OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00967/PIP Permission in Principle

Proposal: Permission in principle for the proposed residential development of 5-9 dwellings

Location: Land At 291 And Rear Of 293 To 307 Ugg Mere Court Road Ramsey Heights

Applicant: Messrs Bedford

Grid Ref: 525346 285230

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is as area of land to the east of Ugg Mere Court Road (the main road passing through Ramsey Heights).

The site measures approx. 0.58ha extending east from the developed edge of Ugg Mere Court Road into the undeveloped land to the rear of No's. 293 - 307 Ugg Mere Court Road. Access is to the south of No.291 and the red line plan includes this property. There is a gated access (but no dropped kerb) from Ugg Mere Court Road, the access is formed of grassland between No's 291 and 293. The site itself is not well defined by boundary treatments (beyond those associated with the dwellings on the Ugg mere Court Road frontage). As such, those to the west are informal and made up of fencing, hedging, outbuildings and so on with the curtilage of No. 291 extending further east into the site (as is characteristic of those dwellings to the north of the access with deeper gardens) thereby forming a partial boundary consisting of a close board fence. Further east, the site expands into the open countryside beyond with tree planting visible and post and rail fencing visible in the distance but approx. 61m and 68m outside the red line boundary respectively.

It should be noted that this site (including land outside of the red line plan and up to the previously referred to boundaries) was put forward as an option under the Land Availability Assessments as part of the Local Plan update (Ramsey 10) but was dismissed as an option due to the loss of agricultural land and the fact that it lies within Flood Zone 3a. Further details on this are in the proceeding sections of this report.

In terms of constraints, as above, the site lies within Flood Zone 3a as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data, it is not within a Conservation Area and there are no Listed Buildings or trees subject to Preservation Orders in the immediate vicinity.

The current proposal is the first part of a permission in principle application, which only assesses the principal issues namely location, use, and amount of development proposed and establishes whether a site is suitable in principle. Should this application be successful, the applicant will have to submit a Full Technical Details Consent (FULTDC) application covering all other detailed material planning considerations. Permission in Principle is sought for 5-9 dwellings on the site.

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

It should be noted that the adopted Scheme of Delegation states that all applications for permission in principle are delegated unless the proposal is recommended for approval and contrary to the adopted and draft development plan. As this is a refusal (and given that tilted

balance is engaged the Local Plan Policies concerned with housing supply are no longer up to date) this decision is delegated.

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
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
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)
Land Availability Assessments (2024)
The National Design Guide (2021)
Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None-relevant

CONSULTATIONS

Ramsey Town Council recommend approval stating that they will re-assess at a later stage (full technical details - FULTDC)

*CCC Highways - No objections in principle. Improvements required which can be dealt with under FULTDC.

*HDC Environmental Health - No objections in principle - further consideration of amenity impacts on 293 Ugg Mere Court Road and any necessary mitigation would be required under a FULTDC.

*HDC Landscapes Team - No representations received at the time of determination.

*Cadent - No objections in principle.

REPRESENTATIONS

One objection has been received and this is available to view on HDC's Public Access Site. It broadly relates to the following matters:

*Impact on area of natural beauty and loss of agricultural land.
*Loss of view.
*Impact on wildlife.
*Pressure on infrastructure.
*Insufficient access.
*Flood risk.
*Concerns over future potential for development of wider site.

Officer comments: Loss of view is not a material planning consideration and cannot be taken into account in the determination of this application, nor is the site within a designated area of outstanding natural beauty. Concerns regarding the development of the land outside of the red line are noted but each application must be assessed upon its own merits and so again, this cannot be taken into account. All other matters are discussed in the proceeding sections of this report.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

This application is made pursuant to the Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) Order 2017 (as amended) (PIP regulations) that provides opportunity for an applicant to apply as to whether permission in principle is acceptable for a site, having regard to specific legislative requirements and, in accordance with ref. 58-012-20180615 of the NPPG, as to whether the location, land use and amount of development proposed is acceptable. The permission in principle (PIP) consent route is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development which separates the consideration of matters of principle for proposed development from the technical detail of the development.

The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second ('technical details consent') stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. PIP establishes that a particular scale of housing-led development on a defined site is acceptable. The aim is for a PIP to minimise the upfront and at-risk work of applicants.

The report addresses the principal, important and controversial issues which are in this case:

1. Location
2. Land Use
3. Amount of Development
4. Other Matters

1. Location

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 5,501 homes. The current 5YHLS is 4,430 homes equivalent to 4.03 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'. While 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.

As referenced in the preceding sections of this report, the Local Plan is undergoing a review/update and the Land Availability Assessments (LAA)consider this site. The site was put forward as part of a larger site (Ramsey 10:Land off Ugg Mere Court Road) for delivery of 50 homes The outcome of the evaluation was that the site (as a whole) was not suitable for delivery of housing for two key reasons:

*The land is grade 1 agricultural land.

*The land lies within Flood Zone 3a.

In solely assessing this site, whilst Policies LP9 (small settlements) and LP10 (the countryside) are out of date (and so afforded less weight in the determination of this application) they are not to be entirely disregarded.

Ramsey Heights is defined as a small settlement under Policy LP9 of the Local Plan which states that these settlements can support proposals within the built-up area (BUA) of the settlement subject to tests relating to the sustainability of the settlement (levels of infrastructure, accessing services by sustainable travel methods and so on) as well as the impact on the settlement as a whole. The Local Plan defines a BUA as a distinct group of buildings that include 30 or more homes. It also states that land which relates more to the group of buildings rather than to the surrounding countryside is also considered to form part of the BUA.

The Local Plan goes on to state that the BUA will exclude open spaces which extend into the countryside and are not well contained by strong boundary features or primarily relate to the countryside in their use, form or character.

For the purposes of this assessment, given the character of the site, the undefined boundaries, and its relationship with the surrounding countryside it is considered that it lies outside of the BUA. As such, Policy LP10 (The Countryside) is the correct policy for assessment.

LP10 seeks to limit development in the countryside unless allowed through other opportunities provided for within the Local Plan. LP10 states that all development in the countryside must:

a. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:

i. avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) where possible, and

ii. avoiding Grade 1 agricultural land unless there are exceptional circumstances where the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the loss of land;

b. recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and

c. not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

In this case the land is defined as grade 1 agricultural land (and so land of the highest grading). Whilst it is acknowledged that within this rural district the loss of some high value agricultural land is inevitable if housing is to be provided (much of the developed area of Ramsey Heights is the same grading) it is questionable if the provision of 5-9 dwellings (the tenure of which is not known at this stage) outweighs the loss of the land. The only developed section is the dwelling (No.291), it is not a previously developed site and so there is no reason that it cannot be used for agricultural purposes. On balance therefore it is concluded that the loss of this land would be harmful and contrary to the policy as there are other sites within the district which could accommodate this quantum of development on land (including previously developed land) which has a lower grading.

In terms of parts b of LP10, permission in principle applications are not required to provide any details as to layout, scale, design etc. However, in considering this, the LPA are of the view that the introduction of residential development on this site would result in the erosion of land which forms a natural separation between the built-up area of the (relatively linear section) of the village and the countryside beyond. The site is considered to relate much more to the countryside than to the settlement and so would fail to recognise the character and beauty of the countryside by the introduction of alien features in an otherwise unspoilt setting.

In terms of part c, whilst a refusal solely on these grounds (especially considering tilted balance) would not be justified, it remains that the erosion of this land and further introduction of built development into the countryside would result in the introduction of uncharacteristic factors such as noise, light, odour etc. Whilst unlikely to be severe, residential development and its accompanying characteristics all intensifies these impacts and cumulatively has potential to cause harm.

Whilst the site is considered to lie outside of the BUA (and so Policy LP9 need not be applied under normal circumstances), given that tilted balance is engaged, an assessment has been conducted as to if the site was within the BUA of the settlement. These tests relate to the sustainability of a location when services within it are considered, opportunities for users to access everyday services and facilities and general impact upon the character.

Ramsey Heights provides no services with residents reliant on Ramsey St Mary's (which in itself has limited services). The centre of Ramsey St Mary's (where there is a shop and primary school) lies approx. 3.1km from the application site. There is a church (slightly closer to the site), but services remain limited. It is however acknowledged that the Spatial Planning Area of Ramsey lies 2.8km to the east and there is a regular bus service providing a service to Ramsey and

Peterborough with at least three stops along Ugg Mere Court Road. There is a footpath that runs the length of the eastern side of Ugg mere Court Road (where the entrance to the site is) and so occupants of the site would be able to access this service. Residents of the site would likely need to have significant reliance on a private motor vehicle, despite the footpath links and bus connectivity with adjacent settlements. Therefore for 5-9 new dwellings in this location, due to lack of services and facilities the development is considered to be unsustainable.

In principle there are no fundamental objections to some growth within small settlements and the concerns raised in objections are noted. However, whilst there are bus services to nearby settlements it is still considered the lack of service provision in the village would render 5-9 dwellings unsustainable and contrary to parts a Policy LP9 of the Local Plan in this location.

In this case, the main harm is when assessed against part c of Policy LP9. Ramsey Heights consists mainly of development either side of Ugg Mere Court Road which is the main road leading through the village. Built development varies in age, scale and design and is punctuated by views across the open countryside between properties. The western side of the road has development (historically formed) extending into the countryside (Middle Drove and Harpers Drove for example) with the eastern side (especially in the vicinity of the application site) forming a linear pattern of development. Whilst it is acknowledged that matters such as design and layout are reserved for a FULTDC application, it is considered that introducing any form of built development on this site would result in the introduction of backland development beyond the existing character of built form interrupting the established pattern of development in this section of Ramsey Heights. As stated in the preceding sections of this report, it would also result in the erosion of land which separates the built form of the village from the open countryside beyond.

Overall, whilst as required by titled balance reduced weight has been applied to Policies LP9 and LP10 of the Local Plan to 2036 it is considered that allowing this development outside of the built-up area of Ramsey Heights would result in visual harm by encroachment and expansion of a small settlement into the countryside. The applicant has not demonstrated that the development would fall within a category which would allow for the relaxation of these policies. It is concluded that this scheme would result in significant and demonstrable visual harm to the rural character of the area and the wider settlement as well as the loss of valuable grade 1 agricultural land and the benefits do not outweigh this harm, contrary to Local Plan Policies LP9 (part a and c) and LP10 (in its entirety).

Matters regarding flood risk are considered in the proceeding sections of this report.

It should also be acknowledged that whilst outside of the Great Fen Landscape and Visual Setting it does border the site

2. Land use

The site lies within Flood Zone 3a as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data and the 2024 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and it is noted that a concern has been raised about the impacts of flooding. Generally, development of this nature would not be permitted within Flood Zone 3a as it would fail the sequential test as set out in the NPPF (2024).

However, it should be regarded 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 LPA would not pursue a Flood Risk Assessment as the site would be regarded as being within Flood Zone 1 and treated as such within the NPPF (2024 guidance).

No details have been provided as to how surface water and sewerage will be managed (and these will form part of an application for FULTDC in the event of a successful appeal). However, it is not considered that the quantum of development proposed would place undue pressure on waste water disposal.

Policy LP14 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of a proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

The Huntingdonshire Design Guide 2017 states when considering residential development there are three key issues that need to be addressed which are loss of privacy, reducing the level of daylight and being overbearing in size and layout.

Officers need to be satisfied at this stage that the site is capable of accommodating the quantum of development proposed without having a detrimental impact on neighbour's amenity and the amenity of the proposed occupiers.

HDC's Environmental Health Team have been consulted and whilst they raise no objections in principle they have advised that the applicant should consider the impacts of noise on the occupants of dwellings either side of the access road and mitigate this where necessary. E.g. a gravel drive would create more noise pollution than hard surfacing. Such matters could be addressed under a FULTDC application in the event of a successful appeal.

As detailed in the preceding sections of this report there are other residential dwellings and land in the vicinity of the application site and the layout would need to be carefully considered to prevent any harm arising from the factors detailed within the Huntingdonshire Design Guide. However, for the purposes of this assessment it is considered that the site is capable of accommodating the quantum of development proposed and could be arranged such to limit negative impacts on occupants of adjacent dwellings and land and future occupants of the proposed dwellings. Such matters would need to be considered at FULTDC stage in the event of a successful appeal.

Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways Team have been consulted as part of this process and raise no objections in principle but do note that in the event that 5 dwellings are exceeded that a bell mouth junction would be required with footway to one side and it is unclear if this can be accommodated within the layout. Furthermore, they would also require details of visibility splays, radius kerbs and footway (if in excess of 5 dwellings), access width and turning and parking details. They are satisfied that this could be dealt with under a FULTDC application in the event of a successful appeal.

Overall, whilst concerns surrounding the access are noted, given the details provided alongside the quantum of development and lack of objection from CCC Highways as specialists, it is considered that the scheme could be realised in accordance with Policies LP5, LP15, LP14, LP17 and LP37 of the Local Plan to 2036.

3. Amount of Development

Local Policy LP12 states new development will be expected to be well designed based upon a thorough understanding of the constraints and appraisal of the site's context, delivering attractive, usable and long-lasting buildings and spaces. A proposal will be supported where it can demonstrate that it contributes positively to the areas character and identity, successfully integrates with adjoining buildings, the routes and spaces between buildings, topography and landscape.

In this case, whilst the LPA are satisfied that the density of development can be accommodated on the site and matters of scale, design and massing are not matters for consideration at permission in principle stage as discussed above it is considered that the proposal would result in the introduction of development to a rural location which would be harmful to its character and which would result in erosion of the land between the village and the wider countryside. Furthermore, the introduction of backland development beyond the existing character of built form in this section of Ramsey Heights would interrupt the established pattern of development.

It would therefore fail to accord with Policies LP11 and LP12 (in particular parts a, b and c), parts C1 and I1, of the National Design Guide (2021), and the provisions of the NPPF (2024), in particular Para. 135 parts a and c.

4. Other Matters

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states that the scope of permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of development as assessed above. In the event of a successful appeal the applicant would need to also receive a grant of technical details consent before the development can proceed.

*Ecology

Policy LP30 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be required to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and that a proposal will ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type and location of development.

Further to the above (and separate from the requirements of LP30) the development will be 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 FULTDC 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.

Concerns have been raised regarding impacts on wildlife and the presence of grassland and hedging within, surrounding, and immediately adjacent to the site means that a preliminary ecological survey and any additional species-specific surveys would be required as part of any FULTDC application to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and appropriate mitigated. Details of how a 10% BNG will be achieved in accordance with the legislation would also be required.

*Water Efficiency

Any future application for technical details consent would need to confirm compliance with the optional Building Regulation requirement for water efficiency in Approved Document G, as set out in criteria j. of Policy LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.

*Accessible and Adaptable Homes

Policy LP25 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 requires all new dwellings to comply with optional Building Regulation requirement M4(2) 'accessible and adaptable homes', unless it can be demonstrated that site specific factors make this impractical or unviable. Any future application for technical details consent would need to confirm compliance with this policy.

*Developer Contributions

Any subsequent Technical Details application should be accompanied by a signed Unilateral Undertaking for the provision of wheeled bins in accordance with the Developer Contributions SPD (2011).

*Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

As the proposed development is for new residential dwellings, the development would 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.

*Utility apparatus

Cadent have identified apparatus in the vicinity of the application site. Their comments (published on the planning file and dated 25th of June 2025) raise no objections btu provides details on areas where development must be avoided and easements. These should be considered as part of a FULTDC application in the event of a successful appeal.

* Planning Balance

The proposal will result in the delivery of five to nine homes towards the housing supply. This is afforded moderate weight.

In terms of the economic dimension of sustainable development, the proposal would contribute towards economic growth, including job creation - during the construction phase and in the longer term through the additional population assisting the local economy through spending on local services/facilities. This is afforded moderate weight.

However when these benefits are weighed against the above identified visual harm to the countryside and the sustainability harm in terms of access to services and facilities, it is concluded that the harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when considering all the positives and negatives of the proposal into account.

*Conclusion

Section 38(6) TCPA 2004 states that "if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

The proposed development is contrary to the development plan, being residential development in the open countryside and in the rural policy area outside the built-up area of Ramsey Heights which does not meet any development plan policy exceptions.

Whilst reduced weight has been given to the relevant policies given the situation with the Council's five-year housing land supply and application of tilted balance, the proposal represents an unacceptable visual encroachment into the countryside, by introducing a backland form of development, where the prevailing character and pattern of development in the vicinity is one of ribbon linear development of houses fronting the main road, with deep rear gardens bounding the

countryside. The development would result in a visually odd and harmful staggered boundary with the countryside, exacerbating this countryside encroachment, when compared with neighbouring sites, rather than the clear existing linear form of built form and then the countryside beyond. Furthermore, the location of the site is considered to be unsustainable for 5-9 dwellings proposed, having regard to the limited services and infrastructure within the nearby village.

It is therefore considered the benefits would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the harm, and so the proposal is contrary to Policy LP9 (parts a and c), LP10 (in entirety), LP11, LP12 (parts a, b and c), the National Design Guide (2021) parts C1 and I1 and the provisions of the NPPF (2024), in particular Para. 135 parts a and c.

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