
| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Date: | 4 January 2019 |
| Title: | Employment Land in Great Haseley |
| Contact Officer: | Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer, Thame Town Council 01844 212833 |

Background

1. Great Haseley Parish and Thame Town Councils share a boundary on Rycote Lane, South Oxfordshire. Land along Rycote Lane in Thame holds Thame Cars, a business offering vehicle sales and repairs, ASM Auto Recycling, Gregory Distribution and David Einig Contracting, who specialise in plant and vehicle hire and land restoration.
2. Great Haseley Parish hosts The Oxfordshire golf course and spa facility, the entrance to Rycote Chapel, and three, separate former farm yards that have been converted to industrial and agricultural retail use.
3. On the 18th and 19th December 2017 two planning applications were submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council. The first was for some 16,700 square metres of B1 – B8 employment land and floorspace; the second, for the relocation from central Thame of the Thame Farmers Auction Market. The latter included an element of agricultural retail services, a café and small business units.
4. The planning permission for the Cattle Market was granted permission at SODC's 19th December 2018 Planning Committee, although it is noted that the official decision notice has yet to be issued. Having requested that the applicant for the above two schemes submit their schemes in parallel it is expected that the District Council will issue a decision on the proposed industrial land shortly.
5. Great Haseley Parish Council supported the application for the cattle market but recommended refusal for the employment land scheme. As the two sites lie outside Thame's boundary Thame Town Council felt it could only submit comments rather than make any formal recommendation.
6. It is understood that Great Haseley are increasingly concerned with the prospect of future applications on land both north and south of Rycote Lane. The presence of three small industrial sites on former farmyards, plus the proximity of the area to the strategic highway network is seen as adding to the risk of wider, future proposals for further employment land applications.

Great Haseley's Options

7. Having discussed these concerns with Members of Great Haseley Parish Council, Thame Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer offered to prepare a briefing outlining options Great Haseley has for preventing future incremental growth along Rycote Lane. This was offered in the knowledge that Thame Town Council is itself similarly concerned with unplanned growth within or along its borders. It was agreed this would be presented to Great Haseley Parish Council alongside a request from Thame to cooperate on any wider cross-border concerns prior to the commencement of the review of its neighbourhood plan.
8. There are several options for Great Haseley Parish Council to consider:

1. The parish could undertake its own neighbourhood plan.
 2. It could develop a single-issue neighbourhood plan. It is permissible to have a plan that covers just one topic, such as employment.
 3. It could choose to work with the District Council to define a policy on employment within the Parish for inclusion within the Local Plan.
 4. Work alongside Thame through the review of its neighbourhood plan to constrain further employment growth along Rycote Lane.
9. Other options that are legally available to Great Haseley would not help. For example, Neighbourhood Development or Community Right to Build Orders are designed to allow specific development, rather than constrain it.

Option 1 would involve agreeing the area the plan should cover, identifying environmental or other constraints and perhaps establishing the need for particular types of development. This would, however, allow for other matters of concern to Great Haseley to be regarded. For example, this could include the development of design policies for Great Haseley in order to help steer how new housing or extensions to existing ones would look.

To undertake this task would involve the formal identification of the area the plan is to cover, the creation of a strong vision by the community and, potentially, the consideration of understanding the current and future needs of the Great Haseley community and how allocating land could help meet such needs. The plan would need to be consulted on and examined by an independent examiner to ensure that it has been sufficiently well prepared against national and local legislation and policy. Once passed, a referendum must be held to ensure the majority of local residents are in favour of the Plan's adoption.

Neighbourhood plans require significant resources in terms of volunteer time, money for research, etc. Grants do exist to help neighbourhood plan groups create and update plans which should help cover most, if not all costs.

Risks would include landowners submitting sites for consideration for employment, housing or leisure allocations above and beyond any locally identified need. Recent changes to national planning policy guidance make it clear that neighbourhood plans could have a shelf life of as little as two years, meaning Great Haseley would have to undertake frequent reviews of its neighbourhood plan.

Option 2 would require all the formal stages of neighbourhood plan making to be complied with as outlined above, but without the same level of complexity. Once the neighbourhood plan area has been defined, a relatively simple assessment of employment needs within Great Haseley would be able to establish if more employment land is required. Such a plan might only result in a single policy, with introductory text, and a basic map to either help constrain or develop future land for employment purposes.

Risks would include land being promoted for allocation beyond any locally identified need. Recent changes to national planning policy guidance make it clear that neighbourhood plans could have a shelf life of as little as two years, meaning Great Haseley would have to undertake frequent reviews of its neighbourhood plan.

Option 3 would involve working with the District Council and its officers to develop a policy for Great Haseley parish only, for adoption within the District's Local Plan. Due to the constraints around the need to submit their draft plan to Government by 31 March 2019, it is not expected that the District will be able to react to such a request in time. The District is also continuing to promote the right for communities to control their own futures through neighbourhood plans. The most recent draft of the Local Plan, for example, has only worked

to support aspirational neighbourhood plan groups (such as Nettlebed) through high-level allocations of land and housing.

Risks involved with this approach would be that Great Haseley would have to wait until the next review of the District Local Plan before being able to begin to work with the District Council, should they be sympathetic. It is probable the next review will start well within the next 5 years, although by no means certain.

Option 4 would involve agreeing a line with Thame beyond which employment land should not encroach along Rycote Lane. To enable this to become a material matter for any future planning application, the boundary of the Thame neighbourhood plan area would have to be altered to include the agreed area. It is emphasised that this need not involve any change to the physical border of either Great Haseley or Thame Parish.

The work of Great Haseley would be limited to agreeing the boundary line and perhaps agreeing any policy that might be required to help in its justification. The designation of the enlarged Thame Neighbourhood Plan area would be undertaken under a relatively light bureaucracy. Any work subsequently undertaken by Thame would however require the clear consent of Great Haseley Parish Council, perhaps via a memorandum of understanding.

Risks would include a wildcard planning application being made on land outside of any prescribed boundary prior to the adoption of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan. Similarly, with the recent change in guidance requiring more frequent reviews of neighbourhood plans proposals for development may be made at each subsequent refresh.

Other matters

10. It should be emphasised that Thame Town Council has no wish to increase its administrative area, unless there is a clear advantage in doing so. Should this subsequently occur it is recommended that any boundary review be undertaken separately, and away from the designation of a neighbourhood plan area. This will help avoid conflation of the planning and administrative functions.
11. It is clear that parish boundary review can only take place with the full consent of any parish or town councils involved.
12. Regardless of any boundary review, there is currently no known financial reward (or penalty) for either Great Haseley or Thame Councils in suggesting an extension of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan area. Planning obligations for employment (non-retail) uses are currently chargeable, but the rate has been set at zero until the end of 2019 at the earliest. It is likely therefore that both the Cattle Market and the proposed industrial estate will escape CIL charges and as a result, that neither Great Haseley nor Thame will receive any financial contribution.
13. It is sometime suggested that Town or Parish Councils should retain a small proportion of rates to offset services provided for local businesses. As per the planning obligations outlined above, this is unlikely to happen. It is, however, recommended that any future financial dividend from development within the extended neighbourhood plan area be shared between Great Haseley and Thame via a mutually-agreed scheme. This could be agreed either within the previously mentioned memorandum of understanding or via another binding mechanism. Such an agreement need not happen prior to the adoption of the neighbourhood plan, as it would not involve a material planning matter, but it is recommended it takes place prior to the first public draft of the neighbourhood plan in the spirit of encouraging mutual trust.

Recommendation:

14. Given the relatively small population of Great Haseley, and the known resource implications in developing and refreshing neighbourhood plans, it is recommended that Option 4, working within the review of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan, be considered by Great Haseley. Thame has excellent experience in plan making and has both staff and financial resources dedicated to the specific purpose of reviewing the current Thame Neighbourhood Plan, and ensuring future versions are kept relevant for the purpose of deciding planning applications.