

## Full Council

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**Title:** DAF Trucks Ltd Kingsmead Business Park Thame OX9 3FB

**Date:** 10 August 2021

**Contact Officer:** Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

### Background

1. Members will recall that this site is identified as an employment area within the made Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP). The applicant secured two prior approval applications for the former DAF training and headquarters office building for 45 flats. A later hybrid application seeking outline permission for up to 129 dwellings, 1,511 sq. m. of office space and full planning permission for a 68-bed care home in C2 use was refused permission by the District Council in February of 2019. A subsequent appeal granted permission on 27 March 2020. The Town Council challenged this permission through the High Court but the judgement was made in favour of the site promoter.
2. A Reserved Matters application was reported at Thame's Full Council meeting of 9 February 2021. The Town Council objected to the application on the following grounds:
  1. The proposal delivered housing at 41.6 dwellings per hectare (net), contrary to Local Plan 2035 (LP2035) Policy STRAT5.
  2. Local Plan Policy CF5 requires that open space on new developments meets the standards set out in the District Council's Open Spaces Study. The site's location means that a Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) should be delivered, rather than a Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP). Concerns were also raised regarding the location or quality of each of the Local Areas for Play (LAP), and the LEAP, and the proximity of housing and car parking to the LEAP. Noise and pollution concerns were raised regarding the LAP located in the north-east corner of the site.
  3. The proposed solution for electric vehicle charging could not be classed as fast charging, contrary to Local Plan 2035 Policy TRANS5 ix.
  4. The design was felt to be cramped, and potentially constrained by working to the outline application covering this part of the DAF Trucks site. The Town Council proposed that, given the site's relationship with the Phoenix Trail and lack of any real constraint due to the existing and planned boundary treatments, an alternative design approach would work better. The latter comment was made with reference to both the site's historic use as an employment site, and its location next to Thame's most modern industrial units. In failing to relate well to its site, the proposal was contrary to Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) Policy ESDQ16.
  5. The design approach taken was not sufficiently explained. This was contrary to TNP Policy ESDQ15 in not explaining how the development works as a whole to reinforce Thame's character. It was similarly contrary to LP2035 Policy DES2 in failing to demonstrate how the site's design was informed by and responded to the site and its surroundings and reinforced the site's identity by enhancing local character.
3. The applicant submitted a set of amendments to address concerns raised by both the District and Town Councils. Given the imposed time constraint it was not possible to return the amended application to Full Council. The Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer (NPCO) sent the District a delegated response to this application on 9 June 2021, based firmly upon

the Town Council's originally submitted concerns, as listed above. This was reported at Full Council on 22 June 2021:

"The amended plans were largely welcome, with improvements to the open space offering, however not all concerns had been addressed. It was considered that an intensification of the site would have enabled better open space, and there was scope for a bolder design that would better respond to the character of the site and surroundings. The NPCO had since spoken to the case officer who had taken the Town Council's comments into account but advised that the District Council could not ask the applicant to deviate significantly from the outline application. Overall, it was felt that, despite the Town Council's objections, the amendments were closer to a good scheme."

4. Although objections 1-3 and 5 (above) stood, it was recognised that a considerable effort had been made to improve the design and introduce a more fitting gateway to the site than that offered by the care home and office schemes. Overall, though, the design approach had still not been explained and it remained that the site could still do more to reflect both the historic use and the existing character of the site and its connected neighbouring uses.
5. The applicant requested that prior to submitting the amendments before the Town Council today, that a meeting be held with the NPCO in order for the applicant's team to fully understand the Council's concerns. This meeting was held on 7 July 2021 with the Acting Town Clerk, Committee Services Officer and NPCO present. Attendees from the applicant's side included representatives from the site developer Bellway Homes and their architects and planning agent. The applicant provided details of how their application had developed over time and stated how the scheme had been improved to better reflect local policy.

### **Proposed Development**

6. The most recent amendments are in line with the recent discussion described above. The development would now deliver:
  1. Two-storey market housing consisting of:
    - 2 x 1-bedroom maisonettes
    - 17 x 2-bedroom houses
    - 24 x 3-bedroom houses; and
    - 16 x 4-bedroom houses.
  2. Three-storey market housing consisting of:
    - 17 x 3-bedroom houses
    - 10 x 4-bedroom houses
    - 4 x 1 bedroom apartments; and
    - 11 x 2 bedroom apartments.
  3. Two-storey affordable housing consisting of:
    - 7 x 2-bedroom houses; and
    - 4 x 3-bedroom houses.
  4. Three-storey affordable housing consisting of:
    - 4 x 1-bedroom apartments; and
    - 6 x 2-bedroom apartments.
  5. Shared ownership housing consisting of:
    - 5 x 2-bedroom houses; and
    - 2 x 3-bedroom houses.

7. It is declared that the parking arrangements remain unchanged from the original scheme. The Town Council did not question these arrangements.
8. A total of 0.43 hectares of public open space will be provided across the whole of the application site. The Central LEAP will be the largest, with 0.18ha. The north-eastern will approximately 0.11ha in area, with the north-west and south-west areas being 0.047 and 0.51, respectively. Two areas adjacent to the eastern apartments total 0.035ha.

## Details

9. The matters raised in the Town Council's objections of 9 June 2021 will be dealt with in turn.
10. **Density.** As explained above, it was noted at Full Council on 22 June 2021 that the District Council would not seek to encourage the applicant to depart from the hybrid (outline) permission. Within the pre-amendment meeting of 7 July 2021, the Town Council reiterated its belief that a higher density scheme would work well in this location given the current and proposed screening and its proximity to the Phoenix Trail. The applicant stated they understood this but had invested considerable time and resource into delivering a scheme that would deliver 129 homes and would not wish to revisit this decision.
11. **Open Space.** The Town Council's main concern was with the size and quality of the central LEAP. The south-east of Thame is deficient in terms of substantial areas of public open space and seeking a NEAP would have been reasonable, given the publication of the District's Open Space Study in January 2017, a few months before the first pre-application advice on this site was given. Regrettably, it appears that the District Council did not recognise or pursue this shortfall as the study's findings could have been introduced as a material consideration. It is possible the District may have felt constrained by the policy in place at the time, the unambitious "saved" policy R6 from the 2011 Local Plan.
12. The applicant is proposing a LEAP in line with their pre-application discussions with the District Council. It is claimed that the proposal would now yield 0.43 hectares of public open space across the whole site which might just be considered in line with the old policy R6.
13. The central open space is now larger and proposed as a linear "square" (see design section, below). It will be surrounded on three sides by housing and be immediately abutted by narrow roads that primarily feed the adjoining housing. The surface of this roadway will have a differently paved, shared surface to keep speeds low and lessen the importance of vehicles in the street. There will still be 8 car parking spaces next to this central area, a small reduction, but parking has now been reduced or moved away from the other public open space areas.
14. The north-eastern area of public open space has benefitted from a wider change to reduce the numbers of homes exposed to the traffic noise of Howland Road and positive changes to improve its quality. These include a more pleasing planting scheme and layout, shared surfaces on its approach and the removal of car parking from the immediate area. The applicant is now also proposing to build a brick wall inside the frontage hedgerow and planting to help shield this space from both noise and air pollution.
15. **Electric vehicle charging.** The applicant has expressed a commitment within their newly submitted addendum to the Design and Access Statement (DAS) to provide 7kW, rapid chargers to any dwelling where a driveway immediately adjoins a property. It is stated this will cover some 45% of the dwellings, and that this goes beyond the conditions of the outline application which only seeks provision for every 10<sup>th</sup> dwelling.

- 16. Design.** Within the addendum to it DAS the new design approach has been explained. The “Pavilion” area formed from the potential care home and office buildings remains unchanged. The most significant difference comes with the abandonment of the “Street” area and the introduction of a formal street and building layout for what has become “The Square”. This consists of 2 and 3 storey housing on the north and south of the central public open space, with a 3-storey apartment block flanked by single 2-storey houses to the west.
- 17.** The design of these houses is stated as being influenced the nearby industrial units. This includes the use of low, pitched rooves, and strong, vertical brickwork / stacked balcony features informed by the supporting columns of the industrial units. Windows are linked across the main frontages using contrasting (“pulled header”) brickwork, to provide features which are stated as having been influenced by the dominant, horizontal form of the large windows on the fronts of the nearby commercial units. The use of grey window frames mirror those used within the Windles and Groves buildings. Within the addendum to the DAS, it is explained that this more formal approach reflects the site’s strongest visual / architectural influence, namely that of the industrial area to the east.
- 18.** The formal core is stated to help create a strong sense of arrival and place, and better manage the transition to the softer, less formal housing that surrounds it. This area, the “Lanes”, has become even less formal than originally proposed due to a recommendation from the District Council’s Urban Designer. They felt it appropriate to form a transition between the more dense, formal core and the residential uses adjoining to the north and west, despite the proposed replacement soft landscape screening. Other improvements have, however been made to the area, including improvements to both the approach and immediate environment of the areas of public open space.
- 19.** Dual-aspect homes are now found on each corner, to help improve the sense of a safe environment. The applicant has also introduced a greater variety of styles and details to provide interest in the street scene. It is claimed that the correct distances between homes (back to back, back to side, etc.) have now been achieved. Additional landscaping has been introduced within the street scene to break up areas and rows of parking. The breaking up of parking areas has also allowed for additional sites suitable for tree planting. The greater use of shared surfaces in the Lanes, and improvements in terms of deeper front gardens and soft landscaped areas should provide the visual appeal and amenity of the area.
- 20. Public Art.** The applicant has suggested that the public art provision could be directed towards reflecting the industrial nature of both the site and adjoining former railway line. They have offered to engage further with the Town Council when the Public Art Strategy, a requirement of the outline application’s S106 agreement, is drawn up. Provision could be focused onto the Phoenix Trail, which would considerably widen its audience.

### Planning considerations

- 21.** As discussed above, there were several key areas of concern:
1. Density – LP H11
  2. Design approach – LP DES2 and TNP ESDQ15, ESDQ16
  3. Design of open space – LP CS5
  4. Supporting the take up of low emission vehicles – TRANS5
- 22.** Given that the site’s hybrid full / outline application was approved under the old SODC Local Plan, this may not represent a test of how the District Council will apply density considerations on new development sites. Although a minimally compliant scheme would result in approximately 10 more units on site, it is felt that there is little benefit to be gained

in pursuing this objection without the support of the District Council. As explained above, that is unlikely to be given.

23. Regarding design matters, the addendum to the DAS now adequately explains how the proposal reinforces and responds to both the site and local character, and so Policy ESDQ15, and arguably ESDQ16 and LP 2035 DES2 could be considered as having been met. This would, however, be a nuanced decision. The central core and Square have demonstrable connections with the surrounding, connected neighbouring uses. When leaving the site, the strong architectural forms of the Windles and Groves buildings will be especially obvious to any future resident or visitor. This proposed design approach is considered appropriate. The Lanes area, however, is felt to have been directed towards a less appropriate design by the District Council. If we chose to argue this the District Council's Planning Committee would, however, be faced with a scheme that largely meets policy concerns and will provide a good quality of environment. Any continuing objection is unlikely to be upheld at District.
24. A greater, single area of public open space to NEAP standard would have been a considerable benefit. The public open spaces and their immediate environments have been considerably improved, however, and will help achieve the role of advertising connections / acting as positive gateways to the surrounding footpath / cycle path network. Neither the District, or Town Councils raised the issue as a material consideration when responding to the original, hybrid application and this means we would be at a disadvantage when arguing for such a facility, now. As the applicant does not wish to move away from their outline permission it should be recognised that this much-needed item is likely to remain undelivered for the foreseeable future.
25. The improvements to the north-eastern area of public open space are positive. The proposed mitigation to reduce noise and air pollution in this area, the concealed brick wall, is likely to be relatively effective and will help ensure it becomes a well-used space rather than just a connection to the wider footpath network.
26. The recognition of the need for improved electric vehicle charging infrastructure is welcome. Given that the proposed provision would go beyond that required by the outline permission, it is proposed that LP 2035 Policy TRANS5 has been met.
27. The applicant has worked positively to meet the objections and concerns of both the District and Town Councils. Although the Town Council could have hoped to have achieved more from this site in terms of infrastructure, dwellings (including affordable housing) and design, the applicant will naturally feel more guided by the early opinions received from the District Council during the initial pre-application discussions that stretch back at least as far as early 2017. Despite this, the policies from the TNP and new Local Plan 2035 can be judged to have worked well in influencing the development of the proposal and have led to a measurably improved outcome for both the site and the wider Town.
28. This report has focused on the objections of the Town Council only and has not considered outstanding matters raised by District and County officers.

### **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that Thame Town Council supports this application.