

**SOUTH DOWNS JOINT COMMITTEE**

**Agenda Item 6**

**PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**7 SEPTEMBER 2009**

**EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT**

**REPORT BY THE SOUTH DOWNS OFFICER**

**Application No: 21514/082**

**Proposal: Outline application – residential development comprising sixty nine dwellings, access roads, parking and landscaping**

**Location: SCU Leydene, Long Down Lane, East Meon, Petersfield**

**1. The Site**

- 1.1 The SCU Leydene site (also formerly known as HMS Mercury) is located two miles to the south of East Meon. It is a former Ministry of Defence (MOD) site that straddles Long Down Road. That part of the site to the south of the road was redeveloped in the late 1990's with 20 large "executive" houses to secure the removal of a range of unattractive buildings as "planning gain", along with the conversion of the former Leydene House to provide 10 dwellings and the creation of the Sustainability Centre.
- 1.2 The northern part of the site is located on high ground on the edge of Wether Down and the South Downs Way passes along its western and southern boundaries. This part of the site still contains the former MOD buildings consisting of a range of two-storey accommodation buildings set in a crescent layout, a large portal-frame sports hall and a number of offices and other ancillary buildings. It is surrounded by a tall security fence.
- 1.3 The eastern end of the site contains part of a Bronze Age cross-dyke known as Leydene Ditches, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The land to the west on the other side of the South Downs Way is a former playing field.
- 1.4 In 2004 the former East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Planning Panel was consulted on a proposal to convert the buildings on the north side of the road to provide 85 dwellings. An objection was made to those proposals, which were refused. An appeal was subsequently lodged, but later withdrawn.
- 1.5 On the 18th May 2007 a Certificate of Lawfulness was issued by East Hampshire District Council for a number of uses commensurate with a military facility on this northern part of the site.

## **2. The Proposals**

- 2.1 This current application is again for the land to the north of the road. The existing site would be cleared and 69 dwellings would be constructed along with associated access, internal roads, parking, landscaping and environmental improvements.
- 2.2 The layout and indicative designs are shown in the attached appendix. The dwellings would be predominantly two storey (although there would be some of 2½ storeys) in small attached groups.
- 2.3 The dwellings would be of a fairly plain design, and the external faces would consist of a mix of brickwork, with some elevations being rendered. The layout would be on a series of culs-de-sac.
- 2.4 The 'western parcel' (former playing field to the west of the South Downs Way) would be retained as landscaped amenity space. The SAM at the eastern end of the site would be protected from development and an adjacent car park reduced in size.
- 2.5 Due to the lack of a local gas supply and unsuitability of the area for deliveries of biomass material, the applicants state that electricity will have to be relied on to provide heating and hot water, although air source heat pumps are proposed, which are low-carbon rather than zero-carbon. If a zero carbon approach is required, then the applicants suggest provision of a small wind turbine for every dwelling.

## **3. Assessment**

- 3.1 This site is previously developed land and is very unattractive in its current state. The text supporting East Hampshire District Local Plan (Second Review) Policy MOD2 expresses a preference for restoration of the whole site to downland, and this is repeated in the East Meon Village Design Statement.
- 3.2 However, the applicants state that the granting of a Certificate of Lawful Use means that there is now a fallback position of military use which could well be of greater detriment to the surrounding area than a residential development and that the restoration of site to downland is not an option.
- 3.3 Alternative uses to residential have not been considered, although given the location of the site, the opportunities for an acceptable appropriate business use seem limited.
- 3.4 It is therefore likely that some form of residential development may be the only viable way of securing the restoration of the rest of the site. However, this should be limited to the minimum necessary, whereas the current application for 69 dwellings seems excessive to secure this.

- 3.5 In addition, the design/materials proposed are very plain and the layout is more akin to a residential estate within a settlement rather than paying more regard to the sites semi-isolated rural setting.
- 3.6 The approach set out in paras 3.4 and 3.5 is supported in the District Council's Policy MOD2, which states that redevelopment of MOD sites outside of settlements should, *inter alia*, be in keeping with the scale and character of the surrounding area.
- 3.7 Accessibility via different modes of transport is also a requirement of Policy MOD2. At the Local Plan Inquiry, the Inspector concluded that any development of less than 140 dwellings would result in a lower transport impact than military use of the site. The applicants therefore do not propose provision of alternative forms of transport although they offer the possibility of a Travel Plan including a 'Travel Pack' promoting alternatives to the private car.
- 3.8 Although the physical development would not intrude into the scheduled area of the cross dyke to the east, the dwellings would lie in close proximity, with pedestrian access across the SAM to the proposed car park. The development therefore would seem to result in the SAM being exposed to greater risk than at present given that it is currently surrounded by security fencing.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 Given the sensitive landscape setting and the remoteness of the site, the proposal for 69 dwellings seems excessive for the site, although the benefit of the removal of the existing buildings and the fallback situation of a lawful military use must also be taken into account.
- 4.2 Nevertheless, the extent of development proposed for the site and the design and layout of the dwellings would not be in keeping with the scale and surroundings of the local area.
- 4.3 This, combined with concerns regarding the reliance on the private car suggest that the proposals would be contrary to Policy MOD2 of the East Hampshire District Local Plan.
- 4.4 There are also concerns regarding the proximity of development to the SAM.

#### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 It is recommended that, following discussion by the Planning Committee, East Hampshire District Council be informed that:
1. The Joint Committee understands that there is a fallback position of a lawful military use and that the removal of the existing buildings is desirable. However, the site is in a very sensitive location, being sited on high ground with no sizeable settlements in close proximity and served by narrow rural roads. The Joint Committee therefore

considers the scale of development proposed to be excessive for this site.

2. The housing estate style layout, limited mixture of materials and plain design of the dwellings are also not considered to be in keeping with the character of the area.
3. The Joint Committee is also concerned that despite the applicants suggesting the possible production of a travel plan, reliance will be on the private car as no public transport provision is proposed.
4. Accordingly, the Joint Committee **objects** to the proposal as it does not appear to comply with requirements b and C of Policy MOD2 of the East Hampshire Local Plan (Second Review)
5. In addition the Joint Committee is concerned that the proximity of development to the cross dyke at the east of the site and the public access across it could detrimentally affect the scheduled monument. Accordingly, the Joint Committee **also objects** to the proposals as they appear not to comply with Policy HE17 of the Local Plan.
6. However, if permission is to be granted, the Joint Committee would welcome consideration of conditions (either as part of permission for this application or for a subsequent full application) ensuring that:
  - materials used are of a high quality and are locally sourced, where possible;
  - controls be placed on the use of external lighting (given the sensitive position of this site);
  - those open parts of the site including (but not limited to) the former sports field are restored to chalk grassland;
  - sustainable measures such as renewable energy provision, rainwater harvesting be incorporated into the proposals (although individual wind turbines for each dwelling may not be appropriate);
  - a Travel Plan is made or provision be made for public transport improvements.

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