OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00773/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Replacement dwelling

Location: Abblitt Dairy Farm Mereside Drove

Applicant: Cambridgeshire County Council

Grid Ref: 531012 290711

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is Abblitt Dairy Farm, a site located within the open countryside on the edge of Ramsey Mereside and subject to an agricultural tenancy. A detached two-storey dwelling and substantial outbuilding occupies the site which also features typical domestic landscaping. The wider holding is larger than the red line given for the site which focuses only on the dwelling and associated structures/layout.

The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no Listed Buildings or trees subject to Preservation Orders in the immediate vicinity. The site lies within Flood Zone 3a as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data. It also has a high risk of fluvial flooding as per the 2024 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

The dwelling is suffering from structural decay (a structural report accompanies the application) and requires demolition. This application seeks permission to demolish the dwelling and provide a replacement dwelling slightly north-west of the existing dwelling.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP5: Flood Risk
LP6: Waste Water Management
LP9: Small Settlements
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP20: Homes for Rural Workers
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
LP37: Ground Contamination and Groundwater Pollution

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

Huntingdonshire Design Guide (2017)
Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2024)
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

1100638FUL - Proposed two-storey extension (Approved)

CONSULTATIONS

Ramsey Town Council - Neutral response - no comments either objecting to or supporting.
HDC Ecology Team (informal consultation) - Objection, further details in the proceeding sections of this report.
HDC Environmental Health Team - No objections subject to condition.
HDC Arboricultural Officer - No objections subject to condition.
Environment Agency (EA) - No objections.
Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Highways Team - No objections.
Middle Level Commissioners (IDB) - No representations received at the time of determination.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received at the time of determination.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 48 of the NPPF (2024). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of a number of adopted neighbourhood plans, however, there is not an adopted neighbourhood plan in place for Ramsey or its villages. Therefore, in this case no neighbourhood plans are given weight in the determination of this application.

The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

The main issues to consider are:

*The principle of development
*Design, visual amenity and impact on the countryside
*Residential amenity
*Highway considerations
*Flood risk
*Biodiversity
*Impact on Trees

*The principle of the development

HDC's Local Plan has a specific policy (Policy LP20) relating to the provision of homes for rural workers which contains a number of tests to confirm acceptability covering:

*The tenure of the building in relation to the occupation of the occupant(s).
*Exploration of other suitable accommodation nearby.
*Exploration of conversion of existing buildings.
*The permanency of the construction.

It should be recognised that the above is more focused on the provision of a dwelling on a site which is currently not occupied for these purposes or for an additional dwelling. In this case this relates to a replacement dwelling. As such, the principle of a dwelling (for an agricultural worker) is already established on this site and so the full force of the policy is not applied. However, notwithstanding this consideration, officers are satisfied that based upon the detail provided (structural reports and so on) that the requirement for a replacement dwelling have been justified. Furthermore, its tenure shall be secured by condition as will the demolition of the existing dwelling in order to ensure that only one dwelling remains on the site.

Overall, having regard to the above assessment, subject to conditions, the development is considered to be acceptable in principle subject to compliance with all other material planning considerations and conditions.

*Design and visual amenity

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan state, amongst other matters, that proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context and has drawn inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings, including natural, historic and built environment, contributes positively to the character and identity of the area and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings, the routes and spaces between buildings, topography and landscape.

In this case, the site is occupied by a detached, two-storey dwellinghouse with a hipped roof and finished in white render. It is typical of many agricultural dwellings in this part of the country and there is nothing notable with regard to its design. It is proposed to replace this with a detached dwelling set slightly further north-west. The replacement would be two-storey with a pitched roof and side projection which is set back from the front and rear elevation and which has a lower ridge height (and so appears subservient). It is a simple design, and its scale is not excessive for its purpose or the site. A change in materials is proposed (mainly the alteration from render to red brick - all other materials will remain as per the existing dwelling). This is considered to be acceptable but specifications of all external materials shall be secured by condition given the sensitive rural location.

Overall, it is not considered that the development would be uncharacteristic of the locality or would result in the introduction of built development which would be considered incongruous or harmful. It therefore accords with Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036.

As the site is located within the open countryside some assessment under Policy LP10 of the Local Plan is require. LP10 seeks to limit development in the countryside unless it is permitted via other policies of the Local Plan (one of which is LP20 discussed above). LP10 seeks to secure the long-term use of the best and most versatile agricultural land and avoid the introduction of development which could be harmful to the character of the countryside either visually or due to other accompanying factors (such as noise, odour or obtrusive light).

In this case, the land is classified as grade 1 agricultural land (and so land of the highest value). However, it should be recognised that this is the case for all of the land surrounding the site. The need somewhat dictates the siting, and, given that this land is not used for agricultural purposes at present, the modest scale of development and the fact that the existing dwelling will be demolished (thereby releasing its footprint back to its original state - albeit unlikely for agricultural purposes) there is no objection on this basis. In terms of the other matters, as above, it is not considered that the dwelling by virtue of its scale and design would result in visual harm to the location nor would it (given the existing occupancy of the site) give rise to any factors which would impact the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

It is important to note that securing the tenure of the dwelling and the demolition of the existing dwelling are important factors of this consideration as development of this nature would not normally be supported in such a location due to the potential of harm through intensified development.

Subject to conditions the development accords with Policy LP10 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Residential amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings. HDC's Environmental Health Team have been consulted and raise no objections in terms of noise or odour either on the future occupants or to third parties. They do note that there could be some contamination of the land due to its use and so recommend a standard condition to deal with this matter.

In terms of other considerations, given the scale, siting and isolated location and relationship with other dwellings and land (alongside the fact that a dwelling already exists on the site) it is not considered that there would be any negative impacts arising from overbearing impacts, overshadowing, loss of light, loss of privacy or overlooking. It should be noted that in making this determination this is based upon the fact that the occupants of the existing dwelling shall move into the new dwelling upon completion with the existing dwelling demolished. Officers would have significant concerns (and would not support) the layout shown on plan ref A 60482 2C without the previously referred to conditions being attached to the permission.

It should be noted that it appears that bedrooms 3 and 4 do not technically accord with the floorspace requirements for a double and single room as per the technical housing standards - nationally described space standard document. However, they do accord in terms of their width. This is a relatively minor failure within what is a 4-bed property. As such, there is no justification for refusal or amendments solely on this basis.

Overall, subject to conditions, the development accords with Policies LP14 and LP37 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Highway safety

There is no change to the way that vehicles enter or leave the site or parking provision and, given that the existing dwelling will be demolished there is no intensification of the access. It should be noted that the site is located a significant distance along a rural track and therefore has a neutral impact on the highway network. Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highways Authority have been consulted and raise no objections to the development.

Policy LP17 of the Local Plan requires that all Class C (3) development should provide secure covered storage for cycles (one space per bedroom) to promote sustainable travel. In this case, whilst no detail has been provided on this provision, given that this relates to a replacement dwelling (with the existing conditioned for demolition) there is no intensification and no overall change from what exists. As such, on balance it is not considered necessary to apply the full weight of LP17 to this proposal.

Overall, the scheme is considered to be acceptable in terms of parking provision and highway safety impacts and therefore is considered to broadly accord with Policies LP16 and LP17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

*Flood risk

The application site is wholly within Flood Zone 3a and shown to be at risk of surface water flooding as per the most recent EA Flood Risk Maps and Data and the 2024 SFRA. The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and the EA have been consulted. In this case, whilst provision of a dwelling would normally be resisted in Flood Zone 3a (the application of the sequential and exception tests being required as per the NPPF 2024) there are some exceptions to this. A typical exception may be where a need is demonstrated for the type of development (such as a rural workers dwelling) in a specific location. Each case is considered upon its own merits and, where permitted, with conditions to ensure the safety of the occupants in the event of a flood emergency. In this case, this relates to a replacement dwelling with the existing dwelling being demolished. As such, this will not result in the provision of an additional dwelling (thereby putting additional persons at risk of flooding) in Flood Zone 3a. It should also be noted that as a two-storey dwelling there is some refuge (at first floor level) in the event of a flood emergency. The EA have been consulted and raise no objections. The do advise that the Internal Drainage Board (Middle Level Commissioners) are consulted - this has been done but no representations have been received at the time of determination. The EA also suggest considering emergency planning (considering evacuation/rescue) in the event of a flood emergency. In this case, given the above

assessment and the mitigation measures (floor levels) in the FRA (which will be secured by condition) it is not considered necessary to impose further restrictions.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that existing raised defences, which the 2024 SFRA specifically does not take account of, provide some protection to existing properties in this area. Given this, Huntingdonshire District Council's Development Management Planning Committee agreed the following:

Some villages, including some of the Ramsey villages, are entirely within Zone 3 in the 2024 SFRA. New development within settlements, can in some cases help enhance or maintain the vitality of a rural community and this is a key objective of the Council's Planning Strategies and the NPPF. Therefore, for those villages which are entirely within Flood Zone 3 as defined in the 2024 SFRA only, the 2010 SFRA which took account of flood defences will be used as the basis for decision making, and general market housing will only be permitted in areas shown as being in Flood Zone 1 as defined in that document. This approach follows discussions with the Environment Agency and the Middle Level Commissioners and will ensure that regard is still given to flood risk but will also allow some development to be approved in these villages to maintain their vitality.

The Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2010 shows the site to be within Flood Zone 1 and the site is at low risk of surface water flooding and groundwater flooding as per the relevant 2017 SFRA maps. Accordingly, as the site is considered to be in Flood Zone 1.

As this is the case the site is regarded as being within Flood Zone 1 and treated as such within the NPPF (2024 guidance) which therefore further reduces the concern of flood risk implications.

In terms of surface water, discharge from the buildings shall be dealt with at the building regulations stages. However, again, given that the existing dwelling will be demolished alongside the permeability of the surrounding land, it is not considered that there would be any significant surface water run-off issues.

Overall, the proposal is considered to broadly accord with Policies LP5 and LP15 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Biodiversity

Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires a development to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and achieve a net gain where possible.

As well as the above (and separate from the requirements of LP30) qualifying new development is subject to Biodiversity Net Gain legislation pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. This means that a 10% statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) would be required with any future application, following the hierarchy of onsite provision; mixture of on-site and off-site provision; and the last resort of statutory biodiversity credits unless it can be demonstrated that the development would be exempt.

In this case the application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated April 2025. The report recommended further surveys in respect of bats. An Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) dated June 2025 has been provided which details the outcome additional surveys and this has been reviewed by HDC's Ecology Officer. Subject to conditions to secure details of external lighting, a further tree survey (in respect of tree 1) as per the PEA (for roosting potential) and a non-native invasive species management plan (eradication of Cotoneaster) they raise no objections.

In terms of BNG, HDC's Ecology Officer raised concerns that the required 10% gain could not be provided given the baseline used for calculation and the reliance on a private garden to provide the BNG. Following this response, revised details have been received, the metric does not present any

errors and tree planting is not proposed outside of the red line boundary (on land within the applicants ownership) such that a 12.68% uplift in habitat units can be achieved. Whilst the Ecology Officer has not been re-consulted, Officers are satisfied that this resolved the concerns raised. In any event, the standard condition which shall be applied to the permission requires the applicant to demonstrate a contingency plan should it become apparent that the 10% cannot be achieved in the manner proposed.

Overall, having regard to the above matters, subject to condition, the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to biodiversity impacts and accords with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Impact on Trees

There are some trees within the site which whilst not afforded formal protection do have the potential to be impacted by the development (works or vehicle movements/landscaping) taking place within the root protection area (RPA). Further, one tree (T1) is proposed for removal. HDC's Arboricultural Officer has been consulted and raises no objections to the development. He has assessed the scale and value of the trees (included that proposed for removal) and agrees that there could be some impact on the RPA and as such, a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) would be required. A TPP can be secured by condition.

Overall, subject to condition, the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on trees and therefore accords with Policy LP31 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Other matters

*Accessible and Adaptable Homes

Policy LP25 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals that include housing to meet the optional Building Regulation requirement M4(2)" Accessible and adaptable dwellings" unless it can be demonstrated that site specific factors make this unachievable. No details have been provided to the contrary on this point and so this shall be secured by condition.

*Water Efficiency Policy

LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals that include housing to comply with the optional building regulation for water efficiency, as set out in Approved Document G. The proposed development will be conditioned to be in accordance with and will be built in accordance with the LP12 (j) standards.

*Developer contributions (CIL)

The development will be CIL liable in accordance with the Council's adopted charging schedule; CIL payments will cover footpaths and access, health, community facilities, libraries and lifelong learning and education. CIL forms have been provided as part of the application and these shall be dealt with by the Council's Implementation Team.

The proposal is considered to accord with the requirements of Policy LP4 of the Local Plan to 2036 and the Developer Contribution SPD in this regard.

Developer contributions (Wheeled Bins)

Generally, an application for a new dwelling would require the submission of a unilateral undertaking form for wheeled bin provision. In this case this provision is already in place and there will be no net increase of dwellings on the site (once the existing dwelling has been demolished). As such, this has not been pursued further.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the requirements of Policy LP4 of the Local Plan to 2036 and the Developer Contribution SPD in this regard.

*Conclusion

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it is acceptable in principle, would be visually acceptable and would not be harmful in terms of residential amenity, highway safety, flood risk, ecology or impact on trees.

Having regard to all relevant material considerations the proposed development is considered to comply with Policies LP2, LP5, LP10, LP11, LP12, LP14, LP15, LP16, LP17, LP20, LP30, LP31 and LP37 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and consequently, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

If you would like a translation of this document, a large text version or an audio version, please contact us on 01480 388424 and we will try to accommodate your needs.

CONTACT OFFICER:
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