Minutes of a site meeting held on **Monday, 4 July 2016 at 10.10am**
at Unit 20, Southwold Business Centre, St Edmunds Road, Southwold

**Members present:**
Councillors P Ashdown (Chairman) and A Cackett

**Cabinet Member present:**
Cllr S Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing

**Officers Present:**
I Robertson (Area Planning and Enforcement Officer) and A Stapleton (Democratic Services Officer)

**Others in Attendance:**
Mr M Aust (Pathfinder Development Consultants)
Cllr I Bradbury, Southwold Town Council
Cllr W Windell, Southwold Town Council

**Apologies:**
Councillors J Ceresa and J Groom

---

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 a future meeting of the Planning Committee.

The Area Planning and Enforcement Officer explained the application, which was for the construction of 20 affordable rented properties on a brownfield site in a central location within Southwold. The site was accessed from and included an unmade track from St Edmunds Road. The track was unregistered with no known owner, and would be upgraded and resurfaced in a bound material, with a footpath to the southern side and parking retained to the northern side. The current access to the remaining units of Southwold Business Centre to the north would be retained.

The existing building to the west of the site would be demolished and replaced with a 2/3 storey block of 10 flats. The land and buildings to the southern boundary would see two terraces of 4 properties, and a semi-detached pair of properties would be built adjacent to the existing electricity sub-station. There would be 27 parking spaces for the use of the 20 properties, which had been reduced from the original plans to give a more spacious layout.

During the site visit, Members viewed the location of the site and the context of its general setting, starting at the access road and moving towards the site. It was noted that there were residential properties to three sides of the site boundary, with the remainder of Southwold Business Centre to the north.

The Area Planning and Enforcement Officer displayed the proposed plans for the development including proposed building elevations and explained that there had been some internal layout changes to minimise overlooking into gardens. There had been objections from neighbouring properties due to the proximity and height of the proposed development, and despite proposed landscaping schemes, the potential for overlooking across into existing properties. The overall height of the 3 storey element of the proposed development was slightly higher than existing neighbouring properties, all of which were also 3 storeys in height. Occupiers of existing business units also wished to see the scale of the 3 storey element of the development reduced.
Questions from Committee Members

Members raised questions on the following issues:

- The removal of two trees on the site.
- The proximity of the boundary wall and planting to neighbouring properties.
- The mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units.
- Access to the rear of the two 4 unit terraces.
- Provision for waste bins (communal for the flats, individual for the houses, although this could be changed to communal at some time in the future with the loss of some parking provision).
- The site seemed quite tight for the number of units.
- The units would provide affordable housing with priority given to local people via the Housing Revenue Account and tied to S106 money for Southwold and Reydon.
- There would be a secure cycle store on site.
- Orwell Housing Association would deliver the development, and tender to a local contractor.
- Some design differences across the proposed buildings, even if simply in brickwork or roof tiles, might be sufficient to provide the mixture of design needed to blend in with existing nearby properties. However, the site had cost 4 times the cost of a similar site elsewhere in the District (although significantly discounted on Southwold land prices), and there was a balance to be made between housing need and design.

Comments from Southwold Town Council (STC)

STC was concerned at the design elements and would prefer to see a mixture of materials. Whilst the layout was acceptable, the design was mediocre, and this should not be an exception simply because it consisted of affordable housing. Contemporary design was acceptable, but the Neighbourhood Plan required natural local materials to blend in as far as possible with the surroundings and prevent the site looking like or becoming an “enclave”. In 10 years’ time it was hoped the development did not look like a separate dormitory block, but blended in with surrounding buildings.

The Area Planning and Enforcement Officer advised that the Council could ask to see samples of materials, and that the Town Council’s concerns over design had been set out in the report to be considered by the District Council’s Planning Committee. Mr Aust, an external consultant who worked with the Housing Team on affordable housing projects, added that any changes to make the design more appealing would need to be made within the budget for the development – and to bear in mind the need to avoid rendered surfaces, which were expensive to maintain and quickly deteriorated visually. The architect for the development would be present at the Committee meeting, and would be asked to provide some further detail on materials.

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

The site visit concluded at 10.45am.