

Meeting a Critical Housing Need

Planning Application DC/15/2120/FUL – Kininvie, Fordham Road, Newmarket

1. This note has been prepared following the 1st June Development Control Committee at which a decision on the above planning application was deferred until the next committee on the 6th July to enable the risks associated with refusing the application to be considered. Whilst we welcome the Officers' recommendation for approval, we note that Officers did not refer in their original report to the fact that the scheme will contribute to the critical need for this particular form of housing. This omission needs to be corrected in the report being taken to committee on 6th July, and is plainly a factor that weighs heavily in favour for the case for granting consent when considering the overall planning balance of the scheme.
2. As set out within the social needs report¹ submitted in support of the planning application, the older population of Forest Heath is increasing at an alarming rate. The proportion of those aged 65 years and older will increase by around 45% and those aged 85 years by about 93% above their current numbers by 2030. The vast majority of these will be owner-occupiers.
3. In terms of satisfying this particular housing need and the sustainability benefits that accrue, the proposed sheltered housing development:
 - Provides purpose-built, specifically designed units of accommodation for local older people – an acknowledged housing need;
 - Releases larger family sized housing and assists in moving along the housing chain;
 - Provides care, safety, security and companionship and thereby reduces anxieties and worries experienced by many elderly people living in accommodation that does not best suit their needs in retirement;
 - Reduces management and maintenance concerns;
 - Is accessible to shops and other essential services, being within walking distance or accessible by public transport;
 - Helps to promote an independent lifestyle for its elderly residents; and,
 - Helps to maintain the residents' health and general well-being.
4. The above benefits reduce the demands exerted on health and social services and other care facilities not only in terms of better health, well-being and peace of mind, but also in so far as doctors, chiropodists, physiotherapists, community nurses etc. all having opportunity to attend to the needs of several residents in a single visit, thus promoting a better use of public resources.

¹ Social Needs Report, Contact Consulting, October 2015.

5. The proposed redevelopment of the site for housing for older people presents a significant opportunity to contribute towards meeting the current and projected need for specialist housing for older people within Newmarket and across Forest Heath.
6. Specialist accommodation for older people has specific locational requirements which require the developments to be sited either within or close to town centres. In the case of Newmarket, opportunities for sites that are suitable for this form of development are severely limited, particularly when other constraints such as the Conservation Area are taken into account. When opportunities on sustainable sites such as Kininvie exist, they should be taken.
7. Members should also be reminded of national policy that provides overarching guidance on the matter. The NPPF advises: *To deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, local planning authorities should:*
 - a. *plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community (such as, but not limited to, families with children, older people, people with disabilities, service families and people wishing to build their own homes);*
8. The Government's recently Adopted Planning Policy Guidance states under Assessment of Housing and Economic Development at subsection 3:
 - a. *"Housing for older people*

*The need to provide housing for older people is **critical** given the projected increase in the number of households aged 65 and over accounts for over half of the new households"*
9. This statement is clear. We find no reference to other "critical" housing needs (or similar terminology) in the guidance or within the National Planning Policy Framework. Given the acknowledgement of a "critical" need, it is for the Planning system to deliver it unless there is very good reason why it should not.
10. It is therefore important that meeting an identified local need is afforded significant weight in the planning balance when determining this planning application at the Development Control Committee on 6th July.