

Land to the east of Cambridge Road, Hardwick

Introduction

Chivers Farms together with Cambridgeshire based house builder Hill, have formed a partnership to promote and develop a long term masterplan for the land to the east of Cambridge Road, Hardwick. Their proposal is for a development that delivers extensive community facilities, a local employment hub and a relief road linking the centre of the village directly to the St Neots Road, all funded through the delivery of high quality housing.

Chivers Farms has had a long association with Hardwick. They have seen the village expand in size moving west away from its historic centre. Hardwick's historic growth has seen the village become one of South Cambridgeshire's larger villages by population. The Parish Council, working with the local residents have identified a strong desire to see the facilities and services in the village enhanced. Chivers Farms and Hill have an aspiration to rebalance the village, reinforcing the village centre around the Primary School and shops and providing significant community facilities through the development of high quality housing.

The initial proposals for the land are very much at an embryonic stage with the current masterplan showing:-

- Relief road connecting the village centre to St Neots Road
- Two pedestrian crossings to Cambridge Road
- Large areas of public open space to include three football pitches, circular walk and informal recreational areas
- Approximately 235 homes of which 40% will be affordable homes.

Other potential uses for the site may also include:-

- Local Shop(s)
- Community Building
- Sports Pavilion
- Car Parking for the Primary School, Shops, Sports Facilities, Community Building etc
- Barn style office development

The final proposed land uses will be shaped through extensive consultation over the coming years.

The land currently lies within the Cambridge Green Belt and so its development will only be considered over an extensive and successful period of engagement with both the local community and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

In the paragraphs below we have set out the site's planning constraints together with a proposed timetable that will govern how the land could come forward for development.

Planning

The site lies within the Cambridge Green Belt and current Government policy attaches great importance to Green Belts. The Green Belt and its boundary around Hardwick is defined through South Cambridgeshire District Council's Local Plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in "*exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the Local Plan*" (para. 83). South Cambridgeshire is currently reviewing its Local Plan which is at the Examination stage. There is no current opportunity to seek the removal of the land east of Cambridge Road from the Green Belt and therefore its allocation for development in the current Local Plan review, unless the inspectors conducting the Examination find the plan to be unsound and request that South Cambridgeshire identifies additional land for development. The Examination into the Local Plan review is likely to run until April/May 2017 and the Local Plan may become adopted late in 2017.

The timetable for the next review is not yet confirmed, but a joint Local Plan with Cambridge City has been agreed as part of the City Deal, starting in 2019, which will allow for the consideration of the land

east of Cambridge Road. It is likely therefore that the earliest that the next Local Plan might be adopted is 2022.

The site's Green Belt designation means that should any planning application for the land east of Cambridge Road come forward prior to an adoption in the Local Plan, the NPPF states that inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in "*very special circumstances*" (para. 87, National Planning Policy Framework). The development of the land east of Cambridge Road would be considered as "*inappropriate*".

In considering planning applications on Green Belt land, the NPPF requires that substantial weight should be attached to any harm to the Green Belt from development. The NPPF states that very special circumstances "*will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations*". Where a Council considers that there are "very special circumstances" to justify approving a planning application in the Green Belt that application has to be referred to the Secretary of State who has the power to call-in the application for his own determination.

Neighbourhood/Village Plan

The preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) or Village Plan (VP) could be a potential mechanism by which the local community of Hardwick could support the development of the land east of Cambridge Road, if they chose to.

Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) were introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and enable communities to positively support local development. They form part of the statutory development plan and hence planning applications should be determined in accordance with them unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The aim of NPs is to enable local communities to have a greater say in the development of the areas in which they live. However, Government Ministers have made it clear that NPs should not be used to review Green Belts, which is the task for Local Plans. The NP could, however, be used to express a local preference for changes to the Green Belt to be made through the Local Plan. This approach has been found acceptable in other parts of England.

A Village Plan (VP) is a non-statutory plan. It holds significantly less weight than a NP which must be independently examined. Nevertheless, a VP could also be used to express a preference to South Cambridgeshire District Council for the removal of land from the Green Belt. Hardwick Parish Council endorsed the preparation of a VP in August 2015. The detailed timetable and programme is not yet available, but it is expected that the VP to be in place around end of 2017.

Potential Timetable

The dates below are indicative, setting out the timeframes over which the land east of Cambridge Rd could be promoted and developed.

2016/2017	The commencement to any background studies, eg Green Belt study, Transport study
End 2017	Hardwick Village Plan in place
2019	Consultation begins on South Cambridgeshire District's Council next Local Plan
2024	South Cambridgeshire District's Council Local Plan is adopted
2024/2025	Planning application submitted for the land east of Cambridge Road
2025/2026	Construction work commences on the land east of Cambridge Road