

To Development Management
From Planning Policy
Date 14th October 2021
Reference DC/21/0315/FUL

Proposal Specialist dementia care village for up to 120 residents, including: 20 x 6-bedroom apartments provided within five buildings; central amenity building containing shop, restaurant, pub, communal hall, offices, and staff accommodation; club/hobby rooms; treatment/counselling rooms; vehicle and cycle parking; landscaping proposals and associated works.

Location Little Court, Haverhill Road, Little Wratting, CB9 7UD.

These policy comments focus on the acceptability or otherwise of the principle of the proposed development. They supplement the previous comments of the 3rd of September 2021 and are written after consideration of the Rapleys response of 15th September 2021.

Policy DM23

Policy DM23 relates to special housing needs and is irrefutably relevant to this application. It is not accepted that the plan is silent on specialist care as DM23 applies. The policy states that new schemes for accommodation for elderly and/or vulnerable people will be permitted on sites deemed appropriate for residential development by other policies contained within the local plan. The site is located in the countryside where residential development is not normally permitted (see policies DM5, DM27, CS4 and CS13) and the proposal therefore does not benefit from support from these policies.

Notwithstanding the above paragraph 5.7 of the supporting text to Policy DM23 recognises that the need for specialist accommodation for elderly people is likely to increase over the plan period, and that due to space and/or other medical standards or requirements some very specialised care homes cannot find suitable sites within the more sustainable settlements in the district. In such cases evidence needs to be provided as to why other sequentially preferable buildings or sites are unsuitable and to demonstrate the need for the facility in the proposed locality. The nature of this proposal, specifically designed for those living with severe dementia justifies consideration as a very specialised care home.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

PPG - Housing for older and disabled people (June 2019) sets out government guidance on planning for older and disabled people. Paragraph 16 is of particular relevance as it addresses what should be considered when assessing planning applications for specialist housing for older people, citing the location and the viability of a development as factors. Where there is an identified unmet need for specialist housing, local authorities should take a positive approach to schemes that propose to address this need.

Comment

Policy DM23 is a positively worded policy which aims to allow accommodation for elderly and/or vulnerable people on sites appropriate for residential development and subject to listed criteria. This proposals countryside location means it is on a site deemed inappropriate for this type of residential development by other policies in the local plan (Policies DM5, DM27, CS4 and CS13).

NPPF Paragraph 12 of the NPPF confirms the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making and that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan permission should not usually be granted. It also advises that Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

In this case paragraph 5.7 of the supporting text to Policy DM23 and advice contained in the PPG - Housing for older and disabled people (June 2019) are material considerations which warrant particular consideration in the planning balance. The applicant has submitted a report on the sequential approach adopted for site selection and West Suffolk CCG in consultation with SCC has provided comments regarding the need for specialist dementia care in this location (It should be noted this response recognised a demand for complex dementia care in the locality but could not quantify it).

The site is not ordinarily considered suitable for residential development on sustainability grounds in the rural area. However, the applicant has set out the benefits of a quieter rural environment for future residents. If the case officer is content that the applicant has satisfactorily demonstrated that they have not been able to find a sequentially preferable suitable site and that there is a need for the facility in the proposed locality, this would warrant consideration of a departure from the development plan, if there are no other major material planning considerations (such as site accessibility) contrary to the proposal, that outweigh the identified benefits in the planning balance.