



## **PLANNING REPORT**

### **FLAMSTEAD VILLAGE**

**APRIL 2016**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I have been asked to consider whether there is any development potential for additional housing in the village of Flamstead, having regard to national and local planning policies.
- 1.2 Firstly, development proposals must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless there are other material considerations to indicate otherwise.
- 1.3 In this instance the development plan comprises the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Dacorum's Core Strategy.

### **The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

- 1.4 The NPPF was published in 2012 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied locally through the individual local authority districts. It makes clear in paragraph 12 that the starting point for decision making is the development plan and proposals that accord with an up to date local plan should be approved. It continues that proposals which do not accord with the development plan should be refused.
- 1.5 Development in the Green Belt has for many years been considered to be harmful and there is no exception in the NPPF. Paragraph 87 reinforces this age old policy stance. By definition, development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

### **Core Strategy**

- 1.6 Dacorum District Council adopted its Core Strategy in September 2013. This document, taking account of the NPPF sets a clear policy framework for the borough until 2031.
- 1.7 Within the Core Strategy, Flamstead is identified as being within the Green Belt and is a "selected small village".

### **Policy CS5**

- 1.8 In accordance with national policy, the Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development to protect its open character, local distinctiveness and prevent urban sprawl. As such, housing development in the Green Belt will not be acceptable unless there are very special circumstances.

## Policy CS6

- 1.9 Flamstead is one of four villages in the Green Belt which are identified in the Core Strategy as “selected small villages” where they are defined as being inappropriate locations for large scale growth but where it is recognised there is the need for limited development. To that end, policy CS6 will permit limited infilling for affordable housing for local people providing any development is sympathetic to its surroundings and retains and protects the character and appearance of the village.
- 1.10 The supporting text to the policy makes clear that “limited infilling” is a form of development “...whereby buildings.... proposed or constructed within a gap along a clearly identifiable built-up frontage or within a group of buildings.” It further continues that “...the term ‘limited’ refers to development which does not create more than two extra dwellings.”

## Site Allocations

- 1.11 The Core Strategy also sets a clear strategic policy framework against which to progress a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) which allocates sites for future development in the borough. To that end, the Council carried out extensive consultation with stake holders and the local community before producing its draft consultation document for submission to the Planning Inspectorate.
- 1.12 One of the main functions of the DPD is to identify sites for additional housing. To assist with the identification and selection of sites, the Council used a range of sources including sites put forward in 2006 and 2008 and also undertook a call for sites in 2014 and again in early 2015 where the size threshold was set at sites of 0.3 hectares or greater or sites capable of accommodating 10 dwellings or more.
- 1.13 The Council published its consultation document in August 2015 which ran for 6 weeks to allow for representations to be received. The document and any comments received were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 5th February 2016 for formal examination in public to be held in due course. (A date yet to be fixed).
- 1.14 No sites in Flamstead have been identified as being suitable for additional housing.

Whilst land opposite Bowling Cottage, Chequers Hill in the village was put forward in the call for sites, the Council have opted not to progress this site as an allocation due to the Green Belt and their 2013 policy CS6 relating to small villages. No other sites in the village appear to have been put forward.

## Rural Sites for Affordable Housing

1.15 The DPD makes clear in supporting text that the countryside and smaller villages offer very limited opportunities for housing per se and that policies for new development are generally more restrictive. It further advises that work is continuing to identify small schemes (below 15 homes in each case) for affordable homes within and adjoining small villages where there is a genuine and justifiable need and whereby such a scheme might be acceptable. However, this refers to the borough as a whole and there will be other small villages that differ from Flamstead (i.e. not within the Green Belt and are not identified as a "selected small village" as in policy CS6) and whereby such a scheme may be acceptable. But even then, it is important to note that whilst work may be continuing to try and find such sites for genuine affordable housing need, there is no guarantee that such development would be forthcoming given equally the importance placed on the local authority to safeguard the character of a village and the open countryside.

## Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

1.16 In early February 2016 the Council published its draft SHLAA which contains a schedule of all sites identified in the borough. This document went out to public consultation and the deadline for responses was Monday 29th February. It should be noted no individual sites in the village have been identified.

1.17 I am aware that seven sites in Flamstead were apparently on the list when a call for sites was asked. Whilst any number of sites can be put forward across the borough as a whole, not all will make the final list for a number of reasons and it is only those that are considered suitable for development that have been included.

1.18 As advised above, none of these sites are identified in the recently published SHLAA.

## Conclusions

1.19 Having regard therefore to the NPPF, Core Strategy, and the Council's recently published Site Allocations DPD together with the draft SHLAA of February 2016, in my professional opinion it is highly unlikely that there is any development potential in the foreseeable future for additional housing sites within the village of Flamstead and certainly not for at least the next 25 years, during the life span of the Core Strategy.

1.20 Only infill development for affordable housing (up to two dwellings) may be acceptable subject to it being justified by need. And then, any development that might be acceptable and justified by need must still be appropriate to ensure the character of

the village and surrounding landscape is safeguarded as outlined in Core Strategy policy CS6.

### **A Neighbourhood Plan**

- 1.21 In my view, because the Council's Core Strategy is up to date and housing sites have recently been identified through the Site Allocations DPD and the draft SHLAA, I'm not convinced there would be any real gain in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan when the village is already protected from further housing development through the local development framework and recently published documents.
- 1.22 A Neighbourhood Plan is a very costly exercise and lengthy process and would only be approved if it conformed to the aims and objectives of the Council's own development plan.
- 1.23 What is important to note here is that when drawing up Neighbourhood Plans regard must be had to national planning policy and be in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan. As already advised, the up to date development plan and recently published Site Allocations DPD make clear that Flamstead village is not suitable for large scale housing development, or other large scale development that would impact unacceptably on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 1.24 Neighbourhood Plans will only come to fruition and take effect if they comply with national planning policy and are in general conformity with the local plan, and with a majority vote from the local neighbourhood.
- 1.25 Neighbourhood Plans carry very limited weight in the determination of applications until they formally take effect.

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