

Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing

Foxton



- Burmor Construction
- Landowner
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

The community

Foxton is home to about 1,300 people and 500 houses. The village is situated on the southern side of the A10 midway between Cambridge and Royston. There is a train station on the Cambridge-London line at the northern edge of the village.

Summary

Chalk Hill is a development of 15 affordable homes on the edge of Foxton village. The sensitive location, facing onto green belt land, presented some design challenges. However, strong partnership working between the design team and South Cambridgeshire DC resulted in a scheme which won the regional LABC Building Excellence Award for 'Best Social or Affordable New Housing Development'.

The scheme has been developed and managed by South Cambridgeshire DC, a partner in the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership. This is the second rural exception site development for new council owned homes as part of South Cambridgeshire DC's new build programme.

Foxton is classified as a 'Group Village' in the South Cambridgeshire Local plan reflecting the limited range of services available. The Local Plan restricts housing development to 8 dwellings within the village envelope or 15 dwellings on a single brownfield site in group villages.

Key statistics

No of properties:	15 affordable homes
Property types:	4 x 1 bed houses 6 x 2 bed houses 5 x 3 bed houses
Tenure type:	All for Affordable Rent (capped at LHA rate)
Planning permission granted:	July 2015
Start on site:	January 2016
Completion:	January 2017
Project value:	£2,397,530
Right To Buy receipts	£719,259



Key Partners

- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- The Design Partnership
- Foxton Parish Council

Project history

A Housing Needs Survey was undertaken by Cambridgeshire ACRE in 2009. This identified 12 households with a potential need for affordable housing and a local connection to Foxton. However, by the time the scheme was being considered at planning committee the level of need, based on the Housing Register, had risen to 18.

A range of sites for a rural exception scheme were considered. Pre-application advice from the planning department and discussions with Foxton Parish Council concluded that this site on land adjacent to Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road was the optimum site.



The site viewed from Hill Farm

The chosen site is at the southern end of the village on the western side of Fowlmere Road. The site is separated from the village framework by Hill Farm, a working farm which was not available for development. Opposite the site, on the eastern side of Fowlmere Road, is agricultural land within the Green Belt. The southern and western boundaries also face onto agricultural land.

The site is well related to the village with key services – village shop, primary school, church and recreation ground – all within 1km.

There was a concern that planning consent for use of land to the north of the site, within the same ownership, for the parking of up to four

lorries and associated trailers, would have a negative impact on residential amenity. However, assurances were received that the consent was no longer in operation and the Environmental Health Officer confirmed that existing farm uses would not cause undue disturbance. This did cause some delays but was clearly an important step in ensuring a high quality living environment.



The entrance to the scheme

The scheme design underwent several iterations as discussions with the planning officer and urban design officer progressed. The aim of the scheme was to create an extension to the village that is sympathetic to, and in character with, its surroundings.



Sketch scheme 5 was submitted for formal pre-application

A public event was held to share the initial designs and a further session was held prior to commencement where local residents could find out more about the scheme and how they or their family could apply for tenancies.

Key changes to the scheme included:

- a more linear layout and moving the local area of play (LAP) to a more central position;
- at the southern end of the site the plots were turned to be perpendicular to Fowlmere Road to create a more prominent edge to the scheme. Four of these dwellings were incorporated into a barn like design;
- plots nearest to Fowlmere Road were brought forward and parking re-arranged to create a stronger building line and more active street scene;
- extra landscaping was introduced to soften the scheme into its surroundings and provide buffers between garden boundaries and Fowlmere Road. New trees were planted throughout the site;
- a new footpath was constructed from the site access to adjoin the end of Hillfield. This allowed safe pedestrian access into the village centre; and
- the scheme access was moved providing a new access into Hill Farm, designed so that farm traffic did not affect the road surface or pose risks to the residents.

confirmed, parking spaces re-arranged and the roads built to adoptable standards.

The final scheme comprised 4x1 bed houses; 6x2 bed houses and 5x3 bed houses. All properties have been let at an Affordable Rent but capped at the LHA rate. The scheme can justly claim to have been completed to a very high finish. The houses were built to achieve Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Photovoltaic panels were avoided to improve their appearance but air source heat pumps were used which also reduced heating costs for tenants.



A range of finishes were used



The final site plan

Negotiations were still on-going when the scheme went to planning committee. In fact, the Parish Council, despite finding ‘the scheme and house design very satisfactory’ objected as it felt a number of details had still not been addressed fully. However, revised plans largely sorted these. For example, the new footpath was

The boundary fencing and landscaping were the first completed parts of the scheme which meant that the scheme had a ‘settled’ feel by the time residents moved in.

Tony Welland, a Director with The Design Partnership, was adamant that the use of the ‘Project Partnering Contract’ process played a key role in driving quality. This contrasted with the usual ‘Design & Build’ approach by locking in design standards and materials and capping the budget. Any budget savings are shared by the builder and client. Chalk Hill was delivered on time, to a high quality specification and £55,000 under budget.

Nine out of the 15 homes were let to households with a local connection to Foxton. The remainder went to households with a local connection to nearby villages (mainly Shepreth) through the cascade system. This relatively low

occupancy by local people was due to the size mix of the houses. All 1-bed houses and all but one 2-bed houses were let to local households. A cascade was used out to surrounding villages for the 3-bed houses. This was due to changes in the allocations policy as a result of the government welfare reform legislation ('under-occupancy' rules).

Looking forward

The success of this scheme has encouraged the Parish Council to look for sites for a further rural exception scheme. The emerging Foxton Neighbourhood Plan contains a strong policy on supporting rural exception schemes where such schemes can demonstrate they are meeting local needs and are acceptable in terms of their environmental impact.

Celebrating success

Many local residents were able to benefit from the scheme. One good example is a man with disabilities who had lived in the village for over 30 years when he moved not his new home in Chalk Hill. He still lives with health issues but his new council home has allowed him to live independently in a community he knows, with supportive family close by.



A 'barn-style' building incorporating 4x1 bed houses

Key learning points

Consultation and design are part of an iterative process. The fundamentals of the scheme have changed little since inception but many minor

changes have made a significant cumulative impact on the final scheme quality.

A local landowner with a vested interest in the community has different motivations to an institutional landowner. In this case the landowner looks out over the scheme from his window.

The Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership

Cambridgeshire ACRE is the Rural Community Council for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is an independent charity established in 1924. It facilitates the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership which includes a mix of Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

The partnership has a clear objective – to deliver affordable housing for local people in rural communities. It does this mainly through delivering rural exception schemes. These are small developments normally on the edge of a village where planning permission would not normally be granted. An exception is made on condition that the majority of the houses are affordable in perpetuity and prioritised for people with a strong local connection to the parish concerned.

For more information about how we deliver rural affordable housing please contact:

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