

## Planning & Environment

---

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Office Land at Phoenix Park (<a href="#">P23/S0690/FUL</a>)</b>
	<b>The erection of 9 x 2-bedroom apartments with associated parking and landscaping (As amplified by additional information received 28 March 2023 and as amended by information received 03 April 2023 and 2 January 2024.)</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>23 January 2024</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer</b>

### Background

1. The site is approximately 0.15 ha in area and was previously part of the former DAF training and office facility. The site gained specific permission at Appeal for office use under the wider decision related to hybrid planning application P18/S3143/O. This sought the development of 1,511 sq.m. of office space, up to 129 dwellings and a 68-bed care home. A clause within the S106 agreement associated with the Appeal decision limited use of this part of the wider site to office use to prevent harm being caused to the occupants of the planned, adjacent housing and nearby care home.
2. The site was cleared of the former DAF building and currently hosts a temporary car park and sales office that promotes the wider residential development on Phoenix Park. In March 2023 the Town Council objected to an application for 9 x 2 bedroom apartments on the grounds of poor design (including bulk and scale), poor amenity space, impact of noise and air pollution from Howland Road, and a lack of affordable housing provision.
3. In August 2023 the Town Council objected to an amended scheme for 5 x 1 bedroom apartments and 4 x 3 bedroom homes on the basis of housing mix, impact on the existing apartments to the west, internal light for the lower apartments, and amenity space.

### Proposed Development

4. It is proposed to demolish Bellway's purpose-built visitor centre, parking area and temporary landscaping and build 4 x 3 bedroom homes and 2 x 1 bedroom maisonettes. The maisonettes would be available as Affordable, First Homes (with a discount against the market value and a capped maximum price).
5. Twelve parking spaces would be provided in a rear, parking court arrangement with bicycles parking proposed within secure sheds.

### Transport and access

6. The Highways Authority have responded to the application and stated the proposed levels of vehicle and bicycle parking are appropriate.
7. Car parking spaces have been provided at 2 spaces per 3-bed house and 1 for each of the maisonettes. Two visitor spaces are identified making 12 spaces in total. Electric vehicle

charging points are proposed with access available from each allocated space. In terms of bicycle parking it is claimed that 2 secure, covered spaces would be provided for each bedroom.

### Noise and amenity

8. Due to the site's proximity to Howland Road, traffic noise is known to be high. A further acoustic report has been submitted by the applicant, detailing the expected noise levels for each frontage and garden.
9. It is proposed to fit all of the dwellings with mechanical extraction, with trickle vents on facades and on opening windows. The bedrooms would be fitted with room-specific ventilation systems to provide external air to reduce the risk of these rooms overheating during summer months.
10. The acoustic report states that noise levels in the gardens would, with appropriate fencing / brick walls (including a short section 2.4m high on the Howland Road frontage serving Plot 4) be expected to be within the level considered acceptable for plots adjacent to a busy road. This appears to represent an improvement on earlier designs and layouts.

### Housing mix

11. The principle of requiring affordable housing at a rate across the whole site has already been established. Thame HNA states the housing mix should apply equally to both market and affordable housing.
12. Notwithstanding that the Thame Housing Needs Assessment identifies the greatest need in Thame is for 3-bedroom properties, it is questionable as to how far a new standard can be applied on top of this, as well as the earlier part of the scheme. Given that the number of properties identified for this site has also reduced in number it is now considered appropriate to support the District Housing Team's view.
13. The scheme is now smaller, with the affordable housing component required at 2.4 homes across the 6 units that are proposed. The District Council's Housing Team has already responded stating that the two maisonettes offered as First Homes would be acceptable, with a monetary contribution for the remaining part-unit.

### Design

14. Plots 3 – 6 are sufficiently similar / identical to those proposed under the previously amended scheme. Their design is acceptable and should sit comfortably beside the completed homes to the site's north that also front Howland Road.
15. The remaining 2 dwellings are the maisonettes. These will join onto the cranked Plot 3. Each will have a separate entrance, one to the road serving the rear parking court, the other, the main estate road. The bedrooms for each will face southwards onto the service road while their lounges sit on the west frontage, onto the service road.
16. The maisonettes are proposed to be half-clad with feature tiles, with one gable to the north (rear) and one to the west. These features would add interest in the street scene. Plot 3's garden would be bound on its southern edge with part of the maisonette's rear wall, but the half-tiling and a "blind" window at ground floor level should significantly reduce its impact.

17. The Town Council's former concern about the development shading habitable rooms within the adjacent apartment block to the west has been removed.
18. The maisonettes' service road frontage looks onto the side of the apartment block to the west. While this is a three-storey development the elevation is not featureless, and landscaping has been proposed immediately in front of the apartment block to help reduce its impact. The gap formed by the landscaping and service road looks generous when viewing the submitted street scene, but the distance between the two properties would be 0.8m closer than the SODC Joint Design Guide would recommend. While this is regrettable, it is considered that the slight reduction in distance would be acceptable, given that landscape mitigation will be required and provided.

### **Summary**

19. The proposal should be looked at on its own merits and should not be overly compared with earlier proposals. Given the site's constraint, in that its access road must sit at the furthest point from the Howland Road junction, the proposed design and layout is considered acceptable.

### **Recommendation**

20. For the reasons given above, it is recommended that Thame Town Council supports this application.