

**Site Address: Sites D and E Graven Hill
Upper Arccott Ambrosden**

15/00266/DISC

Ward: Ambrosden and Chesterton

District Councillor: Lynn Pratt

Case Officer: Alex Keen

Recommendation: Delegate to the Head of Development Management to approve the Masterplan and Design Code, subject to:

- A) Receipt of a satisfactory plan showing the location of bus stops, and;
- B) Minor amendments to the street design principles sufficient to address OCC Transport concerns , and;
- C) Inclusion of an additional section in the Design Code detailing sustainable construction methods

Applicant: Graven Hill Village Development Company

Application Description: Discharge of conditions 26 (masterplan and design code), 30 (phasing plan), 31 (M40 junction improvements), 37 (district heating feasibility), 48 (strategic landscape scheme), 61 (relief road safeguarding zone), 62 (foul water drainage), 65 (surface water drainage) and 67 (surface water drainage) of outline planning permission 11/01494/OUT

Committee Referral: The details submitted in respect of condition 26 raise important issues of design in respect of a site of strategic planning importance to the District

Committee Date: 03 September 2015

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The application site is part of an existing MoD logistics, commodities and service operations base at Graven Hill, to the south of Bicester. It comprises a mix of mainly post-war commercial and industrial buildings located around the perimeter of Graven Hill, and accessed via a network of internal roads and private railways. The principal access to the site is off the A41 Aylesbury Road to the north, with the private railway network connecting to the Oxford to Bicester rail line to the west of the site. There is woodland, grassland and agricultural land within the site and Graven Hill itself is a landmark natural feature in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.2 Outline planning permission (ref: 11/01494/OUT) was granted in August 2014 for the redevelopment of the site including the demolition of existing buildings and the erection of up to 1900 new homes along with a local centre comprising a primary school, community hall, shops and retail services, employment development comprising a mix of B1 (light industrial), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) uses, and associated public open space, highway works, sustainable drainage systems etc. It is anticipated that the majority of the new homes will be delivered as self-build or custom-build housing.
- 1.3 St. David's Barracks and the existing railheads to the south of Graven Hill are outside the application site boundary and are not presently proposed to be redeveloped.

- 1.4 The current application is seeking approval of various details required to be submitted under conditions of the outline planning permission. It is intended that the majority of the details will be determined by officers, in accordance with the scheme of delegation. However the design code and masterplan submitted in respect of condition 26 is considered to raise important design issues, and it is condition 26 only which is the subject of this report.
- 1.5 The design code and masterplan will set the framework and guiding design principles which all subsequent applications for reserved matters approval will be expected to follow. Furthermore it is intended that compliance with the design code and masterplan will be the main requirement of the Local Development Order (LDO) that is being prepared to facilitate the delivery of the self-build plots.
- 1.6 An LDO is a type of planning permission granted by the Local Planning Authority. Government Guidance advises that LDOs are intended to streamline the planning process by removing the need for developers to make a planning application to a Local Planning Authority. The Council's Executive agreed a draft LDO for consultation at its meeting on 6 July 2015. The report to Executive and the draft LDO are attached as Appendix A to this report.
- 1.7 The masterplan consists of the following documents:
- Masterplan Development Document (dated 29.06.15)
 - Proposed Masterplan (Dwg. No: A-L-010 Rev G)
 - Proposed Masterplan Northern Area (Dwg. No: A-L-011 Rev H)
 - Adoption Strategy (Dwg. No: A-L-014)
 - Building Heights Plan (Dwg. No: A-L-030 Rev I)
 - Proposed Land Use Plan (Dwg. No: A-L-040 Rev N)
 - Road Hierarchy Plan (Dwg. No: 406 Rev A07)
 - Street Hierarchy Summary (dated 29.07.15)
 - Road Type Sections (Dwg. No: A-L-510 Rev G)
 - Constraints Parameter Plan (Dwg. No: A-L-020)
 - Strategic Landscape and Habitat Masterplan (dated June 2015)
- 1.8 The design code deals with the northern area of the site only, which is the proposed residential development, local centre and community facilities, and is divided into two sections. The first section sets out the vision and rationale for the development, summaries the overriding design principles, and outlines the self-build process. The second section sets out the design requirements in detail, as applicable to the various different component character areas within the development.

2. Application Publicity

- 2.1 The application has been published on the Council's online planning register. Two objections have been received from residents of Wretchwick Farm Cottages, which lie to west of the application site. In summary they raise the following concerns:
- They were not notified about the previous applications
 - The route of the access road proposed to serve the employment area does not appear logical having regard to the existing topography of the site
 - The proposed employment area access road would be in close proximity to their properties, with potential for regular noise and disturbance from commercial traffic
 - The route of the access road is proposed to be safeguarded for a possible relief road; if approved this would become the main option for any future relief road and would seriously affect the amenity and enjoyment of their properties

- The route of the access road would affect wildlife, including protected species such as Great Crested Newts and rare birds and butterflies
- The nearest dwellings would overlook Wretchwick Farm Cottages with a resultant loss of privacy
- Wretchwick Farm Cottages are heritage listed

An alternative route for the employment area access road is proposed, set further into the site and more closely aligned to the route of the existing access road.

3. Consultations

3.1 CDC URBAN DESIGN CONSULTANT: **no objections** but in summary makes the following observations/comments:

- Much of the advice given at pre-application stage appears to have been taken on board
- The issue of whether to separate the landscape and built environments may need further discussion as the code uses/reinforces the role of the public realm to set the character. A thematic approach should be considered to add an element of differentiation within the site
- The palette of materials appears somewhat conservative
- More detail/clarity should be provided re: building lines and the importance of active facades on corner-turning plots
- A bus route to the employment area should be considered
- More detail on the format/content of the plot passport would be welcome as this will be the distillation of the code for most plot purchasers
- There is a need to build in a 'lessons learnt' review process, so that the code can be amended/adjusted as necessary in response to learning from implementation
- Thought should be given to how disputes would be resolved in the event that plot purchasers wish to depart from the design code

3.2 OCC TRANSPORT: **final comments awaited**. However negotiations are ongoing regarding a number of outstanding issues. In summary these are:

- Road widths: OCC require roads which will have two way buses either now or in the future to be 6.75m wide. OCC consider that 6.0m wide (as proposed) to hamper progress of the bus service and undermine reliability. Streets with one way bus movement can be 6.0m wide. OCC are also concerned more generally that narrower road widths will lead to maintenance issues (e.g. clipped kerbs and damage to other highway features).
- Primary streets: in addition to the concerns about road width, OCC comment that junction radii should be 6.0m minimum not maximum.
- Secondary Streets: on the basis these could serve up to 300 homes, OCC consider 4.8m width is too narrow – they advise it should be 5.5m and where there is the temporary bus route (assuming one way) it should be 6m. Junction radii should be 4.0m minimum.
- Tertiary Street 01 and 02, Rural Lanes: where these serve up to 25 properties, OCC advise the road width should be a minimum of 5.5m rather than 4.8m. In this case it will be acceptable for there to be no footways but there will need to be maintenance margins on both sides (to allow the maintenance of road edging and installation of lighting and other necessary street furniture e.g. signs). These will need to be a minimum of 0.6m wide. The junction radii need to be a minimum of 4.0m. These streets will need to be lit with OCC approved columns and lanterns.
- Vehicle tracking: On the tracking drawings there appear to be a number of locations where large vehicles get very close to the edge of the highway

and/or over swing off the highway. Including over verges, parking spaces etc. OCC are particularly concerned that the highway edge and other pieces of street furniture such as signs and verges and lamp columns might get damaged more often than normal.

- Bus stops: OCC believe it is very important that locations of bus stops are included in the design code and masterplan at this stage.

3.3 CDC LANDSCAPE: **no objections** but makes the following comments/observations in respect of the design code:

- Front boundary treatment: I have some concerns about visual integration along roadways in the development which are comprised of individual properties. I would prefer to see one hedge species specified in a particular area rather than a choice.
- Village greens: If the village greens are to be used for markets and social gatherings as stated on p12 then the grass needs to be close cut not left long. Long grass is more suitable on some of the larger open spaces.
- Village Centre: I would like to see more detail about the character of the village centre. It is especially important to provide adequate parking which does not dominate the spaces created or look as though it is an add-on.
- Tree-lined boulevards: these are welcome but will need to be designed alongside Highways specification for street lighting which seems to state no trees within 10m of each column which is restricting.
- Trees: I would like to see lists of indicative tree species for different areas of the site to provide local character.

Further information is requested in respect of the strategic landscape scheme.

3.4 CRIME PREVENTION AND DESIGN ADVISER: **no comments**

4. Relevant National and Local Policy and Guidance

4.1 Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1

BSC4:	Housing Mix
ESD13:	Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement
ESD15:	Character of the Built and Historic Environment
Policy Bicester 2:	Graven Hill

4.2 Cherwell Local Plan 1996 (saved policies)

C28:	Layout, design and external appearance of new development
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4.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in particular paragraph 17 “core planning principles” and sections 4 “promoting sustainable transport” and 7 “requiring good design

4.4 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), in particular the section on design

5. Appraisal

5.1 Condition 26 requires that: *Prior to the submission of reserved matters for Graven Hill, a master plan and design code shall be provided covering at least such matters as the distribution of land uses, character areas, forms of buildings, street hierarchy, measures to support sustainable travel, strategic landscape, building typology,*

materials, servicing, parking and sustainability features. The Design Code shall be approved in writing prior to the submission of reserved matters and thereafter the reserved matters shall be made in accordance with the agreed Code. The reason for the condition is: To ensure high quality development in accordance with Policy C28 of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5.2 Paragraph 56 of the NPPF states that: *the Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.* With regard to masterplans, paragraph 032 of the PPG on design explains that: *Masterplans can set out the strategy for a new development including its general layout and scale and other aspects that may need consideration. The process of developing masterplans will include testing out options and considering the most important parameters for an area such as the mix of uses, requirement for open space or transport infrastructure, the amount and scale of buildings, and the quality of buildings.*
- 5.3 With regard to design codes, paragraph 036 of the PPG on design explains that these are: *a type of detailed design guidance that is particularly useful for complex scenarios involving multiple parties in long-term development. A code can be a way of simplifying the processes associated with new development to give more certainty to all those involved and help to make high quality places...Preparing a good code is about finding a balance between technical specificity and a succinct description of what is required. Some of the best and most effective codes are very short...To promote speed of implementation, avoid stifling responsible innovation and provide flexibility, design codes should wherever possible avoid overly prescriptive detail and encourage sense of place and variety (unless local circumstances can clearly justify a different approach).*
- 5.4 The assessment of whether the submitted masterplan and design code is acceptable to discharge condition 26 shall be made in the context of this guidance, with particular regard to each of the matters listed in condition 26 as follows:

Land uses

- 5.5 The submitted Land Use Plan demonstrates a distribution of land uses that is broadly in accordance with that considered and approved in the outline planning permission. The main employment area (comprising a mix of industrial and business uses) is shown to be located to the south-east of the site with the residential development shown located to the north of the site. A village centre is shown with a primary school, community centre and sports fields close by, and large areas of public open space are shown distributed throughout the site, including allotment gardens to the north-west. Officers are satisfied that this is an appropriate strategy for managing the distribution of land uses across the development.

Character areas, forms of buildings, street hierarchy, building typology and materials

- 5.6 The submitted Design Code identifies 12 “character components” across the residential (northern) part of the site. The Code explains that these character components are grouped into those that will deliver an “urban structure” and those that will deliver a “rural structure”.
- 5.7 The urban structure includes the village centre focused around two village greens linked by a high street, the primary perimeter road running east-west and incorporating features retained from the existing railway network, a tree-lined boulevard serving as a secondary road leading west out of the village centre, and a network of community streets and urban lanes.

- 5.8 The rural structure includes open spaces, parks, green corridors, and a network of rural lanes on the perimeter of the development fronting onto those spaces.
- 5.9 For each character component, the Code identifies a number of design criteria, or constraints, which will be applied to deliver the desired character. In all areas baseline criteria are applied such as identifying the maximum build zone, the maximum build height, boundary heights, and the points of vehicular access.
- 5.10 In the village centre and along the primary and secondary routes and along the rural lanes (the outward face of the development) additional restrictions will apply such as materials palettes, specific boundary treatments, and a fixed front façade position. The primary and secondary routes in particular would have a fixed, strong building line with terracing along the tree-lined boulevard, whilst minimum building heights are also specified in the village centre. However even within these areas 'signature' plots are identified where only the baseline criteria will apply, to encourage design innovation at focal points in the development.
- 5.11 The rationale behind this coding approach is to achieve a balance between providing a clear and legible street hierarchy with the principal routes appearing the most formal and consistent in appearance, whilst allowing design freedom for individual plot purchasers, so supporting a self-build method of delivery.
- 5.12 There is no doubt that this coding approach provides a significant amount of design flexibility with potential for a wide range of building types to be developed varying in size, shape, form, design quality and appearance. However officers consider this approach is appropriate in the context of facilitating self-build development, and are satisfied that the additional design restrictions to be applied in sensitive areas and along primary routes should help create legibility and develop a sense of place that responds appropriately to the existing environment.
- 5.13 The intention to retain and incorporate, where possible, existing built features such as sections of the existing railway, water towers, and concrete ponds into the public realm is welcomed in this respect, and should contribute to creating a unique sense of place that draws on the history of the site. Likewise the additional design restrictions that would apply to the outward face of the development, along with maximum building heights that are consistent with the building height restrictions imposed by other conditions of the outline planning permission, should ensure that the wider landscape impacts of the development are acceptable.
- 5.14 Importantly it is made clear in the Code that it will apply to the first phase of development only and will be subject to review and amendment as necessary prior to commencement of subsequent phases. This is sensible in view of the innovative nature of self-build development in the UK, and will allow for the Code to be refined in response to lessons learnt as the development progresses.

Strategic landscape

- 5.15 In the context of the above, officers consider ensuring a high quality public realm will be especially important to creating a sense of place and to reinforcing character across the development.
- 5.16 The Masterplan documents (including the land use plan) show the distribution of strategic open space across the site including the location of parks, allotments, areas of woodland and meadow, play areas, sports pitches, attenuation ponds, and other amenity spaces. This distribution is considered an acceptable strategy to inform the detailed landscape design as it shows existing features (e.g. woodlands, meadows, ponds) retained and incorporated as key features in the development, with new

landscape features sensitively designed and located to provide a network of accessible green corridors and open spaces throughout the site.

- 5.17 For each character component, the Code identifies a number of guiding principles that will inform the design, planting, treatment, lighting and maintenance of the public realm including public open spaces. These principles seek to ensure the use of high quality materials, and promote incorporating soft landscaping into the design of streets and boundary treatments wherever possible, drawing inspiration from the existing rural landscape character of Graven Hill. In particular perimeter roads and streets fronting onto open space are to be designed so as to provide a soft edge to the development that blends with the landscape, with lighting kept to a minimum and pavements/cycle ways passing through the landscape instead of running immediately alongside the highway.
- 5.18 It is noted that the Council's Landscape officer would prefer to see further detail in respect of the strategic landscaping. However full details of landscaping are required to be provided as a reserved matter, and officers are satisfied that the level of detail provided to discharge condition 26 is adequate and appropriate as a strategy for the general distribution and approach to designing a high quality public realm.

Measures to support sustainable travel, and servicing and parking

- 5.19 The submitted Masterplan and Design Code incorporate various measures to promote sustainable travel including locating community facilities and buildings such as the primary school, community hall and sports pitches within easy walking distance of the village centre, providing a network of cycle paths with links to the wider cycle network, requiring the provision of cycle parking facilities across the site, and designing the primary and secondary routes to accommodate bus services.
- 5.20 With regard to servicing and parking, the Masterplan and Design Code show that parking for at least two cars would be required to be provided on the majority of the residential plots. Where on plot parking is not provided (e.g. in the case of apartments and terrace housing along the tree-lined boulevard) private parking courts are shown. In addition provision is made for unallocated on-road parking in residential areas throughout the development.
- 5.21 In the village centre, on road parking provision is shown on the Masterplan along with space for servicing the rear of the commercial units. There is also space shown for spill-out activity along the frontages to the commercial units. Parking and access to serve the sports pitches, the school, community centre and allotments is also shown on the Masterplan along with a drop-off point for buses serving the primary school.
- 5.22 It is the case that OCC Transport officers have raised a number of concerns about road widths, the lack of footpath and street lighting provision on some road types, visibility splays and vehicle tracking at junctions, and the need for the locations of bus stops to be identified on the masterplan. OCC officers have also raised concerns about the increased maintenance liability they consider would arise from narrower streets, with a greater likelihood of verges being clipped and pavements and street furniture damaged.
- 5.23 Paragraph 042 of the PPG section on design states that: *In many cases shortcomings in street design reflect the rigid application of highway engineering standards in terms of road hierarchies, junction separation distances, sight lines and turning radii for service vehicles. The result is often a sense of sprawl and formlessness and development which contradicts some of the key principles of urban design. Imaginative and context-specific design that does not rely on conventional standards can achieve high levels of safety and amenity.*

- 5.24 The street design principles used in the masterplan and design code draw on Government guidance contained in Manual for Streets, and have been applied so as to achieve a balance between facilitating traffic movement and connectivity, whilst creating a unique sense of place that responds well to the existing environment. Officers consider this to be an appropriate and acceptable design strategy in the context of Paragraph 042 of the PPG.
- 5.25 Furthermore it is important to note that full details of the internal access roads are required to be provided as a reserved matter, and other conditions of the outline planning permission require approval of full details of the pedestrian, cycle and vehicle routes, vision splays, and vehicle tracking to be provided and agreed prior to construction of each phase. Taking into account the PPG advice about the need for flexibility, officers consider many of the specific concerns raised by OCC Transport officers are best addressed at this detailed design stage.
- 5.26 A meeting has taken place with the developer and OCC Transport officers present, during which it was agreed that a balance needs to be struck between providing certainty as to the guiding principles which will inform the detailed design of streets, and flexibility to provide the best design solution at the reserved matters stage. Minor amendments to the street design principles are to be following this meeting, and are expected to be received in advance of the Planning Committee meeting. These amendments, along with any further comments received from OCC Transport, will be reported in the written updates.
- 5.27 With regard to bus routes and road widths, as already noted these have been designed in accordance with the guidance contained in Manual for Streets. In addition the bus routes planned to be provided in the first phase of development are envisaged to be one way only and so the proposed width of 6 metres should be adequate in this respect. It would be unreasonable to require the road width to be designed (as requested by OCC) to accommodate two way bus traffic in the future when currently there is no realistic or planned prospect of this level of service being provided through the first phase of development. In addition the design code will be reviewed and amended as necessary prior to subsequent phases where two way bus traffic will need to be accommodated.
- 5.28 Concerns about potential maintenance costs are not considered to be sufficient reason to conclude the submitted details are unacceptable in planning terms.
- 5.29 A plan showing the location of bus stops is close to being agreed by OCC officers and the developer, and is expected to be submitted prior to the Planning Committee meeting; progress on this will be addressed in the written updates.

Sustainability features

- 5.30 The submitted Masterplan and Design Code do not explicitly address this matter, except for detailing measures to promote sustainable transport options and detailing the incorporation of sustainable drainage features into the strategic landscaping. However officers have agreed with the developer the inclusion of an additional section in the Design Code detailing sustainable construction methods to be applied across the development, including on self-build plots. The developer has committed to providing this in advance of the Planning Committee meeting. Officers are satisfied that this would be adequate to discharge the requirements of condition 26.

5.31 Other matters

The concerns raised by neighbours of the development regarding the layout and proximity of the proposed employment area access road to their properties are noted.

However this layout was proposed and considered in detail as part of the outline planning application, and is shown on the approved plans listed under condition 2 of the outline planning permission. As such it would not be justified in planning terms to require the developer to make substantial amendments to the masterplan in response to these concerns, given the layout of the access road has already been assessed and found acceptable.

- 5.32 The matter of the safeguarding zone proposed for a south eastern relief road shall be addressed separately in the assessment and determination of the details submitted to discharge condition 61 of the outline planning permission. Likewise the issues raised regarding the potential impact on biodiversity and protected species were considered in detail at the outline planning stage and are addressed by other conditions of the outline planning permission.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The submitted Masterplan and Design Code is considered to provide an acceptable strategy and framework for guiding detailed design proposals that come forward at reserved matters stage. It provides sufficient detail to deliver an integrated and legible form of development with its own unique and attractive sense of place, and that responds well to the defining characteristics and qualities of the existing environment. Conversely it provides flexibility and freedom for self builders to express their individuality whilst providing an appropriate degree of certainty as to the relationships between plots and the vision for the character and quality of the development as a whole. It also provides flexibility for the development to adapt and respond to the challenges of delivering self build development on a large scale.
- 6.2 Although various concerns have been raised by OCC Transport officers regarding the detailed design of streets, subject to minor amendments to the street design principles contained in the masterplan and design code, it has been agreed that these concerns are more appropriately addressed at the detailed design stage, to provide flexibility in achieving the best design solution.

7. Recommendation

Delegate to the Head of Development Management to approve the Masterplan and Design Code, subject to:

- D) Receipt of a satisfactory plan showing the location of bus stops, and;
- E) Minor amendments to the street design principles sufficient to address OCC Transport concerns , and;
- F) Inclusion of an additional section in the Design Code detailing sustainable construction methods

Statement of Engagement

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and paragraphs 186 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), this decision has been taken by the Council having worked with the applicant/agent in a positive and proactive way as set out in the application report.