below.

I have found that on balance the proposal is sustainable development within the overall meaning of paragraphs 18 to 219 of the Framework. Nevertheless despite the proposed mitigation there would still be some harm to the character and appearance of the countryside and there would be a reduction in its openness within the A66/A67 corridor. The proposal is clearly contrary to the countryside protection elements of LP Policies E2 and H7 as well as being contrary to CS14. However, if Darlington's overall housing needs are to be met then it will be necessary to develop greenfields on the edge of the countryside somewhere.

Any potential harm to the character and appearance of the local countryside could be reduced by conditions requiring the improvement of the boundary screening along the edges of the site, and other landscaping within the parts of the site to be developed. Consequently any harm to the countryside aspects of saved LP Policies E2 and H6 and Policy CS14 would not be significant and is outweighed by the proposal's clear benefits. Any potential harm to education and highways within Middleton St George could be overcome by the contributions that would be delivered through the Section 106 Agreement or by planning conditions.

As noted above therefore, the impacts of the development on the wider environment are considered to be acceptable in the context of the need to provide more housing in the Borough of Darlington.

The Section 106 Agreement agreed as part of the outline planning permission is intended to mitigate any adverse the proposed development may have on the local environment and facilities and in some cases improve them. To reiterate the content of that Agreement these related to the provision of affordable housing (or a financial contribution towards), a financial contribution towards extending the local school, a financial contribution towards improving the local Trunk Road network as well as local open space provision and footpath/cycle links.

Other issues raised by third parties

Many issues raised by objectors such as sewage capacity, school place capacity, road capacity etc have been addressed by consultees and documented above. There are other issues that have been raised however and they are detailed below.

- Doctors surgery – The existing surgery is said to be at capacity and may indeed close or relocate. There is no requirement for the Council to provide a doctors surgery in any settlement – it is purely a commercial decision by a Doctors' Practice. It is one of a number of local facilities that are desirable to have within a village but not one which would determine whether residential planning permission should be granted or not, however the construction of new dwellings within the village may have the effect of increasing the likelihood that such facilities will remain available.

- Ecology impacts – No specific issues have been raised by consultees in this regard. The conditions imposed at outline stage have been complied with to ensure impacts on important habitats and species are minimised.
- The Neighbourhood Plan – This Plan was launched in January 2014 and its references to Core Strategy locational strategy and housing numbers rely on what the Gladman Inquiry Inspector concluded was out of date housing policies in the Core Strategy. The Inspector agreed that until the Council has up to date housing policies in place which are reflected in the Neighbourhood Plan then little weight can be attached to the document in planning terms.
- Character of the village – The location of the application site is such that it is not visually seen as part of the fabric of the main village – indeed it is outside the development limits of the village as defined in the Local Plan. New and enhanced landscaping will assist in screening the new development from public viewpoints There will be some impacts on the village infrastructure from the increase in vehicular traffic generated by the current proposal, but this is not seen as having such a detrimental impact as to warrant refusing planning permission.
- Surface water and sewage drainage – Officers have consulted Northumbrian Water, aware that local residents have concerns relating to the capacity of the local drainage network to take existing and proposed levels of discharge. A sustainable drainage solution is to be adopted and full details of this have yet to be agreed and will be the subject of a condition should permission be granted. Otherwise Northumbrian Water has no objections to the proposals.
- Housing Density – The proposed development density is some 22 dwellings per hectare which is well below the 30 – 50 range referred to in Council policy documents. This low figure is achieved by taking into account the large area of open space provided adjacent the Whinnies Nature Reserve. Over dense development is not therefore considered to be an issue in this instance.

As already noted above, many of the reasons for objecting to this proposal relate to matters of principle which were examined at the outline planning application Public Inquiry and cannot be revisited at this Reserved Matters stage. Matters such as traffic levels, need for new housing, impacts on the nature reserve, impacts on the road network, school capacity, sustainability and compliance with National and Local planning policies have already been considered and the conclusion reached by the Planning Inspectorate that the principle of developing this site with up to 250 dwellings is acceptable.

The numerous conditions imposed by the Inspector at outline stage, where they haven't been discharged at this stage, carry through and will need to be discharged at a later date.

SECTION 17 OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that planning permission be granted with the following conditions:

1. B5 – In accordance with plans.
2. Highways Engineer's conditions yet to be finalised.
3. K4 – Surface water disposal
4. E3 – Landscaping implementation.
5. B4 – External materials