

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
PLANNING SERVICES MEMORANDUM****Planning and Sustainable Communities**

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Our Ref : **14/02063/OUT (Cherwell ref: 14/02004/HYBRID)**

**To**

WODC Planning Policy Manager  
Elmfield  
Witney

**Proposed:** Outline Planning Permission for up to 1500 dwellings, including affordable housing and up to a 150 unit care village (C2) with associated publicly accessible ancillary facilities; site for a new primary school; up to 930sqm of retail space; up to 7,500sqm locally led employment (B1/B2/B8) including link and ride; site for a football association step 5 football facility with publicly accessible ancillary facilities; public open space, associated infrastructure, engineering and ancillary works, (all matters reserved except for means of access to the development); and Full Planning Permission for the development of Phase 1 at the south western corner of the site for the erection of 29 residential dwellings (29 of the 1500 described above) with associated open space, parking and landscaping; with vehicular access provided from Upper Campsfield Road (A4095), Shipton Road and Oxford Road (A44) and the application is accompanied by an environmental statement.

**At:** Land South of Perdiswell Farm & East of Woodstock, Shipton Road & Oxford Road, Shipton on Cherwell, Nr Woodstock

**Applicant:** The Vanbrugh Trust and Pye Homes Ltd

Please forward your comments, by email to the named Officer. If you have any queries or require more information please do not hesitate to contact Catherine Tetlow.

**Consultee Comments**

This application seeks planning permission for a predominantly residential development incorporating 1,500 homes. The scheme also incorporates a care village, primary school, sports facilities, neighbourhood centre, employment area, public open space and a link and ride site. The application seeks outline planning permission with the exception of the south-western corner of the site for which a full application has been submitted for 29 dwellings (of the 1,500 homes on the overall site).

The site is located to the south-east of Woodstock and is bounded by the A44 Oxford Road to the south, the A4095 Upper Campsfield Road to the west, residential development to the north-west and open countryside to the north. Immediately to the south of the A44 Oxford Road lies the grounds of Blenheim Palace which has been designated as a World Heritage Site. The southern-western corner of the site falls under the authority of WODC and the remainder of the site falls within Cherwell District.

## **Principle of Development**

Woodstock is defined as a service centre in both the adopted and emerging Local Plans. There is clearly an expectation that the town will accommodate future development. As the applicant has identified, the town scores well in terms of the Council's settlement sustainability matrix offering a good range of services and facilities for a town of this size.

As a defined service centre, Policy H7 of the adopted Local Plan applies which allows for residential development on the basis of infilling, rounding off within the built up area, conversion of existing buildings and on allocated sites. The application site fulfils none of these criteria and as such is a departure to the policy and has been advertised as such.

In a report to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Officers reported that the Council is able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply taking account of the proposed housing requirement of the pre-submission draft Local Plan (525 homes per annum) and the likely delivery of new homes in the period to 2020.

In their supporting planning statement, the applicant unsurprisingly argues that the Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply on the basis that it should be measured using the SHMA requirement of 660 homes per annum and that the Council's supply assumptions are overly optimistic. They also argue that a 20% buffer should be applied rather than 5%.

I do not accept this. The District Council is in the process of challenging the SHMA through its Local Plan and considers that based on more recent evidence and analysis, the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for housing in West Oxfordshire in the period 2011 – 2031 is 525 homes per annum. On this basis it is reasonable to benchmark the 5-year supply position against this lower requirement. In terms of supply, I do not consider the Council's assumptions to be over-optimistic and I remain of the view that with a strong past record of housing delivery, a 5% buffer applies in the case of West Oxfordshire rather than 20%.

In light of the Council being able to demonstrate that it has a 5-year supply, Policy H7 can be afforded more weight than in the absence of a 5-year supply.

Having said that I would acknowledge that the policy was conceived some time ago, pre-dates the NPPF and was adopted at a time when large-scale releases of greenfield land on the edge of settlements was not envisaged or required.

The proposed replacement policy, which is Policy H2 of the emerging pre-submission draft plan, recognises that at main service centres such as Woodstock, new dwellings will be permitted on undeveloped land adjoining the settlement where the proposed development is necessary to meet identified housing needs and is consistent with a number of specified criteria.

In terms of the first issue, I consider that the application as proposed is not needed to meet identified housing needs. Land immediately adjoining the east of Woodstock has been assessed by the Council in its SHLAA as being suitable for around 180 new homes and it is anticipated that this would help to meet the level of identified housing need set out in the emerging Local Plan. However, the application proposal is for 1,500 homes which far outweighs the level of need identified and is massively out of proportion with the scale of development envisaged for this area in the SHLAA.

The majority of the development falls into Cherwell District and the site has not been included in the Cherwell Local Plan to meet their identified housing requirement. As such there is no justification for it in terms of housing need.

In further support of their case, the applicant alludes to the issue of unmet housing need arising from Oxford City. I would agree that there is a significant amount of unmet need that will need to be accommodated within the HMA however a process of joint working is currently underway being co-ordinated by the Oxfordshire Growth Board, in order to consider the best options for dealing with this unmet need.

Until that process is complete, there can be no certainty about whether this site represents a preferred option for accommodating Oxford City's unmet housing needs. There will be a large number of other options considered and assessed and to release this site now before that process is complete would be premature and contrary to the duty to co-operate.

Even if one were to accept that there is a housing need for this scheme, it is relevant to consider the proposal against the criteria set out in emerging Policy H2. Importantly, the first of these criteria is that 'the development should be of a proportionate and appropriate scale to its context.'

At 1,500 homes plus employment land, new school, local centres, sports facilities and various other community facilities, I fail to see how this proposal could be considered to be of a 'proportionate and appropriate scale'. I would acknowledge that a smaller scheme of 180 or so dwellings as identified in the Council's SHLAA would be of an appropriate scale for a town the size of Woodstock.

The second criteria of Policy H2 refers to proposals having to be of 'demonstrable benefit to the local community'. Again this is directly applicable and I would argue that whilst the applicant goes to great lengths to spell out the economic and social benefits of the proposal, the scale of development is such that it cannot reasonably be considered to be of community benefit. Indeed it is likely to have a profound and harmful effect on the local community by virtue of the sheer scale and impact of the proposal.

The fifth criteria of Policy H2 requires development to form a logical complement to the existing scale and pattern of development and/or the character of the area. Again I would suggest that the application proposal fails to fulfil the criteria. A development of 1,500 homes cannot be considered to form a logical compliment to a town the size and form of Woodstock.

To summarise, in terms of the principle of development in this location, whilst I would agree that Woodstock is a sustainable settlement, capable of accommodating additional growth, what is currently proposed is completely at odds with both the adopted and emerging Local Plans. The Council's SHLAA acknowledges that the site is capable of accommodating around 180 homes but this is a very different proposition.

The development is not needed to meet the identified housing needs of either West Oxfordshire District or Cherwell District and whilst it could potentially be seen as a way of addressing unmet housing need arising from Oxford City, to grant permission now would be premature and pre-empt the outcome of the countywide option appraisal work that will be happening over the next 6 months.

## **Transport considerations**

### Highway considerations

The scheme will be served by three access points comprising of two primary access points, one of which is located off the A44 Oxford Road and one off the A4095 Upper Campsfield Road. In addition, the site is served by one secondary access off Shipton Road to the north. The main access off the A4095 is proposed to serve the 'link and ride' and employment site. Notwithstanding the principle of development on this wider site, it would seem more logical to position the link and ride site adjacent to the A44 which is already a key bus route? Perhaps this has already been explored and there are highway or landscape constraints which restrict this?

The application includes works to the local highway network including upgrades to the Bladon Road roundabout to increase its capacity. Are the highways department supportive of all the measures proposed and are these sufficient to mitigate the impacts? Traffic on the A44 towards Oxford is identified as operating beyond capacity during morning peak hours and therefore this suffers from congestion on a daily basis. The Transport Assessment submitted alongside this application sets out a list of required upgrades at each phase of development and includes County Council led schemes including upgrades to the Wolvercote and Cuttleslowe roundabout as well as infrastructure work associated with the Northern Gateway. It is not clear whether the County Council upgrades and the Northern Gateway works are committed schemes and if not, what will be the impacts of additional flows without these upgrades in place? In addition, there is a lack of clarity regarding the Northern Gateway 'infrastructural' works; what do these incorporate, when are they anticipated to be completed and have they been committed?

The proposal includes the provision of a coach park to the north of the site which will serve the Marlborough Secondary School. A few options have been suggested regarding the details of this. Are the highways department supportive of this concept? In addition, do we consider the landscape impacts of this to be detrimental (this area is on the edge of the development site and may look unsightly from the adjacent countryside.)?

Finally, are the highways department supportive of the access points, internal road network and the general location, accessibility and dimensions of the parking spaces?

Policies BE3 and T1 of the WOLP 2011

### Public transport opportunities

The site is considered to be well located to benefit from and assist in improving on the current bus provision available within the vicinity of the site (in particular the S3 service to Oxford). The site lies within a bus corridor (A44) and therefore this offers future residents on the site an alternative to car based travel. However, due to the expanse of the site, some areas exceed the recommended maximum distance for accessing a bus stop.

It is important to ensure that the provision of conveniently located bus stops are included and these are well connected by a lit footpath to encourage use of this mode of transport throughout the day.

The 233 bus service travels directly past the site and takes passengers from Witney to the railway station in Long Hanborough. There is support locally in improving the frequency of this service and contributions should be sought to help fund such improvements. I note this service is proposed to re-route into the site which will increase patronage on this service and provide a good service from the site but will increase the journey time from the Witney direction to Long Hanborough.

A 'link and ride' is proposed to connect Woodstock to Oxford and the new Oxford Parkway railway station at Water Eaton. This is a new concept and there are no examples of any such schemes in the District. What are the views of the highways department on this aspect of the application? Is there flexibility in this concept to respond to changes in other transport connections?

Policies BE3 and T3 of the WOLP 2011.

#### Walking and cycling links

Good accessibility between the site and the established parts of the town is particularly important to help the site integrate with the town and to enable residents to access key services and facilities without the need drive.

The development includes six pedestrian/ cyclist access points on the western edge of the site and this appears to provide a reasonable level of accessibility to allow the western part of the site to integrate with the existing built up limits of the town. The eastern section of the site beyond the Scheduled Monument is more difficult to integrate by virtue of its distance from the existing built up area of Woodstock and this will discourage walking into the centre of the town.

Policies BE3 and T2 of the WOLP 2011.

#### **Landscape impacts**

The site comprises several large flat arable fields with field boundaries comprising of hedgerows of differing heights. The site itself is not subject to any landscape related designations, however it is located at close proximity to Blenheim Palace which has been designated as a World Heritage Site with a Grade I registered garden.

The smaller western part of the site which falls within West Oxfordshire is identified in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 as semi-enclosed limestone wolds which are visually exposed and sensitive to development. The wider site which falls under Cherwell District is identified in the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study as estate farmlands which supports a range of habitats.

The Council previously commissioned a Landscape Review of the smaller parcel of land on the western side of the site to help inform its evidence base. This was completed in May 2014 by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd and this assessment concluded the following:

- Open land to the south of the site should be excluded from development.
- Development should be no higher than 2.5 storeys high with the rural edge development no more than 2 storeys high with a broken roofscape.

- The development area must be broken by the provision of open space, tree and woodland planting to reduce the scale of the built form in keeping with the local townscape pattern.
- All existing mature trees, hedgerow and scrub cover should be retained to provide a basic structure for landscape mitigation.
- Parkland style woodland should be created in the southern field to complement the wooded parkland at Blenheim Park.
- The semi-formality of the approach to Woodstock along Oxford Road should be reinforced.
- Substantive tree planting should be provided to break up the new urban edge.
- The detailed design of the landscape setting to each vehicular and pedestrian/cycle access and the existing road corridor should reflect the different character of each vehicular or pedestrian approach to Woodstock with particular attention to retaining the parkland character of the A44 and the semi-rural character of Shipton Road.
- The site plays a major contribution in the landscape and visual objectives for this area as set out in OWLS and WOLA.
- The design and layout of the development should avoid uniformity and reflect the small scale character of the town in a well treed historic pattern.

Although this landscape assessment only considers a small parcel of the total site area, it provides some useful principles which are relevant to the wider site, not all of which have been followed such as the retention of undeveloped land to the south of the site. Even if these suggestions are followed where possible, the sheer scale of the development proposed is extremely unlikely to respect the small scale, historic character of the town and will harm this important approach into Woodstock.

Policies BE4, BE8, BE11, NE1 and NE3 of the WOLP 2011.

### **Affordable Housing and Care Village**

- Cross boundary allocation of affordable housing  
*The council would seek joint nominations in each delivered phase of affordable housing, equally with Cherwell District Council.*
- *The requirement in policy terms (policy H11) for affordable housing in this high value area of West Oxfordshire is 50% of the total development. I understand that CDC seeks 35% affordable housing in rural areas. It is my belief that West Oxfordshire ought to be encouraging the delivery of affordable homes as near to 50% as possible across the whole development area.*
- Policy BE2 General Development Standards  
*We should strongly encourage any proposed dwellings to be designed to meet the requirements of Lifetime Homes and in terms of energy efficiency; the dwellings should aim to meet the Government's objective to achieve a zero-carbon future. The Energy Strategy and Code for Sustainable Homes Strategy submitted states that the target is to achieve an equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 for residential elements and a BREEAM 'good' rating for non-domestic elements. The Council also requires the completed affordable homes to be Housing Quality Indicator compliant and achieve the relevant space standards of Level 1 / 2 for general and adapted dwellings.*

- Housing Need and scheme mix

*From interrogation of the Council's Common Waiting List I can confirm that there are 140 households who would qualify for housing on this development were it available today. Of these 30+ require affordable older persons accommodation. I am not convinced by the applicant's argument that the care village should be Use Class 2 and not 3. Woodstock is a highly sustainable settlement for older persons due its transport links, health, shopping and social facilities. Many older persons with connections to Woodstock and in need of some support would benefit from being able to access affordable purpose built housing either as affordable rent or shared ownership. There are several examples of this provision in high values areas around Oxfordshire, not least in neighbouring CDC.*

*WODC seeks as a guide a unit mix of 65% 1 and 2 bedroom properties, 30% 3 bedroom homes and no more than 5% 4 bedroom houses. In addition we have identified a need, in similar terms to those of CDC of 3% Wheelchair ready / adaptable homes, ranged across the overall mix.*

- Phasing

*The development is proposed to be phased over a 15 year period and in seven stages. I recommend that we seek to ensure that this development does contribute to the council's 5 year land supply in light of the applicant's arguments in their submission relating to the perceived current under-supply.*

### **Local infrastructure**

A development of this scale will clearly impact on local services and infrastructure and contributions will be sought from the County Council towards services such as the local library, secondary school and community facilities including youth services and children's centres. Additionally, other organisations are likely to seek funding to help mitigate the impacts on other services such as local policing, the GP surgery in Woodstock, ambulance and fire services and sports/ recreational facilities. On-site needs have been identified, including a new primary school and sports facilities. Other on-site facilities include space for allotments and playing areas.

A utilities report has been submitted alongside this application and this assesses the capacity of various services including gas, electricity, mains water and telecommunications. Some further investigative work is required and in some cases upgrades are necessary but it appears that capacity is, or can be, made available for all services.

Considering sewerage infrastructure capacity, I note that Thames Water raise no objection to the development provided a dedicated development sewage pumping station is provided to transfer flows directly to Woodstock as set out in the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Statement dated November 2014.

Finally, superfast broadband is often overlooked by developers and infrastructure to support access to superfast broadband will be required.

Policy BE1 of the WOLP 2011

### **Employment allocation**

The proposed development incorporates a modest employment area to provide small office spaces for start-up business on the eastern edge of the proposed site. Notwithstanding the principle of development on this wider site, it is well located within close proximity to the A44, Oxford Airport and the nearby business parks accessed of Langford Lane including

Oxford Spires. Therefore, the site should take advantage of its position by incorporating a meaningful employment allocation and yet the employment area as a proportion of the overall site area is extremely modest.

In terms of its relationship with the neighbouring residential uses, the employment area is set at close proximity with no obvious buffer to separate the uses and to limit noise or other impacts which may create tensions between these two uses.

### **Biodiversity and Ecology**

This is an important consideration and the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that the impacts have been mitigated and net gains in ecological enhancement will be achieved where possible

In July 2014, BSG Ecology was commissioned by the applicant to carry out various ecological surveys of the proposed development area. These include an extended Phase I habitat survey, great crested newt survey, badger survey, dormouse survey, reptile survey, roman snail survey, bat surveys and a characterisation of the breeding bird community. According to the reports, the main habitats found within the planning application site area include arable fields, broadleaved semi-natural woodland, hedgerows and field margins of semi-improved grassland. The applicant proposes to provide a number of ecological measures including a 'bat corridor' and off-site habitat creation in the fields to the north of the site. This will include the planting of a hedgerow and native tree planting.

An ecologist should be consulted on behalf of the Council to assess the various reports so that their expert opinion can be sought on whether appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures have been incorporated into the scheme. We also need to be satisfied that the measures are practical and effective in the long term. For example, can we be sure that the habitat creation to the north of the site can be protected in the long term and also will the bat corridor be suitable given the increase in light levels and the number of people who will be crossing this area?

Policies NE13 and NE15 of the WOLP 2011.

### **Flood Risk**

This parcel of land is situated in Flood Zone I (low risk of flooding) and therefore it is sequentially preferable for housing development. However, the applicant must demonstrate that surface water run-off will be satisfactorily drained.

The applicant has prepared a Flood Risk Assessment which assesses the ground water table, flood risk and drainage. The reports suggest measures including an attenuation basin to the southern boundary of the site and infiltration swales among other measures. The views of the Council's Engineers/ Environment Agency regarding the FRA should be sought.

### **Other considerations:**

- Phasing  
The development is proposed to be phased over a 15 year period and in seven stages. Are we satisfied that this is phased appropriately to ensure services and facilities will be available to serve the new households in a timely manner? In addition and notwithstanding the principle of development, do we consider that the entirety



of the western section of the site should be phased ahead of the larger section to the east of the Scheduled Monument as this integrates more readily with the existing fabric of the town?

- Retail Impact Assessment

Retail is proposed as part of the overall mix of development to serve the development. Whilst Woodstock has a strong town centre draw with a good mix of independent shops and other facilities and services, we need to be fully satisfied that this retail element will not harm the functions of the town centre. The retail element is above 500sqm (up to 930sqm) and therefore a retail impact assessment should be carried out.

- Loss of Agricultural Land

The applicant states that the site is classified as Grade 3b (moderate quality) with small areas classified as Grade 4 (poor quality). The loss of good quality agricultural land should be avoided where possible.

- Contamination

A desk study and ground investigation has been completed and the contamination risks are considered to be low.

### **Planning policies and detailed considerations**

The Planning Statement and the specialist reports accompanying the application provide a summary of the national and local policy context and considerations. In terms of the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan the key policies are:

- Policy BE1 Environment and Community Infrastructure

- Policy BE2 General Development Standards

*The need for the development to be well-designed and respect the existing scale and pattern of the area and, where possible, improve the character and quality of its surroundings and provide a safe, pleasant, convenient and interesting environment, are especially important given the context of the sites surroundings and position.*

*Do we consider the indicative layout to be accessible with conveniently located services and facilities to allow safe and convenient access? The location of the on-site primary school which is situated close to the Marlborough Secondary School and the proximity of the local centre to the care home village appear logical.*

*Are we happy with the proposed heights of the buildings in the positions shown? Will these assimilate well into the landscape on this edge of town site? This is particularly important on the south and eastern edges of the site as this forms a gateway into Woodstock. In addition, are satisfied that the indicative densities proposed are in keeping with the area. I note that the highest densities will be within the centre of the site.*

*We should strongly encourage any proposed dwellings to be designed to meet the requirements of Lifetime Homes and in terms of energy efficiency; the dwellings should aim to meet the Government's objective to achieve a zero-carbon future. The Energy Strategy and Code for Sustainable Homes Strategy submitted states that the target is to achieve an*

equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 for residential elements and a BREEAM 'good' rating for non-domestic elements.

*Finally, do we consider that the development provides a sufficient level of secure cycle parking and refuse storage?*

- Policy BE3 Provision for movement and parking
- Policy BE4 Open space within and adjoining settlements
- Policy BE8 – Development affecting the setting of a listed building
- Policy BE11 – Historic parks and gardens  
*The gardens belonging to Blenheim Palace are Grade I registered and therefore any development which impacts on the setting of these gardens is a key consideration.*
- Policy BE12 – Archaeological monuments
- Policy BE13 Archaeological Assessments  
*The Scheduled Monument lies in the centre of the site and therefore archaeology is a critical consideration. As well as the known archaeological remains, there is likely to be unknown remains which could be of significance.*  
*An Archaeological Assessment which investigated over 200 trenches was commissioned by the applicant and this identified a moderate amount of archaeological deposits, mostly concentrated in two areas within the larger eastern field.*  
*It is essential that the investigative work carried out and the findings are agreed with the County Archaeologist, Hugh Coddington and it may be necessary to consult English Heritage?*
- Policy BE18 Pollution
- Policy BE19 Noise  
*Are we satisfied that noise from nearby developments including Oxford Airport has been given due consideration?*
- Policy BE21 Light pollution  
*Light pollution should be minimised in the countryside and on edge of settlement sites to avoid unnecessary and excessive light spillage. The application includes the submission of a Lighting Masterplan which identifies measures to reduce light spillage. Due to mix of uses and with particular regard to the sports facilities, the development is likely to significantly increase light pollution. The impacts on the WHS and gardens should also be considered in this regard.*
- Policy NE1 Safeguarding the countryside
- Policy NE3 Local landscape character
- Policy NE6 Retention of trees, woodlands and hedgerows

*An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been submitted alongside the application. Tree cover along the eastern and southern boundary of the site is particularly important in screening the development. Is Nick Dalby satisfied that the applicant has properly considered existing vegetation/trees on the site in shaping the indicative layout of the development? Also, is he supportive of the proposed planting/ vegetation buffer areas and are these sufficient to provide meaningful screening?*

- Policy NE7 The water environment
- Policy NE10 Water resources
- Policy NE13 Biodiversity conservation
- Policy NE15 Protected species
- Policy T1 Traffic generation
- Policy T2 Pedestrian and cycle facilities
- Policy T3 Public transport infrastructure
- Policy H2 – General residential development standards

**Policy H3 Range and type of residential accommodation**

*The general housing mix on the overall site appears reasonable with the bulk of houses on the site consisting of 3 bed houses and two bed flats and houses. However, the full application includes a high percentage of 5 bed houses (21%).*

- Policy H7 Service centres
- Policy H11 Affordable housing  
*It is proposed that 40% of the houses on the site will be affordable. Policy H11 of the adopted plan requires 50% on unallocated sites. Additionally, the draft Local Plan Housing Consultation Paper (August 2014) identified a requirement for 50% affordable housing in higher value areas in which this site falls. Whilst the level of affordable housing fails to comply with WODC's existing and emerging planning policy, this should also be considered against the level of affordable housing sought by Cherwell which I understand is 35%. On this basis, we may conclude that 40% on-site affordable housing when calculated as an overall percentage across the entirety of the site is acceptable?*
- Policy TLC7 Provision for Public Art  
*It would seem logical for this to form part of the gateway features into the site. Heather McCulloch can advise further on this element.*

Planning Policy Team  
19<sup>th</sup> September 2015