OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 24/02249/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Alterations and extensions to existing dwelling and erection of three dwellings

Location: 37 Rectory Road Bluntisham Huntingdon

Applicant: C Death

Grid Ref: 537183 274459

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is 37 Rectory Road, Bluntisham. It lies to the south-east of the centre of the village and currently hosts an unoccupied detached dwelling which is in a poor state of repair. It is well bounded to the north (Rectory Road) with relatively dense hedgerow offering only glimpses of the dwelling. To the south is open countryside.

The site is within Flood Zone 1 as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data and does not present at being at risk from other sources (as per the same maps). The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no protected trees within it or in the immediate vicinity. The Grade I Listed St Mary's Church lies to the immediate east with the Grade II Listed War Memorial to the north.

This application seeks permission for the alteration and extension of the existing dwelling and the erection of three new dwellings (one to the east and two to the west).

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

During the lifetime of the application and on the advice of specialists and officers revised plans have been received. Whilst the red line has been amended this was a reduction as opposed to an increase. Some minor design changes have been undertaken and as such, on the balance of fairness neighbours and the Parish Council have been re-consulted accordingly. It was not considered necessary to re-consult all technical consultees.

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
LP3: Green Infrastructure
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
LP16: Sustainable Travel
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP25: Housing Mix
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings
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)
Annual Monitoring Review regarding housing land supply (2024)
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)

The National Design Guide (2021)

* C1 - Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context
* I1 - Respond to existing local character and identity
* I2 - Well-designed, high quality and attractive
* B2 - Appropriate building types and forms
*M3 - Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users
* N3 - Support rich and varied biodiversity
* H1 - Healthy, comfortable and safe internal and external environment
* H2 - Well-related to external amenity and public spaces
* H3 - Attention to detail: storage, waste, servicing and utilities

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

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None relevant

CONSULTATIONS

Bluntisham Parish Council recommend approval.
HDC Conservation Team - No objections.
HDC Environmental Health - No objections.
HDC Urban Design - No objections.
HDC Arboricultural Officer - No objections subject to conditions.
HDC Operations (Waste) - No representations received at the time of determination.
HDC Landscapes Officer- No representations received at the time of determination.
HDC Ecology Officer - Objection - further details in the proceeding sections of this report.
Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Historic Environment Team - No objections subject to conditions.
Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Highways Team - No objections subject to conditions.
Historic England - No comments to make.

REPRESENTATIONS

Four representations have been received and these are available to view on HDC's Public Access Site. Three were neighbour comments neither objecting to nor supporting the scheme. The subject of two of these relates to the bell ringing which takes place at St Mary's Church and that any future prospective occupants should be aware of this and not object. One raises concerns about the appearance of the dwellings and a request for swift boxes to be installed should the development proceed.

A fourth representation has been received from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and now referred to as The Countryside Charity. They raise objections to the proposals which are broadly summarised below:

*Relationship with the Grade I Listed Church

*Other new builds reflect the character of the village the design of this proposal undermines character and heritage and the setting of the Church.

*Highway safety concerns due to the levels drop into the site and potential reduced visibility.

These matters shall be addressed in the proceeding sections of this report.

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, as stated above, there is not an adopted neighbourhood plan in place for Bluntisham. 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, impact upon the countryside
*Impact on heritage assets
*Residential amenity
*Highway and parking considerations
*Flood risk
*Impact on trees
*Biodiversity
*Other matters

Whilst not wholly applicable to this application (given that the site lies within the built-up area of the village and is acceptable on other grounds) this report should be read with the knowledge that the Council is currently in 'tilted balance' which requires consideration in housing-related development at this time. This is summarised below:

NPPF paragraph 78 requires the Council to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against our housing requirement. A substantially revised methodology for calculating local housing need and the reimposition of this as a mandatory approach for establishing housing requirements was introduced on 12th December 2024 in the revised NPPF and associated NPPG (the standard method).

As Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 is now over 5 years old it is necessary to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS) based on the housing requirement set using the standard method. NPPF paragraph 78 also requires provision of a buffer to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. As Huntingdonshire has successfully exceeded the requirements of the Housing Delivery Test a 5% buffer is required here. The 5-year housing land requirement including a 5% buffer is 5,586 homes. The current 5YHLS is 4,430 homes equivalent to 3.88 years' supply.

As a result of this, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied for decision-taking in accordance with paragraph 11 (d) and footnote 8 of the NPPF in relation to applications involving the provision of housing. This is generally referred to as 'the titled balance'. As no 5YHLS can be demonstrated the Local Plan policies concerned with the supply and location of housing as set out in the Development Strategy chapter (policies LP2, LP7, LP8, LP9 and LP10) of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 are considered to be out-of-date and can no longer be afforded full weight in the determination of planning applications.

*The principle of the development (including impact on Landscape Character Area)

Bluntisham is defined as a small settlement under Policy LP9 of the Local Plan to 2036. LP9 supports development proposals within the built-up area (BUA) where there are suitable levels of services and infrastructure, where everyday services can be accessed via sustainable travel methods and where it would not impact the character of the settlement.

For the purposes of this assessment, whilst the site is on the periphery of the village it is considered to lie within the BUA which is defined as a distinct group of 30 or more homes. There is

some separation to the dwellings to the west, but an expanse of built development to the north consisting of mid-20th century Local Authority bungalows and the entrance to Hollidays Road and which is very clearly a part of the BUA. The Hollidays Road dwellings appear typical of early/mid-20th Century LA housing and these extend from Hollidays Road onto Rectory Road and extend further east (directly opposite the Church) and so further from the village than the proposed site.

In terms of sustainability, whilst services are limited Bluntisham does offer more services than some other small settlements and so is not at the lower end of sustainability in the 'settlement hierarchy'. There is a Church, Public House, Primary School, Day Nursery, Village Hall, Convenience Store and Recreation Ground. There is also a regular bus service to St Ives. Further, whilst it is noted that a main road would have to be navigated, St Ives is approx. 5.3km away from the site and so it is not unreasonable to consider that this could be accessed by bicycle to persons of reasonable physical fitness.

Matters regarding impact on the character and appearance of the area are addressed in the proceeding sections of this report but are considered to be satisfactory for this part of the assessment.

The site also lies within the Great Ouse Valley Landscape Character Area as defined within the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (Chapter 3). The SPD advises that development proposals should:

*Enrich the area by reinforcing its special qualities and acknowledging its distinct local character.

*Use appropriate building materials to retain the distinctive local character of villages.

*Maintain or enhance water quality and quantity and not lead to any adverse impact on flood risk or flood defences.

*Protect and enhance the strategic green corridor formed by the river valley, particularly where it passes through settlements.

*Minimise the environmental impacts of recreational activities.

*Protect and enhance the ecological value of the river, its margins and the valley floor.

*Promote opportunities for wildlife and conservation initiatives to support and enhance the area's biodiversity.

*Protect the setting of historic structure such as bridges and mill buildings.

*Encourage public access along the Great Ouse Valley through.

In considering the above it should be acknowledged that this is a very minor residential development in an area which already has a residential character. It will not therefore result in the introduction of uncharacteristic development within a protected landscape nor extend further into the countryside. Some elements are not relevant to this proposal. For the reasons given throughout this assessment the proposal is not considered contrary to the principles set out above which are relevant.

Overall, it is concluded that the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in principle subject to compliance with other material planning considerations and conditions.

*Design, visual amenity, impact upon the countryside

Rectory Road is a main route bypassing the centre of Bluntisham heading from Earith to the north-east towards Needingworth and St Ives to the south-west. Built development is sparser to the south of the road (the application site) and in general the surroundings are mainly 20th Century LA housing punctuated by individually designed dwellings (No.37 being a case in point along with the bungalow (No.31) to the west). The Grade I Listed Church is the prominent structure and is visible from the junction of Hollidays Road. Overall, there is some variance in the scale and design of the dwellings in the vicinity.

This application seeks to refurbish and extend the existing dwelling (number 37) and erect three additional detached dwellings (one to the east and two to the west). The overall design of the new dwellings (plots 1, 2 and 3) will be contemporary (plots 1 and 2 sharing the same design) whilst No.37 will retain many of its original features (such as the hipped roof) and replicate this in the extended section. The new dwellings have a large degree of single storey accommodation with large flat roof projections to the sides and/or rear. The varied elements and design of the roofs add interest to the streetscene. Materials are given as a mixture of render and weatherboarding with single ply membrane a dark grey zinc for the roofs. No.37 will retain the existing tiles and new materials will be to match. Dark grey UPVC and Aluminium is proposed for the windows and doors. Whilst this follows the contemporary nature of the design and is broadly acceptable, given the sensitive location it is considered prudent to attach a condition to the consent to secure full details of the proposed materials.

In terms of the site layout there is good separation between units which provides breaks in the built form and allows for sky gaps retaining a sense of separation and openness. This is particularly so with regard to plots 1 and 2 given that the single storey elements are adjacent to the western boundaries. Parking is ample and is sited in such a way that it will be easily accessible (and so more likely to be used for its intended purpose) and does not overwhelm the scheme. There is some minor interruption of the linear pattern due to the design features of the new units in comparison with No.37, but this is not significant and will not be readily noticeable particularly given the set back and retained/proposed landscaping. It should also be noted that the dwellings to the west are not linear and so this is not uncharacteristic of the area. No details of bin storage/collection has been provided but it is assumed that this will be from Rectory Road and there is adequate provision in the rear gardens. Drag length of bins would be slightly further than the recommended 30m but this is very minimal and not a reason to seek storage to the front of the dwellings which would have the potential to impact the appearance of the scheme.

Officers have given consideration to the fact that the carport for Plot 3 is forward of the principal elevation which does not accord with the guidance contained within the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD. However, there are at least two other dwellings on Rectory Road with garages forward of the property, this is also the easternmost dwelling and so it will not be as prominent as would be the case were it on one of the other plots. Further, as addressed in the proceeding sections of this report, Urban Design have been consulted and do not object to this.

In terms of landscaping, the plans show a mixture of hard and soft landscaping with some retained hedgerows and trees alongside new planting. The submitted landscaping plan also includes details of proposed block and flag paving which is broadly supported but again, specification details will be secured by condition. No information has been provided as to boundary treatments and again will be conditioned.

As alluded to above, HDC's Urban Design Team have been consulted, some minor amendments were suggested, have been provided and as such they have been re-consulted and support the proposals subject to the conditions suggested above.

Officers note the concerns raised in the comments and the requirements of LP9(c) and appreciate that this contemporary design will be a new introduction to the locality. However, it should be acknowledged that the Council (where appropriate) support such design. Page 33 of the

Huntingdonshire Design Guide sets out recommendations for Contemporary Architecture and notes that:

'The design of new development in Huntingdonshire must draw from these traditional building forms found within the district, with particular reference to locally distinctive built form, scale, proportions, details and materials.' And 'Contemporary interpretations of local building forms will be encouraged and welcomed, with particular emphasis on using more natural light in the design of buildings, more articulation to the elevations and the use of locally distinctive materials'.

Having assessed the surroundings and arrangement of the site (as above) which contains a mixture of both traditional and hipped roofs it is considered that the proposed design would sit comfortably with these and provide some interesting contrast to the streetscene by providing an interpretation of the gable fronted dwellings on Rectory Road. The contemporary design is therefore supported and accords with the Design Guide in this regard. Furthermore, it should be regarded that as detailed in the preceding sections of this report, reduced weight can be given to LP9(c) at this time and any harm would need to be significant and demonstrable in order to resist such development.

Whilst the site is within the BUA there is open countryside to the south. As such, Policy LP10 of the Local Plan is considered relevant. LP10 seeks to protect high grade agricultural land and to secure the character and beauty of the countryside whilst avoiding factors such as intrusive light, noise and odours etc. In this case, given that the site is not given over to agricultural use part a of LP10 is not considered wholly relevant. The section of land to the rear (also within the ownership of the applicant) is given over to planting to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain and so the built form will be well separated from the land to the south. For the reasons assessed above alongside this separation and the established residential character it is not considered that the proposal will be harmful to the appearance of the countryside nor would it give significant rise to factors which could affect the enjoyment of the countryside by others.

Overall, it is considered that for the reasons given above, the proposal will not result in harm to the character or appearance of the area or the wider countryside and therefore accords with Policies LP9(c), LP10, LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Impact on heritage assets

As detailed above, whilst the site is not within a Conservation Area it is within the setting of the Grade I Listed St Mary's Church and Grade II Listed War Memorial.

Section 66 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Para. 212 of the NPPF sets out that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'.

Para. 213 states that 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification'

Local Plan policy LP34 aligns with the statutory provisions and NPPF advice

In this case the application is accompanied by a Heritage Statement which considers the impacts on heritage assets. Historic England have been consulted and have declined to comment suggesting that the LPA seeks the views of internal heritage advisers (Conservation).
HDC's Conservation Team have been consulted and raise no objections as, whilst they accept that the development will result in a change to the setting of the heritage assets their significance is in some way protected by the vegetation between the sites.

A detailed assessment on design has been carried out earlier in this report and it is not considered necessary to repeat this. Having regard to this assessment, the matters which will be secured by condition and the advice of specialists Officers conclude that the development would not cause harm to the setting of the Listed Buildings/Structures.

Further to the above, Cambridgeshire County Council's Historic Environment Team have also been consulted. Whilst they don't object, they do note that the site lies within an area of archaeological potential and therefore recommend a condition for further investigations to be completed prior to commencement. This shall be added to the decision.

Officers are satisfied that (subject to condition) the development accords with Policy LP34 of the Local Plan to 2036, the provisions of the NPPF (2024) and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

*Residential amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan requires that a scheme should ensure that a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupies of neighbouring land and buildings.

In terms of matters of overlooking and loss of privacy it is considered that the layout of the site and arrangement of the fenestration will prevent harm in terms of privacy subject to conditions set out below:

*The gallery and bathroom window to the side (west) elevation of plots 1 and 2 should be obscurely glazed and have their means of opening controlled by condition to prevent views towards the garden area of No.31 Rectory Road and the side ground floor windows in the eastern elevation of Plot 1 (serving the playroom, study and secondary sitting room window).

*The shower rooms and secondary bedroom windows in the sides (east) elevation of Plot 2 should be obscurely glazed and have their means of opening controlled by condition to prevent perceived overlooking to the side (west) elevation of No.37 given the limited separation between the two units.

*The shower room windows in the side (west) elevation of Plot 3 should be obscurely glazed and have their means of opening controlled by condition to prevent overlooking to the garden area of No.37.

It is not considered that the location of any other doors and windows either at ground or first floor level would have a detrimental impact in terms of privacy on existing occupiers or future occupiers of the new dwellings. It is acknowledged that there will be some unavoidable overlooking of the rear garden areas but this is generally expected of development of this nature and there are unlikely to be harmful views towards any highly used areas such as patios. Carefully considered boundary treatments (to be secured by condition) will also reduce the impacts.

In terms of overbearing impacts, overshadowing and loss of light, the separation between the units, the scales of the various elements and the careful arrangement of rooms (which generally means that habitable rooms are not reliant solely on a single window for natural light) is considered satisfactory in terms of the units themselves both in terms of to the dwellings and garden areas.

There is approx. 14m between the side (east) elevation of No.31 and Plot 1 and the dwelling is located such that it is not directly opposite the large bay window on the side of 31 meaning that there will be no impacts on the property itself. The separation and the fact that the single storey element is adjacent to the boundary also avoids an impact on the garden area. It is also noted from the levels details provided that the site is lower than Rectory Road and No.31. This will therefore also serve to minimise the impacts.

In terms of other matters, Officers consider that there is ample outside space associated with the units and as established earlier, there are options of leisure and recreation which are easily accessible by sustainable travel methods. HDC's Environmental Health Team have also been consulted and raise no objection in terms of noise, odour or contamination. Officers note the concerns regarding the bells of the adjacent church, it would be for the Council's Environmental Health Team to consider the impacts (in the event of any complaint raised to them). However, the Environmental Health Team are aware of the relationship between the site and the church and have not raised any objections (as above). This is not a matter which can be addressed through the planning process and it is not considered that this would have a significant impact on residential amenity longer-term.

Overall, having regard to the above, the development is acceptable in terms of residential amenity and therefore accords with Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Highway safety and parking

The site will be accessed from two points on Rectory Road and each dwelling has two external parking spaces allocated to it (side by side for Plots 1, 2 and 3 and tandem for No.37). Plots 1 and 2 have an integral carport whilst Plot 3 and No.37 has a separate provision. It is noted that the depth of the carport allocated to Plot 3 does not accord with the Desing Guide in terms of its depth, however, given the consideration to the matters below (and likely use) this is considered acceptable.

No details of cycle storage has been provided so it is unclear if it is intended that these will be used for such storage (with the parking spaces used outside). Given the scale of the development this provision is considered broadly acceptable but details of cycle storage (which should be secure as per the Design Guide) shall be conditioned to ensure that given the open nature of the carports it will be secure. If separate provision is intended the site is considered large enough to accommodate it.

CCC Highways Team have been consulted, initially they requested further information on some matters including visibility splays, re-instatement of footway, drainage channel location, levels details, relocation of signage and a reduction of the red line. Thes has been provided, and Highways have been re-consulted. They are now satisfied that the scheme as presented can be achieved with no significant highways safety impacts (subject to conditions).

Overall, the development is acceptable in terms of parking provision, highway safety and sustainable travel and therefore accords with Policies LP16 and LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Flood risk

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data. During the lifetime of the application the flood modelling has altered on this site and so whilst it is now identified as not having a risk of flood this was not always the case (prior to the most recent maps being produced). As such, a Flood Risk Assessment was provided with the application. This concludes that the site is acceptable for such development, that the sequential test is not required and that any risk from future flood risk can be managed by conditioning floor levels.

In terms of surface water, the site sits lower than the main road and the installation of drainage at the highway access, the permeability of the surrounding land and additional measures which can be introduced by careful consideration of hard and soft landscaping (to be secured by condition) means that any impact will be negligible and carefully managed. In terms of waste-water - drainage will be a matter to be considered at the building regulations stages, however, it is not considered that the provision of three additional dwellings would place an unmanageable strain on the system.

Overall, taking all of the above matters into consideration, the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to flood risk and surface water management and accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Impact on Trees

There are a number of trees/hedgerows within the application site which whilst not afforded formal protection offer screening and are an important feature of the area and so worthy of retention. An Arboricultural Report including Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan has been provided and the proposals reviewed by HDC's Arboricultural Officer. Having considered the scheme they raise no objections noting that several smaller trees will need to be removed but that these do not have a significant impact on the character of the area. They note that works are required within the root protection areas of some trees but that the measures provided in the submitted statement are acceptable. Condition suggested by the Arb Officer appears to be erroneous suggesting that a Tree Protection Plan is needed (one has already been provided). As such, a condition to secure compliance to the proposed measures is sufficient.

Overall, subject to conditions, Officers are satisfied that the development will be acceptable with regard to its impact on trees and therefore accords with Policy LP31 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Biodiversity

Policy LP30 if the Local Plan requires a development to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and achieve a net gain where possible. The proposals will also be subject to Biodiversity Net Gain Legislation pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. This means that a 10% statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is required.

The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal which concludes that the site could be developed with minimal biodiversity impacts subject to mitigation and enhancement measures being implemented including swift boxes as per the comments (which will be secured by condition). It does however also state that further surveys are required for bats and surveys/district level license required for Great Crested Newts (GCN). Subsequently, surveys were completed and further details have been provided. A Nocturnal Bat Survey Report prepared by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy concludes that the existing dwelling is used as a non-breeding day roost for common pipistrelle bats and so the works will result in the loss of some roosts. As such, a European protected Species License is required before the works can proceed. Measures have also been suggested for ways to enhance the habitat potential of the site. These matters can be secured by condition.

In terms of GCN a GCN Survey Report prepared by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy has been provided. The report details that an eDNA survey was conducted and founds that a pond within 100m of the development of the site provided a negative response for GCN. The report acknowledges that works do pose a risk of killing or injuring GCN within the site but also concludes that the risk of an offence is highly unlikely. Recommendations as to precautionary working measures (in order to mitigate the risk) are detailed and will be secured by condition.

In terms of BNG, the submission details that in excess of 10% BNG can be achieved by off-site provision (but in land still within the ownership of the applicant to the south of the site). HDC's

Ecology Officer has been consulted and objects to the scheme (in relation to BNG). He is of the view that the value of the land has been degraded (having compared with details submitted as part of the arboricultural submission and aerial photography). Legislation permits LPA's to consider the value of the land from 30th January 2020 and therefore considers that the baseline habitat (taken from the state of the land at the time of the assessment) is incorrect. There has been some discussions between all parties with the applicant advising that the land in question was garden land and clearance only related to habitat management. HDC's Ecology Officer maintains their objection.

Given the above, Officers have had to take a view on this matter. Whilst it is acknowledged that some clearance of the site has taken place which would lower the baseline it remains that the applicant has the benefit of a substantial section of land to the south of the site and that an overall BNG of 17.98 units can be achieved. This is in excess of the 10% required and so reasonably off-sets any anomalies in the submission. The provision of BNG will be secured by condition which also ensures that a contingency plan is in place if the required 10% BNG cannot be achieved.

Whilst Officers accept that this is not an 'exact science' the site (in its current state) is providing limited value in other areas (visually, impact on character etc) and, as a private garden with no protection in place could be cleared at any time thus completely destroying any remaining habitat. As such, on balance, the minor harm in this instance is outweighed by the positives of the scheme. The applicant has worked with the LPA to ensure that surveys are completed, enhancement measures will be included as well as the in excess of 10% BNG. Therefore, on balance, the scheme is considered to be acceptable with regard to biodiversity impacts and broadly accords with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*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. A condition shall be attached to the permission to secure this.

*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.

*Other matters

Developer contributions (Wheeled Bins)

A Unilateral Undertaking to secure the provision of wheeled bins has been submitted as part of the application process. The development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy LP4 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 in this regard.

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.

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. No CIL forms have been provided but this matter will be pursued by the Council's Implementation Team following the grant of planning permission.

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 acceptable in principle, and there would be no harm to the character or appearance of the area, heritage assets, on residential amenity, highway safety, increased flood risk, impact on trees or biodiversity and it can therefore be supported.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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