

Fairfield Park Planning Background

1) Background:

History of site

Fairfield Park and Fairfield Hall occupy the 66 hectare site of the former Fairfield Hospital, which closed in 1999. The original hospital building, named the Three Counties Lunatic Asylum, was built to accommodate mental patients from Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Huntingdonshire. It was designed by a York architect, George Fowler Jones and building began in 1857. Extensions to the original building, designed by the same architect, were erected in 1872 and 1881. He also designed the church, opened in December 1879, the isolation hospital and the superintendent's house. The hospital was placed on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest in 1985 and graded List II. The isolation hospital and church were added to the list in 1997.

In the early 1990s the future of the hospital was in doubt and the first Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (1993) contained a commitment to prepare a planning brief to secure the future of the listed building. A brief was adopted by the District Council in September 1996 and in 1997 planning applications were submitted for re-use of the listed buildings and significant residential development in the hospital grounds. Although the District Council supported the proposals, the planning applications were called in by the Secretary of State for his decision. Following a public inquiry in 1998 planning permission was refused by the Secretary of State for the residential development in the hospital grounds in January 1999.

In his decision, however, the Secretary of State acknowledged that some enabling development was necessary to secure the long term future of the listed buildings but that such development should be limited to that needed for this purpose. In rejecting some parts of the site for development either because of the effect on the setting of the listed building or the countryside, the Secretary of State defined inner and outer envelopes between which enabling development, if justified, would be acceptable. The District Council took into account the decision of the Secretary of State and the views of the Inspector in preparing a revised Planning and Development Brief for the site. After public consultation in 2000 it was adopted as Technical Planning Guidance.

Another planning application was submitted to the District Council in July 2000. Outline planning permission was granted in February 2002 for *'comprehensive development to enable the restoration and re-use of the former Fairfield Hospital, including up to 853 residential dwellings (including conversions, affordable housing and close care), demolition of two existing dwellings, provision of open space, B1 managed workspace, one form entry lower school, retail floorspace (600 sq m), community centre and related highway works, footpath, cycleways and bridleway'*.

The Council and the developers drew up an agreed Masterplan for the development (Which can be downloaded below in section 2). This sets out a design strategy, which aims to produce a unique development that respects the setting of the former Victorian hospital and strives for quality in the design of the built environment. It shows details of the phasing of various parts of the development, density ranges, the siting of landscaped areas and play areas and provides, among other things, a detailed design code for the houses, roads, footpaths and fencing. The design philosophy reflects elements of Victorian architecture such as stone mullions, double storey bay windows, decorative stone detailing, leaded glass, wooden sash windows, grey slate roof tiles, iron railings, stone capped walls, traditional chimney pots and box hedging.

2) Fairfield Park Urban Design Strategy Document (Masterplan):

This is available in pdf format. Email webmaster@fairfieldparkresidents.co.uk if you wish to receive a copy.

3) Planning Overview:

Following the grant of outline planning permission, each of the different house builders on the site has submitted details of various phases of the development for approval by the Council. The original outline planning permission provided for 752 houses and flats to be built at Fairfield Park (plus 101 apartments in the Hall). However because development has taken place at the higher end of the density ranges the original number of houses envisaged has been built on a smaller area of land leaving scope for extra dwellings on the remaining land earmarked for development. In June 2006, the Council gave outline planning permission for a further 158 dwellings to be built. This has resulted in an increase to 910 dwellings. The number of apartments in the Hall has also increased to 273 as a result of smaller units being provided.