

**Application No: 08/01942/F**    **Ward: Kidlington North**

**Date Valid: 24.09.08**

**Applicant:**            Home Office UK Border Agency C/o CgMs Ltd, Marley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC1A 2AT

**Site Address:**        Campsfield House, Langford Lane, Kidlington

**Proposal:**             Erect new multi-faith education and workshop unit

### **1. Site Description and Proposal**

Campsfield House is a 2.8ha site sited south of Langford Lane, Kidlington, to the rear of the ambulance station and Prison Service training centre and south-east of Evenlode Crescent. The site is an existing immigration removals centre operated by the Home Office. The existing buildings are a collection of two-storey brick buildings with numerous smaller single storey buildings and portacabin style structures. The site is banded by a 5.2m high security palisade type fence.

The proposal is to erect a new two-storey building to contain education, library and workshop training rooms on the ground floor and a chapel, Muslim prayer room and another multi faith room at first floor. It will have a total floorspace of approximately 770m<sup>2</sup>. The proposed building is 5.7m high to eaves and 8.4m to ridge. The building will be linked to other buildings in the complex with a covered walking. The building would be of modular construction with light grey cladding at high level, blue grey brick at low level with red brick to the stair towers. The building is proposed to be sited on a grass area to the west of the western most accommodation building. I attach as Annex 1 a letter accompanying the application which explains the need for the development and sets out the applicant's case.

### **2. Application Publicity**

The application was advertised in the local press, a site notice was erected and letters sent to all properties in Evenlode Crescent. No representations have been received.

### **3. Consultations**

Kidlington Parish Council objects to the proposal on the grounds that use should be made of existing land rather than extension into the green belt; they consider that the applicant should provide the facility re-allocating space within the footprint of the existing buildings and that therefore the proposal is not compatible with Green Belt Policy GB1.

Oxford Airport raise no objections subject to the buildings being no higher than those existing.

The Environment Agency consider the proposal is a low environmental risk and will not comment further.

The Council's Environmental Protection Team raise no objections.

Natural England raise no objections.

No comments yet received from Oxfordshire County Council as Local Highway Authority.

#### **4. Relevant Planning Policies**

Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016	-	Saved Policies	G1, G2, G4, EN1
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996	-	Saved Policies	GB1, C7
Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011	-	Policies	GB1, EN34

#### **5. Appraisal**

The key issues to be considered are:

- The impact of the proposal upon Green Belt policy.
- An assessment of the very special circumstances advanced.
- Comparison to previous objections to development at this site.
- Visual impact and mitigation proposed.

#### **Green Belt Policy and Very Special Circumstances**

This site lies within an area which was first proposed as Green Belt in 1958 and was so designated in 1975. The inner Green Belt boundaries were finalized via local plans. The green belt designation washes access this site. PPG2 'Green Belts' defines inappropriate development, and this proposal must be classified as such. There is a strong prescription against inappropriate development in PPG2 and the Development Plan (both Structure Plan and adopted Local Plan), and it should only be approved if there are very special circumstances advanced which outweigh that presumption. In Annex 1 the applicant's agent explains that this building is required to provide needed facilities to improve the well being of inmates of this facility where they may stay up to 17 months (average stay 53 days). They explain that the existing buildings are all in use, and that the courtyards between buildings are needed for outdoor recreation for the inmates. The location is within the existing security fencing and that their own landscape assessment concludes that there will be no material impact on the Green Belt.

Members are reminded that the openness of Green Belts should be protected, and that 'openness' is principally a strategic concept rather than a visual one. A fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The site of this building is somewhat unusual when tested against this issue. Whilst the land is undeveloped currently it lies within the existing large (and in some places prominent) security fence and does not really contribute to the openness of the Green Belt.

#### **Previous Objections**

In September 2004 the Council objected to a Circular 18/84 consultation with respect to two two-storey accommodation buildings (one of which was located in the same position as the current proposal) (04/01393/GD). That objection was contrary to recommendation. The grounds of objection were:

1. The proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the development would be contrary to the advice contained in PPG2, Policy G4 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 and Policy GB1 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. The Council considers that the need to expand the detention centre has not been demonstrated, nor has it been demonstrated that there are not other non-Green Belt locations where this development could occur without causing harm to the Green Belt and its purposes and objectives. The Council consequently considers that the

very special circumstances advanced are insufficient to outweigh the strong presumption against such inappropriate development.

2. The Council considers that the proposed accommodation buildings and any additional external lighting that may be required are likely to be unduly prominent when viewed from Begbroke to the south, so an extent that will cause harm to the visual amenities of the Green Belt.
3. The Council has concerns about the accuracy of the submitted Transport Assessment and the conclusions therein that it considers that the impact of the traffic flows along Langford Lane and its junctions with the A44 and A4260 have not been assessed, information on bus routes is out of date, inadequate parking is proposed, poor facilities for disabled access, and no new green travel initiatives are proposed. Consequently the proposal is considered to be unsustainable in transport terms and contrary to Policy G1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and Policies TR2, TR4 and TR11 of the revised deposit draft of Cherwell Local Plan 2011.

That proposal related to a significant addition to the number of proposed in-mates. Members adopted the position that this use could take place at other removal centres nationwide which were not situated in the Green Belt.

GOSE subsequently set a public inquiry process underway to adjudicate in this dispute between the developing department and the Council (inquiry set for Autumn 2005). Following a confidential report to South Area Planning Committee in June 2005 the Council decided to pursue only reason 1 above. In July 2005 the inquiry was postponed following a Ministerial announcement concerning the future of the Bicester Accommodation Project and the possibility of a remand centre on that site, and subsequently the appeal process at Campsfield House was abandoned in 2006.

The scheme is fundamentally different insofar as it is not aimed at increasing capacity at the existing establishment, but instead improves facilities for inmates. Such improvements cannot be diverted elsewhere, and the previous objections are therefore not valid.

### **Visual Impact**

The site is banded by substantial hedgerows with trees to the west, south and east and is screened from the north by the large buildings of the Prison Service Training Centre. However, these hedgerows are not complete and are deciduous. Consequently glimpses of the roofs of the existing buildings are available from limited positions on the A44 to the west and from the Begbroke Lane footpath to the south. The applicants propose additional planting in the southern hedgerow at a weak part in that line adjacent to the proposed building and extreme additional planting on the land to the west of the proposed building. In your officer's opinion this is sufficient to deal with the increased impact of a further building.

### **Conclusion**

This scheme is different in nature to the 2004 scheme. In the opinion of the Head of Development Control and Major Development the need for these facilities is proven and the degree of impact upon openness and the visual amenities of the Green Belt will be minimal, especially when mitigated by the additional planting proposed. Consequently it is considered that the very special circumstances advanced outweigh the strong presumption against inappropriate development.

## 6. Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that the application is approved subject to:

- (i) the completion of departure procedures; and
  - (ii) the following conditions:-
    1. SC 1.4 Full Duration Limit (3 years) (RC2)
    2. SC 2.0 Details of Matls and Ext Fns (RC4)
    3. SC 3.6 Reinforce Hedge (RC11) 'south'
    4. That no development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme for landscaping the site which shall include:-
      - (a) details of the proposed tree and shrub planting including their species, number, sizes and positions, together with grass seeded/turfed areas,
- Reason - In the interests of the visual amenities of the area, to ensure the creation of a pleasant environment for the development and to comply with Policies G2 and EN1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and Policy C28 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.
5. SC 3.1 Impl Landsc Sch and Repts (RC10)

### **SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION AND RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES**

The Council, as local planning authority, has determined this application in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The development is considered to be acceptable on its planning merits in that whilst defined as inappropriate development the very special circumstances advanced are considered to outweigh the normal presumption against such development. As such the proposal is in accordance with Policies G1, G2 and G4 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and saved Policies GB1 and C7 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the Council considers that the application should be approved and planning permission granted subject to appropriate conditions, as set out above.

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