

Parish: ARWARTON**Location: Land West of 3, Boleyn Place, Queens Road, Arwarton.****Proposal: Erection of 1 No. two-storey dwelling and 1 No. single-storey dwelling (semi-detached) and parking. Construction of new vehicular access for 3 Boleyn Place.****Applicant: Icen Homes****Case Officer: Lynda Bacon****Date for Determination: 3/05/10**

THE SITE

1. The site is located on higher ground on the northern side of Queens Road, (The Street) a classified 'C' road linking Shotley to the east with Harkstead to the west. Erwarton is a settlement that does not have a built-up area boundary and is therefore classified as being in open countryside for the purposes of Local Plan policy.
2. To the south of the application site, on the opposite side of the road, the countryside is designated as the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the land gently falls away towards the Stour Estuary. To the south-east is the Parker Long Poorhouse, a Grade II listed building, and beyond which lies St Mary's Church, a Grade I listed building. Church Farmhouse is Grade II listed and is situated to the south-west alongside Long Wall House, which is single storey range converted to residential use. Existing development to the east of the application site, also on the northern side of the road, comprises semi-detached pairs of two-storey dwellings at Boleyn Place that were built as Local Authority Housing. Boleyn Place is separated from the highway by a greensward that includes a lay-by for additional parking. Beyond Boleyn Place to the east are individual detached chalet style properties.
3. The application site is owned by Babergh District Council and has been used by agreement as an informal parking area for the occupier of 3 Boleyn Place.

THE PROPOSAL

4. The proposal is for a Rural Exceptions scheme under Policy HS06 and will provide two affordable rented units, constructed as a semi-detached pair comprising a two-storey property on the eastern side of the site (Plot 2) adjacent to 3 Boleyn Place and a single-storey property located to the west of the site (Plot 1), both properties will offer two-bedroom accommodation. It would also include a shared vehicular access and dedicated parking area to serve the development. In addition, the application includes provision for a new vehicular access with parking and turning space for 3 Boleyn Place, to compensate for the informal parking area lost as a result of the development.
5. The external elevations of the two-storey dwelling will be painted render and the single-storey property will comprise black shiplap boarding. A red brick plinth and a roof of red clay pantiles are also incorporated. Both dwellings include the provision of two solar thermal panels within the front, south facing roof slopes.
6. The application is supported by a Design and Access statement which, amongst other things, explains that;

“The proposed continues the theme of existing properties in Boleyn Place as semi-detached and broadly on the line of the existing dwellings and their relationship to The Street’ in Erwarton. The layout also relates to the area with views from the site to the south to the Orwell Estuary/Shotley Peninsula, while the north relates to their own private gardens. The side/west elevation has views across the fields. The layout of the dwellings seek to build on these views with dual aspect for the house chalets sitting room and the kitchen dining related to the more private garden area; the bedrooms of this property having the southern estuary views to the front of the house. The adjoining bungalow utilises its views with the bedroom and the dining area related to the south/estuary while the sitting room and other bedroom enjoys the more private rear garden. The kitchen gains from views across the fields to the west. Parking and access is directly off ‘The Street’ and is the same for the rest of this side of the street in Erwarton.

The scale of the proposal relates to the existing with the house/chalet next to existing houses which breaks down to the single storey property as the scheme reduces in scale to relate to the countryside adjacent. The proposal creates the link between existing houses and countryside in its form and scale. From the southern/street aspect the properties merge together with the roof seen as one element blending the two together, the rear/garden and western aspect have the two properties more clearly defined”.

7. The application is also accompanied by an Affordable Housing Statement, a Code for Sustainable Homes Ecological Assessment, an Archaeological Evaluation Report prepared by Suffolk County Council and utility, land contamination and flood risk information.

RELEVANT HISTORY

8. 1969 – Outline planning permission granted for not more than two dwellings.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

9. **PPS1** (Delivering Sustainable Development)
10. **PPS7** (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)
11. **PPS3** (Housing)

PLANNING POLICIES

12. The Development Plan comprises the East of England Plan, adopted 2008, saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

East of England Plan – 2008

- **ENV7** (Quality in the Built Environment)
- **SS1** (Achieving Sustainable Development)

Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006

- **LP01** (Planning Obligations)
- **HS04** (Countryside)
- **HS06** (Rural Exceptions)
- **HS07** (Rural Exceptions)
- **CN01** (Maintaining Local Distinctiveness)
- **TP15** (Parking)
- **CR01** (Development in the Countryside)
- **CR02** (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

- **CR07** (Landscaping)

The relevant documents can be viewed via the internet. Please see Page 4 for details.

CONSULTATIONS

13. PC – To be reported verbally at the meeting, if available.
14. LHA – No objection subject to the imposition of 6 conditions regarding the access layout, visibility, surface water drainage and the provision and retention of the parking areas.
15. SCC – Archaeology Service – The application lies in an area of high archaeological importance recorded in the County Historic Environment Record. An adequate area archaeological field evaluation has been undertaken of the proposed development and the results have been incorporated in the current application. Settlement-type archaeological features dating to the Roman and medieval periods have been defined across the application area. There is high potential for important heritage assets to be disturbed by this development. There are no grounds to consider refusal of permission in order to achieve preservation *in situ* of any important heritage assets. Any permission should, however, be the subject of a condition to record and advance understanding of the significance of the asset before it is damaged or destroyed i.e. full archaeological excavation prior to development is required.
16. BDC Housing Enabling Team – fully supports the application.

REPRESENTATIONS

17. To date, one letter has been received from the occupiers of Long Wall House, opposite the site, which comments that;
 - The design is of a good standard and will blend with the rural aspect.
 - The loss of the Poplar Tree to facilitate access is regretted and the new Poplar proposed should be consider as a replacement for the same removed by BDC in 2001. A row of Poplars previously extended along the road and two further trees were lost in 1987 and the proposals should include replacement Poplar planting, at least one in the grass area in front of Boleyn Place.
 - Mixed hedge planting to the west and north boundaries should be extended to the front south boundary to screen the parking areas and maintain the rural aspect and to continue the hedging which exists on the adjacent fields.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

18. The lead planning policies in this case are saved Policies HS06 and HS07 relating to Local Needs Housing and Saved Policies CR01, CR02, HS04 and CN01 of the Local Plan aimed at protecting the countryside and safeguarding it from inappropriate development and securing a good quality of design for new residential development, which respects the character of the area. The mains considerations are therefore:-
 - The principle of housing development in the countryside as a rural exception.
 - Background to the scheme and local housing need (the appropriateness of a rural exception scheme in Erwarton and the appropriateness of the site identified).
 - The design and layout.
 - The impact on the AONB opposite.
 - Highway safety.
 - Other issues.

The Principle

19. National guidance in PPS1 and PPS7 restricts development in the countryside for reasons of sustainability and its intrinsic value. This is reinforced by policy HS04 of the Local Plan which restricts residential development in the countryside in the interests of agriculture, rural amenity, road safety and the economy of services. There is however a mechanism for delivering housing in the countryside as an exception to the normal policies of restraint if the proposal is entirely for affordable housing and the development is of small scale. It is also essential for the development to meet a local housing need which has been identified from a clear evidence base (usually the Housing Needs Survey). This type of development is called a 'rural exception', as it allows affordable housing as an exception to local plan policy in locations where residential development would not normally be permitted.
20. The application does not propose open market housing for general needs; it proposes two units that would be available for rent as affordable housing solely to meet an identified local need and which would be managed by a Registered Social Landlord, secured by a unilateral undertaking. The proposal therefore qualifies as a rural exceptions site under Local Plan Policy HS06. This policy states that should a registered social housing landlord be able to offer assurances and provisions as set out in Local Plan Policy HS07, then exceptionally, planning permission will be granted for housing in, or abutting, identified villages and in the case of 'clusters' of dwellings in the countryside, the level of provision will be restricted to one unit. Furthermore, Policy HS06 goes on to state that in all the circumstances the following criteria will need to be met:
 - The local housing need cannot be adequately met by other planning policies including social housing provision associated with Local Plan housing allocations;
 - The proposed development, by virtue of its size, scale and type, will not exceed the identified local need;
 - The type of dwellings to be provided are consistent with the needs identified by the housing needs survey and agreed in advance by the District Council.
21. And in the case of 'clusters':
 - A cluster will comprise a tightly-knit group of dwellings clearly defined from the surrounding countryside;
 - Dwellings must be located in gaps in the confines of the cluster or abut it.
22. The settlement of Erwarton is defined as countryside for the purposes of the Local Plan and as such there is no Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB) around the cluster of existing properties. The application site is however, adjacent to existing dwellings and is not therefore an isolated location. The principle of affordable development in this location is therefore acceptable, however two dwellings are proposed whereas Policy HS06 seeks to restrict development within 'clusters' to a single unit. In this instance, given that one dwelling would satisfy policy and that the identified need would justify two dwellings, it is considered that two affordable dwellings are acceptable.
23. The remaining criterion of Policy HS06 are considered in the following section of this report. In summary the local housing need cannot be met by other policies, the scheme does not exceed local requirements. The type of dwellings proposed will also address the accommodation requirements of local people.

Background to the Scheme and Local Housing Need

24. This is a scheme that the Enabling Officers, along with the Parish Meeting and Icení Homes have had full involvement with over a long period of time, dating from 2008, and the proposal is therefore strongly supported.

25. Following the completion of the Local Housing Need Survey the Parish Meeting agreed in 2008 to work in partnership with Icen Homes and the Housing Enabling Team, to try and progress a scheme that would provide Affordable Housing units to meet the need identified. Sites were investigated, with various possibilities being considered, this included liaison with Development Control colleagues to establish which sites were suitable. This process identified the site adjacent to 3 Boleyn Place as being the most suitable exception site for the development. The land is in council ownership and a scheme of 2 units has been progressed, resulting in this planning application.
26. During 2008/9 a Project Group consisting of Parish Representatives, Icen Homes, the Architect, Babergh's Housing Enabling Officer and the Rural Housing Enabler from Suffolk ACRE met to discuss the design and layout of the scheme, with pre-application advice being provided by Development Control.
27. A Community Open Day was held on 7 October 2009 prior to the submission of the planning application, to seek the view of the local community. 22 people attended, all supporting the proposal with no objections raised.
28. In order to fund the construction of the scheme, Icen Homes bid for and secured funding totaling £118,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency in January 2010. To comply with the HCA funding requirements a start on site is required in May/June 2010. The Council is also contributing the land and some capital funding to make the scheme financially viable.
29. Arwarton Parish Meeting completed a Local Housing Need Survey with Suffolk ACRE in July 2008, which identified a need from 5 households, and in addition 2 further households indicated a wish to return to the parish. The respondents in the Local Housing Need Survey were mainly single people or couples wishing to set up home for the first time, there was also an older couple requiring accommodation. It was apparent from the income information provided that rented accommodation would be required. Taking all this information into account it was decided to develop two 2 bed roomed units, one bungalow and one house. The scheme does not therefore exceed local requirements.
 - a) It is proposed that the Exception site will provide 2 affordable rented units; these will be 1 x 2 bed house, 1 x 2 bed bungalow.
 - b) Priority is to be given to people with a local connection to Erwarton, and then to the adjoining parishes of Harkstead, Chelmondiston and Shotley.
 - c) Properties are built to the Homes and Communities Agency Design and Quality Standards, and Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes
 - d) The properties are let through the Choice Based Letting system.

Design and Layout

30. Policy CN01 of the Local Plan requires all new development to be of an appropriate scale, form, design and finish. PPS3 in Para 10 states that planning authorities should deliver well designed high quality housing, this is echoed in PPS1 which places design at the centre of the planning system (Para 35) stating that development which fails to improve the quality and character of the area should not be supported.
31. It is important to recognise that an acceptable design does not normally make development in the countryside acceptable. However, as the proposal is for an 'exception site' the principle of development in the countryside is acceptable as discussed above. The design and layout needs to be of a high quality given the sensitivity of development in the countryside and the landscape quality of the AONB opposite the site.
32. The design and layout of the proposal evolved during discussions prior to the formal submission of the application, which now features the following;

- The semi-detached layout reflects that of existing properties in Boleyn Place and provides two-storey development adjacent to the existing two-storey housing to the east of the site. The single-storey element of the proposal enables the development to step down in scale towards the open countryside to the west and to present a side elevation that is articulated and interesting in longer distance views. Furthermore, the single-storey dwelling has a barn-like appearance to respect its location adjacent to open countryside. The two-storey element includes dormer style windows at first floor level which is reflective of the chalet style properties situated to the east, whilst also serving to minimise the overall height of the development so as to successfully relate to the ridge height of neighbouring properties in Boleyn Place, which are of a shallower pitch.
- The single-storey unit is positioned forward of the two-storey unit so as to provide a visual stop or 'book end' to the ribbon of development along The Street that ends at the application site.
- The detailing incorporates traditional materials. The joinery will be painted timber (black windows, doors, pentice boards and eaves in the single-storey unit and white for the two-storey unit). The main roof comprises clay pantiles with detailing to porches, dormers and the western gablet in plain tiles. The chimney at Plot 2 will be red brick.
- The proposal also includes native hedgerow planting to the west (side) and north (rear) boundaries of the site, which will compliment existing field planting and retain a rural character to the development. Landscaping to the south (front) will help to screen the parking area and the species proposed will be agreed by a condition of the planning permission and will ensure that adequate visibility can be achieved either side of the vehicular access. The proposal necessitates the removal of a Poplar tree to the east of the application site to facilitate safe vehicular access and a replacement Poplar to the west of the site is proposed.
- The existing pedestrian path that separates the front gardens of Boleyn Place from the greensward and lay-by will be continued across the development to provide access on foot.
- The parking area serving the development will be finished in concrete block paving and the new access drive to 3 Boleyn Place will be of a brushed concrete finish to relate to the driveways serving adjoining dwellings.

33. The proposal incorporates solar thermal panels on the southern roof slope, given the orientation of the proposed dwellings, placing the solar panels on the rear roof slope is not an option because the rear roof slope faces north. The inclusion of solar panels is important as this will help the scheme achieve Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The solar panels do not adversely impact on the overall design of the development.

34. In summary, the design and layout will safeguard local distinctiveness (Policy CN01) and landscape quality (Policies CR01, CR02 & CR07)

Impact on the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB opposite the site.

35. As stated above, the site is located opposite the northern extent of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty within the Stour Valley. Although visible from within the protected landscape, the site will be seen as a continuation of existing semi-detached development to the east and will not be 'read' as isolated new built development in the countryside.

36. Policy ENV2 of the East of England Plan requires LPA to have consideration to conserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the area. Policy CR02 of the Local Plan states that the AONB's in the district will be safeguarded through the strict control of development.

37. It is therefore imperative that the design of the scheme is of a high quality which integrates with the cultural heritage and landscape quality of the AONB nearby. For the reasons set out in the analysis above, Officers are of the opinion that the scheme represents an acceptable balance between delivering a rural exception site that addresses the local housing need and safeguarding the cultural heritage and landscape quality of the AONB.

38. In respect of the comments made by a nearby residents suggesting that the planting scheme should include an additional Poplar tree in the grass area fronting Boleyn Place, it should be noted that the grass area is not part of the application site and would not be covered by the landscaping condition. Furthermore, the suggestion to continue native hedgerow planting across the site frontage may not be appropriate in this instance as the hedgerow would need to be positioned so as not to affect visibility at the access, however this request can be further considered when the landscaping scheme is submitted in due course.

Highway Safety and Access

39. The Local Highway Authority has not raised objections to the development but recommends a number of conditions be imposed on any planning permission to secure and retain highway safety.

Residential Amenity

40. The proposed dwellings are situated comfortably alongside the existing semi-detached properties in Boleyn Place and as such the layout of the proposal will not impact on the amenities of adjoining residents in terms of loss of light or dominance. Furthermore, the eastern side elevation of the development does not include windows or doors thereby respecting the privacy of neighbouring occupiers and the first floor rear facing windows within the two-storey dwelling will serve a bathroom and landing area, to minimise the potential to overlook adjoining rear garden areas.

Planning Obligations

41. As stated above, a legal agreement is required to ensure that the dwellings are retained as affordable units and a unilateral undertaking is being prepared to this effect. As the development is a 'rural exceptions site', there is no requirement for an open space contribution under Policy HS32.

REASONS FOR APPROVAL

42. Having regard to the housing needs of Erwarnton and its adjoining parishes, the location of the site adjacent to existing development and the absence of alternative sites more capable of delivering an affordable housing scheme, the proposal is an acceptable exceptions based local needs housing scheme and is in accordance with the provisions of policies HS06 and HS07 of the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 (2006). Furthermore, the proposal complies with Local Plan policies CR01, CR02, CR07, CN01 and LP01. These seek to protect the countryside from inappropriate development and to safeguard the AONB opposite the site. They also seek to secure quality layouts and designs in new developments which respect the local context and do not adversely affect highway safety interests. The application represents an acceptable proposal in housing need and design terms which would not have adverse impacts on traffic/pedestrian road safety, residential amenity or the character of the area or the environment in general.

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) That the Solicitor to the Council be authorised to secure a Planning Obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to provide:
 - Affordable Housing
- (2) That, subject to the completion of the Planning Obligation referred to in Resolution (1) above to the satisfaction of the Solicitor to the Council, the Chief Planning Control Officer be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:

- Details of materials to be submitted and agreed
- As recommended by the LHA
- Archaeological excavation prior to development
- Landscaping
- Control over any lighting scheme
- Details of levels to be submitted and agreed
- Details of sheds to be submitted and agreed

(3) That in the event of the Planning Obligation referred to in Resolution (1) above not being secured, the Chief Planning Control Officer be authorised to refuse planning permission for the following reason:

- In the absence of a legal agreement securing the units as affordable housing the proposal would be contrary to Policies HS06 and HS07 of the Babergh District Local Plan Alt 2 (2006).