



Listening Learning Leading

Planning Services  
**HEAD OF SERVICE: Adrian Duffield**

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By email only

**Our Ref: P16/S1954/RM**

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Dear Mrs Stamm,

**Site: Elms Park, Thame**

**Proposal: Proposed improvement works to Elms Park including the provision of new paths and the relocation and replacement of the multi-use games area**

I refer to your application for approval of reserved matters for the above. While the proposed works would enhance the recreational and amenity value of the current park, there are a number of minor issues that need to be addressed as set out below.

#### **Multi Use Games Area**

As you are aware, Fields in Trust provide advice on suitable buffer zones for a range of play facilities and for a Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA) a 30 metres minimum separation between the activity zone and the boundary of dwellings is recommended to reduce the possibility of conflict between local residents and those at play.

Section 6 of the Design and Access Statement provides that there is a 30 metre buffer for the MUGA with properties to the south but this is not demonstrated on the submitted plans. My measurements suggest that the MUGA would be less than 30 metres from the residential properties (27m from the house, 23m from garden boundary of 33 Broadwaters Avenue). I would be grateful if you check your plans in relation to this issue; it will be necessary to demonstrate that the minimum buffer is achieved.

Furthermore, although comprehensive information has been provided for the play area, there does not appear to be similar information for the MUGA. Although heavy

duty mesh fencing is specified on the hard works plan, there are no details of the proposed colour or height. It would be helpful if these details could be provided together with details of any equipment or lighting proposed.

### **Play Area**

Some responses have raised concerns about the reduction in the size of the play area, the amount and type of equipment proposed. Full details can be viewed on the council's website but the issues raised include:

- Existing play area is very well used, especially by children attending the adjacent Primary School.
- Welcome the proposal to refurbish the park and play equipment but concerned about reduction in size of the play area and inadequate provision for play equipment which will not cater for the number of children who currently use the facility.
- Currently there are 2 spinning elements, 6 "big kid" swings and 4 baby swings. Proposal should provide as many swings for all age ranges as currently exists.
- Play provision appears to be aimed at younger children
- Signage encouraging dog owners to keep their dogs on leads and dog waste bins should be considered.
- Concerns about the play area being relocated in front of the Van Diemens Rd houses, will result in a significant increase in the amount of noise.
- Consultation suggested that there might be an adventure play area for older children

You may wish to comment on these concerns. The proposal would result in a 47% reduction in the size of the play area but I assume this is compensated by the provision for a wider range of informal play opportunities?

### **Undulating Play areas**

It would be helpful to have a specification for what is proposed for these areas. If these informal play areas include trees, details will be required given that landscaping is a reserved matter for which the application is seeking approval.

### **Provision for Paths**

The alignment of the perimeter path is of some concern. It is usual for paths to have curved edges to reflect desire lines. I appreciate that a key design consideration is to maximise the size of central space so that it can be used for a variety of purposes. However, this could be achieved with some rounding of the north and south corners and I would be grateful if you could consider this amendment.

The perimeter path will link into the path within the proposed housing development. Continuity of appearance between the two paths will be important to ensure that the space appears continuous and publicly accessible. The housing development path will comprise self-binding, buff colour gravel. The park perimeter path is proposed to be ulticolour tarmac paving 6mm, light grey (or similar)

The light grey appearance for the perimeter path is unlikely to provide this continuity, a buff colour would be more appropriate. Furthermore, it would be helpful to have further information on the tarmac finish so that we can assess whether this is a suitable material. I would be grateful if you could advise whether you wish the specific details for the clay paving to be approved at this stage.

### **Planting Plans:**

No planting plan has been provided for the northern section of the application site. The illustrative landscape plan indicates planting in this location. A planting plan will be required for this part of the site.

The application provides for high quality planting proposals, the proposed tree species are varied and includes many long lived tree species well suited for park land planting. However, it is important to ensure any trees have an appropriate relationship with neighbouring uses. The Forestry Officer has concerns about the impact of the proposed planting along the western boundary with the proposed adjacent residential dwellings. The planting indicated will grow to form a dense tree line that would have an overbearing impact upon the proposed dwellings, resulting in ongoing costly maintenance that would affect the trees natural appearance.

An option for addressing this issue would be to reduce the number of trees proposed along the western boundary from 13 to 9 to allow for greater separation between each tree, enabling a more open and naturally balanced appearance. Moving the row of trees to the eastern side of the proposed perimeter path would provide the necessary separation between the trees and the proposed dwellings.

Alternatively, the species of trees could be amended to provide for a more conical/narrow species. Such species include *Fagus sylvatica* dawyck, *Quercus robur fastigiata* koster, *Corylus colurna*, *Liriodendron tulipifera fastigiatum*, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. It is still recommended that the trees be moved further from the proposed dwellings. The trees could be within 1 metre of the proposed path if planted with a root diverter to prevent disruption to the path.

These amendments would enable a more sustainable treescape that could be left to grow on to maturity.

If vandalism is unlikely to be an issue, the Forestry Officer recommends that the size of the tree planting stock be reduced in size from 18 to 20cm girth to 12 to 14cm girth. Smaller planting stock will establish more quickly and in the long term make better trees. While larger trees would provide an instant impact, they require more maintenance and are more likely to fail.

### **Performance Area**

I would be grateful if further information could be provided in relation to the proposed performance "area".

**Gated access for Park Street Properties.**

It would be helpful if the plans could indicate current arrangements. The gated access for 82 Park Street is not shown on the plans.

**Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Request for Conditions**

OCC have requested conditions relating to sustainable drainage, construction method statement and bicycle parking. I have discussed these conditions with the County Highway Officer who agrees that the bicycle parking condition is not necessary given that this is an existing use.

As regards sustainable drainage, this can be addressed by provision of details for disposal of surface water. Similarly, the construction method statement only needs to indicate the location of access for equipment/deliveries, storage and likely hours of construction. If these details are provided, it will avoid the need for conditions requiring further approval of details.

**Extension of Time**

It will be necessary to consult on any amended plans that maybe submitted. Therefore, once I receive the amended plans, we will need to discuss an amended timescale for the determination of the planning application.

I hope this letter is helpful in clarifying the amendments that may be required. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are issues that you would like to clarify or discuss.

Yours sincerely



Mella McMahon  
Major Applications Officer