

Full Council

Date:	31 July 2018
Title:	Land to the north of Moreton Road, Moreton
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

Background

1. The proposed development site is approximately 0.41 hectare in size, recti-linear, and aligned north-east to south-west. It is an area of paddocking that fronts Moreton Road, linking to Rycote Lane, the A329, and an assemblage of farm and former farm buildings, and Chestnut Farm house, on its south-eastern flank. To the north-east is School Lane House, and the School House. To the north is an enclosed field.
2. Three pre-application meetings have been held between the Town Council and the developer. Two, in November 2017 and March 2018, have been attended by residents of Moreton. Initially, two schemes were shown to the Town Council, one for 5 dwellings and one for 7. The former contained a higher proportion of larger properties. For subsequent meetings a 7-dwelling scheme was discussed.
3. In April 2018 the developer held a pre-application consultation event within Moreton and invited both spoken and written comments on the proposed development. The developer provided a form questionnaire which was sufficiently open in its questions in order to ensure members of the public were allowed the opportunity to fully express their approval / concerns.

Proposed Development

4. Application P18/S2260/FUL is for 7 dwellings on just over 0.4 hectare, a density of around 17 per hectare. The proposed development is all two-storey and comprises:
 - 1 x 2 bedroom semi-detached property;
 - 2 x 3 bedroom houses, one semi-detached, one detached;
 - 3 x 4 bedroom detached homes;
 - 1 x 5 bedroom dwelling (4 bedrooms with study/fifth bedroom option).
5. The development is split into two main groups. Plot 7 is styled to call to mind a Georgian farmhouse, set well back from the roadside with plots 5 and 6, being converted barns within its associated farmyard. Plots 1-4 meanwhile have been styled in order to represent interpretations of traditional farm-worker houses.
6. The properties are practicable, for example only bedroom 4 of plot 1 does not have built-in storage. Although there are no adopted standards for room or dwelling size within the current development plan, the smaller properties are reasonably close to the nationally described space standard. There are 17 formal parking spaces indicated on the plans, of which 10 are covered and within car ports.

Discussion

7. **Housing policy.** The site counts as a windfall planning application. Policy H5 of the 2013 Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) declares that permission will be granted for small residential developments on infill and (brownfield) redevelopment sites within the parish. It is particularly mentioned that this would include Moreton village. The policy also states that

proposals must be well-designed, and meet “relevant requirements set out in other policies in this Plan and the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy”.

8. The latter part of the last sentence above is included for clarity, but is in itself superfluous. In order to be eligible for referendum, all neighbourhood plans have to be in conformity with the strategic policies contained within the Development Plan as a whole (NPPF paragraphs 12 and 13). Paragraph 20 of the revised NPPF tells us housing remains a strategic policy matter; and paragraph 29 reminds us that neighbourhood plans must not undermine those strategic policies, and must remain in general conformity with them.
9. Against this background, it has been noted that TNP Policy H5 does not specify a size of development, or introduce a threshold to explain what the TNP means by infill. In not doing so, policy H5 is and remains compliant with the District’s Core Strategy policy CSR1. The TNP does not introduce a specification for infill because it did not seek to vary from that laid down in CSR1. The village of Moreton is described within Appendix 4 of the District’s Core Strategy as an “other village”. Policy CSR1 prescribes that infill is to be limited to sites of up to 0.1 hectare, which would allow for around 2, or possibly 3, dwellings. The proposed development site is at least 0.4 hectares in area, and is therefore not compliant with both Core Strategy Policy CSR1, and Policy H5 of the TNP, i.e., it is not infill.
10. Within paragraph 13.10 of the 2012 Core Strategy it is explained that infill is defined as “the filling of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage or on other sites within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings”. The Moreton Road junction, punctuated by the War Memorial and a distinctly different residential area to the south-west, does not represent a continual frontage, but the end of a frontage. Similarly, the site’s road frontage of around 120 metres, should not be described as a small gap. Finally, the site is not closely surrounded by buildings; the longest side is free of any building, and the frontages to Chestnut Farm and Moreton Road can hardly be considered as surrounding. Site area aside, this scheme does not conform to the description of an infill site given within the Core Strategy. It equally does not comply with what might be called “redevelopment”; that term would be restricted for previously developed sites and this is a green, undeveloped site.
11. In providing a mix of housing types, the scheme is compliant with TNP Policy H9. It is not, however, compliant with TNP Policy H10 as there has been no Thame-Specific Affordable Housing and Dwellings Mix Strategy submitted along with the proposal. Although the scheme does not pass the threshold to trigger affordable housing, it should be made clear that the need for Thame-specific dwelling mix strategy should have accompanied the application.
12. **Design.** The farmyard/worker housing avoids a merely linear, semi-urban development and attempts to respond to the neighbouring area in varying the set back of the properties. The materials used in the properties are primarily traditional brick and clay tile. Exceptions are in use of wood cladding to suggest a later lean-to extension on Plot 1, the two “barns” of Plots 5 and 6, and in side/end walls of carports. Plot 1 presents a side profile to the junction of Moreton Road and The Furlongs, a single and two-storey aspect that helps further the apparent distance between the dwelling and the junction. The alignment of this dwelling is turned, in order that the dwelling looks more towards Plot 2 and the shared access and driveways. This will help avoid any future confusion over which phase of village development the dwelling belongs to.
13. At the other end of the development, plot 7 faces the road from its set-back position, while the barn dwellings have been designed to address the “farm yard”. Care has been taken to avoid overlooking between habitable rooms, with the use of obscure glazing in certain windows. The distance between the back of School Lane House and the kitchen/bedroom elevation of plot 7 is likely to be over 20 metres, but it is difficult to be certain with the reduced

scale plans supplied by the District Council. Plot 7 itself is presented in a Georgian style. This is suggestive of a build by a wealthy farm owner, and it is worth noting that Georgian farmhouses do exist in Moreton.

14. Fenestration is sensibly dealt with across the scheme, with window opening types appropriate to the style of building, e.g., the smaller, “farm worker” houses have simple casement windows, the “Georgian” farmhouse sash, and the barns, a mix of casements and both flush and recessed rooflights.
15. On the basis of the Design and Access Statement submitted, and notwithstanding the uncertainty over the distance between the rear of School Lane House and plot 7, the development meets the needs of TNP Policy ESDQ15, in showing how the proposal would reinforce Thame’s character. In the matter of TNP Policy ESDQ16, explaining how the development relates well to its site and surroundings, the Statement similarly explains how the proposed scheme developed in response to constraints and site-related opportunities. This can, however, be weighed up separately from how the proposal responds to the Moreton Conservation Area.
16. TNP Policy ESDQ20 requires designs that follow traditional architecture in response to historic character should use historically correct materials. The Design and Access Statement mentions traditional brick and clay tile, and wooden boarding, but does not mention the materials to be used for windows, soffits, downpipes, etc. Such items tend to have a significant effect on the appearance of buildings and Policy ESDQ20 sensibly requires that such matters should not be left to chance. This policy has not been adequately satisfied.
17. It is a requirement of Policy ESDQ27 that the often “forgotten” design elements of schemes are included from the start of the design process. On this matter, it is notable that although gutters and downpipes are shown, other important items such as bin stores, bicycle storage or parking, and boilers and the accompanying flues, are not. Policy ESDQ27 has not been met.
18. **Landscape impact.** Supplied as part of the Design and Access statement is an honest assessment of the impact of the development on the landscape and setting of Moreton. It correctly points out that the scheme’s impact will be more considerable during winter months. The hedgerow to the north of the site, and along Moreton Road, will help shield the proposed development when the hedgerow trees and shrubs are in leaf. Those to the south and south-east, facing the War Memorial and Chestnut Farm, are scrubby and sparse. Submitted mitigation proposals include concentrating on the replanting or reinforcement of these hedgerows with native species, which will serve to both soften the development and improve the site’s biodiversity.
19. The site will be visible from Moreton Road, possible from as far as The Chestnuts, in winter. The approach to Moreton from this road will certainly feel less rural as a result. The view from The Furlongs across the War Memorial will change significantly; the paddock will disappear, while the longer view to the field behind the paddock will be closed off by the proposed dwellings and car ports. The next most critical view will be that looking south-west from the Thame Conservation Area, which will primarily be impacted on during the winter months.
20. Overall, it is felt that the scheme would have a negative effect on the wider setting of the village in the landscape. This should not be confused with the aesthetics of the scheme within its site.

21. **Moreton Conservation Area.** There is no published appraisal of the Moreton Conservation Area. The Moreton CA itself is centred on the cluster of listed buildings to the east of the proposed development site. It is therefore difficult to establish elements that particularly warrant consideration when judging the impact of the proposed development. There is no evidence that the area is connected with particular persons or events. It is therefore more likely that the Moreton CA is protected for its combination of its connection with past farming and village activities, its place in the wider economy of the past, and its aesthetic value. The inclusion of the road and verges opposite Chestnut Farm however, which are immediately adjacent to the proposed development site, indicates that they are seen as making a positive contribution to the whole.
22. The scheme's eastern crossover will be within the Moreton CA and this must be given some regard. The development will, however, mostly impact on the setting of the Moreton CA. The setting itself must be regarded as what contributes to the Moreton CA, in light of this application. The setting is not discussed within the applicant's Design and Access Statement. The proposed development would undoubtedly alter the setting of the Moreton CA and would serve to erode the spatial relationship between the Chestnut and Moreton farms. It would also impact negatively in the sense of both arrival into the Moreton CA and the view south-westwards, from the CA. There would, therefore, be harm. In the narrower terms of undermining the significance of the Moreton CA as a cluster of residential and formerly commercial and civic buildings at the end of the Moreton ribbon, the harm is deemed significant. In this context, the proposal is contrary to ESDQ15, in undermining Thame's historic character, and is also contrary to ESDQ16, in weakening, rather than maintaining or strengthening, the distinct character of the local surroundings.
23. In undermining the Moreton Conservation Area by harming the contribution it makes to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place, the proposal is contrary to Core Strategy Policy CSEN3. As a site outside the Moreton CA that is introducing a harmful effect upon it, the development is contrary to Local Plan Policy CON7.
24. In failing to demonstrate how the setting of the site and the proposal does and would contribute to the Moreton CA, the proposal is contrary to paragraph 189 of the revised NPPF. It is also wholly contrary to paragraph 200 of the revised NPPF, in that it would not enhance or better reveal the significance of the Moreton CA, but would in fact erode that significance.
25. The harm to the Moreton CA must be seen as less than substantial, in that it would not involve the loss of the area through demolition. Paragraph 196 of the revised NPPF informs us that in these cases, as a designated heritage asset, the public benefits of the proposal must be weighed against the harm to that asset. It is believed that on balance, and with reference to paragraphs 189 and 200, the NPPF indicates the harm would outweigh the benefit, in this case.
26. It is judged that the impact on Moreton's listed buildings when taken individually is limited to that of harm to their setting. Although this will undoubtedly be greater during winter months when vegetation has died back, this remains minor, overall.
27. **Transport.** The TNP Policy GA1 requires development to provide good pedestrian and cycle connections to the town centre and other local destinations. Paragraph 9.3 explains what good pedestrian and cycle connections are. They are: short and direct; designed as pleasant places to be; overlooked by adjacent building fronts. It would be unreasonable to require the applicant to provide improved cycle and pedestrian connections, from Moreton. Furthermore, such connections would fundamentally change the setting of Moreton and its conservation area. It is noted however, that cycling opportunities do exist within the area; the Phoenix Trail is close by and the track to Tetsworth is more than passable. No provision

has been made though for cycle parking within the scheme. This is contrary to SODC Local Plan Policy D2, which specifies standards of one space per bedroom.

28. Parking spaces for 18 cars have been declared, although only 17 can be seen on the drawings. More parking is possible in front of some of the car ports. All dwellings have two identified spaces, as a minimum. The very lowest interpretation of the District's parking standards possible would require only 14 spaces. Due to the development's location and the certain reliance on the private motor car for the residents, it would be reasonable to request that more spaces be provided than for similar developments in more sustainable locations. The applicants have officially declared 3 parking spaces for each of the 4 and 5-bedroom properties. Four parking spaces have been declared as shared/visitor space. Parking could, therefore, be seen as generous, but concern remains due to the lack of any immediate facilities in Moreton. The likely number of vehicles and trips from each property is likely to be higher than the norm. Concern has also been expressed during pre-application discussions about the need to ensure that the adjoining lane is kept clear of vehicles in order to permit modern farm machinery to access buildings, farmyards and fields.
29. The assessment of daily vehicle trips the proposed development will generate is, as is common with these assessments, based on a wholly inadequate data set. It is not known if the data for similar locations is not available, or whether there has been an element of careful selection of data. Of 29 days of survey data used for the trip estimation, just 3 days are within village locations, one from each:
- Burham has a population of 1,251 as at the last Census, and has a community centre, village hall, three pubs, a general practitioners, a primary school, a petrol filling station, bakery and takeaway, and an at least hourly bus service between Maidstone and Chatham;
 - Brooks Green, near Horsham is relatively remote, and is a ribbon development like Moreton, with a similar dearth of facilities. The development generating the analysed trips though was a large Park Home site of 56 dwellings. It is not known if these homes have a target audience, e.g., the retired, or young, that might skew travel choice. A bus service travels between Horsham and Amberley, for Southern Rail services, every 2 hours;
 - Kentford is a small village in terms of population, but again should not be compared with Moreton due to its rail station within 1km of the main street, and multiple employment opportunities. It has a village hall, post office, village store and at least 2 public houses. Multiple bus services operate, up to half-hourly, each.
30. The remaining 26 days of data are from sites within major towns, a mix of edge of town and urban locations. All have good or excellent bus services, and a few with immediate access to cycle routes. Some are within half or one kilometer of town centres, surgeries, schools and rail connections, and all are therefore likely to generate a totally different travel pattern than any household in Moreton. Members would be better relying on their own experience of Moreton and its residents in this matter.
31. **Amenity.** Moreton lacks any formal or informal play space for children. There are no shops or public houses, and only a post-box and bus stop for the one bus a week that is subsidised to visit. The County Council is trying to end bus services for non-primary age school children, meaning a 1km walk from the eastern edge of the village along an unlit path, the majority of which is unmade. It is likely that most will be transported by private vehicle for at least the winter and early spring/late autumn months. For any sort of service or basic need, the residents would have to travel out of Moreton.

Recommendation:

32. This application is for a proposal that would undoubtedly result in a good standard of amenity for its occupants. It would, however, result in a development that would be car-dependent, and sited within an inappropriate site within a village that lacks even the most basic of services. The proposal would lead to the erosion of the Moreton Conservation Area by having a negative impact upon its setting and by confusing the purpose of its designation. It is recommended the Town Council recommend the refusal of this development proposal.