

Minutes of a site meeting held on **Monday, 8 August 2016 at 10.00am**
at Former HM Blundeston Prison, Lakeside Rise, Blundeston, Lowestoft

Members Present:

Councillors P Ashdown (Chairman), S Allen, N Brooks, A Cackett, J Groom and C Rivett.

Officers Present:

P Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management and S Carter (Democratic Services Officer).

Others in Attendance:

Mr S George, Badger Building Ltd
Mr E Gilder, Badger Building Ltd
Mr J Nicholls, Blundeston and Flixton Parish Council

The Chairman welcomed Members to the site meeting and reminded those present that the purpose of the meeting was a 'fact finding' exercise only and to provide Members with an opportunity to view the site and its surroundings.

No decision would be made before the application was considered at the meeting of the Planning Committee on 24 August 2016.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management explained that the application was for a hybrid planning application for the demolition of the prison and the construction of two shop units with four flats, three office units with car parking, 16 affordable housing units (full submission), and a residential development, care home, roads and open space (outline submission). The proposal was to walk the site and show the location of the proposed shop, pre-school nursery building, office accommodation and the lie of the land towards the lake.

Phase one of the development, the full submission, proposed:

- Two shops with four one-bedroomed flats above on the site of the former bachelors' quarters; 10 parking spaces were being proposed adjacent to Lakeside Rise, four of which would be for the flats.
- Three two-storey office buildings located near to the current main entrance.
- 14 starter homes, comprising six two-bedroomed houses and eight one-bedroomed flats, in a two/three-storey block adjacent to the existing housing area, with an archway providing access to a rear parking yard.

Questions from Committee Members

Members raised questions on the following issues:

- Demolition works.
- Construction time.

Mr George confirmed that, subject to permission being granted, it was hoped to start work at an early stage on Phase 1; Phase 2 would take a long time to plan. With the amount of concrete and metal on site, it was anticipated that demolition and reclamation works would take some 12-18 months; other than some floor tiles, asbestos had already been removed. In the meantime, the prison had been open for tours resulting in some 1,500 visitors raising £6,000 for charity.

Mr Gilder confirmed that construction would commence along side demolition works and the main wall would be left in place for protection until the main building had been demolished.

Mr Nicholls reported that Badgers Builders had been very active in keeping the Parish Council fully informed.

In the vicinity of the site entrance, Mr Gilder gave an indication of the location of the proposed two shops with flats over. He confirmed that they had written to all residents seeking comments and encouraging them to respond to the planning application.

The nursery school already had separate consent to proceed and this was the building on the opposite side of the entrance. There would be a 2m high fence in order to provide an enclosed play area. Works had already commenced following Ofsted approval, thus ensuring that there was no vandalism or further deterioration of the building.

Members proceeded to the former governor's residence along Lakeside Rise as this was to be the location of the flats and rear courtyard. The proposed office accommodation was further along to the north, on current parking areas, and would comprise three new buildings facing inwards and backing onto the main road (Hall Road). The trees had been fully surveyed and some would have to be removed. There would still be adequate screening between the buildings and the road so as to maintain the rural landscape.

The proposed Section 106 agreement would allow the offices to be marketed for a period of three years; if the accommodation was not taken up in that time, there would be a further report back to the Committee. The actual offices would not be built until a tenant(s) had been found; this was due to the different style of construction used for office accommodation as opposed to residential dwellings and the resulting difficulty to subsequently convert to alternative accommodation.

Mr Gilder confirmed that all prison buildings were above flood risk area and any flood water at the present time would be absorbed into the land opposite the lake.

All three accesses could be cleared and used and, if necessary, visibility splays would be improved as the boundary land was owned by Badgers. It was understood that 160 people had been working on the prison site, so it was not anticipated there would be any additional traffic as a result of the residential accommodation.

Questions

Specific questions were asked with regard to:

- Flood risk to new buildings.
- Surface water.
- Football pitch.
- Proposed open space and future upkeep.
- Sight lines at the road junctions.
- The current location of the pre-school nursery.

Mr Gilder confirmed that all new buildings would be above the current flood level. The proposed arched building on the site of the governor's former residence was considered to be an elegant, statement entrance. With less concrete on the site and more garden areas, surface water drainage should improve, however soakaways could be considered. The artificial sports pitch would not be retained. A commuted sum would be paid for the upkeep of the public open space.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management confirmed that a mechanism would be in place, possibly overseen by a management company, to ensure the maintenance of the open space land in perpetuity. Mr Nicholls advised that the Parish Council might consider undertaking that responsibility, with appropriate funding.

Mr Gilder advised that the verge on the opposite side of the road and at the road junctions were not Badger's responsibility.

The pre-school nursery currently used the village hall but it was not always possible to accommodate the group. In the hall, they had to pack up all items after their sessions and nothing could be affixed to the wall. Here, in the refurbished building, the group would have their own space. Mr George confirmed that Badgers would retain the building and lease it to the pre-school nursery group.

Members then proceeded along the edge of the site and the density and height of the current buildings and workshop were discussed.

Questions

Members' further questions related to:

- The substation.
- County wildlife site.
- The farmhouse.
- Current workshops.

Mr Gilder confirmed that the substation was in fact gas and would remain. All buildings inside the wire and the farmhouse were to be demolished. A landscaping scheme for the whole site would be submitted and no development would extend into the wildlife site. The bricks used for the walled garden would be reclaimed. Although the farmhouse predated the prison, it was not viable to retain the building.

Mr George confirmed that a full photographic record of the site had been undertaken by the County Archaeology Department as a historical record. It was understood that the prison had used the walled garden for growing produce and had also kept pigs on the site.

Members proceeded along the northwest of the site towards the perimeter adjoining the lake and it was clear to see the fall of the land towards the lake.

Mr Gilder explained this was the furthest point of the development with regard to Phase two. The outline application related to Phase two which would be within the fenced area and proposed 130 dwellings and a care home, the latter would be located on the current artificial sports pitch. The large oak tree gave an indication of the extent of the enclosure; it would obviously remain. There would be footpath access along the water frontage, with appropriate fencing to ensure there was no public access to the water and no illegal fishing. The lake itself was in private ownership.

Mr George confirmed that, if permission was granted, it was hoped to start works straight away. He considered it important to tidy the site outside the wire first, so that the development of starter homes and affordable housing could commence. It was also important to get the shop(s) established at an early stage. At the same time, there would be work in progress on the remainder of the site.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The site visit concluded at 11.02am.

Note: The Chairman had invited Councillor Rivett to attend the site visit as part of his new Member training.