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

Director of Planning

North Hertfordshire Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

District ref: 24/01733/PNQ
HCC ref: NH/21946/2024
HCC received: 12 August 2024
Area manager: Manjinder Sehmi
Case officer: Paul Marshall

Location

Woodcotes, Fears Green, Sandon, Buntingford, SG9 0QZ

Application type

Prior Approval

Proposal

Prior Approval Class Q Agric to Dwelling : Conversion of former Poultry building into 3 residential dwellings with all associated building works

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:

COMMENTS

The proposals are for Prior Approval Class Q Agric to Dwelling: Conversion of former Poultry building into 3 residential dwellings with all associated building works. Fears Green Sandon also known as Gannock Road is maintainable by the highway authority and is unclassified and provides a local access function in the road hierarchy. The vehicle speeds past this site are limited to 60 mph. There have been no recorded accidents near the site in a rolling 5-year period.

Policy Review:

The key documents used to assess the application are:

- Manual for Streets 2007

- National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021)
- Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Local Transport Plan-4 [2018-2031, May2018]
- Cycle Infrastructure Design DfT Local Transport Note 1/20 (July 2020)
- HCC's Place & Movement Planning Design Guidance (adopted in March 2024)

PLANNING HISTORY

The application site has no previous planning history.

DRAWINGS

The Highway Authority note the submission of materials in support of the planning application, including drawing numbers: PL001, 002, 010, 030, 100, 300, and Application for Prior Approval.

The HA acknowledges that the proposed development is not expected to have any significant impact on the operation of the highway network. The main concern the HA has relates to the unsustainable location of the proposed residential development.

With new builds the planning process seeks/provides the opportunity to improve conditions for both development and highway safety by applying current higher standards of policies, design, accessibility, and safety to new developments, and not to retain and/or continue with past obsolete standards.

Accesses in new builds should adhere to current higher standards of accessibility as outlined in both local and national policies, guidance's, and regulations.

Cycling and walking are a key part of HCC/NPPF plans, the HA expects provision of safe footway to the vehicle access of the proposed site which is one of the key issues identified in HCC/NPPF to encourage active sustainable transport choices.

However, no footways exist along Fears Green and the development cannot provide the required footways in the interests of highway safety to ensure vulnerable users have access to safe facilities that encourage active travel and ensure the site is accessible for all vulnerable users.

The lack of footway means residents would have to either walk along an unlit and extensively very long carriageway of Fears Green that has a 60mph speed limit, giving rise to conditions contrary with and prejudicial to the safety of all road users especially for people with mobility issues, or the residents will be predominantly reliant on vehicle trips. 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.

Summary

Policies encourage active travel, which is about 'living locally' and giving people the ability to access most of their needs within an easy walk or cycle from their home, with safe access to cycling and local public transport options.

Walking or cycling to and from the site would therefore be neither particularly appealing nor safe. This is likely to discourage occupiers of the proposed dwellings from walking and cycling to local services, also the site is not served by public transport and so no public transport options exist for occupants of the site that could easily access. Accordingly, the development cannot be described as

well served by public transport, walking, and cycling opportunities, and the site's situation is not conducive to accessing the development and surrounding area except predominantly by private car.

The limited alternative transport options available mean that occupiers of the proposed development would be likely to be highly reliant on one mode of transport, the private car, for a significant majority of their journeys and to serve their daily needs. Consequently, although vehicle movements would only be associated with 3 dwellings in this instance and may therefore not be particularly significant, the site and appeal of the proposal cannot reasonably be described as sustainable in relation to accessibility considerations.

With the lack of realistic transport alternatives and occupants of the development thus having little choice other than to rely on driving to and from the site, neither could the development be regarded as promoting sustainable transport choices and having no adverse environmental impact.

This would likely result in treacherous conditions for any future occupiers navigating the roads by foot or cycling during the evenings, winter months or adverse weather fronts, there is no nearby bus stops, or acceptable walking distances to access public transport, services and facilities. On this basis, the proposed development would not enhance or maintain the vitality of the rural community and would lead to the use of unsustainable travel modes and likely to heavily rely on the private car.

Residential developments should be delivered in the most sustainable locations, connectivity is maximised, the need to travel is minimised, and safe and direct walking and cycling routes are provided.

Consequently, the site and its access without the provision of safe and lit footway connectivity with established settlements and public transport are not considered acceptable for residential development in such an isolated location because it is not viable for access by non-car transport modes contrary to all policies and guidance's, in particular NPPF which seeks new development to provide safe and suitable access for all, and to create safe and secure layouts minimising conflicts between traffic and pedestrians.

Furthermore, permitting the development would set an undesirable precedent for similar schemes elsewhere.

The onus is on the applicant to provide detailed explanation, information, plans that demonstrate how all the aspects of the proposals are compliant with the appropriate guidance's and policies for the HA to fully understand and assess the viability of the proposal to make an informed decision.

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 accessibility of the proposed development contrary to Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) policies 5 and 6 and also contrary to the principles of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.

Signed

Paul Marshall

27 August 2024