



4 Arnold Way Thame Oxon OX9 2QA

t: 01844 214631 m: 07753 502955

email: jake@jcpc.org.uk

APPLICATION BY COMMERCIAL ESTATES GROUP AND MR CHRISTOPHER HOLLAND FOR OUTLINE PLANNING PERMISISON FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT COMPRISING UP TO 175 RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS (INCLUDING UP TO 40% AFFORDABLE HOUSING) WITH VEHICULAR ACCESS AND EMERGENCY ACCESS FROM THAME PARK ROAD, A PEDESTRIAN / CYCLE LINK TO JANE MORBEY ROAD, STRUCTURAL PLANTING AND LANDSCAPING, INFORMAL AND FORMAL OPEN SPACE INCLUDING RETAINED AGRICULTURAL LAND, CHILDREN'S PLAY SPACE, ALLOTMENTS, SURFACE WATER ATTENUATION AND ANCILLARY WORKS ON LAND WEST OF THAME PARK ROAD, THAME, OXFORDSHIRE.

REPORT TO THAME TOWN COUNCIL

OCTOBER 2013

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Report has been prepared to advise Councillors in respect of formal amendments made to the application (P13/S2330/O) submitted by Commercial Estates Group and Mr Christopher Holland for outline planning permission for up to 175 dwellings (and related works) on land west of Thame Park Road (known throughout the Thame Neighbourhood Plan process as Site D).

1.2 Councillors will recall that the application was first considered at a meeting in August¹ in which the Town Council resolved to issue a holding objection in relation to the application in order that a number of issues could be resolved. The holding objection related to the following matters:

- Evidence of how the distinctive qualities of Thame will be incorporated in to the development and detailed mechanisms for the delivery of such;
- Re-consideration of the Composite Parameters Plan and associated technical evidence and justification in relation to:
 - The re-alignment of the western edge of the built development to create a corridor that reflects the framework plan set out in the TNP.
 - Minor re-alignment of the southern edge of the built development to provide a buffer with the adjoining agricultural/commercial buildings.
 - Extend the built development to the north of the site, subject to not compromising the corridor along the western edge of the site.
 - Details of maximum building heights by location identified in the CPP.
 - Inclusion of, and Increased provision of, publicly accessible routes, including through the south-western field and riverside walks, together with onward connections to Site C.
 - Provision of a potential cycle/pedestrian linkage point in the north-western corner of the site.

¹ and reference should be made to the full report presented to that meeting.

- 1.3 In addition, there were a range of other considerations set out in **Document 1** of the August Report and in respect of which further information and clarification was sought.
- 1.4 Since the resolution of the Council in August there have been a number of meetings between the Applicant (and their consultant team), the Town Council and South Oxfordshire District Council in which these, and other matters, have been under consideration. Insofar as it relates to Town Council specific matters these discussions have focussed, primarily, on the issues set out in Paragraph 1.2 above.
- 1.5 As a result of these discussions, the application was formally amended and supplemented by the following material submitted on 18 October 2013:
- Composite Parameters Plan (P013_RevL)
 - Illustrative Master Plan (M008_RevC)
 - Highway Access Arrangements (100011/HL/01E)
 - Design and Access Statement Supplement
- 1.6 This Report therefore summarises the amendments and additional information submitted with the application, and reviews those amendments in the context of the holding objections and other matters previously raised by the Town Council

2.0 The Amendments and Additional Information.

2.1 The amendments and additional information submitted include the following:

- Alterations to the Composite Parameters Plan to provide a minimum, 15.0m deep landscaped buffer to the western boundary of the site;
- Information in respect of the design rationale and related justification for the inclusion of a buffer to the northern boundary of the site;
- Supplement to the Design and Access Statement to include:
 - Plans showing Design Evolution and Urban Structuring Principles;
 - Analysis of Road Hierarchy Structure including reference back to existing street precedents in Thame;
 - Examination of seven character study areas within the proposed development, providing details of:
 - Enclosure;
 - Density Range;
 - Edge Set-backs;
 - Parking;
 - Building Typologies; and
 - Street Typologies.
 - Each study area is accompanied by an illustrative master plan extract and cross-section.
 - Illustrative details or Public Realm and Landscape Materials Palette.
- Review Statement in connection with publicly accessible open space; and
- Additional Material in respect of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

2.2 The material set out in the above amendments is reviewed in the following section in the context of the key issues previously highlight by the Town Council and which gave rise to the Holding Objection.

3.0 Planning Considerations

3.1 This Section of the Report assesses the key planning considerations having regard to those matters that gave rise to the Holding Objection, as set out in full at paragraph 1.2. These matters are considered in turn below.

(i) Evidence of how the distinctive qualities of Thame will be incorporated in to the development and detailed mechanisms for the delivery of such

3.2 The Supplement to the Design and Access Statement includes within it reference to a range of existing street typologies in Thame (Park Street, Croft Road and Fish Ponds), analysing their structure and form in terms of width, use and building heights, and uses this information, along with that set out in the original Design and Access Statement in relation to 'Density Studies' to demonstrate, by reference to seven character areas within the development and along the spine road, how existing street typologies and forms will be reflected the development.

3.3 The additional material, and the information contained within the illustrative master plans/sections for each character area, sufficiently demonstrates a linkage and pathway between the analysis undertaken of the distinctive qualities of Thame and the layout principles of the proposed development. Further, having regard to the density of the proposed development, the material also indicates that, in the event it is considered necessary, there is sufficient scope at the detailed design stage to refine these details to ensure and maintain these principles. These matters, combined with the fact that building design will come forward for consideration at the detailed stage, is such that it is considered the applicant has appropriately addressed the issues raised regarding the pathway between the distinctive qualities of Thame and the proposed development. That being so, and subject to measures at this stage to control implementation of the detailed design in accordance with the principles set out in the Statement, the proposals are considered acceptable in this respect.

(ii) The re-alignment of the western edge of the built development to create a corridor that reflects the framework plan set out in the TNP.

3.4 At the first meeting between the applicant, South Oxfordshire District Council and Thame Town Council following the Holding Objection issued by the Town Council, a request was made by the Town Council for the application to be subject to review and comment by the District Council's appointed landscape consultant.

3.5 This was duly undertaken by the District Council, with the landscape consultant (Machin Bate Associates) reporting their findings at the end of September. Insofar as it relates to the western boundary of the site the consultant concluded that there -

'is a concern that part of the western site boundary open space is too narrow for adequate planting when contemplating the prospect of minimising the visual impact of the new development on views from the western countryside and its context with Moreton (TNP page 50, Policy ESDQ23). At its narrowest point, the site's western boundary open space (to incorporate planting) scales at much less than 10m wide with a road beyond that will likely incorporate street lighting. In my judgment, this is totally inadequate. From our considerable experience in assimilating developments, I would not venture anything less than a solidly planted 15m strip'.

3.6 Following the comments from the landscape consultant the Composite Parameters Plan and Illustrative Master Plan have been amended to pull the development edge back from the western boundary to a minimum of 15.0m, albeit along the majority of the western edge a distance greater than 15.0m is provided to the development edge. The revisions to the Composite Parameters Plan and the Illustrative Master Plan are supported by an illustrative analysis within the Design and Access Statement of the potential layout of development along this edge (known as the Informal Countryside Edge Character Area). This illustrates that, in addition to the minimum 15.0m landscaped 'buffer', the buildings would be further set back from the western boundary by the order of 9.0 - 13.0m (to make allowance for the road way, foot way (as

appropriate) and front garden area). Thus, in combination it is likely that buildings would be set back a minimum of 24.0m from the western site boundary.

- 3.7 Whilst it is not necessarily considered appropriate that a 'solidly planted' 15.0m buffer is provided along this western edge as recommended by the District Council's landscape consultant (since the resultant 'woodland' block would not be that consistent with local character), it is considered that the revisions to the Composite Parameters Plan and Illustrative Master Plan, when combined with the material contained in the relevant character area analysis, sufficiently demonstrates that the objective set out in the TNP of '*soften[ing] views from the Thame-Moreton footpath*' can, subject to condition, be appropriately achieved at the detailed design stage.

(iii) Minor re-alignment of the southern edge of the built development to provide a buffer with the adjoining agricultural/commercial buildings.

- 3.8 Further discussions have been held with the applicant regarding the relationship of the proposed development with the retained agricultural and commercial buildings located in the central/southern section of the site. It has been indicated in those discussions that the proposed dwellings would be off-set a sufficient distance from these buildings as to not result in any adverse amenity consequences for future occupiers. Whilst details of such have not been supplied, it is considered that there is sufficient 'flex' within the scheme to ensure an acceptable relationship is secured at the detailed design stage.

(iv) Extend the built development to the north of the site, subject to not compromising the corridor along the western edge of the site.

- 3.9 Concerns were previously expressed by the Town Council to the fact that a 'buffer' had been introduced along the northern boundary of the site² without substantive evidence or justification for such and that a consequence of doing so had been the erosion of the anticipated landscape buffer along the western edge of the site. However, as outlined above, it is considered that an acceptable position has now been reached in relation to

² In contrast with Fig HA6 of the TNP.

that western boundary buffer and, as shown in the revised Illustrative Master Plan, this has been achieved without necessitating or requiring alterations to the northern boundary, with the only material consequence being that the extent of the residential development area has been reduced from 6.81 to 6.75 hectares. The effect of such is to raise the average density of development across the site from 25.6 to 25.9 dwellings per hectare. In the context of the overall development, it is not considered this marginal increase in density would have any significant consequences, or consequences that would, of itself, justify re-aligning the northern boundary of the development edge closer to the northern site boundary.

3.10 Notwithstanding this position, the applicant has provided further design justification for the inclusion of a buffer along this boundary, namely:

- to provide greater permeability for pedestrian and cycle movement;
- to create the opportunity for circular walks around the development;
- to enhance the amenities of future occupiers of the dwellings on the northern section of the site through an improved outlook on to landscaped areas;
- to provide a more sensitive transition from employment to residential uses; and
- to provide improved safety and security in this area through increased natural surveillance of public space.

3.11 Whilst the relative weight of each of these factors varies, taken in conjunction with the considerations set out above in relation to the western site boundary (and in respect of which this issue has been intrinsically linked) it is considered the design rationale and justification for such is sufficient that no material objections can be raised to this element of the scheme.

(v) Details of maximum building heights by location identified in the CPP.

3.12 Matters of the height of the proposed buildings across the site have been discussed with the applicant. Whilst (as set out in the previous Report) no objections were raised in principle by the Town Council to the height ranges proposed, it was felt that by

- disaggregating likely built heights across the development, a better understanding would be possible of the potential landscape impacts of such. Indeed, the District Council's landscape consultant has advised that *'the location of these units [those of the maximum indicated height of 9.0m], and the total proportion of these in the development will influence the degree of their visual impact on the landscape'*.
- 3.13 Notwithstanding such, the applicant has indicated that this is a matter that would be best addressed at the design stage once further consideration has been given to the detailed layout and form of the development. Whilst such information would have been helpful, given that acceptance of the illustrative height ranges at this stage (which are, in any event, lower than the highest buildings on the adjoining Croudace development) would not preclude issues regarding the landscape/visual impact of such being reviewed and raised at the detailed design stage, it is considered unreasonable to maintain a holding objection on these grounds alone.
- (vi) Inclusion of, and Increased provision of, publicly accessible routes, including through the south-western field and riverside walks, together with onward connections to Site C.*
- 3.14 The additional material submitted with the amendments to the application advises that *'defined public access would of course be provided through the remaining land south of the development area, to deliver the TNP objective of access to the Cuttle Brook'*. It is assumed that by reference to access to the Cuttle Brook in this statement, this is referring to the inclusion of routes through the area outlined in blue on the site location plan (which is land excluded from the application site area but within the control of the applicant). On the assumption that this is correct, then subject to the mechanism that secure and deliver such access, this would address the issue raised regarding the provision of a riverside walk. Similarly, matters regarding onward connections to Site C could be subject to similar control mechanisms.
- 3.15 Discussions remain on-going regarding public access to the south-western field of the application site, which extends to approximately 4.5 hectares. Notwithstanding, in their

latest submission the applicant reiterates their view that access to such is not practical since:

- it would be a 'route to nowhere' as it would not provide access to any other designation;
- it would be distant from existing or proposed development for which there is no natural surveillance or security; and
- such lack of surveillance could give rise to anti-social behaviour that would interfere with a continued agricultural use of the land.

3.16 As recently as last Friday discussions were held with South Oxfordshire District Council regarding access to this area of land (which would provide a further recreation opportunity in connection with the development and secure the extent of publicly accessible open space identified for the site in the TNP) and how this could be achieved in a manner that does not prejudice any on-going agricultural activities. Whilst these matters remain unresolved, they are ultimately issues that could form part of any Section 106 Agreement and thus it is considered appropriate that any resolution reached by the Town Council in relation to the amendments to the scheme is contingent upon the satisfactory resolution of this matter.

(vii) Provision of a potential cycle/pedestrian linkage point in the north-western corner of the site.

3.17 At the first meeting with the applicant and South Oxfordshire District Council following the August resolution of the Town Council, the applicant indicated that there would be no limitation or objection (in land or ownership terms) to the facilitation, at some future point, of a footpath / cycleway connection in to the north-western corner of the site from the Phoenix Trail. Since that time the applicant has advised of their intent that it only be the allotments and community orchard of the 'formal' Public Open Space that is transferred to the ownership of the Town Council, with the remainder of the formal open space remaining in private ownership and maintained by a Management Company. Whilst discussions remain on-going with the District Council in this regard, it

- nevertheless remains appropriate that any Section 106 Agreement includes an appropriate clause that ensures land is available to facilitate such a link.
- 3.18 Whilst (i) - (vii) reflect the key issues raised by the Town Council and which gave rise to the Holding Objection, a number of more detailed matters were set out in Document 1 to the August Report. Although a number of these have been answered during the course of negotiation, a number of items remain outstanding. Nevertheless, the applicant stated that a comprehensive reply to each of these matters would be provided once formal responses had been received from various technical consultees. These consultees have now reported and, although such matters of clarification would not materially affect the judgment to be made by the Council in relation to the application, it is considered appropriate to secure a full response to the various issues raised given the influence that such may have on Section 106 matters, planning conditions, and future consideration of any detailed/Reserved Matters application.

4.0 Recommendation

4.1 In view of the above matters it is recommended that the Town Council remove their Holding Objection and resolve to support the application, subject to:

- the inclusion of appropriate mechanisms, in either a Section 106 Agreement or Planning Conditions, to secure delivery of the design principles set out in the Design and Access Statement, as amended and updated;
- the inclusion of an appropriate clause with the S106 Agreement to secure and facilitate at some future point the creation of a footpath/cycleway from the north-west corner of the site to the Phoenix Trail;
- the outcome of discussions in respect of access to the south-western field, and delivery mechanisms in respect of the provision of publicly accessible routes (including the land edged blue to the south of the site and extending up to Cuttle Brook);
- receipt of a comprehensive response to each of the matters set out in Document 1 of the August Report; and
- the Town Council having full involvement in the negotiation and preparation of the Section 106 Agreement and Planning Conditions.