

**PEARCES YARD AYLESBURY ROAD THAME OX9 3AS**  
**SODC APPLICATION REF: P21/S0644/FUL**

**Full planning permission for the erection of a 70 bed care home development (Use Class C2), including communal space, landscaping and associated development**

**1 Officer Recommendation:**

That the Town Council OBJECTS to this application: The development fails to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area and setting of a number of listed buildings; the harm to heritage assets is not considered to be outweighed by the public benefits. In addition, the proposal results in the loss of employment land which has not been demonstrated to be justified.

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

- a) The principle of a care home in this location
  - b) Loss of employment use
  - c) Impact on the character and appearance of heritage assets and wider area
  - d) Living conditions of existing and proposed residents
  - 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. P19/S3289/PEJ in August 2020. In summary, it advised that the principle was acceptable but concerns were noted in respect of the loss of employment and impact on heritage assets; the harm would need to be balanced against the public benefits.

A meeting was also held with the Town Council in November 2020.

Previous planning applications notably permitted the subdivision of the large warehouse into two separate units and the creation of a new retail unit within the main area (approved 2009).

The change of use from B1 to D1 (veterinary centre) of the ground floor of The Old Shop Building was permitted in December 2013.

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**4 Risk Appraisal**

As the Town Council's position, if the recommendation in this report is accepted, is to OBJECT to the development, and notwithstanding the pre-app advice given, it is possible that there could be a contrary decision by SODC. Therefore, in the event that it is considered by the SODC Planning Committee, a councillor should be nominated at the meeting to represent the views of the Town Council at that meeting.

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## 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
- H10 Provide a Thame-Specific Affordable Housing and Dwelling Mix Strategy.

#### Working and Shopping

- WS12 Retain existing employment land in employment use

#### Getting Around

- GA1 New development to provide good pedestrian and cycle connections to the town centre and other local destinations
- GA2 Strategy for improving pedestrian and cycle connections; coordinated with the Green Living Plan for Thame
- 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

- 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
- ESDQ20 Building style must be appropriate to the historic context
- 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
- 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

## **SODC Local Plan 2035 Policies (SOLP)**

### **Strategic**

STRAT1	The overall strategy
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
H1	Delivering new homes
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
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 northern side of the town, on the western side of the main Aylesbury Road, from which vehicular access is gained. It is currently occupied by a series of buildings, the largest of which is a series of simple, modern agricultural / industrial style buildings with pitched roofs; these are in use as an agricultural product wholesaler (with retail element). The other, much smaller, buildings on the site, one of which is used as a veterinary centre and the other a garden machinery store, are older and of more traditional 'farmyard' character of red brick elevations. The veterinary building which is located just to the south of the entrance is locally listed. The northern and western boundaries are marked by mature trees.
- 6.2 The site lies within the northern part of the conservation area and is within the setting of a number of listed buildings. Lashlake House (Grade II\* listed) and Jasmine Cottage (Grade II listed), which both front the open space and The Wool Warehouse to the rear, lie immediately to the south of the site. The Old Vicarage (locally listed) lies to the west beyond which is St Mary's Church (Grade I listed) set in an elevated position within the church yard. Priest End, a narrow lane off Aylesbury Road, provides access to the above properties but is cut off by a gate located at the eastern end of the church yard such that the church and The Vicarage can only be accessed by vehicles from the west.
- 6.3 Immediately to the south of the eastern part of Priest End is the open cricket ground with a public footpath running across it from the south-east corner near the Bell Lane junction linking through the church yard and beyond. The TNP notes the cricket ground as an existing open space with the public footpaths across the field and along Priests End linking Aylesbury Road to the western end of the High Street identified as key pedestrian routes.

### *Proposal*

- 6.4 The proposed 70 bed care home would comprise a single large, roughly 'U' shaped, two and a half storey building of rectangular plan form, set in a courtyard layout, located towards the southern boundary of the site, in the general position currently occupied by the large warehouse buildings. It would be of red brick elevations with dark grey standing seam roof.
- 6.5 The elevational treatment presents a uniform frontage of large windows at ground and first floor, under a central flat crown roof with pitched edges. The roof edges would be punctuated by occasional gables, with the main entrance section on the northern side being higher than the rest and incorporating another larger central gable feature with single window at second floor level, all under a large flat central crown roof.
- 6.6 It would contain a range of communal facilities, including large 'entertaining' room, orangery, lounge areas, dining rooms and 32 bedrooms on the ground floor, the majority with direct access to the gardens, and 38 bedrooms on the first floor. The second floor would contain the laundry room, storage and staff room facilities.
- 6.7 The veterinary / office building located at the eastern end of the site would be demolished and the area laid out with parking spaces, directly accessed off Aylesbury Road via the existing access. Further parking areas would be located on the northern side of the site around the main entrance, providing a total of 31 car parking spaces and 16 cycle spaces are provided.
- 6.8 New tree planting and garden areas are proposed around the site within the new formal central courtyard garden and along the continuous path around the building.

- 6.9 The applicant describes the scheme as delivering an ‘exceptional care home environment’ with open space, landscaping and outstanding communal facilities. The key features are described as:
- A high-quality care home development that is located within the built-up area of Thame;
  - 70 single occupancy bedrooms designed to the highest standard all including their own en-suite bathroom;
  - The development will help meet an identified need within the District of all aspects of elderly care provision including nursing, personal and dementia care;
  - Spacious communal areas including lounges, dining rooms, orangery, terraces and a large communal “Great Room” located near the entrance of the development at ground floor; and
  - A variety of facilities for care home residents including a cinema room, bar area, library, hair / beauty salon, exercise room and arts / hobbies room. All facilities are easily accessible from residents’ bedrooms and spread evenly across the development.
- 6.10 The applicant suggests that the massing of the building is similar to the existing buildings and appropriate in heritage terms. The ‘slight’ increase in height is considered necessary in order to accommodate a viable, high quality scheme, in line with care home requirements. The applicant considers it to be a significant improvement on the existing, run down building which justifies the increase in height.
- 6.11 The application is supported by the following documents:
- Planning Statement
  - Heritage Statement
  - Care Homes Needs Assessment
  - Design and Access Statement (DAS)
  - Flood Risk Assessment
  - Surface Water Drainage Report
  - Landscape Statement
  - Arboricultural Report
  - Ecological Report
  - Transport Assessment
  - Travel Plan
  - Geotechnical Report – phase 2
- 6.12 The application was the subject of community consultation.

### *Representations*

- 6.13 A number of representations have been submitted in response to the application which in summary raise the following concerns: building too high – 3 storey element out of keeping, would be dominant in views across the cricket ground, inappropriate materials, flooding concerns, overlooking, insufficient parking, need for improved boundary treatment, protection of trees, the older buildings including the Old Shop, in the eastern part of the site are of historical interest having a longstanding connection with the former woolstaplers business and should be preserved, noise and disturbance during construction.

## 7 Discussion of key issues

### *The principle of a care home in this location*

- 7.1 The recently adopted SOLP seeks generally through policy STRAT1 and TH1 to support the main towns, including Thame, by providing, amongst other things, homes. The District 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, including C2 development, 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 sites for specialist housing for older people in locations with good access to public transport and local facilities.
- 7.2 Policy H13 relates specifically to specialist housing for older people. Such development is encouraged in locations with good access to public transport and local facilities. The supporting text also notes that developers are encouraged to work with local communities to enable sites to be identified within Neighbourhood Plans. The benefits of such housing including in providing smaller, more suitable housing within a care environment which can free up family housing is recognised.
- 7.3 The TNP does not identify or allocate specific sites for care homes, but its objectives include to provide a range of different housing types across all tenures.
- 7.4 In respect of affordable housing, SODC policy H8 only seeks to require such provision where a C2 development delivers a net gain of 10 or more self-contained units. Therefore, this scheme would not be required to provide 'affordable' units.
- 7.5 The site is located reasonably close to the town centre with a bus service running along Aylesbury Road and bus stops within reasonable walking distance. Given the nature of the use, the proximity of these services and facilities will be mainly to provide for staff and visitors to the site. It is considered that in this regard, the location would be appropriate.

### *Loss of existing employment uses*

- 7.6 The site is currently occupied by a mixture of uses, including the main agricultural wholesaler, which includes a retail element, as well as the vets. SODC policy TH1 seeks to provide new employment opportunities and improve the stock of existing employment areas and policy EMP3 seeks to retain existing employment land to promote and grow a balanced, sustainable economy and to support local services. Changes of use or redevelopment to non-employment uses will only be permitted in certain circumstances, including that the existing employment use is no longer viable, or, that there is no market interest following a year of active and effective marketing, or that the development will bring significant improvements to the living conditions of nearby residents. In addition, where there is no reasonable prospect of being used for continued employment use, a mixed use incorporating employment space should be considered first.
- 7.7 The plan defines employment uses as those falling within Class E (introduced by the amendment to the Use Classes Order in 2020). This includes all uses formerly falling within Classes A and some B uses and D1). Use Class B8 remains.
- 7.8 Policy WS12 of the TNP seeks to retain existing employment sites outside the town centre boundary in employment use. Non-employment uses only permitted if the existing use is considered to be no longer economically viable and the site has been marketed at a reasonable price for at least a year for that and any other suitable employment or service trade uses. The policy specifically refers to uses falling into the former B use class, which partly now fall into the new Class E.

- 7.9 The applicant suggests that the large building on the site is A1. However, this is not borne out by the planning history which confirms that the building's primary use is warehousing with ancillary retail use. The permission referred to above is subject to a condition which confines the retail area to that permitted (575 sq.m.) with the remainder retained as B8 use (2125 sqm.). There is no further permission or other indication that the use has changed since then.
- 7.10 The Government in introducing the new Class E has sought to provide flexibility to enable different uses to be introduced without the need for planning permission and thus support local economies. There is no indication or information within the application that demonstrates what other employment uses have been considered; even if the buildings are no longer fit for purpose, as suggested by the applicant, the possibility of refurbishment or redevelopment for employment uses should be considered first.
- 7.11 It is acknowledged that the proposed use will generate employment, however, these would be outside the above use classes and thus of a different nature and type that the policies are seeking to retain in order to maintain a balance of employment within the town. Whilst this benefit is recognised, it does not of itself, outweigh the need to demonstrate compliance with the above policies, which the applicant has failed to do.
- 7.12 The loss of the employment site is therefore contrary to policies TH1 and EMP3 of the SOLP 2035 and to policy WS12 of the TNP. It also fails to show how the development will support local economic growth and productivity, taking into account local business needs, contrary to the NPPF.

*Impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and setting of listed buildings*

- 7.13 The site occupies a very sensitive location, partly within and partly adjoining the conservation area within the oldest part of the town. The area has a unique rural, village character being visually separated from the main built-up areas of the town centre to the south and residential areas to the east.
- 7.14 The SODC Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CAA) describes the area in some detail, noting a number of important elements and features of the area.
- 7.15 In respect of the western part of Priests End and the church it states:  
*"The area around St. Mary's Church is the ancient heart of the town. Priest End is a broad open road with the churchyard and allotments to one side and the walls of the Prebendal, with mature trees behind on the other. Although an open area this space feels remarkably isolated from the town, almost like a village in its own right. This is emphasised by the open space separating it from the town on all but the High St. side. The two key components to this area are the church and the Prebendal but it is the spaces between these two, as much as the buildings themselves, which give Priest End its character."* (page 16).
- 7.16 Also, in respect of the churchyard:  
*"The churchyard is a very important open space. Avenues of pollarded limes planted for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee cross the churchyard on its north, south and east sides, dividing it into a series of smaller spaces, especially in summer when the trees' dense foliage forms a solid mass. In this way the churchyard maintains an open aspect. (page 17).*

7.17 And in respect of the area along the eastern part of Priests End:

*“Running between the stone walls of the Old Vicarage and St. Mary’s churchyard is a footpath that links Priestend with Aylesbury Road. At the church end there are broad grass verges beside the path and the view towards the Aylesbury Road end is partly closed by a 5-bar gate and the overhanging branches of trees in the Old Vicarage’s garden, all of which produces a scene quite rural in character that contributes to the area’s village feel. The footpath leads to the drive of Lashlake House and Jasmine Cottage, a pair of fine 18th century houses that form an attractive backdrop to the north side of the cricket pitch. Brick garden walls flank these houses and the pavement in front has stone kerbs. The northern edge of the cricket pitch is bordered by a 19th century wrought iron estate fence instead of a wall, giving the drive to the houses a very open aspect and visually bringing the houses almost onto the cricket pitch. This helps impart the feel of a village green to the area.”*

7.18 With specific reference to the Aylesbury Road / Pearce’s Yard area it states:

*“Coming into the town from the north and approaching the cricket pitch, the northern end of the conservation area in Aylesbury Road still has a strong sense of the former rural fringe of the town. The road is flanked by brick walls on both sides giving a narrow and enclosed feel but with views into and out of the conservation area. At this point the works of H&C Pearce are a major feature. This woolstapler and rural supplies company is an important part of this corner of the conservation area and their yard contains a mixture of late 19th and early 20th century buildings that are built of a uniform red brick and share a plain, industrial character.”* (page 19).

7.19 And:

*“Whilst views out of the conservation area along Aylesbury Road are of an uninspiring mixture of modern housing (with the exception of no. 41), street lamps and road signs, the edge of the area is marked by an attractive group of houses: Ash Tree Cottage, (a 17th century timber-framed house extended in the 18th century), its neighbour no. 21 and the adjoining building in Pearce’s yard“* (page 19).

7.20 The CAA also identifies important views, including from the south across the cricket ground and from Priest End and the whole of the cricket ground and church / church yard is identified as important open space. The TNP identifies the public footpaths to the south and along Priests End as key pedestrian routes and the cricket ground as an open space to be protected.

7.21 The site itself still has the character and appearance of a farmyard, (it appears that the locally listed building and others to the eastern end may have been originally associated with buildings on Aylesbury Road) located on the edge of the settlement. However, the former woolstaplers use which used both the listed Wool Warehouse and the locally listed Old Shop established a slightly different, albeit agricultural use. The later addition of the larger buildings gives it a more quasi-industrial character, though the building is not dissimilar to many found on modern day farmyards. It is adjoined to the south by a number of individual listed buildings of considerable quality, in domestic use. Historic maps indicate that much of the western part of the site was open land associated with these buildings. The church is also an important Grade I listed building within its wider context.

7.22 It is noted that the applicant has been through a series of design evolutions, as set out in the DAS. The DAS suggests that the design of the building draws from those around the site in a way that complements rather than competes with them, adopting an industrial vernacular form using traditional local materials. It suggests that it uses a variety of character treatments and massing to visually break up the volume of the building.



- 7.23 However, it is considered that the resultant approach adopted would be inappropriate for the site. The building presents a rather uniform elevations that resembles more of a large office building rather than reflecting any traditional industrial vernacular. The overall size and mass of the building is also uncharacteristic of this vernacular in the context of the site. The gable ends are of a lower pitch than traditionally used in nearby buildings and the use of the central flat crown roof is out of character with the predominantly pitched roofs in the vicinity. The elevational treatment will do little to relieve the scale and mass of the building. Although the DAS and Heritage Statement focus on the 'slight increase in height', this increase amounts to the whole of the roof area above the main two stories, the bulk of which is much larger than the existing buildings on the site. It is considered that the resulting building fails to respond to either the existing rural 'farmyard' character of the site itself or the more domestic scale and character of the immediately surrounding buildings.
- 7.24 The Heritage Statement has assessed the significance of all heritage assets affected, concluding that the site is within the setting of Lashlake House, Jasmine Cottage and the Wool Warehouse to the rear and St Mary's church. It is concluded that there would be a minor level of harm to the setting of Jasmine Cottage and a minor level of harm to the conservation area as a result of the loss of the locally listed building, resulting in less than substantial harm.
- 7.25 However, it is noted that whilst the assessment includes 4 viewpoints, there is none from the churchyard. The impact on the view from the south across the cricket field is concluded to be low with the building appearing as a background element with limited perception of form. Currently however it is noted that the existing buildings on the site are barely perceptible with the setting of the listed buildings appearing as an open, rural context. The buildings would result in additional built development, higher than the existing buildings with a larger more bulky roof, extending across a wide backdrop to these buildings in this view. It is considered that this would detract from the open, rural village green character, as identified in the CA above.
- 7.26 The view from the bridge over the river to the north east is also assessed and it is concluded that the proposal will improve the architectural quality of the site and the semi-rural character through additional planting. However, the existing building, whilst visible is recessive in appearance and the proposal will introduce a much larger mass of building in the view which will have a more dominating presence. 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. It is considered that the building will fail to integrate successfully in its context, despite the existing and proposed planting.
- 7.27 Overall, it is considered that the proposal will not be sympathetic to the special qualities of the surroundings of the site as described well in the CAA, and would introduce a building of significant scale and mass that fails to complement the open village feel of this part of the conservation area and the setting of the adjoining listed buildings which is a very important component of the distinctive character of the town. Nor would it provide a suitable transition to the countryside. The loss of the locally listed buildings would also result in less than substantial harm
- 7.28 It would therefore conflict with TNP policies H6, ESDQ16, ESDQ17, ESDQ18, ESDQ20, ESDQ21, ESDQ22 and ESDQ26 and SOLP policies DES1, DES2, ENV1 and H3.

#### *Accommodation type and environment for proposed occupiers*

- 7.29 The proposed residential use is one that will provide for specialist care with individual en-suite bedrooms supported by communal areas, providing a number of facilities for the residents to use, in accordance with the “HAPPI” industry standards.
- 7.30 The internal layout is typical of care home buildings with a central corridor serving rooms on either side. Each room will be relatively spacious and have its own en-suite. A range of communal areas will provide a range of facilities and amenities for the residents.
- 7.31 The central courtyard garden will provide a pleasant area for the residents to enjoy with further areas around the building.
- 7.32 Overall it is considered that the proposal would provide a high quality environment for its residents, in that respect, would be in accordance with TNP policies EDSQ28 and EDSQ29 and SOLP policies DES5, ENV5 and H3.

#### *Impact on living conditions of adjoining properties*

- 7.33 The proposed building will be sited in close proximity to Lashlake House and Jasmine Cottage which lie to the south along Priest End. The applicant suggests that a distance of 25 metres would be maintained between the buildings. This would just meet the minimum distance considered acceptable in a two storey, building face to face relationship. In terms of outlook which is not referred to by the applicant, it is noted that the proposed building will be located around 2 metre from the boundary. Whilst the existing building is right on the boundary it is much lower at this point as the roof slopes away from the boundary. However, the area between the two buildings would be retained as existing which is an open yard area, and the nearest part of the building would be a ‘short’ elevation such that overall it is considered that the relationship would not be unacceptably harmful.
- 7.34 TNP policies H6 and SOLP policies DES6 and DES8 will therefore be satisfied.

#### *Highways, parking and accessibility for sustainable modes*

- 7.35 The proposal will utilise the existing access off Aylesbury Road. This provides a 4.8m wide roadway with a 1.2 m footway to the side.
- 7.36 The 31 proposed car parking spaces would be located in two main areas, one around the site entrance and the second along the northern boundary where the main entrance is proposed. There is no adopted parking standard for care homes and the applicant has based the requirement based on staff and visitor requirements at other developments. 16 cycle spaces are also proposed.
- 7.37 In terms of sustainable modes of transport, the site lies within reasonable walking distance of the bus stop on Aylesbury Road and within reasonable walking distance of the town centre.
- 7.38 The application is also supported by a Travel Plan setting out the measures that would be adopted to further encourage use of sustainable modes.
- 7.39 Overall, TNP policies GA1, GA6, EDSQ24 and SOLP policies TRANS2, TRANS4 and TRANS5.

#### *Ecology / biodiversity*

- 7.40 The supporting ecology report and surveys confirm that the site is of little value in this regard. However, to ensure biodiversity net gain, a number of measures are proposed including the introduction of habitats through new planting (sensory garden, wildflower meadows, hedgerows and trees).
- 7.41 The proposal would therefore satisfy SOLP policies ENV3 and ENV5.

### *Flood risk / drainage*

- 7.42 The site lies mainly in flood zone 1. The supporting flood risk / drainage report identifies that site is not at risk of flooding and that all potential sources have been assessed with the risk remains low. The drainage strategy incorporates sustainable drainage solutions including increased permeable surfaces and underground tanks with a reduction in discharge rates and no requirement to discharge into the River Thame thus providing a betterment over the existing situation.
- 7.43 Foul water would be discharged to the existing public foul sewer network.
- 7.44 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 .

### *Contributions to local infrastructure*

- 7.45 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
- 7.46 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.

### *Other considerations*

- 7.47 The applicant suggests that whilst there is no need to demonstrate a requirement for the development proposed, a need assessment has nevertheless been carried out to support the application. This concludes the following:
- a need for 109 'all bed' market standard (en-suite) bedrooms in the catchment;
  - additionally there is a need for 108 specialist dementia beds in the catchment (both taking into account existing permissions and pending applications).
  - Work needs to start now to meet this unmet need, so the proposal will meet short and medium term requirements and will assist in reducing pressure on the NHS by reducing 'bed-blocking'.
  - Current provision in South Oxfordshire is below the County average and below the County Council's objective level
- 7.48 It is noted that for the purposes of the assessment, the 'catchment' is identified as being a fairly extensive rural area extending about 6 miles around the town, incorporating the settlements of Haddenham & Stone to the east, almost up to Wheatley and Watlington to the west, Chinnor to the south and close to Princes Risborough to the south-east. The pipeline provision includes proposals within this catchment area, but it is unclear how provision within the areas just beyond the catchment may affect the requirements – for instance, those living in the areas closer to Aylesbury would suggest that persons would look towards that area, rather than to Thame. It is known that further developments are planned in Aylesbury and Princes Risborough. In addition, there appears to be no reference to the recent application at The Elms.
- 7.49 It is also suggested that the development will help address the problems arising from those living alone or in inappropriate accommodation, that it will provide a high-quality care home, reduce loneliness and improve quality of life and provide an attractive and suitable choice for people and free up family homes.
- 7.50 The applicant also notes that the use has a high ratio of staff and will deliver around 89 jobs (about 82 full time equivalent and 7 part time), significantly more than the existing land uses.

## 8 Conclusions

- 8.1 It is recognised that care homes contribute to housing supply by providing specialist care for those who can no longer care for themselves in their own homes, thereby releasing their own homes into the market. However, it is noted that this contribution is not a direct 1 for 1 ratio given that it will not necessarily release housing onto the market depending on the circumstances of the individual, such as other members of the family continuing to live there. There would be benefits in respect of meeting a need for specialist accommodation as indicated above.
- 8.2 However, it is considered that the harm arising to heritage assets and failure to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and setting of listed buildings, together with the harm arising to the local distinctiveness and character of the town, would not be outweighed by these benefits.
- 8.3 In addition, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that the loss of the existing employment site is justified.
- 8.4 Overall, it is considered that there is a conflict with the development plan which is not outweighed by material considerations.