

Castleoak Care Developments Ltd

Land forming part of Burston Garden Centre

St Albans

AL2 2DS

Statement of Community Involvement in Support of Proposals for a new Retirement Living Community

December 2020

Pre-ambles

There is considerable local support for the proposals. In the applicant's experience it is unheard of for a Green Belt scheme to so strongly be supported by local groups. The appeal Inquiry heard from separate residents' associations who spoke strongly in support of the scheme. Councillor Featherstone the ward member for St Stephen's, whose parish the proposals sit within, strongly supported the scheme. The Committee decision came down to a casting vote.

On the 5 October 2020 the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan – Pre-Submission (Regulation 14) Consultation Draft was published. The purpose of the Plan is to guide development within the Parish and provide direction to any interested parties wishing to submit planning applications. The process of producing the Plan sought to involve the community widely. The Plan recognises that there is an identified and evidenced local housing need in St Stephen and consideration should be given to how that is to be delivered, including where any new housing might be sited. Accordingly, with due regard to its own evidence base the Plan supports the removal of the application site from the Green Belt and allocation for approximately 200 units of specialist housing.

It is instructive to see that the intention of the plan's authors is that the site should be developed as a care facility.

1. This Statement outlines the consultation approach that has been adopted and how the scheme has evolved and been amended to reflect the observations and issues raised by all interested parties. This statement also demonstrates how the applicant's consultation strategy accords with

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the St Albans Statement of Community Involvement (2015), in particular Section 4 dealing with community involvement in the planning application process.

2. The previous proposals were the subject of stakeholder consultation which remains wholly relevant given the current proposals still consist of a retirement community, under Use Class C2, that will provide care to those in need of it and with facilities and amenities that will help residents live happier more independent lives.
3. In light of the recent planning history, the redesigned scheme proposes a significant reduction in the quantum and density of development with the removal of the 64-bed care home. This enables the number of assisted living units and care bungalows to remain the same at 80 apartments and 44 bungalows whilst substantially reducing scale, mass and density. More generally, the redesign has focused on addressing the reasons why the previous scheme was refused by the Council and subsequently dismissed at appeal.
4. Castleoak has continued to engage in extensive consultation with the local authority, its statutory consultees, local communities and other stakeholders since the determination of the previous application.

Consultation with St Albans District Council

5. Three meetings with the LPA have now taken place over the course of the evolution of the proposals:
 - i. Pre-application Meeting 1 (10 October 2017)
 - ii. Pre-application Meeting 2 (18 June 2019)
 - iii. Pre-application Meeting 3 (6 October 2020) and 2 further follow up meetings (17 and 30 November)
6. The revised proposals have been further refined following Meeting 3 and the subsequent follow up discussions which were all attended by senior planning (Sarah Smith) and conservation (Ruth Mitchell) officers from St Albans District Council (who also attended Meeting 2 (Sarah Smith also attended Meeting 1) with Stephen Rickard attending on behalf of Castleoak and also represented by David Phillips of DPV Consult (planning matters), Jenny Buterchi, Mary Hutchinson and Adrian Judd of PRP (design and landscape) and Jonathan Smith (heritage) of RPS the applicant. The purpose of these discussions sought to establish that the changes proposed overcome the authority's and appeal Inspector's previous concerns, ensuring the redevelopment will deliver a net improvement to the setting of Burston Manor and the Green Belt when compared to the previous proposal.

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7. The collaborative nature of the subsequent discussions has been very much welcomed by the applicant and the final scheme has sought to respond to the advice that officers have provided in seeking to narrow down the issues between the respective parties.
8. Whilst it remains the case that, based on planning policy definitions, the proposals constitute “inappropriate development”, and, by definition, harm to the Green Belt and heritage assets, officers acknowledge that this proposal represents an improvement to the setting of Burston Manor and the Green Belt when compared to the previous proposal.
9. At the same time officers have welcomed the applicant’s commitment towards the provision of affordable housing and in seeking to put in place measures which will encourage occupation of the units by those already living locally. Subject to finalisation of the details, they recognise these would deliver very significant additional public benefits over and above the other public benefits the scheme will deliver.
10. In addition to the meetings with the local planning authority, Castleoak have also sought to consult with the Council’s Waste Management Team and with the Secure by Design Officer at Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Consultation with Hertfordshire County Council

11. Castleoak have held detailed discussions with the local highways authority. Further details are provided in the accompanying Transport Assessment.
12. Castleoak have had dialogue with the Head of Accommodation Commissioning at Hertfordshire County Council.

Consultation with Local Stakeholders

13. Leading up to the submission of the refused application Castleoak engaged with a number of local stakeholders including:
 - A meeting with the Chiswell Green Residents Association on 15 September 2017
 - A meeting with the Park Street and Brickett Wood Residents Association on 29 September 2017
 - A meeting with the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on 5 April 2018
 - Telephone conversations with Councillor Bill Pryce (Parish Councillor) on 30 August 2017 and 3 April 2018
 - Telephone conversation with Councillor Brian Ellis (Housing and Inclusion Portfolio) on 24 August 2017
 - Telephone conversation with Councillor Brian Gibbard (St Stephen’s Ward Councillor) on 12 September 2017

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- Telephone conversation with Councillor Colette Wyatt-Lowe (Cabinet Member for Adult Services) on 18 September 2017
- Telephone conversation with Councillor David Winstone (St Stephen's Ward Councillor on 24 August 2017
- A meeting with Councillor Colette David Yates on 30 August 2017
- A meeting with Councillor Jock Wright (Park Street Ward Councillor) on 22 August 2017
- A meeting with Councillor Robert Donald (Chair of the Health and Well-Being Partnership) on 5 October 2018

14. The overall impression gained from these meetings and conversations is that there is considerable sympathy for the need for older person's accommodation and a recognition of the requirement for sensitive Green Belt development that reflects a genuine local need.
15. Castleoak have continued to engage with local stakeholders since the previous application was refused and dialogue on the current application is ongoing.
16. Specifically, since the first application was refused, the applicant has maintained contact with St Stephen Parish Council, Bricket Wood Residents Association, Park Street Residents Association who all remain supportive of the proposals. Castleoak and Elysian Care have also written to some Council Members to explain the changes being made to the revised scheme and to offer to provide any additional factual information that Members wished to receive.

Consultation with Local Communities

17. Prior to the submission of the previous application a public exhibition was held on 24 April 2018 between 3.30pm and 7.00pm at The Noke Mercure Hotel, Watford Road, St Albans, AL2 3DS at which the design proposal was presented to local residents and other stakeholders.
18. The circulation list included all residents with whom the local authority will formally consult when a planning submission for the Site is made. Following the advice received from the local resident's association, invitations were also sent to a large number of residents living beyond the Council's formal consultation boundaries such that invitations were issued to all residents residing within the ward of St Stephen's (over 6,000 addresses).
19. Notification of the event was also posted in the Herts Advertiser on 19 April 2018.
20. Castleoak also invited the local ward councillors, members from the Neighbourhood Plan Forum and the two local Residents Associations.

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21. The Noke Hotel was selected as the nearest and most appropriate community venue for the public exhibition. The event was arranged so that it did not fall during the main school holiday period and took place both during the afternoon and into the early evening to maximise turnout.
22. The exhibition gave attendees the opportunity to view exhibition boards detailing the proposal.
23. Residents engaged in small group discussions with the design team who were on hand to answer questions and provide clarification on any issues.
24. The consultation event was well attended. In total, 82 residents signed the attendance sheet and there were approximately 120 attendees in total.
25. Attendees were given the opportunity to register their comments at the exhibition. A total of 28 comments forms were completed on the day of the exhibition and a further 1 copy was received after the event.
26. The comments sheet included a number of questions to which residents were asked to agree or disagree. The following key findings were noted:
 - Of 28 responses, 22 respondents 'strongly agreed' and 2 respondents 'agreed' that there is a local need for specialist older peoples' accommodation promoting independent living (a total of 86%). Only two residents disagreed. Linked to the above, 22 of 28 residents agreed and strongly agreed that the proposal for the Burston Garden Centre would help to address this local need (79%)
 - A total of 20 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the proposal would make much better use of this partially developed Green Belt Site (71%). 4 respondents (14%) disagreed. The majority of residents agreed that the proposals would support the following:
 - Releasing much needed family accommodation (only 4 respondents disagreed)
 - Helping the challenges facing the NHS (only 4 respondents disagreed)
 - Respecting their surroundings including How Wood (again, only 4 respondents disagreed)
 - Improving access arrangements (6 respondents disagreed)
 - Improving the existing road junction (8 respondents disagreed – 28%)
 - Secure the future of the garden centre (4 respondents disagreed)

Summary

27. This planning application is a direct reflection of the consultation events that have been held and, wherever viable and practicable, addresses the specific points that have been raised. Castleoak proposes to maintain good levels of communication with local communities and other

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stakeholders throughout the application process and beyond as part of a process of providing regular and timely updates.