

Appeal Decision

Inquiry held on 13 November 2012 Site visit made on 14 November 2012

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 9 January 2013

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/A/12/2179343 Land off Warmingham Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0HN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for outline planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Gladman Developments Ltd against Cheshire East Council.
- The application Ref 12/0883C is dated 9 March 2012.
- The development proposed is residential development of up to 194 dwellings, site access, highway, landscaping, open space and associated works.

Decision

 The appeal is allowed and outline planning permission is granted for residential development of up to 194 dwellings, site access, highway, landscaping, open space and associated works at Land off Warmingham Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0HN, in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 12/0883C dated 9 March 2012, subject to the conditions set out in the Schedule annexed to this decision.

Applications for costs

2. At the Inquiry applications for costs was made by the appellant against the Council and by the Council against the appellant. Those applications are the subject of separate Decisions.

Background and preliminary matters

- 3. The appeal site lies at the edge of the built-up area of Middlewich. It comprises an L-shaped parcel of land, some 7.37 hectares in area, made up of two agricultural fields. The northern arm of the 'L' is bounded by modern suburban development along Davenham Way, while the eastern arm, where access would be taken, faces suburban housing on Warmingham Lane. The site is surrounded to the south and west by open farm land. To the east, enclosed by the 'L', is another field fronting onto Warmingham Lane. The Council has now resolved to approve planning permission, subject to conclusion of a legal agreement¹, for the development of this land ('the Bellway site') with 149 houses.
- 4. The appeal proposal seeks outline planning permission for the erection of up to 194 dwellings, with the principle of development and access to the site as the only matters for full approval at this stage. The layout, scale and appearance of

¹ Application Ref 12/2584C

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the development and the landscaping of the site are reserved for later approval. The submitted Design and Access Statement ('DAS') provides some parameters of scale for the buildings, and the associated indicative plans² give sufficient information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces to allow the proposal to be assessed.

- 5. The appeal was submitted in July 2012 against the Council's failure to issue a decision within the prescribed period. In September 2012, the Council resolved to approve a subsequent duplicate application³, subject to conditions and to the conclusion of a section 106 agreement. The agreement, which was still under negotiation at the time of the Inquiry, is to cover the provision of 30% affordable housing on the site, the provision of open space, and payments towards the education and transport improvements, the latter jointly with the Bellway site. The improvement of a nearby bus stop would be separately funded via a section 278 agreement, to be matched by the Bellway site.
- 6. At the same time, the Council formally considered the appeal application and resolved that, had it retained jurisdiction, it would have approved permission in similar terms and subject to the same planning obligations.
- 7. The appellant's concern about the reasonableness of the short timescale approved for submission of reserved matters and the commencement of development was addressed by a later relaxation of the Council's position⁴. The only other area of dispute between the parties was the appellant's preference that the issue of affordable housing would best be addressed by a condition rather than by a planning obligation, and this has now also been accepted by the Council.
- 8. By the opening of the Inquiry, the updated Final Statement of Common Ground records that there were no areas of disagreement between the parties. At the Inquiry, the appellant submitted a copy of an executed unilateral undertaking ('UU') as a deed of planning obligation under section 106, with covenants covering all of the issues identified in the Council's resolution with the exception of affordable housing.

Policy context

- 9. The development plan for this part of Cheshire East includes the North West of England Plan. Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 ('RSS') together with saved policies from the Cheshire County Structure Plan and the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review ('LP'). It is agreed that the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan is at too early a stage of preparation to be afforded weight in this appeal.
- 10. RSS Policy L4 requires an annual housing provision in Cheshire East of at least 1150 dwellings, of which at least 300 were to be in the former Congleton district. This is a significantly greater provision than allowed for by the LP, and for a considerably longer period.
- 11. The appeal site lies just outside the LP's settlement zone for Middlewich, and is therefore classed as open countryside. Housing development of the scale

² Plan Nos. 4754-L-02, 4754-L-03

³ Application Ref 12/2685C

⁴ Considered in more detail below under 'Conditions'

proposed would be contrary to LP Policies PS8 and H6, which seek to protect the open countryside.

- 12. However, there is no dispute that the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. Sufficient evidence was before the Inquiry to conclude that the shortfall is significant and serious, without the need to explore the precise extent of the deficit, which is subject to debate about the status of particular sites and about the correct level of 'buffer' percentage to be allowed in accordance with the guidance of paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework'). In these circumstances, paragraph 49 of the Framework advises that the housing policies of the LP should be regarded as out of date and that the proposal should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 13. The Council's subsequent policy stance, in the form of its Interim Planning Policy on the Release of Housing Land, issued in 2011, could be afforded only limited weight due to its lack of formal adoption as a supplementary planning document ('SPD'). But, even in the light of recent draft revisions, as a policy approach to housing supply it cannot be regarded as up to date because of the current shortfall in provision.

Main Issue

14. The main issue is whether, in the absence of a deliverable five year supply of housing land, the proposal would represent a sustainable form of development, in accordance with relevant national and local policy.

Reasons

15. The Framework outlines the three mutually dependent dimensions to sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. The achievement of sustainable development should seek to produce gains across each dimension.⁵

Social

- 16. One of the positive improvements identified by the Framework is widening the choice of high quality homes. With up to 194 dwellings, the proposal would make a significant contribution to meeting the need and demand for additional housing, as identified in the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment ('SHMA'). The DAS outlines the proposed mix of unit sizes, which would range from 2 bedroom to 5 bedroom, thereby addressing the requirements of a variety of potential residents. The majority of the provision would be market housing, but affordable housing would also be spread across the site.
- 17. The affordable housing provisions of saved LP Policy H13, and the subsequent Supplementary Planning Document No.6: Affordable Housing and Mixed Communities of April 2006, are based on historic survey data and must now be considered out of date. The Council's more recent Interim Planning Statement on Affordable Housing of February 2011 ('the IPS') does not attract the full weight of a formally adopted SPD. However, its target of 30% provision of affordable housing accords with the guidance of the Framework, being based on the needs data of the latest SHMA and consistent with the objective of

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 6-9

creating sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, with a wide choice of high quality homes in a mix based on current and future trends and the needs of different groups.

18. The proposal would make a significant contribution towards addressing the shortfall in affordable housing in the local area identified by the SHMA. Although the level of provision would be no greater than that sought by the IPS, there is evidence to suggest that local viability factors mean that achievement of the full target provision is increasingly challenging. The level of provision adds some weight in favour of the proposal.

Economic

- 19. The increase in housing numbers would accord with the recently finalised Town Strategy for Middlewich, which is intended to feed into the emerging Local Plan, and which envisages an increase of 1600 homes in the town up to 2030. The strategy recognises the benefit of a 'critical mass' of population in supporting the growth of the town's economy and infrastructure.
- 20. The proposed development would result in direct employment and supply chain benefits during the construction phase, but would also contribute in the longer term to increased demand for local shops and services. There is no firm evidence to support concerns raised by some local residents about inadequacy of local infrastructure. The only identified gap in provision is in secondary education, for which a contribution would be made to fund additional school places.

Environmental

- 21. Together with the adjoining Bellway site, the proposal would result in a loss of open farm land at the urban edge. However, the land is not of high agricultural or landscape quality and, given the existence of suburban housing to the north and east, the two sites represent a logical incremental extension of the settlement boundary.
- 22. The accessibility of the site is analysed in the submitted Transport Assessment ('TA'), as updated for the duplicate application. This shows that a good range of facilities would lie within reasonable walking distance of the site, including convenience shops, bank, post office, public house and primary school. The town centre of Middlewich and a range of facilities further afield, including employment opportunities, would lie within convenient cycle distance.
- 23. Journeys on foot and by cycle from the western part of the site would particularly benefit from the ability to pass through the Bellway site, whose layout was amended prior to approval to allow for a link up to the appeal site boundary. A complimentary link or links within the appeal site can be secured by condition as part of the later approval of the layout reserved matter.
- 24. Such a link would allow easier access to the nearest bus stops on Warmingham Lane/Cross Lane, which provide services to Crewe and Sandbach as well as Middlewich town centre. The promotion of sustainable modes of transport, including public transport, is one of the objectives of the updated Travel Plan, which sets out a clear action plan and targets. The proposed provision of a new bus shelter can be secured by means of a condition, while the submitted UU includes the funding of measures to encourage bus use by new residents.

- 25. The TA's analysis of traffic generation and the effect on the operation of the local highway network, in conjunction with those of the Bellway development, is accepted by the Council as highway authority. While noting concern expressed by some local residents about increased traffic, there is no reason to conclude that the proposed mitigation works at junctions on Kinderton Street, to be jointly funded by the two developments, would not be adequate to prevent harmful congestion. Similarly, jointly funded traffic calming measures on Warmingham Lane, subject to later detailed design, should ensure the safe operation of both site accesses.
- 26. The design of the proposed junction onto Warmingham Lane would involve the loss of some existing hedgerow, but the great majority of the hedge would be retained, as would the willow tree to the north of the junction. The DAS suggests that the entry to the site could be designed as an open green space. The alignment of the access directly opposite the detached house at 125 Warmingham Lane would have some adverse effects on the existing residents, owing to the sound of vehicles turning at the junction and the outlook onto traffic facing the house, which could result in some limited glare from headlights. Similar effects would be found at a much reduced scale at other nearby houses. However, none of these effects would be sufficiently serious to justify rejection of the proposal.
- 27. In general, the DAS gives confidence that a development of reasonably good design quality could be secured, with a potential network of open spaces involving the retention of hedgerows and the formation of new ponds and water features, a positive edge to the open land to the south and west with continuous public access, a hierarchy of clearly defined routes and well delineated public and private realms.
- 28. The open space and water features would contribute to mitigation for the proposal's effect on the habitat of protected species, including great crested newts. The evidence suggests that the favourable conservation status of the species would be maintained and a Natural England licence granted. The details of mitigation, and of measures to avoid adverse effects on badgers and breeding birds and to promote enhancement of biodiversity, can be secured by conditions.
- 29. The site is at low risk of flooding, and the detailed design of sustainable drainage measures can also be secured by condition.

Conditions

- 30. The Council's list of proposed conditions, which cover similar topics to those approved for the duplicate application, was discussed at the Inquiry. It was agreed that a number of the proposed conditions could be amalgamated. Subject to that and to some amendment in the interests of precision, the conditions would comply with the guidance of Circular 11/95⁶ ('the Circular'), but for a few exceptions identified below.
- 31. The shorter than standard time limits sought by the Council for submission of reserved matters (two years) and for commencement of development (three years from the date of permission or one year from approval of final reserved matter, whichever is later) are in line with its revised position on the duplicate application. The appellant accepts that, unlike the originally proposed limit of

⁶ DoE Circular 11/95: *The use of conditions in planning permissions*

six months for submission of reserved matters, these timescales are reasonable. Government guidance⁷ explains that the law allows for shorter or longer time limits to be imposed, but that the timescale should be appropriate to the size and nature of the development.

- 32. In this case, the proposal is of some size, but considerable progress has already been made on matters of layout, scale and landscaping, and this can be reinforced by a separate condition requiring accordance with the submitted DAS. A separate condition seeking to limit the effect of the submitted indicative development framework is not necessary. The time limits proposed, which would be the near equivalent of those for a full planning permission, such as that approved for the adjoining site, are justified by the need to address the significant shortfall in the supply of deliverable housing, in accordance with the objectives of the Framework.
- 33. Given the reduced timescales and the scale of the development, prior submission of a masterplan and design code would not be justified, as these can be adequately dealt with in the approval of the reserved matters. A further condition is required to define the permission by limiting the maximum number of dwellings and by identifying the approved plans, which show the site location and the site access arrangements, but not the proposed traffic calming measures, which would be subject to later approval.
- 34. The other main matter that had divided the parties was the appellant's preference to address the issue of affordable housing by means of a condition, rather than by a planning obligation, as was being negotiated for the duplicate application. By the time of the Inquiry, the Council had agreed that a condition could be satisfactorily imposed.
- 35. There is little doubt that an obligation can have considerable advantages in providing certainty on the provision of affordable housing, particularly when a scheme is well advanced and the likely input of a social housing provider/manager is known. However, the Circular advises that there may be circumstances where use of a condition would be acceptable, particularly where, as here, failure to provide affordable housing would be a reason to reject the proposal.
- 36. In this instance, the condition proposed, which is closely based on the published model form, would be reasonable and necessary and would otherwise meet the tests of the Circular, except in one respect. The condition would not seek to control the tenure, price or ownership of specific dwellings, but sets parameters for the later approval of a scheme, which would need to be legally sound and enforceable. The precise proportion of affordable rented and social rented housing, within a minimum rented provision of 65% of the affordable units, can be left for later resolution following more detailed analysis of need at the relevant time. The aspect of the draft condition that would not meet the tests relates to energy performance: no adopted planning policy basis has been shown for a requirement to achieve a set level of the Code for Sustainable Homes, which can in any event be secured by other means.
- 37. Of the other conditions, those necessary to prevent adverse impact on living conditions for existing and future residents include: the approval and implementation of measures to mitigate traffic noise; the approval of a Phase

⁷ ODPM Circular 08/2005: Guidance on changes to the development control system paras 19-33

II ground contamination report and implementation of any required remediation; the approval and implementation of a Construction Method Statement. In the interests of protection of the historic and natural environment, including protected species, conditions are necessary to require a programme of archaeological work; safe disposal of surface water; use of decentralised energy; provision of new ponds and protection/enhancement of the existing wetland area; protection and mitigation of effects on great crested newts, badgers, breeding birds and bats.

38. The attainment of adequate levels of accessibility by non-car modes of transport justifies a requirement for pedestrian/cycle connection(s) with the Bellway site, and the provision of a new bus shelter at the nearest bus stop. It is unclear what is precisely intended by the proposed condition requiring separate details of possible alterations to the scheme in respect of links between the site and onto the proposed roundabout. A requirement to use the roundabout approved for the Bellway site rather than the vehicular access currently proposed would be a fundamental change to the proposal, which cannot be delivered by condition. As outlined above, pedestrian/cycle link(s) can be incorporated into the layout.

Unilateral undertaking

- 39. The submitted UU covers all of the topics included in the section106 agreement to accompany the duplicate application, with the exception of affordable housing. Obligations are provided with respect to the provision of open space and a play area and their future management by a company; a payment towards the cost of additional secondary education provision; a payment towards the shared cost of highway improvements and the implementation of traffic calming; and a payment to cover the cost of bus passes, vouchers and season tickets for future residents, in accordance with the submitted Travel Plan.
- 40. On the basis of the evidence provided, the obligations would meet the requirements of Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and the tests set out in paragraph 204 of the Framework. The obligations can be taken into account and they add weight in favour of the appeal proposal.

Conclusion

41. For the reasons set out above, subject to the identified conditions and in the light of the obligations of the UU, the proposal would under current circumstances amount to a sustainable form of development in accordance with national and local policy. There would be some adverse impacts, primarily through the loss of open countryside land and on the living conditions of residents opposite the site access, but these would be significantly outweighed by the benefits of the proposal, taken as a whole. In those circumstances, the guidance of the Framework is clear that development should be approved. I conclude that the appeal should be allowed and outline planning permission granted.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR

Annex

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/A/12/2179343 Land off Warmingham Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0HN

Schedule of conditions

1. Details of the layout, scale, appearance and landscaping ('the reserved matters') shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority before any development is commenced and the development shall be carried out as approved.

2. Application for approval of the reserved matters shall be made to the local planning authority not later than two years from the date of this permission.

3. The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than whichever is the later of the following dates:

(a) three years from the date of this permission, or

(b) one year from the date of approval of the last of the reserved matters to be approved.

4. The development hereby permitted shall comprise no more than 194 dwellings and shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 4754-L-01; 1279/17 Revision C (in respect of site access arrangements only and not traffic calming measures).

5. The detals of layout, scale, appearance and landscaping referred to in Condition 1 shall accord with the Design and Acccess Statement (Ref DAS-4754-01 rev B dated March 2012) and shall include one or more pedestrian/cycle links with the adjoining 'Bellway' site (application Ref 12/2584C).

6. No development shall take place within the application site until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

7. No development shall take place until a mitigation scheme for protecting the proposed dwellings from traffic noise has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No dwelling which forms part of the scheme shall be occupied until the approved works to that dwelling have been completed.

8. No development shall take place until:

(a) A Phase II intrusive site investigation has been carried out and the results submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority;

(b) If the Phase II investigation indicates that remediation is necessary, then a Remediation Statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The remediation scheme in the approved Remediation Statement shall then be carried out.

If remediation is required, a Site Completion Report detailing the conclusions and actions taken at each stage of the works, including validation works, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to the

first use or occupation of any part of the development hereby permitted.

9. No development shall take place until a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All construction work shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved Construction Method Statement, which shall include the following details:

(a) The method and duration of any pile driving operations (expected starting date and completion date);

(b) The hours of work, which shall not exceed the following:

- Construction and associated deliveries to the site shall not take place outside 08:00 to 18:00 hours Mondays to Fridays, and 09:00 to 14:00 hours on Saturdays, nor at any time on Sundays or Bank Holidays;

- Pile driving shall not take place outside 08:30 to 17:30 hours Mondays to Fridays and 09:00 to 13:00 hours on Saturdays, nor at any time on Sundays or Bank Holidays;

(c) The arrangements for prior notification to the occupiers of potentially affected properties;

(d) The responsible person (e.g. site manager / office) who could be contacted in the event of complaint;

(e) A scheme to minimise dust emissions arising from construction activities on the site. The scheme shall include details of all dust suppression measures and the methods to monitor emissions of dust arising from the development. The approved dust suppression measures shall be maintained in a fully functional condition for the duration of the construction phase.

10. No development shall take place until a scheme to limit the surface water run-off generated by the proposed development and to manage the risk of flooding from overland flow of surface water has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be completed in accordance with the approved details.

11. No development shall take place until details of how the proposed development will secure at least 10% of its predicted energy requirements from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon sources have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be completed in accordance with the approved details, which shall thereafter be retained.

12. The reserved matters application(s) referred to in Condition 1 shall include details of a scheme in respect of pond construction and habitat creation. The scheme shall include:

• Precise details of the design of the ponds including sections and landscaping;

- Precise details of proposals to enhance opportunities for bio-diversity in the site;
- Timetable for implementation of the agreed measures;

• Precise details of the long-term management and maintenance of these areas within the site.

The approved scheme shall then be fully implemented in strict accordance with the approved details and strategy.

13. No development shall take place until a plan for the protection and/or mitigation of damage to the marsh area (as defined on Figure 2 of the supporting Ecological Appraisal dated 7 March 2012), both during construction works and once the development is complete and including management responsibilities, has been

submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

The scheme shall include the following elements:

Details of how pollution will be prevented;

• Details of aquatic and emergent vegetation (such as reed bed areas) which will be retained and enhanced;

• Details of the retention of the marsh area.

The marsh protection plan shall be carried out in accordance with a timetable for implementation as approved.

14. The development shall not begin until detailed proposals for the incorporation of features into the scheme suitable for use by breeding birds (including swifts and house sparrows) and roosting bats, including a timetable for implementation, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The proposals shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and timetable and retained thereafter.

15. No development shall commence until an updated survey for the presence of badgers at the site, carried out by a suitably qualified person, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. If any evidence of badgers is found, then the report shall include measures for their protection during development and for the retention of existing or provision of alternative sett(s). The approved measures shall be implemented in strict accordance with the approved details.

16. Prior to undertaking any works between 1st March and 31st August in any year, a detailed survey shall be carried out to check for nesting birds within the area of the proposed works. Where nests are found in any hedgerow, tree or scrub to be removed, a 4m exclusion zone shall be left around the nest until breeding is complete. Completion of nesting should be confirmed in writing to the local plannning authority by a suitably qualified person.

17. No development shall take place until a scheme of compensation/mitigation for great crested newts within the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be completed in accordance with the approved scheme.

18. No development shall take place until details of a bus shelter to be provided at the location of one of the existing bus stops at Cross Lane have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. No dwelling hereby permitted shall be occupied until the shelter has been provided in accordance with the approved details.

19. The development shall not begin until a scheme for the provision of affordable housing as part of the development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The affordable housing shall be provided in accordance with the approved scheme and shall meet the definition of affordable housing set out in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework. The scheme shall include:

i) The numbers, type, and location on the site of the affordable housing provision which shall consist of not less than 30% of the dwellings. The tenure shall be split 65% social rented or affordable rented and 35% intermediate and the dwellings shall be 'pepper-potted' across the site.

ii) The timing of the construction of the affordable housing and its phasing in relation to the occupancy of the market housing. No more than 80% of the open market dwellings shall be occupied before the affordable housing is completed and available for occupation.

iii) The arrangements for the transfer of the affordable housing to an affordable housing provider or the management of the affordable housing if no Registered Social Landlord is involved.

iv) The arrangements to ensure that such provision is affordable for both first and subsequent occupiers of the affordable housing.

v) The occupancy criteria to be used for determining the identity of occupiers of the affordable housing and the means by which such occupancy criteria shall be enforced.



APPEARANCES

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

John Hunter of Counsel

He called⁸ Daniel Evans BA(Hons) MCD MRTPI

FOR THE APPELLANT:

BA(Hons) BPL MRTPI George Venning

He called Marc Hourigan

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Principal Planning Officer, Cheshire East Council

Instructed by Martyn Twigg, Fox Strategic Land and Property Limited

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For discussion of Conditions and Unilateral Undertaking:

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⁸ Written evidence was also tendered by: Richard House BA(Hons) MRTPI

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Neil Jones BSc MSc DipTE CEng CIHT CMIT Principal Development Officer Highways

Central Area Manager (Spatial Planning) Cheshire East Council Programme Manager Highways Cheshire East Council Principal Development Officer Highways Cheshire East Council

DOCUMENTS

- Council's letter of notification of the Inquiry and list of those notified 1
- 2 Response to the appellant's Application for Costs and LPA's Cross-Application
- 3 Appellant's Rejoinder to the costs application
- 4 Opening on behalf of the Local Planning Authority with attached copy e-mails
- 5 Opening on behalf of the Appellant
- 6 Certified copy of executed Unilateral Undertaking
- 7 E-mail dated 12 November 2012: Nicola Baines to Martin Twigg
- 8 Extract from Encyclopaedia of Planning Law
- 9 Letter dated 16 October 2012: Cheshire East Borough Solicitor to Gladman Developments Limited and attached e-mail exchange dated 16 and 17 October 2012: Rachel Goddard-Martin Twigg

PLAN

speet Approved Layout Plan, Bellway Homes development Α

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