

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of Area Planning Committee (South and West) held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on Thursday 20 January 2022 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor G Richardson (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors A Savory (Vice-Chair), E Adam, J Atkinson, D Boyes, L Brown, M McKeon, D Oliver, S Quinn, I Roberts, A Sterling and S Zair

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cairns and M Stead.

### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Savory declared a non-prejudicial interest in item no. 5a) as a Member of Wolsingham Parish Council and Councillor Quinn declared a non-prejudicial interest in item no. 5c) as the item was within Shildon and Dene Valley's ward boundary, of which she was the elected Member.

### **4 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **5 DM/21/01832/FPA - Land West Of 1 Durham Road, Wolsingham**

The Committee considered a report of the Principal Planning Officer which provided details of an application for the Construction of 20 affordable homes and associated works at Land West Of 1 Durham Road, Wolsingham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Planning Officer provided a detailed presentation of the report and included site location plans, aerial photographs and photographs of the site.

Ms H Heward from Believe Housing spoke in support of the application, reiterating the Principle Planning Officers presentation and endorsing the positives findings. In summary, the application provided social, environmental and economical benefits and would deliver 100% affordable housing, with the inclusion of two bungalows.

A number of electric vehicle charging points had been included which were over and what was required by policy, as well as various other improvements. The design was to a high standard and quality finish, which was in-keeping with the local area and the site had footpath links to the rest of the community. The development complied with all policy.

Councillor Boyes noted Believe Housings reputation as one of the biggest social housing providers in the north east and strong proven record. This was an area that desperately needed affordable housing and he strongly supported the recommendation and moved approval for the reasons outlined in the report.

Councillor Adam advised that he was also minded to support the recommendation for similar reasons to Councillor Boyes however he was disappointed that despite the Council trying to reduce CO2 emissions, the development did not seem to recognise that and the only recommendation was with regards to sustainable design. With the recent rise in energy costs, he wondered why the developer had not considered any renewable energy that would save the customer money.

Ms Heward advised that whilst she appreciated Councillor Adam's comments, discussions with officers had taken place but the decision had ultimately come down to the financial viability of the site. The developer had made an effort with a fabric first approach by reducing carbon emissions through insulation and increased energy efficiency, with some other aspects such as the provision of electronic vehicle charging points.

Councillor Brown advised that was also going to bring up Policy 29 however she recognised that Wolsingham was short of affordable housing and seconded the recommendation for approval.

Councillor Brown required further details on the rent to buy scheme and the Planning & Development Solicitor advised that although the schemes did vary, properties were initially rented and often the rent was used as deposit to purchase the property at end of certain period. The money that was generated from the sale of the property had to be invested in more properties.

Mr T Winter from Believe Housing confirmed that their rent to buy scheme gave the tenant the opportunity to rent the property at 80% of the market rent for five years but the onus was on the buyer to save the other 20% in order to purchase the property at the end of the scheme. If the tenant did not wish to purchase at the end of the five year period they were able to continue to rent the property.

In response to a further question from Councillor Brown, Mr Winter advised that the money from the sale of their properties had to be used for future affordable housing provision, but there was no requirement to build in the same area.

Councillor Oliver commented on the number of struggling businesses in this area and agreed that it needed affordable housing. In summary he advised that the location was good, it was within walking distance from the centre of Wolsingham and he supported the application.

Councillor Savory confirmed that she lived near to the site and welcomed the development. Affordable housing was always in great demand in the area and there had been no objection from the Parish Council, nor local residents or businesses which indicated that the local area also welcomed the development.

Councillor Atkinson confirmed that he also supported the scheme.

Councillor S Quinn had arrived during the debate and therefore did not take part in the discussion or decision making with regards to this item.

### **Resolved**

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following s106 agreements and the conditions outlined in the report:-

- 20 Affordable Housing units
- £16,950 offsite footpath improvement works
- £49,662 education contribution
- £34,782 Open Space, Sport and Play Provision contribution
- £3700 Habitat Mitigation

## **6 DM/21/03473/FPA - Land west of Durhamgate Development Centre, Hay Lane, Spennymoor**

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer which provided details of an application for Erection of 3 storey 66no. bed residential care home for the elderly with associated works on Land west of

Durhamgate Development Centre, Hay Lane, Spennymoor (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Planning Officer provided a detailed presentation of the report and included site location plans, aerial photographs and photographs of the site.

Ms T Spencer, Agent, addressed the Committee with regards to the concerns raised by Adult and Health Services about the need for a care home. The vacancies quoted were across the County but the needs assessment that had been conducted by the Applicant was over a 3 mile radius. There were another five care homes in the area with 1 or 2 vacancies, but from the analysis of population in the catchment area and the number of homes in the area, a further 66 beds had been identified.

The company specialised in building care homes which had given them a wealth of experience

From the research that had been done they had indicated that this was a suitable area for a care home and would provide an additional choice of accommodation to meet the needs of the growing elderly population.

Ms Spencer advised that there were other benefits that the development would bring to the area such as the provision of 50-60 jobs.

The Senior Planning Officer reminded Members that competition between care providers and viability was not a material planning consideration, so although the comments made were accepted, they could not be considered when determining the application.

Councillor Boyes referred to comments in the report from Children and Adult Services that referred to the occupancy of 'existing DCC care homes' as he was under the impression that there weren't any.

The Planning and Development Solicitor advised that in terms of the Committees assessment of the application, Members should not have regard to the comments that were not associated with a material planning consideration.

Councillor Boyes questioned whether the comment should be in the report and the Planning Development Solicitor advised that it was not an issue that would prevent the Committee from determining the application.

In response to a question from Councillor Atkinson, Ms Taylor advised that from the analysis of the area, there had been a number of different age brackets identified and a standard national industry formula used to

determine the number of beds, and then a figure was generated based on the need within the area.

Councillor Atkinson confirmed his support for the application.

Councillor Brown advised that the development included the installation of solar panels and ground pumps and commented that the application was supporting the aging population of County Durham and seconded the proposal.

### **Resolved**

That the application be APPROVED subject to the completion of a unilateral undertaking pursuant to S106 to secure a £7700.00 financial contribution and the conditions outlined in the report.

## **7 DM/21/03180/FPA - 9-16 Fir Tree and 22-28 Maple Avenue, Shildon**

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer which provided details of an application for Demolition of 24no. apartments and garages and erection of 15no. bungalows at 9-16 Fir Tree and 22-28 Maple Avenue, Shildon, Co Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Planning Officer provided a detailed presentation of the report and included site location plans, aerial photographs and photographs of the site.

Councillor Quinn confirmed that she knew the area well and there had been several problems with the flats, which housed predominantly elderly people on the ground floor with younger people above, which was a mix that did not work. There were some problem areas, prevalent anti-social behaviour and as the Applicant had relocated some of them, the flats remained empty and became difficult to let. They had been boarded up and increased vandalism. The decision to build bungalows was the best way forward in her opinion and she welcomed the site. It was a good location for the bus service, had two local shops and she believed the properties would be more desirable.

Councillor Atkinson had no objections and moved the recommendation for approval as per the Officers report.

Councillor Brown referred to the reference to comply with Policy 29 as the Council were trying to minimise greenhouse gas but agreed that converting flats to bungalows was a better option and seconded the proposal.

The Applicant responded to confirm that the homes would be built to emerging building regulations and would have 38% carbon reduction which

was an improvement on the current standards. In addition they would all be installed with low carbon heaters and as the Applicant was aware that the cost of electric was higher than gas, solar panels would be installed to offset the additional cost. The Applicant was also hoping to make two properties zero carbon and include battery storage from solar panels.

Councillor Roberts agreed that the development would enhance the area and provide housing for elderly. She was also aware of the anti-social behaviour in the area and therefore supported the application.

As a former Director of a housing board, Councillor Boyes, was aware of how tight budgets were and although it would be more desirable to build 100% green properties, developers had to go with what they could afford. He also supported the application.

Councillor Oliver confirmed his support for the application which would be an improvement in comparison to the existing housing and he welcomed the provision of bungalows.

### **Resolved**

The application be APPROVED subject to the completion of a Section 106 Obligation to secure the following, and the conditions outlined in the report;

- Provision of 10% affordable housing on site in perpetuity