

<b>DECISION DATE</b> 7 January 2009	<b>APPLICATION NO.</b> 08/01154/FUL A7	<b>PLANNING COMMITTEE:</b> 12 January 2009
<b>DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED</b>  ERECTION OF EXTRA CARE HOUSING COMPRISING 14 NO DWELLINGS WITH CAR PARKING		<b>SITE ADDRESS</b>  COVE HOUSE COVE ROAD SILVERDALE CARNFORTH LANCASHIRE LA5 0SG
<b>APPLICANT:</b>  The Abbeyfield Silverdale & District Society Ltd Cove House Cove Road Silverdale Carnforth Lancashire LA5 0SG		<b>AGENT:</b>  Harrison Pitt Architects

#### **REASON FOR DELAY**

Deferred by Committee to allow a site visit.

#### **PARISH NOTIFICATION**

Silverdale Parish Council objects to the proposal and have the following concerns about it:

1. Safety - the scheme would result in increased traffic entering and leaving the site access, which is on a dangerous corner
2. The location is not ideal for elderly people as it is well away from the main village amenities
3. The need for the accommodation is questionable; the Parish Plan identified a need for sheltered housing, but in the centre of the village
4. The appearance of the houses is bland; it would be improved if chimneys were included
5. If consent is granted, it should be subject to a minimum age restriction to ensure that it is only occupied by elderly people
6. House type D is too large and all the buildings should be single storey.

#### **LAND USE ALLOCATION/DEPARTURE**

Within the Arnside/Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS

**County Council Highways** - Pre-application discussions were held about this development and there are no objections in principle. However the junction at the site entrance has substandard sight lines; the applicant should be asked to contribute towards the cost of traffic calming measures to reduce vehicle speeds. These would include junction improvements, moving the 30mph limit further out of the village, and improved signing. In line with County Council policy they ask for cycle parking within the development. They also ask for a contribution towards the cost of funding public transport (the area is served by the Silverdale Shuttle bus). As the site is considered to have a low level of accessibility this is calculated at £17,780. They would like to see this invested in an upgraded service, with better signage and timetables. Funding could also be used to provide better timetabling and discounted tickets to encourage more people to use the service.

Lancashire County Council also asks for a contribution of £6,720 towards waste management and a further contribution (as yet unspecified) towards maintaining biodiversity. The request for these contributions has been passed on to the applicants' agents and their response will be reported at the meeting.

**Environmental Health** - Recommend that a condition should be attached to any consent restricting the hours when construction work takes place.

**Strategic Housing** - The proposal would meet needs identified in both the Housing Needs Survey 2004 (updated in 2007) and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008. The District has a growing population of elderly people and those needing extra care in rural areas have no provision available. The Council requires 40% of housing development to be affordable - the proposal here is that of the 14 planned homes 12 would be for shared ownership, and 2 for social rent. This more than meets the requirement and seems a sensible balance between the two types of tenure, given the high proportion of elderly owner occupiers in the area likely to be in need of this kind of accommodation. Extra care as a concept is one supported by the Council in its Housing strategy. To date, the only extra care housing is in Council and Housing Association schemes in the urban areas of Lancaster and Morecambe. This proposal would not only meet a need in Silverdale, but would encourage other developers to look at meeting this growing need without recourse to scarce public funding.

**United Utilities** - No objections. Water mains will need to be extended to serve this site. A separate metered supply will be required for each dwelling.

**County Council Social Services** - Support the application. The Lancaster Strategic Housing Assessment 2008 has identified a need for extra care housing provision in the Lancaster district and the development at Cove House will go some way towards meeting it. Existing extra care housing within the district is concentrated in Hala, Westgate and Skerton; provision is needed to serve the rural area to the north. At present the only extra care housing available is in the social rented sector and this is not what the majority of older owner occupiers aspire to. The Cove House development will increase choice by making such housing available on a shared ownership basis. The Cove House development has also been designed to meet Best Practice standards, which existing provision in the district does not meet.

**Arnside/Silverdale AONB executive** - The purpose of designating an AONB is the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area. There has clearly been an attempt to use materials to complement the local vernacular style. The development incorporates innovative and sustainable features which are to be welcomed. However they are concerned about building on a previously undeveloped orchard, on elevated land overlooking Morecambe Bay. The landscape impact needs to be carefully considered, and the community need clearly demonstrated. The AONB Management Plan identifies a need for affordable housing for young people; it does not specifically mention housing for the elderly. Assuming that such a need is shown to exist, they would prefer a wholly single storey development at a lower density and are concerned about the loss of trees on the seaward side of the site. They support the proposal in the Sustainability Statement to install a central woodchip boiler as an alternative to gas heating. A development of this kind should provide adequate links to village amenities suitable for wheelchair users and be well provided with public transport.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS RECEIVED

Twelve letters and emails have been received from people living nearby, who object on the following grounds:

- The access on to Cove Road is dangerous and unsuitable for additional traffic
- Fourteen dwellings is excessive and would amount to a housing estate
- Unsuitable development within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Loss of trees within the site
- Adverse effect on wildlife, including bats, owls and deer
- No need for the development
- There are vacancies within the old people's home at Cove House
- Site is too far from the centre of the village and its community facilities
- The future of the shuttle bus service is uncertain
- The development does not include provision for affordable housing
- Permission has already been granted for six old people's flats in the centre of Silverdale
- No additional building should be allowed so close to National Trust land
- Existing housing stock could be used to accommodate elderly people.

One of the letters is accompanied by details of existing properties in Silverdale which it is argued are suitable for the needs of elderly people. Its authors have since sent a further objection by email which argues that the need for sheltered accommodation has not been adequately demonstrated and that it would be more useful for Cove House to provide support for people so that they can continue to live in their present homes.

A petition with 16 signatures from people living in the immediate area has been submitted opposing the application, on similar grounds. It refers to the Silverdale Parish Plan (see report below) and argues that any sheltered housing should be in the centre of the village. Some of the signatories have also written individual objection letters, which are included in those summarised above.

Another objection comes from a resident of Nether Kellet who is concerned that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within it should be protected from any unnecessary development, and that the loss of trees should be resisted. He points out that Silverdale does not have mains sewerage. The area is isolated and unsuitable for additional elderly residents; also the access is by means of a narrow road already congested with traffic to and from caravan sites.

The National Trust, which owns land adjoining the site, has written to express concern that the site is a prominent one on land which is at present undeveloped, on the edge of the village. They recognise that the design is a good one but they would like to see it restricted to only one storey. They ask that a hedge should be planted along the northern boundary and that the existing belt of trees between the development and Morecambe Bay should be retained.

Councillor Fishwick objects to the proposal, on the grounds that the site is three quarters of a mile from the centre of the village and the site cannot be regarded as sustainable; frail elderly people will not be able to access its facilities without vehicular transport. There are no taxis in Silverdale, only the Silverdale shuttle bus which is primarily a link to Silverdale railway station. This service depends on a subsidy from Lancashire County Council and its future is uncertain. She argues that because of its location the development is inappropriate, over intensive and incapable of meeting the needs of people with disabilities. The Silverdale Parish Plan identifies a need for sheltered housing, but within the village; this site is outside it.

## **REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This application was considered by Committee at its meeting on 8 December. A decision was deferred, to allow Members an opportunity to visit the site. This report is a revised and extended version of the earlier one.

The site is at the north east end of Silverdale, on the north side of the driveway to Cove House (shown on some maps as Stone Bower) which is a residential home for the elderly. It is approximately half a mile from the centre of the village as the crow flies, but as the road follows an indirect route it is some three quarters of a mile from it on foot (see the plan which appears at the end of this report).

The bulk of the land concerned is at present an orchard, which is also used as grazing land; the remainder is laid out as a car park. There are mature trees in and around it. To the north is an open field, and beyond it the ground used by Silverdale Cricket Club. To the south is a small group of houses accessed off the minor road to Cove Well.

Morecambe Bay is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (and a Ramsar site) but this designation does not include Cove House or the land within its grounds.

### **THE CURRENT PROPOSAL**

The applicants are a charitable organisation providing accommodation for elderly people. They wish to diversify the facilities offered at Cove House by providing "extra care housing" suitable for elderly people who need support, but are able to maintain a degree of independence. It is envisaged that the equivalent of one full time carer will be employed on the site. The scheme submitted involves a group of fourteen units made up of 8 two bedroom bungalows, 2 three bedroom bungalows, and 4 two bedroom flats. It also includes a communal lounge/meeting room with first floor staff and office facilities. The materials specified are natural limestone for the walls, natural slate for the roofs, and stained timber for the doors. The windows will be of composite wood and aluminium construction.

The layout of the accommodation incorporates "Secured by Design" principles. The communal garden is arranged so that it would be accessible to all the residents. Some of the occupiers of the accommodation are likely to be confused and the garden has been designed so that it can be used as a recreational area without the risk of their wandering off the site.

The statement accompanying the application includes a section on providing appropriate and affordable tenure. It notes that the predominant form of housing tenure in Silverdale is home ownership, and that house values are high (the Silverdale Parish Plan, published in 2003, gave the average property purchase price in the village as £157,000 compared with £68,000 within the District as a whole – as per the figures quoted for 2001). A large proportion of the houses in the area is owned outright, rather than with a mortgage or loan (52.6% as opposed to 34.7% within the Lancaster District as a whole). Based on this the applicants calculate that shared ownership would be appropriate for 85% of the village population. This is the form of tenure proposed for 12 of the 14 dwellings; the other two would be available for rent. The Society does not however rule out making a larger proportion of the dwellings available for rent if there proves to be a higher than expected level of demand. There would also be a service charge; this would be variable depending on the level of support required for home maintenance by each householder.

It is also stated that the accommodation has been designed with energy conservation in mind in order to preserve resources, cut running costs and provide a comfortable environment for the occupants. Solar panels are included to assist with heating domestic hot water. The developers have considered the use of wind power, but have concluded that the site is unsuitable for it because of the trees and the landscape impact of wind turbines within the AONB. They are however investigating the potential for a woodchip boiler.

The proposal is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Survey prepared by a consultant. This includes a tree survey and recommendations for protecting those trees which are to be retained, and replacing those which would need to be felled to accommodate the development. As submitted the proposal envisaged the removal of a line of mature trees along the western boundary, on the grounds that if they blew down during a storm they could damage nearby houses. Although the trees are large ones they are in the main healthy and there is no reason to believe that they are more at risk from storm damage than many others. Following a site meeting, the applicants have agreed to a programme for gradual removal of the trees with a programme of replacement screen planting, rather than wholesale felling.

Part of the site is crossed by an electricity supply line with a pole mounted substation; this would be relocated as part of the development. As no mains drainage is available to serve the development a foul treatment plant will be required; this would be located close to the septic tank serving Cove House.

The Abbeyfield Society is willing to enter into a section 106 agreement under which the accommodation would be marketed initially only to people who are 65 and over (or in the case of couples, with a combined age of 120 or over) and resident in the parishes of Silverdale, Warton and the Yealands, or who wish to relocate in the area because they have a son or daughter living there. If there is insufficient interest after a 13 week period the qualification area would be extended to adjoining parishes. If a unit cannot be filled after 26 weeks, the qualifying area would be extended to cover the whole of the Lancaster City District.

The age definition used is different from, but not incompatible with, the usual City Council requirement that people living in designated sheltered accommodation should be over the age of 55. This approach is used to accommodate the needs of a couple with a substantial age difference, and the needs of those who develop chronic diseases usually associated with old age.

## **PLANNING POLICIES**

The Core Strategy contains the following policies which are particularly relevant to the application:

- **SC1**, which sets out criteria for providing sustainable development;
- **SC3**, which includes Silverdale in the list of those villages which have the services needed to accommodate new development for local needs;
- **SC4**, which states that the Council will release land in accordance with the principle of sustainable development and ensure that new housing addresses identified local housing need;
- **SC5**, which emphasises the need to ensure that new development is of an appropriate quality, especially within designated areas such as AONBs.

The following "saved" policies with the Lancaster District Plan need to be considered:

- **H7**, setting out requirements for new housing in the larger villages;
- **H17**, which states that proposals for new sheltered housing will only be permitted where the site is convenient for bus routes, local services and facilities;
- **E4**, which requires that development within an AONB should take account of its character;
- **E13**, which states that development which results in the loss of significant trees or woodland will not be permitted; and,
- **R21**, which requires appropriate provision for people with disabilities.

The Arnside/Silverdale AONB Management Plan and the Silverdale Parish Plan (while non-statutory documents), are also material considerations. The Silverdale Parish Plan contains a section on "Older People" which notes that several people (though not many) identified a need for sheltered housing for

the elderly within the village. However it recognises that it will be difficult to find a site for this form of development in the centre of the village.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

The application site is within the grounds of Cove House. It can be argued that technically it is a brown field one, but this ignores the fact that most of the land (other than the car park) is currently used for what are normally regarded as agricultural purposes. It is therefore particularly important to show that the development would meet a specific local need.

Silverdale attracts a large number of active retired people. A factsheet summarising data for Silverdale ward from the 2001 Census appears as an appendix to this report; it will be seen that 28% of the population of the area is aged 65 or over. The equivalent figure for the District as a whole is 17%. For Carnforth, the nearest town, it is 18% and for Warton it is 21%. Inevitably as people in this age group get older they will become less active. Although a substantial part of the existing housing stock in Silverdale consists of bungalows, few of them have been designed with wheelchair access in mind. The proposal would therefore meet a local need which can be expected to increase over time. The Council's Strategic Housing Service has pointed out that at present only a limited amount of extra care housing is available within the Lancaster District and all of it is in the Lancaster/Morecambe area.

The site is served by the Silverdale shuttle bus service, but it is not particularly well located in relation to shops and other local community facilities (with the exception of the bowling green and the cricket ground) because of its distance from the centre of the village. Much of Cove Road is narrow, and part of it has no footway. In this respect the application site is inferior to 20 Emesgate Lane, where a proposal for six sheltered flats was approved by the Planning Committee last year. However it is intended to meet the needs of a slightly different group of people, in need of a greater degree of support which would be readily available in conjunction with the existing old people's home at Cove House. The internal layout of the accommodation has been designed with the needs of disabled people in mind.

A welcome feature of the scheme is the provision of secure storage areas, with charging facilities, for electric scooters. This could also be used to provide secure parking for cycles, as required by the County Council, but as few if any of the residents are likely to be cyclists the need here is for facilities for visitors to the site. This can be addressed by a suitably worded condition.

The design of the buildings is of the high quality required for a site in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although some people have suggested that all the buildings should be single storey, this would be detrimental to the overall appearance of the scheme and would result in a larger footprint; there is no justification for asking for an amendment of this kind. The scheme uses materials traditional to the area; it is attractive and in scale with its setting. It will require the loss of some trees, but there is scope for replacement planting within the site, which will benefit the area in the long term.

Many of the objections from neighbours to the proposal refer to problems with the access to the site. Its layout is not ideal; the driveway into the site leaves Cove Road at a point where there is a sharp bend, and there is another minor road to the south which creates, in effect, a crossroads. Although the area is within a 30mph speed limit this is not always respected. Despite this, the County Council as highway authority does not object to the development in principle. A contribution towards the cost of relatively minor works needed to upgrade the junction can be secured by a Section 106 agreement. The developers are happy to contribute funding towards this.

A contribution towards public transport provision is more contentious from the applicants' point of view. They have suggested the option of providing to provide a bus shelter, which would be of benefit both to residents of the site and to the community as a whole. While this would be useful, in view of the distance between the site and the centre of the village, and the lack of an adequate footpath along the side of Cove Road, the most important consideration is that a bus service continues to be available. At present its future is in doubt. There is therefore a strong case therefore for requesting a contribution, through a Section 106 Agreement, towards its continued operation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The scheme will meet an identified local need as described in this report. The design is of the high standard required for a sensitive location within the AONB. The applicants have agreed to retain at least part of the existing belt of trees at the western end of the site.

Important arguments against the proposal are the distance of the site from the community facilities in the centre of Silverdale, and the awkward access off Cove Road. Both have been raised by the objectors, including Silverdale Parish Council and Councillor Fishwick. The position of the site on the edge of the village is compensated for by the presence of the existing Cove Road care facility, which is well equipped to provide the level of support needed by the intended residents. The reason that this particular site has been put forward is because it would be possible to operate the home and the sheltered housing in conjunction with one another.

So far as the access is concerned, there is scope for improving the layout of the junction and the principle of the development is acceptable to the County Council as highway authority.

Taking these factors into consideration, it is recommended that the proposal should be supported, subject to a Section 106 agreement covering occupation of the accommodation and a contribution towards highway and transport improvements.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

This application has to be considered in relation to two sections of the Human Rights Act: Article 8 (privacy/family life), and Article 1 of the First Protocol (protection of property). There are no issues arising from the proposal which appear to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That **PERMISSION BE GRANTED** subject to an agreement under Section 106 of the Town And Country Planning Act 1990 covering occupancy restriction, highway safety improvements and a contribution towards the continued operation of the Silverdale Shuttle bus service, and conditions as follows:

1. Standard three year condition.
2. Amended plans 13 November 2008 covering retention of shelter belt at western end of the site.
3. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.
4. Samples of materials to be agreed.
5. Occupation to be persons over 55 only.
6. Cycle parking for visitors to the site to be provided.
7. Construction work to take place only between 08:00-18:00 Monday to Saturday.
8. Landscaping scheme to be agreed.
9. Programme of replacement planting for trees on the western site boundary to be agreed.
10. Accommodation to be operated only in conjunction with the old people's home at Cove House (and not separately sold etc)