

Application number: S/2020/1403/MAF

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to form 44 Retirement Living apartments for older people including communal facilities, guest apartment, access, car parking and landscaping

Location: Bungalow Sunnyside Water Lane Towcester

Background

Thank you for consulting the Planning Policy and Growth Strategy Team on this application.

The site comprises an existing detached bungalow and its curtilage, within which are a collection of associated outbuildings and a static caravan. In addition to the residential occupation, the site is also used for commercial vehicle sales, with vehicles displayed on the hardstanding to the south of the bungalow.

To the south east of the site is the access road serving Waitrose supermarket. On the opposite side of the access road is Waitrose car park. Adjacent to the eastern end of the south eastern boundary is a public recycling point separated from the application site by a narrow strip of trees and shrubs.

To the north east of the site is a row of two storey terraced houses and a single detached house. To the north west of the site construction is currently underway on a new care home. To the west of the site, on the opposite side of Water Lane, is a modern residential development comprising two and three storey homes and apartments.

Planning permission for a similar was granted in June 2020 following the planning committee's determination to approve the application in January 2020; however, the applicant has included an additional unit and is seeking reduced Section 106 contributions, in light of viability concerns.

Policy Context

The Development Plan for South Northamptonshire (relevant to this application) comprises:

- the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS);
- the South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan (Adopted July 2020)

Policy S1 of the JCS sets out the spatial strategy for West Northamptonshire and seeks to concentrate development in the most sustainable locations. Policy S3 builds on this approach and explains that about 2650 new homes are required in Towcester town between 2011 and 2029 whilst policy T1 supports new housing development within the existing urban area of Towcester. Policy E1 resists the loss of existing employment generating floor

space unless it is no longer viable or there is a clear conflict with adjoining uses.

In addition to the provisions of the development plan, the NPPF is a material consideration in the determination of a planning application. Paragraph 8 sets out the three objectives of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental whilst paragraph 10 highlights the presumption in favour of sustainable development that lies at the heart of the Framework.

Section 5 of the NPPF considers the delivery of a sufficient supply of homes with paragraph 59 stating that the Government's objective is to significantly boost the supply of homes so that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed. Paragraph 61 builds on this and notes the housing needs for different groups, including older people and those who require affordable housing, should be assessed whilst paragraph 117 encourages the effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses.

Within the Local Plan Part 2, policy SS1 seeks to steer development towards the most sustainable locations within the district. Within this policy Towcester is identified as a Rural Service Centre - first category settlement. The application site lies within Towcester town confines. Policy LH1 supports residential development within town and village confines providing it provides an appropriate mix of dwellings, would not harm the character of the area, does not require substantial new infrastructure and would not displace an existing viable commercial use.

More specifically, Policy LH6 identifies that proposals to meet older persons / specialist housing needs for two or more dwellings will be supported on suitable sites that are within the settlement confines subject to accessibility factors; the appropriateness of the scale, form and design of the development; highway, parking and servicing arrangements; and the appropriate provision of gardens and amenity space.

The site is currently in a mixed residential and commercial use and therefore policy EMP2 is engaged. This policy resists change of use of sites which remain suitable for employment use unless it is demonstrated why such uses are not economically viable or the proposal can demonstrate long-term incompatibility with the surrounding area and its residents. It is also identified that new dwellings will not be permitted within employment, retail or commercial sites except where this is in accordance with site specific proposals and policies.

The Land West of Watling Street Planning Brief (Site 10, area 3) covers the application site along with the care home site to the north (Site 10, area 4), Waitrose and the Richmond Road carpark. This explains that the Council will support proposals on the site that retain existing employment uses, make provision for off-road parking and contribute to the improvement of the town's highway network.

It is also identified that in relation to Area 4, South Northamptonshire Council recently approved application S/2013/0269/MAF granting planning permission for the redevelopment of the site and the construction of a 50 bedroom care home. This was a use considered to be consistent with planning policy and appropriate to the surrounding area. It is also stated that should site 3 come forward the Council considers that its redevelopment would represent an opportunity for enhancement both in terms of architectural and urban design, the activities that are undertaken there and the manner in which it functions. The creation of an active frontage to the site to reflect the surrounding uses would additionally be advantageous.

Assessment

The development lies within the town confines of Towcester where the relevant policies of the Development Plan generally support the principle of the provision of new homes.

Despite this, the proposal will result in the loss of the existing van sale business and therefore represents a loss of a commercial employment generating use which is resisted by policy E1 of the JCS and Policy EMP2 of the Local Plan part 2. Details of the number of employees of the existing business have not been provided, however based on the site area and the level of vehicles on display it appears to be a relatively low intensity business.

The proposal will create one lodge manager job and further indirect employment is likely to be created through the need for services associated with the ongoing maintenance and operation of the building (cleaner, gardener etc). Given the apparent low intensity of the current operation, it is considered that the lodge manager position and associated service jobs balance the loss of employment from the existing commercial use.

Conclusion

The application site lies within Towcester town confines where new residential development is supported and whilst there would be the loss of an existing commercial use, subject to sufficient benefits outweighing this policy constraint, the principle of residential development on the site could be considered acceptable.

The Planning Policy and Growth Strategy Team offer the above comments in relation to the principle of the proposed development only. Silence in respect of other matters does not signify either the Policy Team's acceptance or rejection of those matters.

I trust the above assists. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

M Shaw
Planning Policy
14 September 2020