

Cottenham Village Design Group

Planning application comments

S/2317/11

Land At The Junction of Long Drove and Beach Road, Cottenham - Erection of fifty dwellings, public open space, landscaping, vehicular access and associated infrastructure.

Introduction

This application is the biggest in Cottenham for a number of years, the Design Group would like to thank the architects and developers for their time in coming to address the group and interested members of the public in the week the application was registered.

As the development is substantial in content we will aim to comment on the application in the following way; comments on the structure of the application and the site, comments on the layout and lastly comments on the built form.

Structure of Application and Site

Whilst we have some reservations about the development of this green field site, which lies outside the village envelope, and the resulting loss of green space and wildlife habitat, we recognise that it's location makes it in some respects an obvious site for a medium sized infill development. We also recognise that the inclusion of a good proportion of affordable housing offers considerable advantages for the village.

The proposed site for the development borders the village on the corner of Beach Road and Long Drove. In the past it had been in use as agricultural land and before that orchards but has for some years not been tended, we believe that in some publicly distributed documents it has been inaccurately described as Brownfield land which we do not believe to be the case. It is likely that the site would have had some benefit for wildlife in it's overgrown state and it is disappointing to read that the interior of site had already been cleared before the Ecological Assessment was made.

The developer appears to be aware of the importance, both for wildlife and visual amenity, of the hedgerow bordering Long Drove, and we are pleased to see that this is to be retained. This hedgerow is vital, both for the rural character of Long Drove (which is one of the most popular recreational routes around the village), and to provide a soft screen to the village edge. We are keen to ensure that this hedge is managed in such a way that it's tall, bushy and essentially rural character will be retained and it will not be over-manicured.

The layout proposal is a development of one of the layouts presented at a public consultation earlier in the year and is, in the design group's view, the better of the two. The intent to maintain the character of Long Drove and the approach to the village along Beach Road should help to maintain the soft edge of the village in this location and keep the essentially rural character intact. The proposals show a cul de sac arrangement with access into the site purely from Beach Road, a number of pedestrian accesses are then provided at key

points onto Long Drove. The roadway then runs to the rear of the site and includes what could become some nice open spaces adjacent to the existing hedgerow.

Layout

Some areas of concern with the layouts are now highlighted:- All the affordable housing has been located in just one area at the rear of the site. We recognise that there are advantages in not having these properties spread about too much but we feel that splitting the affordable housing into the end of the site is not necessarily in the best interests of the village, we suggest that two sections in parts of the site could give a better mix. Within the village there are good historic precedents for a mixing of the likely tenancies of housing where smaller runs of terrace housing can often be seen sitting alongside substantial detached villas.

There would appear to be an opportunity to provide a pedestrian cut through to Coolidge gardens from the new housing and the Design Group would be keen to see if this could be explored further. One of the key Guidelines with the Cottenham Village Design Guide is concerned with the integration of new areas in the village to form part of a linked overall pattern. A network of routes between homes, schools and shops would benefit residents of the new estate and areas of Coolidge gardens might be able to see the benefit of an access to Long Drove and the new LEAP being provided.

Within the layout itself more information is required to be able to comment much further on any hard landscaping proposals. What has been noted from the street elevation drawings is an intent towards defining the boundaries to properties with walls and fences set behind the line of the houses, but on the plans and drawings there appears to be very little detail regarding the property boundary to the street. The tradition in Cottenham is to mark this with a low wall or railings, the height of any walling being related to whether the boundary is to the rear or front garden and the distance back from the road and status of the house, railings are painted black and are confined only to frontages. The Design Group would expect to see the street constrained in this same fashion with the house sizes and frontage depths generally indicating that a low level wall or set of railings would be appropriate.

Lastly the presentation of the houses fronting Beach Road should be carefully managed to maintain some semblance of the existing rural character of this section of the road.

The Built Form

The Design Group is welcoming of both contemporary and traditional architecture. In this application the developer has presented a traditional scheme and although we welcome the fact that the developer has attempted to reflect the locally distinctive characteristics of Cottenham's traditional buildings and settlement patterns in their designs we feel that the designs fall very short of showing a detailed understanding of these characteristics and in a number of aspects are seriously deficient in this respect. While the proposals contain a number of generic 'traditional' elements which are out of place in the Cottenham context, they sadly fail to build on some of the locally distinctive detailing which, if used sensitively and subtly, might have provided the inspiration for interesting and locally appropriate variations of style.

Materials and mix

The proposal includes a number of houses in red brick and with red roofing tiles - these are completely alien in a traditional Cottenham context. One of the key characteristics of traditional buildings in Cottenham is their relative uniformity of materials. The date at which much of the traditional housing stock was built, following the agricultural enclosure of the 1840s and a series of fires in the 1850s, combined with the presence of a local brick works firing local Kimmeridge clay, means that the great majority of walls are in the local creamy-buff brick. Red brick is almost unknown after the 1840s in traditional buildings, and the handful of buildings in this material are often obtrusive. Where the usual pattern is broken it is typically only by buildings faced in white or cream painted render – either surviving earlier timber framed buildings, or brick buildings which have been rendered subsequently.

A few late Victorian and Edwardian buildings do show a strictly limited use of red brick for detailing such as within the headers mentioned previously and occasionally in string courses. Cottenham's buff brick is almost universally topped by Welsh slate, nearly always with ridge tiles of matching colour, red roof tiles are almost unknown in traditional Cottenham buildings. Where tiles were used historically they were almost always of the same buff material as the local bricks - plain tiles on houses (usually on older houses, replacing thatch) and pantiles on outbuildings.

Roof pitch

The slate roofs characteristic of Cottenham's traditional buildings are almost always to a relatively low pitch, around 30 degrees - significantly less than most roof pitches proposed for this development. Steeper roof pitches are generally only found on surviving earlier buildings roofed in thatch (or where materials such as plain tiles have replaced thatch). The use of roofing of a more neutral grey colour, particularly in combination with lower roof pitches, should also help to reduce the visual impact of the development on views into the village.

Complexity of facades.

The developer appears to be aware that relatively simple and flat-fronted facades are characteristic of Cottenham and we are pleased to see that they have made some effort to reflect this. However a very high proportion of houses - in particular the common house types A, G and H - incorporate bay windows, which are relatively rare in the traditional mix of Cottenham buildings, in particular for houses of a smaller size. Where bay windows are found in Cottenham they are located on larger, double-fronted villa houses and are arranged symmetrically on both sides. These are also quite substantial with stone mullions to the corners rather than timber. Their use in this scheme needs to be reduced and we suggest that if further interest needs to be added to the layout / streetscene then there are a number of typical features of Cottenham houses that could be better incorporated into the designs at key points to add interest (see below).

In addition, house Type G incorporates a projecting central weatherboarded feature - this appears very alien in the Cottenham context, both in terms of form and materials. With the exception of the upper portions of the side gable of a small number of early buildings, weatherboarding was reserved almost exclusively for outbuildings rather than dwellings, and in this development would only really be appropriate on garages or structures which clearly emulate traditional outbuildings in form. Some houses, types 2, 3, and 4, also incorporate a projecting porch design which is not typical of Cottenham, the typical feature to entrance doors, if at all, are stone or timber doorcases and rounded arched doorways, the general rule being that as the size of the house increases the larger the doorway or detail involved.

Conclusion

While we do not object to a development of this density in this location, given that the developer has chosen to use traditional building styles we feel that it is essential that these accurately reflect and draw on the specific local traditions of Cottenham and we feel that this has not been achieved in a number of important respects. We therefore object to the detailed design proposals contained in this application and would expect to see these amended better to reflect the local characteristics of Cottenham. We believe that a more careful reading of the Cottenham Village Design Statement and a thorough perusal of the existing buildings in the village should enable this to be achieved.

Summary of recommendations

In summary, we suggest that the designs be worked up/amended as follows, particularly with regard to materials and detailing:-

- Most crucially that 'white'/buff brick for walls and grey slate for roofing should be very much the dominant materials. Slate is traditionally Welsh or could be a good quality man made version.
- Roofs should be to the appropriate pitch of around 30 degrees, shallow pitch roofs with hipped gables should also be used in the layout.
- Buildings using different materials or roof pitches to the above should be kept to a strict minimum and be located so as to add variety to the streetscene only. Timber cladding should be reserved for ancillary structures such as garages or the flats over garages which would then emulate traditional outbuildings.
- The proportion of bay windows should be greatly reduced to reflect the proportion found in the village as a whole. They should be confined to larger houses and used symmetrically where possible.
- Appropriate local detailing could be incorporated to add variety (bearing in mind that the use of detailing should be subtle and restrained as it is in the village's traditional buildings) - for example:
 - Detailing to doors could mix doorcases with semicircular or elliptical brick arches. These are a significant local detail found in great number and remarkable variety of forms and could add much needed variety to the built forms.
 - A variety of eaves detailing could be used – in the village examples range from simple dogtooth brickwork to more elaborate terracotta or wooden mouldings.
 - The use of margin light glazing bars provides subtle variation to the windows in the village.
 - Small, round headed 'poor windows' (found in side walls only) are another distinctive local feature which could be incorporated.
- Property boundaries to the street should be defined by the use of low walls or railings. Details of these would be required.

Finally the group would like to make comments on any revisions to the proposals which may arise.

'C/1: Developers and planners should consult the Village Design Statement, which reflects the views of the community.' (Design Statement p.2)

'C/2: Developers, planners and public authorities should take relevant local advice concerning facilities (including education, sport, culture and entertainment) to be provided as a result of new development.

• Refer to South Cambridgeshire District Council's Development Control Policies for guidance on provision of infrastructure for new developments (policy DP/4) and retention of existing services and facilities (policies SF/1 and SF/9).' (Design Statement p.2)

'L/1: 'Landscape design criteria should form a key aspect in the layout, form and urban design qualities of new developments' Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (Cambridgeshire County Council).

• In the case of significant landscape developments or changes, a professional design scheme should be prepared for consultation.

• New landscapes should be endowed with sufficient management resources for securing long-term care.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/2: Essential elements of the parish's distinctive Fen Edge landscape character should be protected.

• New developments should minimise the impact on existing landscape qualities and features.

• New developments should contribute positively to the quality of the landscape and enjoyment of the environment.

• There is considerable room for the improvement of wildlife habitat and protection. This creates opportunities for developers to address these aspects within their schemes and enhance the assets of the village.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/3: New developments on the village edge should give high priority to landscape design and management of light pollution, to protect and enhance the external view of the village.

• Do not form a stark edge to the village, or spoil the outside view by neglecting the backs of gardens or buildings.

• Shelter and contain the edge using appropriate native broadleaf species.

• Achieve well-designed compositions using hedge and woodland screens.

• Maintain dark skies in the countryside at night by minimising light spillage from new development.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/4: Action by landowners, community groups and individuals.

• Plant native and/or locally typical species to retain landscape character and to benefit wildlife within the village.

• This is a landscape of wide views and open spaces. Efforts should be made to minimise impact of developments on the character of this landscape.

• Consider the impact when designing details such as bridges, signs, gates and stiles.

• When planting, relatively small groups of trees may be most appropriate.' (Design Statement p.6)

'S/1: Settlement patterns are a key to the distinctive nature of the village. Developers should recognise this and respect the characteristic layout.

• Create streets with a purposeful line: settlement should follow the street and should not be random. In general avoid closes and culs-de-sac.

• The settlement pattern is characteristically rectilinear not winding.

• Refer to the two patterns of house density. One is informal with houses built cheek-by-jowl; the other is in a regular linear pattern.' (Design Statement p.7)

'S/2: New developments need to be integrated with the village and form part of a linked overall pattern.

• Build up a network of routes between homes, schools and shops, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.

• Protect existing views within the village, and into the countryside.

• Create vistas into and within the newly developed areas.

• New infrastructure should not detract from the appearance of the village or surrounding area.' (Design Statement p.7)

'S/3: Infill development or lateral extensions to existing buildings should maintain gaps which provide views out of the village.' (Design Statement p.7)

'O/1: A coherent overall strategy is needed to increase the extent and variety of public spaces suitable for informal recreation.' (Design Statement p.9)

'O/2: Landscape design advice should be obtained for the planning of open spaces.' (Design Statement p.9)

'O/4: New developments and community initiatives can add to the provision of open spaces in different ways.

- *Create linear transitional spaces within or on the edge of the village.*
- *Contribute to a framework of linked recreational routes.*
- *Allow for informal recreation or meeting spaces.*
- *Provide well-planned and furnished playgrounds.*
- *Create and plant incidental open spaces.*
- *Landscape and plant car parking areas.'* (Design Statement p.9)

'B/3: Relationships between buildings are as important as the design of buildings themselves.

- *Make skilful use of spaces between buildings: this can help new developments to be assimilated successfully.*
- (Design Statement p.19)

'B/6: New developments should acknowledge their Cottenham context and avoid pattern-book designs. Developments can maintain and strengthen the visual cohesion of the village, and help to renew the specific architectural traditions of Cottenham.

- *Refer to local settlement patterns in layout.*
- *Respect local characteristics and context of the particular site.*
- *Refer to local building forms and proportion. There is a variety of proportions throughout the village: developments can reflect those which are adjacent.*
- *Use good quality materials – whether modern or traditional – which are appropriate to Cottenham.*
- *Where possible, roof lights should be located on rear elevations or otherwise away from public view. In more sensitive areas they should be mounted flush with the roof and the number of openings kept to a minimum.*
- *Refer to locally distinctive details; accurately match these to the chosen building form and avoid mixing styles or historical references in the same building.*
- *Respond to typical settings and garden forms and avoid large areas of hard surfacing.*
- *New-build garages and car parking areas should not obscure house fronts; avoid blocks of garages.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'B/7: The appointment of architects and, where appropriate, relevant specialists is encouraged for all developments.

- *Developers should provide perspective drawings, isometric drawings or artists' impressions to show how new developments will appear in relation to their overall surroundings.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'B/9: Carefully considered local energy saving or generating solutions should be supported.

- *Solar panels and other devices should be encouraged, so long as they can be installed without detrimental effect on the visual environment of the village.*
- *Locations should be selected for solar panels or similar equipment based on maximising energy savings and minimising disruption to the appearance or fabric of the building.*
- *In sensitive situations, solar panels should be mounted flush and finished to blend with the roof.*
- *Average wind speeds in Cottenham are generally too low for productive use of micro-generation turbines; their use is not recommended unless significant benefits can be demonstrated.*
- *Avoid locating equipment on public facing façades wherever possible.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'H/1: Roads should be designed first and foremost from a pedestrian and vulnerable road users' perspective.

- *Particular emphasis should be applied to the core of the village.*
- *Consider alternative road surfaces which may help slow traffic.* (Design Statement p.20)

'H/2: Road safety needs to be improved by the reduction of through traffic.

- *Highways authorities should ensure early consultation prior to significant road developments within the village.*
- The Design Group has in addition requested that consultation should cover other significant road developments within a 10-mile radius.*
- *Public transport services need to be improved and promoted, including a link to the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway.*
 - *Traffic calming measures need to be well maintained.* (Design Statement p.20)

'H/3: More cycle ways are needed, and existing cycle ways need to be improved.

- *Develop safe and pleasant pedestrian and cycle routes for everyday travel around the village, for example safer routes to schools.* (Design Statement p.20)

'H/4: Agents for developments need to consult with the highways authorities at an early stage.

- *Plan road designs in new developments to reduce traffic speeds by unobtrusive safety measures.*
- *Encourage flexibility in the size and siting of visibility splays and other road engineering.*
- *Minimise the use of concrete kerbs and other urban elements.*
- *Additional highway access points should not be introduced in busy or dangerous locations without giving due consideration to road safety.'* (Design Statement p.20)

'H/5: Road surfaces should be in keeping with the village character.

- *Markings should be kept to a minimum and coloured surfaces avoided wherever possible.'* (Design Statement p.20)

'F/1: The streetscape needs a considered design approach employing professional landscape designers.

- *Developers can assist by entering into early discussions with the agencies responsible.*
- *Street furniture should suit its Cottenham context: designs of street lighting, for example, could renew the local tradition of metalwork.*
- *The muted levels of current lighting should be preserved: downlighting using white light rather than orange is preferred.*
- *Private security lights should be muted and carefully sited to light the required area without forming a hazard to road users.*
- *Simple designs are usually most appropriate.*
- *Seating and other street furniture of good quality, or specially designed, can enrich the character and enjoyment of the village.*
- *Gates and metal railings should generally be painted black.'* (Design Statement p.21)

Applications viewed and comments prepared on behalf of Cottenham Village Design Group by Alex Darby, John Williams, Mike Smith, Bill Miller and Steven Poole, December 16th 2011. All quoted text is taken from the Cottenham Village Design Statement, Supplementary Planning Document: <http://www.cvdg.org/design-statement-2007.pdf>. Comments are based solely on the principles and guidelines set out in this document.