

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Tuesday, 5 December 2023 at 4.00 pm.

#### PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

C Ball	L Darwin
B Flux	JI Hutchinson
J Lang	G Renner-Thompson
G Stewart	M Swinbank
A Watson	

#### OFFICERS

A Deary-Francis	Ecologist
D Hadden	Solicitor
N Leadbeatter	Housing Enabling Officer
L Little	Senior Democratic Services Officer
R Murfin	Director of Housing & Planning
M Patrick	Highways Development Manager
T Wood	Principal Planning Officer

Around 13 members of the press and public were present.

#### 42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Dodd, Foster, Hill, Reid, Robinson and Wallace.

#### 43 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 7 November 2023, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

#### 44 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Flux advised that his personal circumstances could lead to a perception of bias in connection with item 5 application 23/0287/FUL and as such he left the meeting at this point.

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## 45 DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The report outlined the procedure to be followed and requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

## 46 23/02787/FUL

**Residential development of 94 new homes (Use Class C3), an 84 apartment extra care facility (Use Class C3), the preservation of the Water Tower, demolition of existing buildings and all associated infrastructure. Former St Georges Hospital, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2NS**

A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by T Wood, Principal Planning Officer with the aid of a power point presentation. A sheet detailing minor revisions to a number of conditions in the report was circulated to Members at the meeting. This included the tightening of conditions, correct plan numbers being added, the deletion of two conditions and requesting further information to be provided such as the CMP and added trigger points. A further condition was also to be added regarding the phasing plan. Further updates in addition to those circulated were noted as follows:-

- Revised Condition 10 – remove second sentence and add “completed in accordance with the approved plans for the signalisation of the junction.”
- Paragraph 7.28 of the report at the third line down add “and apartment blocks” after extra care apartment complex.

The revisions to the conditions would be uploaded to the Council’s website. R Murfin, Director of Housing and Planning stated that this was a very complex and strong scheme and whilst it would not deliver affordable housing in the usual sense it did provide 47% of additional housing units.

Jane Cadman addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the Committee. Her comments included the following:-

- She lived in Thorpe Avenue which was the older estate adjacent to the access road. Whilst she did support the building of the homes, extra care facility and general site plan she partially opposed the transport statement and travel plan for the safety and wellbeing of residents of her estate which was the west of the St. George’s access road.
- She asked that revisions be looked at for the changes to the junction of the St. George’s access road and the A197 and agreed with statements made that the junction could not take more traffic. Her issue was with the proposal for traffic lights and would prefer either widening the junction or a roundabout which would permit free flow of traffic.
- She had been advised by users of Tommy’s field, opposite the junction, that the Council had already acquired land from this area for use as a

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roundabout. She advised that there were currently temporary traffic lights at the junction which demonstrated the effect traffic lights had at that junction and on the surrounding areas. She had tried to leave her road at 9.10 am on Monday morning after the school rush, but it was blocked as always. The traffic queue caused by the traffic lights at that junction went through the town, past the Mafekin roundabout and up to the Sun Inn.

- She supported the transport statement where it suggested keep clear signs on the tarmac in front of Thorpe Avenue and Howard Terrace and urged that this be undertaken as quickly as possible so that the exiting and accessing of these roads could be done safely.
- She highlighted the proximity of her estate to the new development advising that her house had been seen on slide one of the presentation. All the houses on Thorpe Avenue abut St George's access road with only one house and garden between them. At the bottom of the road where the junction with Thorpe Avenue and the access road met the A197 there was only 45m, which was no distance at all.
- A lot of the housing on her estate was from the era when cars and garages did not exist and was very closely packed. Residents used two roads to feed onto the local transport network, one being Thorpe Avenue and the other Fenwick Road which fed into Howard Terrace. These roads were currently blocked most of the time by traffic waiting at the traffic lights.
- Neither herself or any of her neighbours had been consulted on this application and currently it only took one coach or two small cars queuing at the temporary lights before Thorp Avenue was blocked and residents could not get out of their road.
- She asked that the safety of the road users on the adjacent site also be considered as well as those using St George's access road.

Melissa Fynn, Head of Development at Countryside Partnerships who was the applicant for the third and final phase of development on the former St. George's hospital site, addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- The site had been identified for regeneration in the adopted Local Plan for over two decades. As part of this phase 94 dwellings and an 84 unit Community Wellbeing Facility were proposed. This was the most challenging part of the site to deliver with derelict buildings to demolish whilst retaining access to the existing hospital. It was also the most interesting part of the site and a lot of effort had been made in designing bespoke apartments that reflected the character of the former hospital buildings and integrated with the water tower which was being retained.
- It was acknowledged that there had been a number of comments on the planning portal and directly to the applicant in respect of the access road. The access road had been difficult to manage and, given the restraints, it had been necessary to close off access for a period of time which had caused a lot of inconvenience to the public and for which they apologised. It was hoped however that it could be seen that good progress had been made and that they were genuinely trying to finish the works as soon as possible to minimise the disruption caused. It was highlighted that the signalised junction had already been approved and did not form part of this application.

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- The many benefits of the development were highlighted and the submitted viability appraisal demonstrated that the affordable housing and other financial contributions that would usually be requested could not be provided.
- It was stressed that the 83 units on the site would be delivered as affordable housing through the Community Wellbeing Facility with Homes England grant funding. If the S106 Agreement sought to secure affordable housing then this could not be provided. As a strategic partner of Homes England, they had a commitment to deliver affordable housing across their sites and often delivered above policy requirements.
- They were excited to deliver this flagship specialist affordable housing scheme with Karbon Homes.

Martin Hawthorne also addressed the meeting speaking on behalf of Karbon Homes in support of the 84 unit extra care scheme as part of the wider application. His comments included the following:-

- NCC was concerned with the escalating costs of providing care and had a shortage of care workers. It was a key priority within the Council's Extra Care and Independent Supported Living Strategy to support opportunities which helped improve services for older people and improve efficiency and lower running costs.
- Those with a medium to high care need were finding that moving to an expensive care home was the only option. By creating a vibrant home from home environment residents could live independently in self-contained apartments.
- Care staff would be able to offer their services to residents all under one roof, making the provision of care better and more cost effective and efficient, and reduce the need for some to go into a care home. It would bring older people together, lowering feelings of isolation.
- Adult Services staff had been involved in the scheme with Karbon from the beginning and together they had created a scheme which catered for those with high, medium and lower care needs; dementia and those with bariatric requirements in an environment with a bistro, hairdressers and communal lounges, which would also be open to the wider community. It would be a lovely place for residents, family and friends to meet along with beautiful well stocked grounds to enjoy.
- Karbon had several successful facilities in the County already offering this service. Karbon board had approved this scheme in advance of this meeting and had pledged the capital required. The care team would be commissioned by the Council to provide the care and Karbon would run the complex building.
- Members were asked to approve this exemplar scheme and help realise this vision for Morpeth and Northumberland.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following information was noted:-

- A full transport and travel assessment had been undertaken in respect of the additional housing and extra care unit including the other uses included within this. The junction had been modified and accepted under a previous

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planning application with footways provided and phasing within the lights at the junction to enable pedestrians to access the development. It was a very steep bank but pedestrians would be able to walk up this should they wish. There was also an additional car parking strategy condition in relation to the extra care facility so that parking did not spill out onto residential streets. Bus routes etc had also been taken into consideration within the previous applications so all transport issues had been considered.

- The applicant had been made aware of the responses from Northumbria Police and the Fire and Rescue Service with amendments having been made to the scheme and all comments addressed and taken into account within the revised layout. This site design was also subject to a road safety audit to ensure safe operations for all users and this would continue through the Highways Adoption procedure.
- There was no S106 contribution to Education or Health due to the viability of the site.
- Condition 9 requested the submission of a construction management plan which would contain the requirement for a wheel wash facility.
- The usual policy requirement for affordable housing would be 10%, 20% or 30%, however this site would provide a 47% contribution of affordable housing, albeit in a different way to the usual as it is not secured by way of s106 agreement. Due to that level of contribution and site constraints the external valuation had stated that no additional S106 contributions would be able to be made to those already included. The provision of an extra care facility of this scale was in excess of what would normally be achieved through the usual S106 contributions.
- The Local Plan set out a series of policy asks in relation to S106 contributions including health and education and the viability of that ask had been tested as part of the public examination. The Inspectorate took into consideration that not every scheme would be able to pay for those contributions but it would be expected that approximately 85% of all schemes would and therefore accepted that a proportion would not be able to make a contribution. In this instance an additional contribution was not viable due to the special circumstances of providing 47% of units for special care, which would not impact on education provision. Whilst the development might have some impact on local health care provision, any health care contribution was for capital expenditure and not revenue. The scheme could not deliver the type of facility being proposed and also pay any additional S106 contributions. There would be a facility in the s106 agreement for clawback to be provided if the margins for the scheme were better than expected and the overall benefit of the scheme offset the harm of no additional S106 contributions being made.
- Highways improvements were tied to trigger points within Phase B, however, to ensure that these were undertaken in a timely manner, the trigger points had been updated to reflect this scheme to ensure that the improvements were delivered in advance of those proposed through Phase B.

Councillor Stewart proposed to accept the officers recommendation as outlined in the report, including the s106 agreement, and with the amendments to conditions as outlined on the amended conditions sheet and further updated condition 10, which was seconded by Councillor Renner-Thompson.

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Members considered that the scheme would benefit hospitals in discharging patients and help provide the additional dementia facilities which were required due to the increasing numbers of people being diagnosed with dementia. As residents accessed the supported accommodation, this would free up other much needed housing stock in the area. This was a very special facility and would benefit the residents of both Morpeth and the wider area and therefore it was considered that the benefits outweighed the fact that no additional S106 contribution was being made in respect of education or health care.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report, amended conditions update sheet and further amended condition 10 and subject to a S106 agreement to secure

- Off-site biodiversity net gain
- To fund £23,025 towards the coastal mitigation measures service
- To include a viability review/clawback mechanism

47 **PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

48 **SECTION 106 UPDATE**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

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