

## **Reason for Delay**

Negotiation.

## **Reason for Referral to Committee**

Site area.

### **1.0 Relevant History**

- 1.1 The proposal subject of this application and the preceding outline application was subject to pre-application advice.
- 1.2 Planning permission was granted in outline under ref 16/00378/1 on the 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019 with all matters reserved save access points onto the Baldock Road.

### **2.0 Policies**

#### **2.1 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations 1996 (Saved) :**

Policy 6 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt  
Policy 26 – Housing Proposals  
Policy 55 – Car Parking  
Policy 57 – Residential Guidelines and Standards

Three supplementary planning documents are applicable. These are **Design, Vehicle Parking Provision at New Developments.**

#### **2.2 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 Proposed Submission Local Plan and Proposals Map:**

Policy SP1 Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire  
Policy SP2 Settlement Hierarchy  
Policy SP5 Countryside and Green Belt  
Policy SP7 Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions  
Policy SP8 Housing  
Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability  
Policy SP10 Healthy Communities  
Policy SP11 Natural Resources and Sustainability  
Policy SP12 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Landscape  
Policy T1 Assessment of Transport Matters  
Policy T2 Parking  
Policy HDS2 Affordable Housing  
Policy HS3 Housing Mix  
Policy HS5 Accessible and Adaptable Housing  
Policy D1 Sustainable Design  
Policy D4 Air Quality  
Policy HC1 Community Facilities  
Policy NE1 Landscape

Policy NE5 New and improved public open space and biodiversity  
Policy NE6 Designated biodiversity and geological sites  
Policy NE7 Reducing Flood Risk  
Policy NE8 Sustainable Drainage Systems  
Policy NE9 Water Quality and Environment  
Policy NE10 Water Framework Directive and Wastewater Infrastructure  
Policy HE4 Archaeology

The site is identified in the Submission Plan as a housing site - **RY1** Land West of Ivy Farm, Baldock Road.

2.3 **NPPF:** Generally and specifically:

- 6. Delivering a wide choice of quality homes;
- 7. Design;
- 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 12. Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment.

### **3.0 Representations**

3.1 **Local Residents - Local Residents** – One local resident has written in raising the following concern:

***“As there are numerous ponds planned for the development, and as a train track runs immediately adjacent to the whole of the north side of the development, please could I request that suitable consideration be given, in the design requirements of the plan, to the safety and security of residents and visitors (especially children) in relation to these aspects. On the previous phase of the Ivy Farm development (the Kier Rosecomb estate) there is easy access to the balancing pond for children through an incomplete wooden fence which incorporates an unsecured gate. In addition there is easy access straight onto the train track from the road, with only a low wire mesh as a deterrent. The residents remain surprised that the estate was allowed to be left like this and would be keen to make sure that the new development does not also have these security and safety issues.”***

3.2 **Royston Town Council** - Has objected as follows:

- ***Traffic calming measures must be implemented both on the site and on the A505 and a stage 3 safety audit should be carried out***
- ***Sewerage – a satisfactory plan must be put into place before the development starts***
- ***It is an overdevelopment of the site and the number of houses is too large and should be reduced. The site is overcrowded.***

- ***The density of houses is too great, especially for a site that borders the SSSI of the Heath***
- ***The attenuation ponds must be made safe and a strong solid fence is needed to prevent access***
- ***The crossing over the railway is dangerous and needs to be made safe***
- ***Landscaping is lacking on the Northern side of the site***
- ***Lack of sustainability on the site; cycling and walking routes***
- ***Lack of cycle parking within the smaller units on site***
- ***The Parish Council understand the Natural England will also oppose this development along with the Conservators***

3.3 **Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA)** - No objection subject to condition 13 imposed on the outline application (16/00378/RM).

3.4 **Highway Authority** – Holding objection re layout

3.5 **Historic England** – Does not wish to make any further comments.

3.6 **Environmental Health**

Noise/Vibration:

On the outline application it was previously recommended:

***“Recommend that a condition be imposed to require details of noise and vibration mitigation including for the proposed primary school prior to first occupation. I would suggest this condition be imposed to require such details with any reserved matters application.”***

Contamination:

Recommend a standard contamination condition on outline no comments on reserved matters application.

Air Quality:

Recommend imposition of condition to require EV charging and travel plan.

3.7 **Herts CC Archaeology** – No comments on reserved matters application.

3.8 **Anglian Water (AW)** – Had no objection to the outline application (16/00378/1) subject to a condition requiring a foul water strategy being drawn up and agreed by the LPA. Condition 15 of the outline reads:

***No development shall commence until a foul water strategy has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. No dwellings shall be occupied until the works have been carried out in accordance with the foul water strategy so approved unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.***

**REASON**

***To prevent environmental and amenity problems arising from flooding.***

- 3.9 **Network Rail** – No objection subject to informative.
- 3.10 **Herts County Rights of Way** – No objection subject to the adjustment of the layout such that there is no building in the way of FP17.
- 3.11 **Herts Constabulary** – No objection
- 3.12 **Waste and Recycling** - No objection subject to a condition requiring the submission of collection details.

**4.0 Planning Considerations**

**4.1 Site & Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 The application site occupies a broad swathe of land between the current urban limit of Royston to the west (as represented by the new Kier scheme) and the relatively new McDonalds restaurant on the A505 roundabout. The application site is shielded from the Baldock Road by a mature tree belt opposite Therfield Heath. The railway forms the northern boundary of the site.

**4.2 Proposal**

- 4.2.1 The proposal is seeking approval of all reserved matters save access points pursuant to the outline planning permission for up to 279 dwellings which has already been granted under ref 16/00378/1. The reserved matters in this case are appearance, landscaping, layout and scale.
- 4.2.2 The scheme in detail proposes 279 new homes (the exact amount estimated in the allocation) with associated parking as follows:

**Social Housing**

15 x 1bed  
39 x 2bed  
38 x 3bed  
6 x 4bed

Total 98 units 206 parking spaces (2.1 spaces per units)

## Market Housing

35 x 2bed  
61 x 3bed  
85 x 4bed

Total 181 units 448.25 parking spaces (2.5 spaces per unit)

There are 3 apartment blocks on the scheme at the western end of the site (near the McDonalds restaurant). These will house 15 x 1 bed and 15 x 2 bed apartments (included in the above schedules).

Following discussions, the overall car parking figure has increased from 613 to 654 based on the need to accommodate car parking on the site.

### 4.3 Key Issues

4.3.1 As this is a reserved matters application relating to an already approved outline permission complete with legal agreement the discussion relates more narrowly to those matters of detail which have been reserved namely :

- Layout
- Landscaping
- Appearance
- Scale

Accordingly the report will be structured around these headings with an added section dealing with 'other matters' such as housing mix, parking etc. following a short introduction.

#### Introduction

4.3.2 The application site has been identified in the emerging submission plan as a housing site (RY1). This site has a dwelling estimate of 279 units and the following considerations for development are set out in the plan:

***Appropriate solution for primary education requirements having regard to up-to-date assessments of need and geographical distribution of existing provision;***

***☐ Retention of Public Right of Way Royston 017 as a green corridor through the site;***

***☐ Appropriate mitigation measures for noise associated with the adjoining railway to potentially include insulation and appropriate orientation of living spaces;***

***☐ Design to minimise visual impact of the development from Therfield Heath;***

***☐ Proposals to be informed by a site-specific landscape assessment and to retain trees as a buffer to the railway line;***

***☐ Consider and mitigate against potential adverse impacts upon Therfield Heath SSSI including provision of green infrastructure within the development to reduce recreational pressure;***

***☐ Address potential surface water flood risk through SuDS or other appropriate solution;***

***☐ Archaeological survey to be completed prior to development.***

***☐ Sensitive design and mitigation measures to address any impact on the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments (pre-historic barrows).***

- 4.33 Following the grant of permission in outline earlier this year under reference 16/003781 (see attached report at appendix A) the new owner of the site, Redrow Homes, has engaged with the Council in order to develop an acceptable scheme in detail (reserved matters - appearance, scale, layout and landscaping). At the time of writing this report there are still some matters which require finalising. However, given the pressing need to deliver homes and the relatively minor nature of these outstanding items, it has been agreed to prepare this report on the understanding that if the outstanding matters have not been satisfactorily resolved before an agreed expiry date of the 30<sup>th</sup> August, the Committee, should it be minded to support the recommendation overall, further resolve to allow officers to refuse planning permission under delegated powers (in the event that the applicant does not agree a further extension of time). See recommendation below.

#### **Layout.**

- 4.3.4 The proposed development of 279 homes has been presented in a layout described by the applicant as follows:

***“... it was concluded that due to the sensitive nature of the landscaping around the perimeter of site, it is a much better solution to keep the main traffic and bus route away from these areas. In running the spine road through the centre of the site the access to the houses fronting the landscaping. Pedestrian movement and vehicular traffic will be more appropriate for the location and setting, whilst avoiding any adverse impact upon the existing landscape.”***

4.3.5 The linear nature of the site is such that any scheme which preserved the established tree belt along the Baldock Road would necessarily feature a central spine road distributing traffic to discrete residential areas. The initial layouts presented specified a very straight central boulevard style spine road which it was felt was overly urban and moreover would encourage higher traffic speeds. Consequently the developer was encouraged to consider incorporating alignment changes in the main estate road with suitable visual termination in the form of open spaces.

4.3.6 The application before members does not fully reflect the encouragement of your officers in that there is only one significant terminating open space and the spine road is only very gently curved from east to west approaching this open space. There is also a small chicane feature at the school end of the site. The developers reason for this design is clearly that any more significant curvature in the central road, coupled with the introduction of further open spaces, would reduce housing numbers to well below the 279 indicated in the allocation. With the significant area of the site fronting Baldock Road shown as safeguarded from development the developer considers the compromise layout to be acceptable. In discussions your officers considered that more had to be done to differentiate what would be an overly long and somewhat undifferentiated road. In this regard the idea to create visual character areas was progressed – the idea being that the house types / styles are varied in blocks to create the sense of moving from one area to another along the spine road. This, it was considered, would work with the curved road to mitigate the sense of an overly straight boulevard. The areas to be created are defined and described by the developer as below:

***• Character Area A - This includes the land nearest the school and existing development.***

***• Character Area B - This includes the land in between, again ranging from the railway frontage to the existing trees.***

***• Character Area C - This includes the LEAP which terminates the spine road and one of the entrances.***

#### **Character Area A**

***• This area is near the existing development to the east. It includes one of the entrances.***

***• Key buildings in this area will be clad with location specific materials such as render and flint to create a sense of place when travelling through the development.***

***• Tree lined verges on the spine road will reflect the boulevards found in the centre of Royston.***

***• Green spaces will be located off the main road in a similar arrangement to that found at the previously mentioned Crest Nicholson development in Fairfield Gardens.***

### Character Area B

- *The spine road contains tree lined verges.*
- *Dwellings address both the spine road and the side roads to create links to the green spaces on the perimeter of the site.*
- *Density is higher on the railway frontage to reflect the recommendation in the acoustic report that built form should be used as an acoustic buffer. Helping to provide private amenity space*
- *The footpaths around the perimeter of the site encourage recreational use on site.*
- *Key buildings will be clad in render or flint knapping.*

### Character Area C

- *The LEAP terminates the spine road and provides an area of green space.*
- *Key buildings in this area will be clad with location specific materials such as weatherboarding to create a sense of place when the development is viewed from the A505.*
- *Shared surfaces and private driveways create a more pedestrian feel.*
- *This area includes one of the site entrances.*

4.3.7 It is not an entirely convincing design feature in my view and I remain somewhat doubtful that the ambition expressed in the design statement will translate effectively to a 'village by village' feel as one moves through the scheme. Suffice to say, that allied with the curved road and the internal open spaces, the idea of creating separate character areas at street level does have some merit in my view. This issue will be discussed further under appearance but I might suggest a materials condition be imposed to ensure that the areas are adequately differentiated at implementation.

### 4.3.8 Summary.

**It is accepted that the layout of the scheme is to some degree limited by the sites linear form and the need to safeguard the well established and important tree belt running the entire length of Baldock Road. The developer has been encouraged to avoid an overly straight central spine road and consider terminating vistas along this road. Their solution is not entirely convincing in my view. This said, it is accepted that this site does exhibit some unusual constraints and this being the reality I am minded to conclude that the presented solution is acceptable subject to a condition allowing careful control of materials.**

**It should be noted that at the time of writing this report the highway authority was considering some minor alignment changes to the layout (see suggested resolution above at 4.3.3).**



## Landscaping

4.3.9 The landscaping of this scheme is central to its success. On this scheme all landscaping not in the ownership of individual properties will be managed by a private management company as secured by the section 106 agreement. The site is relatively exposed and stands opposite the Heath – a resource of significant natural, recreational and historic value. In the applicant's landscape appraisal the architect identifies the aims of the landscaped infrastructure on this site:

- ***Establishment early on of onsite green infrastructure; Interpretation within the SSSI;***
- ***Provision of dog waste bins and waste bags on site;***
- ***Interpretation to home buyers of on site green infrastructure, PRow and SSSI access;***
- ***Provision of circular walks around the site and links to existing walking routes and provision of attractive focal points within the development;***
- ***Retention of the mature wooded buffer along Baldock Road; and***
- ***Encouraging residents to use the PRow north of the application site rather than heading south across Baldock Road into the SSSI.***

4.3.10 The applicant's landscape strategy seeks to achieve the above stated objectives and includes measures for the comprehensive management of the established tree belt along the Baldock Road frontage and the younger plantation belt behind. This management activity will both serve to will both serve to buffer the development visually from the Heath and provide for an attractive recreational resource for residents.

4.3.11 The scheme specifies a series of flood attenuation basins (SuDS) which form an integral part of the overall landscape scheme. These features are dynamic in that they may not contain water for most of the year but are important when rainfall levels and the consequent runoff from the new built areas is high. These areas can be hazardous and the only neighbour representation received raises this point. Accordingly, I would be minded to recommend a condition that requires the scheme to be implemented in accordance with the submitted landscape and management plans and that measures for the protection of SuDS features and the railway are also implemented in accordance with a RoSPA guidance and the informative requested by Network Rail.

4.3.12 The scheme includes a LEAP (Local Equipped Area for Play) or pocket park and other smaller informal spaces. These spaces will be planted and managed to provide an attractive alternative to the Heath for residents. The applicant describes the newly devised walks as such:

***“The interconnected open space throughout the site includes a series of circular walks of differing lengths to provide ‘heath’/‘recreation’ trails to cater for local residents for dog walking, running and cycling with children. These routes aim to encourage short distance recreation to be undertaken on site rather than crossing Baldock Road and using the adjacent Therfield Heath. By providing these routes on site the aim is that pressure on the Heath from new residents moving in and using it will be mitigated by providing green infrastructure services as part of the SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) on site.”***

4.3.13 The associated planting strategy is characterised by the applicant as follows:

***“The planting strategy for the site is described in the following pages. The planting strategy proposes a range of native species within the open spaces around the perimeter of the site. Native species will be supplemented in appropriate locations with non-native species with known wildlife value to enhance biodiversity.”***

The planting scheme also includes hedgerow to define front boundaries. Open spaces will be seeded with both amenity and meadow grass including wildflower meadow mix in some areas. Boundary treatments for individual properties have been specified as mostly 1.8m close boarded. However, 1.8m walls are specified at strategic points where their appearance would be more widely appreciated.

#### 4.3.14 **Summary**

The proposed landscape scheme has been designed to keep residents on the site as much as possible by providing an attractive and useable series of walks and interlinked open spaces. If well executed and appropriately managed, I consider this to be a considered strategy. The care and maintenance of this ‘green infrastructure’ will be the responsibility of a private management company as secured by the 106 agreement attached to the outline permission. It is considered prudent to recommend conditions which ensure the implementation of the landscape scheme and provide for the replacement of any trees or shrubs which die in the first 5 years. It is also considered prudent to impose a condition in order that the railway line and SuDS features are protected in accordance with the advice of Network Rail and an appropriate safety assessment (RoSPA).

## Appearance

- 4.3.15 This reserved matter relates more to the appearance of dwellings and the use of materials. It is undoubtedly the case that a volume house builder like Redrow is going to be somewhat constrained by a limited palate of materials and building forms. This said the applicant has endeavoured to manipulate the standard fare available to best reflect the locality. This approach relies ostensibly on the specification of buff (cream and yellow) facing bricks to pick up on the widespread use of Cambridge and Arlesey whites in the area. The use of weatherboarding, render, tile hanging and flint knapping are strategically specified in prominent positions to reinforce local connection. Most notably, the use of a single slate style roof material is specified across the entire site in order to minimise visual impact, particularly from the Heath.
- 4.3.16 Other than the traditional two storey houses, this scheme specifies a single 3 storey apartment block at the western end of the site near the McDonalds restaurant. Some concern has been expressed by officers over the appearance of this non-domestic scale building in what is an exposed and prominent location. In order to alleviate these concerns the developer has been encouraged to ground the appearance of these buildings in local rural buildings of a similar scale. The idea behind this approach is predicated on producing structures which do not appear as overly urban, rather they strike the observer a redolent of commercial or agricultural buildings already well established in the local landscape. The building now specified is large but has been designed to pick up on commercial buildings in the area particularly the maltings building in nearby Ashwell. There are two smaller three storey blocks towards the new school (eastern) end of the site and these have been appropriately detailed with dark stained timber boarding.

### 4.3.17 Summary

**This site has proved difficult to detail at a density of 279 dwellings due mainly to its elongated shape and relative narrowness. This said the applicant has, within the accepted limits of a volume housebuilder, considered materials and design features which reflect some local influences. This is particularly true of the large landmark building near the McDonalds which, after some length negotiations, has been designed with some eye to local buildings of this scale notably the Maltings building in nearby Ashwell.**

## Other matters

- 4.3.18 The Emerging Local Plan (ELP) Policy HS3 requires that housing schemes comprise a specified housing mix of 60/40% 3bed plus and 1 or 2 bed. The originally offered mix was 73/27%. However, following negotiations this was amended to 68/32% which given the emerging status of the ELP is acceptable in my view.

4.3.19 Car parking was considered an important issue on this site as there are no realistic opportunities to park outside the confines of the site. The scheme was originally specified with 613 spaces which was compliant with the SPD. However, following discussions around the need to provide a more comfortable parking buffer, given the sites relative isolation, the number of spaces was raised to 650 spaces comprising 539 allocated spaces and 111 visitors. This is considered to be a more appropriate level of car parking without compromising the amount of soft landscaping.

#### **Discussion of planning balance.**

4.3.20 RY1 is an allocation in the submission plan and its development will make a significant contribution toward the Council's planned supply of housing – an imperative lent further weight in light of the Local Plan Inspector's most recent letter. Further, it will make a valuable and much needed contribution to the supply of affordable housing and a site for a new primary school for Royston. The scheme will assist in the mitigation of existing recreational pressures on the Heath as well as bring forward much needed improvements to the areas foul water infrastructure.

4.3.21 The grant of outline permission earlier this year has established the overall acceptability of a housing scheme on this site and the detail of two points of access to the site, one at either end of the Baldock Road.

4.3.22 There is some minor conflict with policies in the emerging plan (mix) but the applicant's willingness to move toward a more compliant mix and the relative weight that can be attributed to the ELP render this concern neutral in the planning balance in my view.

#### **4.4 Summary and Conclusions.**

4.4.1 The site will deliver much needed housing, including a significant proportion of affordable stock, as well as a site for a new first school. These are significant **social** and **economic** benefits. Obligations will help to offset harm further. At a point in time when the NPPF requires planning authorities to grant permission for housing unless the harm (social, environmental and economic) **significantly and demonstrably** outweighs the benefits (paragraph 11). Given the considered design of buildings (appearance), layout and landscape and despite some minor reservations set out above, the detailed scheme before the Council is considered acceptable subject to conditions and the resolution of the minor layout issues identified by the Highway Authority yet to be resolved at time of writing (see recommendation) below.

#### **4.5 Alternative Options**

4.5.1 None applicable

#### 4.6 **Pre-Commencement Conditions**

4.6.1 I can confirm that the applicant is in agreement with the pre-commencement conditions that are proposed.

#### 5.0 **Recommendation**

5.1 Members **resolve** to **GRANT** permission subject to the following conditions and to the satisfactory resolution of the minor layout issues identified by the Highway Authority. I would also recommend that this Committee further **resolve** that officers be able to **REFUSE** planning permission (under delegated powers) if these highway issues are not satisfactorily resolved before the currently agreed extension date of the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2019 or any such extension date that may be otherwise agreed with your officers by the applicant.