

Full Council

Date:	18/06/2019
Title:	Park Meadow Cottage, Thame Park Road OX9 3JA
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

Background

1. Members will recall Park Meadow Cottage is a site of 0.6 ha adopted as part of the greater housing allocation site described within Policy HA3 of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP). This small allocation was identified as acting as a key element of the gateway approach that would offer a soft transition between countryside and town and was identified to host exactly 12 dwellings. The District Council granted permission for 9 homes on 0.3 ha of this land on 1 December 2017, through planning application P17/S2210/FUL, in spite of significant objections from Thame Town Council and local District Councillors. Concern was expressed about the partial completion of TNP allocation, at a much higher density than required through Policy HA3. Related concerns included that splitting of the site would result in the loss of affordable housing and that the transition between the countryside and urban area would be hardened as a result. The head of Development Management assured Thame District and Town Councillors at the District's Planning Committee that if the rest of the site came forward at a later date, then the whole site covered by Policy HA3 (3) would be considered when making a decision.

Proposed Development

2. Application P19/S1596/FUL – The erection of two, 2-bed dwellings and four, 3-bed dwellings.
3. The developer has chosen to propose houses of 2 and 3 bedrooms. Within paragraph 3.5 of the Planning Statement, it is stated this was because the 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA and the TNP advises this is where the need lies. The TNP does not state this. Market intelligence on the other hand does tell us that smaller homes are in demand.
4. The internal spaces the applicant has used are higher than the nationally “prescribed” minimum standards, by at least 20 sq. m. for the 3-bed houses and around 5 – 6 sq. m. for the 2-bed dwellings. The external amenity areas also exceeds the minimum required by the 2016 South Oxfordshire Design Guide. These are welcome characteristics.
5. Each house has allocated a minimum of two parking spaces which meets the Oxfordshire County Council standards for new dwellings. Altogether, when combined with spaces within garages the standards are exceeded. However, no unallocated (visitor) spaces are identified away from individual dwellings, meaning that plots 2, 4 and 5 have no spaces available for the use of visitors.
6. The design of the homes has been described by the applicants as “Victorian Arts and Crafts village style”.

Discussion

7. The site is allocated for 12 dwellings within the TNP. Only half of the site area is included in this application (approximately 0.31ha). During the pre-application discussions for the previous application the applicant claimed the owner of Park Meadow Cottage, and the adjacent paddock was no longer intending to develop the remainder of the site. It is now

claimed within the introduction to the submitted Design and Access statement that the family are surprised to find themselves surrounded by the Persimmon, Sycamore Rise scheme and that the amenity of their garden has suffered as a result. The solution offered is the intensive development of most of Park Meadow Cottage's garden although it is not explained how this will benefit current or future occupants.

8. The proposed dwellings, plus the remaining Park Meadow Cottage, when added to the previous scheme give rise to 16 dwellings on 0.6ha, or 26.7 dwellings per hectare. This is contrary to the allocation under Policy HA3 (3) which sets the density at 20 per hectare.
9. The site was allocated in line with the vision and objectives of the TNP. Within paragraph 3.4 of their Design and Access Statement the applicant argues that the "TNP seeks to restrict density on this identified site to about 25 units per hectare, but this is also the minimum density sought generally in the SODC Local Plan. For the reasons outlined above, the existing lower density at the front of the site is desirable in this particular case". It is not clear what Local Plan is being discussed; neither the Local Plan 2011, nor the draft Local Plan 2034 refer to 25 dwellings per hectare as a minimum. It is possible that the applicant is confused with regards to the 2012 Core Strategy.
10. The 3 areas that compose allocation site HA3 "broadly equate" to 25 dph – other specific policy issues apply across the area as a whole. Policy HA3 does provide for a net density of 25 dph, in line with the Core Strategy. For this 0.6 ha site, the density of 20 per hectare; is set to deliver a transition from the adjacent open countryside to the built up area of the Town, under Policy HA3.
11. It is worth noting for example that the area identified as site 2 delivers homes at 40 dph, recognising its relationship with the existing built environment. Regardless of this, and the above paragraph, the quantum of development on site 3 cannot be argued by invoking the District's land use plans; it would be contrary to Section 38 (5) of the 2004 Planning Act. This clarifies the situation where two development plan policies conflict with one another. The most recently adopted plan is considered to have the definitive policy. The Thame Neighbourhood Plan, adopted in March 2013, supersedes any relevant policies within the District's Core Strategy and adopted Local Plan.
12. It is therefore acceptable for policy HA3, in part or full, to ask for a lower density than that prescribed within the Core Strategy and the applicant's case for applying policy over the TNP is false.
13. Bicycle parking is referred to within the application but no space suitable for parking is identified. This is contrary to TNP Policy ESDQ27.
14. Given the location of the proposed dwellings, it is questionable if the design style is appropriate. This small group of dwellings would read as an oddly arranged cluster of Victorian dwellings, some of which are accessed off a road that took a century to build, that was sufficiently set back from the main road to allow the later build of a randomly-arranged chalet bungalow. This is contrary to Policy ESDQ16 and the Design and Access Statement, in failing to explain how this approach reinforces Thame's character, renders the application contrary to Policy ESDQ15.

Recommendation:

15. The Town Council should object to this application.