

LAND TO THE WEST OF WINDMILL ROAD THAME (SODC ref: P20/S4693/FUL)

Development of an existing greenfield site for 31 new affordable homes to include 4x1B maisonettes, 18x 2B4P houses and 9x 3B5P houses. The homes are to remain affordable in perpetuity under the community land trust mechanism and are to provide homes to people with a local connection to Thame. The masterplan includes on site parking and shared green spaces for residents and the wider community. The proposed design also includes proposed upgrades to local infrastructure where the Phoenix Trail meets Windmill Road

1. Officer Recommendation:

SUPPORTS this application and has a RESPONSE to this application: the development should incorporate additional tree planting where possible, particularly towards the southern boundary of the site which will need to provide a suitable transition to the countryside.

2. Key Issues: the key issues are as follows:

- a) The principle of affordable homes in this location
 - b) Impact on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings
 - c) House type, density, layout and design
 - d) Impact on adjoining properties
 - e) Highways, access and parking
 - f) Ecology / biodiversity
 - g) Flood risk / drainage
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3. Planning History: Pre application advice for the proposal was sought and provided under ref. P20/S0447/PEJ in March 2020. It advised that whilst the policy framework did not explicitly support the proposal if a robust case was put forward supported by evidence of need to demonstrate that the proposal comprised sustainable development it could be supported by the Local Planning Authority.

4. Risk Appraisal

Whilst the Town Council's recommendation to SODC is in principle supportive, and the pre-app response from SODC was supportive in principle, it is possible that there could be a contrary decision by SODC. Therefore a councillor should be nominated at the meeting to represent the views of the Town Council at the planning committee.

5. Policies Relevant to the Application

The following policies are of particular relevance when considering this application.

Thame Neighbourhood Plan

Housing

- H5 Integrate windfall sites
- H6 Design new development to be of high quality
- H7 Provide new facilities
- H9 Provide a mix of housing types
- H10 Provide a Thame-Specific Affordable Housing and Dwelling Mix Strategy.

Getting Around

- GA1 New development to provide good pedestrian and cycle connections to the town centre and other local destinations
- GA3 Developer contributions required to support the provision of a cycle route to Haddenham and Thame Parkway Rail Station
- GA6 New development to provide parking on site for occupants and visitors

Community, Leisure and Wellbeing

- CLW2 Actively involve local people in ongoing consultation
- CLW4 Contributions required from developers of new housing to fund additional healthcare facilities

Environment, Sustainability and Design Quality

- ESDQ4 Provide public open space on windfall sites
- ESDQ10 Produce a Sports Facilities Strategy
- ESDQ11 Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage into new development
- ESDQ12 Applications for new development to provide a drainage strategy
- ESDQ15 Developers must demonstrate in a Design and Access Statement how their proposed development reinforces Thame's character
- ESDQ16 Development must relate well to its site and its surroundings
- ESDQ17 Development must make a positive contribution towards the distinctive character of the town as a whole
- ESDQ18 New development must contribute to local character by creating a sense of place appropriate to its location
- ESDQ19 The Design and Access Statement and accompanying drawings must provide sufficient detail for proposals to be properly understood
- ESDQ21 Development proposals, particularly where sited on the edge of Thame or adjoining Cuttle Brook, must maintain visual connections with the countryside
- ESDQ22 The visual impact of new development on views from the countryside must be minimised
- ESDQ23 Streets within new development must be designed as pleasant places to be
- ESDQ24 Pedestrian and cycle routes must link together potential destinations, such as new housing and the town centre
- ESDQ26 Design new buildings to reflect the three-dimensional qualities of traditional buildings
- ESDQ27 Design in the 'forgotten' elements from the start of the design process
- ESDQ28 Provide good quality private outdoor space
- ESDQ29 Design car parking so that it fits in with the character of the proposed development

Delivery

- D1 Provide appropriate new facilities

The NP is currently under review and a call for sites was undertaken in March 2019. The application site has been put forward for consideration.

SODC Local Plan 2035 Policies (SOLP)

Strategic

STRAT1	The overall strategy
STRAT5	Residential densities
TH1	The strategy for Thame
DES1	Delivering high quality development
DES2	Enhancing local character
DES3	Design and access statements
DES5	Outdoor amenity space
DES6	Residential Amenity
DES7	Efficient use of resources
DES8	Promoting sustainable design
ENV1	Landscape and countryside
ENV3	Biodiversity
ENV5	Green infrastructure in new developments
H3	Housing in the towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame, and Wallingford
H9	Affordable housing
H11	Housing mix
INF1	Infrastructure provision
TRANS2	Promoting sustainable transport and accessibility
TRANS4	Transport assessments, transport statements and travel plans
TRANS5	Consideration of development proposals

Non-Strategic

CF2	Provision of community facilities and services
CF5	Open space, sport and recreation in new residential development
ENV11	Pollution – impact from existing and/or previous land uses non-strategic on new development (potential receptors of pollution)
ENV12	Pollution – impact of development on human health, the non-strategic natural environment and/or local amenity (potential sources of pollution)
EP3	Waste collection and recycling

6. Description of site and proposal

Site Description

- 6.1. The site lies on the southern side of the town just beyond the main built up area, accessed off the end of Windmill Way via a section of unmade track to an existing field gate on the eastern boundary of the site. It comprises a long wedge shape of mainly open paddocks divided by open wire fencing; it slopes up gently from north to south. There are some buildings in the western half of the site but these are abandoned and overgrown. The site boundaries are marked by mature hedgerow with some trees; there is little tree cover within the site apart from a large oak and other trees located in the north east corner.
- 6.2. The existing built-up part of the town lies to the north with two storey detached dwellings of Corbetts Way and Arnold Way to the north-west and the three-storey care home to the north-east. The site is separated from the curtilages of these properties by the Phoenix Trail combined pedestrian, cycle and bridleway that provides a well-used route in the local area and which connects the town with Princes Risborough. There is also a wide belt of planting / shrubs to the south of the trail separating it from the site (this area is outside the red edged site boundary). To the east of the site are the town allotments, whilst agricultural fields adjoin to the south and west, these areas being divided by Moreton Lane which runs along the western boundary of the site. There is a further property located just beyond the south east corner of the site, Meadow Brook House, which is also accessed off Windmill Lane.

Proposal

- 6.3. The proposal involves the widening of Windmill Lane from its junction with the Phoenix Trail to the site to provide a 6 metre wide road with widened site entrance. This would involve the removal of the section of hedge and trees that marks the eastern site boundary at this point. The junction with the Phoenix Trail would result in a slight realignment to meet technical standards for the road which would incorporate ramps with central raised table with coloured surfacing to demarcate separation between cyclists and pedestrians and to alert all users to the approaching junction. Bollards would also be provided either side of the road width to prevent vehicle overrun onto the trail.
- 6.4. The development would be served by an internal road which would run through the centre of the site with a turning area provided at the far western end. The proposed residential units would be provided within a number of terraces throughout the site, the majority to the south of the new central roadway. There would be two terraces in the eastern part of the site, one facing onto the internal road and another facing onto Windmill Lane, accessed off a short private drive. The central part of the site would consist of an open space / village green located up to the southern boundary, with dwellings facing onto it either side and a third terrace to the north on the opposite side of the roadway. A final terrace would be sited at the far western end of the site, with a further area of open space with pedestrian link to Moreton Lane. The north east corner of the site would also remain open, with two retained trees and proposed SuDS attenuation basin to serve the development.
- 6.5. The dwellings would all be of two-storey height, which whilst reflecting elements of local tradition would be contemporary in appearance with rendered elevations, brick porches some with balconies above, and tiled pitched roofs. All units are provided with on plot parking and individual garden areas. Further unallocated / visitor parking would be provided throughout the layout

6.6. The application is submitted by the Thame Community Land Trust who seek to meet the housing needs of local residents by providing genuinely affordable housing for those with a strong local need. The application is supported by a town wide Housing Needs Survey, undertaken by Community First Oxfordshire. This found that there is a strong demand for 2 and 3 bed properties with some demand for 1 and 4 bedroomed properties. The proposed size of units as set out in the description would comprise 16 affordable rent units and 15 affordable discount market sale.

6.7. The application is supported by the following documents:

- Arboricultural Report, Tree Survey and Tree Constraints Plan
- Construction Traffic Management Plan
- Design and Access Statement (DAS)
- Flood Risk and SUDS Assessment
- Ecological Impact Assessment
- Transport Statement
- Travel Plan Statement
- Thame Housing Needs Survey Report (HNS)

6.8. The application was the subject of community consultation at which time the DAS states indicated that there was some support for the scheme but concerns raised regarding traffic generation and impact on local roads and the Phoenix Trail.

7. Representations

7.1. A number of representations have been submitted in response to the application which in summary raise the following concerns:

- Loss of countryside and views and resulting adverse impact on character and appearance
- Traffic generation along well used narrow roads, particularly Windmill Lane
- Conflict with users of the Phoenix Trail

8. Discussion of key issues

a) The principle of affordable homes in this location

- 8.1. The recently adopted SOLP seeks generally through policy STRAT1 to support the main towns, including Thame, by providing, amongst other things, homes. Policy TH1 sets out the strategy for Thame which is that the Council will support the delivery of homes that accord with policy H3 which identifies a need of at least 1,518 homes at Thame. Policy H1 which deals with the delivery of homes generally states that housing will be permitted on allocated sites and that development on unallocated sites will only be permitted in certain circumstances. This includes site for affordable housing on a rural exception site or entry level housing scheme.
- 8.2. Policy H10 relates to exception sites and entry level housing schemes. It states that small scale affordable housing schemes will be permitted outside settlements provided that a number of criteria are met. These include, in summary, that the proposed dwellings meet a particular local need that cannot be met in any other way; that the benefits are secured in perpetuity; there is no unacceptable impact on amenity, character and appearance, environment or highways; and that they do not form isolated development with access to local amenities and facilities.
- 8.3. A number of the above factors are considered below but in principle it is considered that the proposal does represent a small scale affordable scheme (in the context of Thame) which will meet a local need. That need remains despite the other housing developments that are being provided and are allocated in the TNP.
- 8.4. The proposed dwellings closely accord with the identified need set out in the HNS and will be controlled in perpetuity by the CLT to ensure that they continue to provide for that local need. The details of how that control mechanism is to operate will need to be set out in the associated S106 agreement but in principle, the housing will either be rented or 'sold' on a leasehold basis with the CLT given the option to secure new tenants or buyers as the need arises.
- 8.5. The proposal would also satisfy TNP policy H10 which seeks to ensure that affordable housing meets Thame specific needs.
- 8.6. It is considered that the proposal would also satisfy national policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing and to meet the specific needs of particular groups, including affordable housing. It also emphasises that in rural areas, decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support developments that reflect local needs (paragraph 77). Local Planning Authorities should support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs.

b) Impact on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings

- 8.7. As indicated above the site is located in the countryside just beyond the built up area and is currently a generally open undeveloped site, with the exception of one small building located towards the western part of the site. It is clearly seen as part of the surrounding open countryside to the south of the town; however, views of it are relatively localised albeit can be clearly appreciated from the Phoenix Trail and to a lesser extent from Moreton Lane as much of the boundary is marked by a high hedge, though this could of course be reduced in height, and there are some gaps in the hedge further to the south.
- 8.8. The proposed development will inevitably result in a change to the character of the site with the loss of much of its intrinsic open rural character and natural appearance. However, a good proportion of the site will remain open, with three areas of open space, two of which are intended to be more 'naturalistic' in appearance. The garden areas will also be more open in character with limited fencing to boundaries and significant extents of hedges along garden boundaries and the periphery of the whole site.
- 8.9. Policies ESDQ21 and 22 of the TNP are particularly relevant and seek to ensure that development on the edge of the town maintains visual connections with the countryside and that the visual impact of new development in views from the countryside are minimised. Whilst the impacts will be generally localised it is nevertheless important to ensure that an appropriate transition to the countryside is provided to maintain visual connections and views and avoid abrupt urban edges.
- 8.10. Much of this will be achieved through careful site layout and suitable boundary treatment and it is considered that the proposed development will secure this, in particular through the siting the central 'village green' which will provide a direct connection to the countryside to the south with views across it from within the site. The open space proposed at the western end of the site will also provide a good transition to what is visually the more 'rural' edge, given that to the east of the site are the allotments and the commercial buildings beyond that are visually evident.
- 8.11. The dwellings themselves will introduce a built up appearance to the site but as indicated above, the proposed landscaping will assist in softening its appearance. However, the detailed landscaping scheme looks to include a relatively modest number of trees and it is considered that additional street trees together with more trees within the open spaces should be sought. The southern boundary of the site also appears to include little in the way of new planting, and whilst there is an existing established hedge on the adjoining land, it is considered that the opportunity should be taken to introduce additional trees to this boundary. As is accepted in the planning statement there are views of the site from Moreton Lane to the south west; whilst the development will be seen in the context of the existing built up edge of the town, which is fairly prominent in existing views to the west of Moreton Lane, a more softened edge to the countryside is nevertheless appropriate.

8.12. Views across the site are currently available at its north-eastern corner where Mill Lane crosses the Phoenix Trail. This area and the views from it will change fairly significantly with the upgrading of the road to serve the site and the introduction of built development on the site. However, the immediate setting will be of the open space with attenuation pond in the north east corner of the site, retaining the existing trees. The dwellings will be seen beyond this within the site albeit there will be a built frontage to the southern part of the lane which leads to Meadow Brook House to the south. Whilst this would be a change to the rural aspect of this part of the trail, the view would be one of a well-designed, 'green' housing development. Views of the site become screened by the existing belt of shrubs and trees along the southern side of the trail further to the west with only limited glimpsed views of the site. The character of this part of the trail is already dominated by the existing built development immediately to the north so this character will not change significantly.

8.13. Overall, it can be concluded that the proposal will provide a high quality, low density scheme that, with the provision of additional landscaping, will provide a suitable transition to the countryside whilst maintaining visual connections, in compliance with the above policies and additionally with policies H5, EDSQ16, and SOLP ENV1.

c) House type, density, layout and design

8.14. The built elements of the proposed housing would not occupy a significant proportion of the site being of relatively low density with significant areas given over to garden areas and public open space. The layout would also enable some views to be obtained through the site to the countryside beyond.

8.15. The dwellings are of contemporary design and although somewhat different in appearance to the predominant red brick within the immediate locality of the site, incorporate locally distinctive features and design cues and would provide interesting street scenes. Each dwelling would be provided with private garden areas with further areas of open space. Provision has also been made for bin storage to the front of plots which will be screened by planting or gabion walls. The proposal will create its own unique sense of place which would be acceptable in this location which is not greatly influenced by the traditional historic character of the town but rather by the adjoining countryside.

8.16. The areas of public open space will provide a pleasant and 'green' character to the development with the central 'village green' providing a quality usable space for informal play and relaxation.

8.17. Overall it is considered that the proposal would provide a high quality environment for its residents that will complement the surrounding area, providing an appropriate transition for this edge of settlement site. This would accord with TNP policies H6, EDSQ4, ESDQ18, ESDQ23, ESDQ26, EDSQ27, EDSQ28 and EDSQ29 and SOLP policies DES1, DES2, DES5, DES7, ENV5 and H3.

d) Impact on adjoining properties

- 8.18. The development of the site will change the outlook for the residents to the north of the site, however this would be softened to a degree by the retained strip of planting immediately to the south of the Phoenix Trail. There would be no direct impact in terms of loss of light or privacy due to the separation maintained.
- 8.19. Meadow Brook House which adjoins the south east corner of the site sits in a generous plot and the separation maintained from the proposed development would ensure that there would be no direct adverse impacts.
- 8.20. TNP policies H6 and SOLP policies DES6 and DES8 will therefore be satisfied.

e) Highways, parking and accessibility for sustainable modes

- 8.21. The proposal would result in the upgrading of the southern end of Mill Lane to the point where it meets the existing site entrance; this would provide a safe and suitable access to the proposed development.
- 8.22. A number of representations have been received objecting to the resulting increased traffic generation and the perceived problems that may arise, particularly given that the roads in the vicinity are well used for parking as well as accessing the town centre and other areas. However, the supporting Transport Assessment concludes that the local highway network can safely accommodate the likely traffic generated by the development. The site itself would provide an internal road network that would be accessible by refuse and delivery vehicles. The proposed junction with the Phoenix Trail has been the subject of a Safety Audit that demonstrates that it would deliver a safe crossing with further assessments to be undertaken at the detailed design stage.
- 8.23. In terms of sustainable modes of transport, the site lies around 700 metres from the High Street within reasonable walking and cycling distance. That is also where the nearest bus stops are which is further than the optimum distance but given that the town contains a good range of amenities and facilities, the majority of which are also reasonably accessible, this would be acceptable in this instance. The Phoenix Trail will clearly provide a convenient link in this respect.
- 8.24. All dwellings are provided with one on plot parking space, with EV charging points, and there are 21 unallocated parking spaces. This would satisfy South Oxfordshire parking standards. The spaces would be located to the front of the dwellings, but interspersed with planting and street trees to break up and soften their appearance. Cycle parking would also be provided on plot.
- 8.25. The application is also supported by a Travel Plan setting out the measures that would be adopted to further encourage use of sustainable modes.
- 8.26. Overall, TNP policies GA1, GA6, EDSQ24 and SOLP policies TRANS2, TRANS4 and TRANS5.

f) Ecology / biodiversity

- 8.27. The supporting ecology report and surveys confirm that there are no specific ecological constraints with no evidence of reptiles, bats or badgers on site. However, as set out in the NPPF, it is necessary to ensure that a net gain in biodiversity is achieved and to that end the report includes measures to create new habitats and provide for their future management, to be set out in detail in further management plans which can be secured via condition.
- 8.28. The proposal would therefore satisfy SOLP policies ENV3 and ENV5.

g) Flood risk / drainage

- 8.29. The site lies in flood zone 1 therefore it is suitable in principle for the proposed development. The supporting flood risk / drainage report identifies that the majority of the site is not at risk of flooding (a small area towards the north being subject to some limited surface water flooding). The drainage strategy incorporates sustainable drainage solutions including permeable surfaces and swales and allows for natural infiltration of the underlying soil.
- 8.30. Foul water would be discharged to the foul sewer network on the adjoining site via underground pipes
- 8.31. It can be concluded that the proposal will not result in any flood risk and that a suitable detailed surface water strategy can be secured in accordance with TNP policy ESDQ11 and SOLP policy .

h) Contributions to local infrastructure

- 8.32. Policies of the TNP and the SOLP require development to contribute to local infrastructure as appropriate and necessary having regard to the impacts of the development
- 8.33. In particular, policies GA3 – contributions to the Thame – Haddenham cycle route, CLW4 contribution to healthcare, and D1 appropriate new facilities of the TNP should be considered and appropriate contributions sought if necessary and justified.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. In conclusion, the proposal represents a suitable and acceptable rural exception scheme that will provide significant benefits to the local community. Whilst there would be a change to the character and appearance of the site, the effects will be localised and not significant overall. It would be a well-designed, contemporary scheme, creating its own character and sense of place with high quality environment for its occupiers with little direct impact on the living conditions of adjoining neighbours.
- 9.2. Overall, it would comply with the development plan and with national policy in the NPPF.