

Full Council

Date:	13 February 2024
Title:	Land north of Oxford Road
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

Proposed Development

1. This application, [P23/S4262/FUL](#), seeks permission for 154 residential dwellings and infrastructure over a site of 17.33 hectares. The application contains details of proposed highways and footpath works, sustainable urban drainage systems, pumping stations and green infrastructure.
2. It is proposed to site 70 homes in an area east of the existing estate and 84 in an area to the north of it. For simplicity, this report adopts the applicant's reference to Phase 2 (to the east) and Phase 3 (to the north).

Background

3. Oxford Road was one of the main housing allocation sites within the 2013 Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP). The main built development consisted of 203 affordable and market homes, accessed off Oxford Road, and these have been completed and occupied. Both the TNP and a legal obligation required that 17 hectares of agricultural land, inclusive of an area identified as an extension to the Cuttle Brook nature reserve to the north and east of the completed housing area, be made accessible to the public.
4. Two other areas were allocated for potential development to the west of the built scheme. The first was reserved for educational use for both the site of a potential new primary school and expansion land for Lord Williams's School. The second area was intended to be used as one of two reserve sites for homes. This was needed in case Lord Williams's Lower School site failed to be redeveloped for the housing allocated to it at Lord Williams's request.
5. To provide certainty that Thame's housing allocations would be built within a reasonable period of time, TNP Policy H2 required the Lower School Site to have achieved planning permission by 1 April 2021. The School had by 2021 formally given notice that they would not be seeking such a permission, and so the housing reserve sites were able to be brought forward for housing. Land parcels for 78 homes at Oxford Road and 57 homes off Wenman Road were automatically freed up for development through this trigger mechanism.
6. Shortly after commencing work for the completed housing at Oxford Road archaeology of national significance was found on the western half of the site. This sterilised the land in development terms, meaning that neither the Reserve housing allocation nor the education facilities would be able to be brought forward. Both the County Council and Lord Williams's have confirmed that neither will need the land allocated for educational use. The issue of the housing remains, however, as an allocation handed down to Thame through the District Council's 2012 Core Strategy and subsequently reaffirmed through their 2020 Local Plan.
7. Prior to April 2021, the landowner approached the Town Council seeking its view on the impact the archaeology had on the Reserve site. At this time Thame's housing completion record had not yet been agreed with the District Council, and the Town looked highly vulnerable to major windfall applications. Subsequently, the District Council adopted their

2035 Local Plan, with its presumption of supporting planning applications where neighbourhood plans had not progressed to site allocation by December 2021. It was, therefore, agreed that it would be reasonable to work towards using part of the land protected for public access while re-providing any lost areas to the west of the site.

8. During public consultation held for the Thame Neighbourhood Plan Review (TNP2) in early 2022 residents supported the use of land around Oxford Road as the main housing site for Thame. Within the most recent consultation, the formal Regulation 14 stage, majority support was again given for this purpose. It must be made clear, however, that TNP2 has not yet reached the stage where even uncontested policies can be given material weight when considering planning applications.
9. Members may recall that the District Council does not currently have a 5-year supply of housing land, as confirmed through their most recent five year housing land supply statement. This would normally trigger the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 76 and footnote 79 of the refreshed National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), however, grants relief for authorities that have an adopted Local Plan that is less than five years old for applications made on or after the day the NPPF was published. In this case, the application was validated on the same day of the publication of the NPPF (19th December 2023).
10. Regardless, the District Council likely has protection from NPPF paragraph 226, which protects those authorities from the presumption who have a draft Local Plan at Regulation 18, subject to the Plan identifying housing needs and allocating suitable sites. All policies within the 2035 Local Plan should therefore be considered extant, including Policy H3, which would support planning applications for housing subject to those proposals complying with the remaining policies in the Development Plan.
11. No matter what decision the Local Planning Authority, South Oxfordshire District Council takes, no development will be able to take place at Oxford Road without either major change to or a thorough reworking of the existing legal agreement that keeps the land at Oxford Road publicly accessible.

Access and transport

12. It is intended that vehicle traffic would use the existing access road off Oxford Road, Roman Way. Within their December 2023 Planning Statement, the applicant claims that the access for the established scheme used Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) standards. Together with the emergency access route some 60 metres to the east of Roman Way the existing arrangement is claimed to be suitable for up to 400 dwellings. This assumption may not, however, extend as far as considering the junction's relationship with local road conditions.
13. From Roman Way, access by car or active travel means to Phase 2 would be reached from Weavers Branch. Within their Design & Access Statement, the applicant has claimed that internal road network was designed to allow for a second phase to the east and a third to the west. Post-development access to the northern housing area would be made off Causeway Close, and it is assumed that OCC will comment on the suitability of this road for that purpose.
14. Both service roads would be a minimum 6 metres wide with 2 metre pavements on either side. In Phase 2, it is intended to keep the pedestrian route through to Rycote Meadow, albeit altered to reflect the intention to form a street along the existing route. Connections to public access footpaths will be available from the edges; each area is proposed to have a circular walk around it, although Phase 2 uses part of the proposed footpath through Rycote

Meadow. Phase 2 also proposes a pedestrian / cycle link to Oxford Road using the existing track adjacent to Town Farm.

15. The applicant has submitted a Transport Assessment that claims to test the proposed extra housing. This estimates an extra 50 cars would leave Roman Way in the peak morning hour with some 21 arriving. It also tests if the Roman Way / Oxford Road junction and Oxford Road / A418 junctions could cope with the theoretical maximum load of the junction of Roman Way and Oxford Road, i.e., that imposed by the 400 dwelling limit. These assessments and the assumptions underlying them will be scrutinised by OCC's Highways Team.
16. Some 279 car parking spaces are proposed across the site, including 31 spaces for visitors. Standards used are 1 car per bedroom for 1 and 2 bedroom houses with all others having 2 spaces. Given that the fewest spaces have been provided for the two-bedroom houses it is not clear if OCC Highways will support this; theoretically, however, standards for car parking have been met.
17. In terms of bicycle parking, the Transport Statement suggests that 2 spaces will be provided per bedroom, in line with OCC standards, although the Planning Statement notes 2 spaces per dwelling will be provided. Given that submitted plans show generous bicycle storage it is expected that the County's standards have been worked to.
18. It is proposed that construction traffic for Phase 2 in the east would use Roman Way and Weavers Branch. Construction access is proposed for Phase 3 from the A418, using an existing field entrance. This would be subject to the approval of OCC Highways.

Flood risk

19. There are three types of flood risk that need to be considered alongside this application:
 - River flood risk
 - Surface water flood risk
 - Reservoir flood risk.
20. Regarding risk of river flooding, plan and decision makers are directed to place development to the areas of least risk. The developer's evidence and long-term flood risk modelling will be tested by three bodies, the Environment Agency, the Local Lead Flood Authority and the District Council's own flood risk and drainage team. It is clear, however, that the built area is outside the current, long-term flood risk zone for river flooding as identified by the Environment Agency. This means the proposal is likely to have passed the first test required by national policy, the "sequential test".
21. The risk of surface water flooding is described as low and this is supported by the Environment Agency's flood risk mapping. The risk may, however, change over time and this might be tested by the three flood risk bodies. Recent case law (January 2024) has, however, confirmed that there is no responsibility on applicants to direct their development to areas at lower risk of surface water flooding, meaning these agencies would not be able to ask for the development to be halted or moved elsewhere to avoid surface water flooding.
22. The risk of reservoir failure is classed as "extremely unlikely" by the Environment Agency, but they choose to test the risk of failure alongside a river flood event in order to show a worst-case scenario. The extent of flood risk associated with reservoir flooding is, therefore, higher than for any other risk. The applicant claims their built development would remain outside of this higher risk area.

23. The applicant's Flood Risk Assessment proposes a minimum floor height for dwellings across the development. They suggest that having taken into account the future anticipated increased flood risk the ground floor height of the buildings would sit at least 0.85m above the highest water level they have modelled.
24. It is worth noting that a similar area to the application site has been proposed for housing within the Regulation 14 draft Thame Neighbourhood Plan. The three main flood risk bodies have either not commented on the proposed allocation or not identified the area as being at risk.
25. In terms of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) it is proposed to use connected features such as swales, attenuation basins (normally dry), ground storage crates and "wet" biodiversity ponds. It is intended for at least some of the roads to drain into swales to provide habitats and features.

Water and sewage

26. The applicant has proposed that the existing foul water (sewage) pumping station will be able to cope with the additional effluent. Gravity will feed the waste water from Phase 2 to the existing pumping station while that from Phase 3 will be actively pumped to the existing station. It is assumed Thames Water will test the submitted calculations and may comment on the assumptions.
27. In terms of fresh water supply Thames Water has confirmed through the last TNP2 consultation that it would have to install additional equipment in order to provide fresh water to the proposed housing. Within the same communication it was stated no upgrades would be required to the existing foul water, or sewage treatment facilities. Thames Water have replied to the application's consultation and repeated this advice.

Housing

28. Within their Planning Statement (paragraph 6.10) the applicant states that they were advised to provide affordable housing with ratios of 25% First Homes, 35% Social Rent, 25% Affordable Rent and 15% Home Ownership. The tenures have still to be agreed with the District Council. While the conclusions of the March 2022 Thame Housing Needs Assessment are being discussed with the District Council we remain unable to use the findings from that report, and so the following is provided for information only.
29. The proposed housing mix is:

30.

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed	Total
Market		11	22	59	92
First Homes	14	1			15
Social Rent	8	14			22
Affordable Rent		8	6	2	16
Shared Ownership		4	5		9
Affordable sub-total	22	27	11	2	62
Total	22	38	33	61	154

31. A 40% affordable housing contribution over 154 homes gives rise to 61.6 dwellings. This has been rounded up to 62 dwellings.

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed	Total
Market		11	22	59	92
Affordable	22	27	11	2	62
Affordable as %	100	71	33.3	2	
Total	22	38	33	61	154

32. Within their response, the District Council's Housing Policy Team have provided a suggested mix for the affordable housing units that are not First Homes. The mix currently proposed by the applicant does not align well with the Team's suggested mix.

33. The site is proposed as a housing site within TNP2. While its draft policies cannot be referenced, we can note that it is the District Council's housing allocation to Thame that is driving the need for our housing allocations. This site would, however, provide for the 143 homes identified within the draft Joint Local Plan as Thame's outstanding housing requirement.

Landscaping

34. The applicant has submitted a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that looks at the impact the proposed development would have while under construction, for the first winter following its completion and during the summer after 15 years have passed. The assessment notes the area does not hold any formal landscape designation.

35. In reply to the last TNP2 consultation, the District Council recommended that two key views be retained through the Oxford Road allocation, the first being the view north from Oxford Road. The Town Council was advised that a wide corridor is maintained adjacent to the Cuttle Brook, keeping the visual link to countryside to the north free of new housing and planting, and that the corridor itself be specifically referenced within policy.

36. The District Council and Historic England also asked that a view be kept from the proposed permissive path on the adjacent Rycote Meadow towards the Listed Buildings of Town Farm

and its associated barns. There is sufficient similarity between the proposed development and the TNP2 allocation to assume the response to the application would be similar.

37. Within the Assessment it is argued that the wider views northwards from Oxford Road are restricted due to the presence of a substantial hedgerow. This is the east-west hedge that sits just below the existing barn in the Phase 2 site area. It is also claimed that the east side of the Cuttle Brook is “framed” by residential properties with the adjacent mature trees limiting views to the east. The Assessment also claims that the view west to the proposed development from the planned path in Rycote Meadow is currently obscured by mature hedgerow vegetation, and so views from here are already restricted. This hedge is substantially broken and mostly consists of low-lying bramble and the land rises to the west. There are, therefore, clear, existing views across the Phase 2 site, including to the Listed barns, from the line of the proposed path.
38. It is claimed that the Phase 2 development would be seen within the close context of the existing estate, Town Farm Close and Cuttle Brook Gardens. The impact is considered by the Assessment to lessen over time when viewed from Rycote Meadow through clusters of tree planting along the Cuttle Brook Corridor (it is not certain what planting this refers to).
39. There would be a substantial change in the visual outlook from both Oxford Road and the proposed pathway through Rycote Meadow. Attempts to screen the Phase 2 development with trees and shrubs could, in time, severely restrict the views. The relationship between Cuttle Brook, Rycote Meadow and the adjacent meadows could be lost.
40. In terms of boundary treatment, it has been proposed to place open spaces on the southern and south western site boundaries to reduce the impact of the development on the Thame Conservation Area. Regarding Phase 3, the intention is to place SuDs and play areas / open space on the boundaries to the open countryside, to reduce the impact of the development across longer views. This may help in preserving some of the setting associated with the buried archaeological remains. The northern / western boundary to the A418 would be addressed through the use of a tall (2 metre high) bund, topped with trees. The treatment of the landscaped areas and the impact on the Thame Conservation Area, and other assets, are dealt with under the policy considerations section, below.

Open Space

41. The 2013 TNP Policy HA1 allocated the Oxford Road site for 203 dwellings. A key part of the allocation was the requirement to provide 17 hectares of publicly accessible open space, the area of which was defined in TNP Figure HA2. Part of this open space was to be provided to form “a natural green area next to Cuttle Brook that forms an extension to the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve and retaining existing trees and hedgerows”. These areas were in addition to the areas of play and amenity space required of modern housing developments.
42. The open space requirement was not only protected through the TNP, but also through binding planning obligations in the form of a Section 106 document. This document identified the area and, through a submitted Development Brief, identified the routes of the permissive paths.
43. Within the Document (15S30, dated 30 July 2015) there is a requirement under the Second Schedule for the submission of a Specification of Works. This was to be “a detailed proposal for the provision of the Permissive Paths, including recommendations for their alignment and for construction materials, the provision of a green area adjacent to the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve, the retention of trees and hedgerows, a planting scheme that reinforces historic field patterns with native tree species, measures to ensure construction works minimise the

impact on bio-diversity a programme for carrying them out and a programme for their future maintenance”.

44. A specification for the permissive paths dated July 2016 was submitted by Bloor Homes. This document does refer to the use of structural planting through the site but there are no details of the type of planting to be used. There appear to be no other requirements or documents that aim to improve the open space areas, including the extension to the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve. It is understood that no additional planting has been carried out away from the build development area since the original works started.
45. It is, therefore, important to understand the proposed open space offer against the backdrop of the existing scheme, which appears to offer no means of reinforcing or improving the area currently operating as an extension to the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve.
46. It is proposed to provide publicly accessible open space, served by existing or new permissive paths through agricultural land to the west of the existing estate. This would equal around 8 hectares. A second area adjacent to all three “phases” of development would be available as parkland, public open space of 3.62 hectares in area. A third area to the north of the open space of approximately 5.7ha is proposed to be used to deliver an area of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG, see below). To the north, beside the River Thames, is an area that is not proposed for change in land use, it would be retained as a grassed area. All four areas would be crossed by permissive footpaths and would appear to collectively deliver close to or even in slight excess of the minimum 17 hectares required of publicly accessible open space.
47. The proposed development of some 154 homes would, however, bring its own open space requirements. Within the applicant’s Design and Access Statement (page 44) it is stated that a population-based assessment of open space requirements would suggest some 0.52 hectares of parkland would be required.
48. As some 78 of the proposed homes would arguably represent the Reserve Site allocation from the TNP there is in any case a policy requirement to deliver a further 0.54 hectare of publicly accessible open space through TNP Policy HA6. This extra quantity may not be fully achieved, in addition to the original TNP requirement of 17ha. Should the applicant’s assessment be found sound then the unrestricted access across 3.62 hectares of parkland could be deemed a benefit that offsets the slight loss of publicly accessible open space.
49. Open spaces are also proposed within each of the phases. In Phase 3, a Local Equipped Area of Play, a “youth sprint strip” and shelter, outside exercise equipment and an area of sensory planting is proposed. Within Phase 2 a smaller Local Area for Play is proposed alongside outdoor exercise equipment, a shelter and sensory planting.
50. The longest continual footpath, as before, is adjacent to the A418 boundary. This would link to a circular permissive path through the agricultural land in the west and to green corridors either side of Phase 3. From there footpaths would split around the proposed parkland and BNG areas and also the retained grass land adjacent to the River Thames. This outer route would connect with Phase 2. An approximately east-west running path would also skirt the northern edge of the public open space. All of the paths are proposed as informal (i.e., unsurfaced) with the exception of short stretches of boardwalk where the paths would cross areas commonly flooded with surface water.

Site Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

51. Local Plan Policy ENV3 requires that development provides a net gain in biodiversity, where possible. The proposed scheme will, however, now be expected to provide a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity terms due to the 2021 Environment Act, which became a formal requirement yesterday (12th February 2024). It is believed that the BNG will be secured through a planning condition and legal agreements, but applicants are being advised to demonstrate that they will be able to achieve the expected gain prior to permission being granted.
52. The applicant has, therefore, prepared an Ecological Appraisal in anticipation. This assesses the existing habitats, which would be used to inform any future BNG calculation. The Appraisal suggests that on-site habitats are important at the local level. They primarily consist of hedgerows, a small area of both woodland and scrub and both improved and semi-improved grassland.
53. For Phase 2, the key losses to development would be the hedges to the west, north and east of the existing barn in part or whole. Typical species recorded include hawthorn, elder and cherry with perennials and shrubs such as nettles, cow parsley, ground ivy, bramble, etc. Parts of the east-west hedges would be removed to provide for access roads or paths, but it is proposed that other gaps would be infilled, and the lengths strengthened with new planting.
54. It is expected that native species hedgerow will be lost but that there will be an overall increase in hedgerow, mostly species-rich. The Appraisal's author believes that this will more than compensate for the loss. It will be the role of the District Council's Countryside Officer to respond to the proposals and to ensure that there is an appropriate net gain in biodiversity in line with national, and local policy.
55. In terms of assessing fauna, the Appraisal presents a mix of direct observations and inferred presence through habitat. For example, two trees were seen as having high suitability for roosting bats. Surveys found several species of bat foraging over the site and evidence otters use the Cuttle Brook. The two attenuation ponds north of the existing development were surveyed for the presence of Great Crested Newts, but none were found. The presence of birds and insects, however, were inferred as present due to the variety of available habitats.
56. Likely means of improving biodiversity were suggested through the use of new hedgerow and shrub planting, new wildflower grassland, the provision of bat and bird boxes, hedgehog highways, habitat piles and insect hotels. It is also claimed the SuDS features, including the nature ponds, will provide extra gain.

Heritage

57. A Written Scheme of Investigation has been agreed with OCC's Archaeologist for the Phase 2 area. It suggests the south-eastern element will be investigated in detail, with the remainder and Phase 3 under the usual watching brief.
58. A Heritage Impact Assessment has also been prepared. This identifies the proximity of the Thame Conservation Area, which fronts Oxford Road and washes over much of Rycote Meadow and all of Cuttle Brook Gardens and Town Farm Close. Three Listed Buildings are in close proximity to the site, Three-Bay Barn, Five-Bay Barn and Town Farm (Listed as Town Farmhouse). The boundary of one building of local note, 4 Oxford Road, adjoins the Phase 2 site.

59. The Assessment states that only Town Farm, Three Bay Barn and Five Bay Barn would have their setting impacted. This former farm complex is seen as offering evidence of the use of the surrounding land, and that there is a perceived relationship between the buildings and the adjoining land. The Assessment claims the conversion of the barns to residential use has heavily and irreparably altered them and they now do not represent rare or particularly interesting survivors of their type. The author considers the same could be said for Town Farm and the encroachment of development, including Town Farm Close and Cuttle Brook Gardens has negatively impacted the setting of the buildings.
60. The Assessment does, however, note that the maintenance of the open space next to the Cuttle Brook "...is important and provides tangible evidence of the former historic character of the area". This relationship would be harmed through the proposed development. It would become very difficult to see and understand how Town Farm and its former buildings relate to one another from within the Phase 2 development itself and the adjacent Rycote Meadow. Within their commentary on the TNP2 Historic England requested that not only should the view be retained from Rycote Meadow, but that ways should be found to enhance the understanding and significance of the group.
61. The impact on the Thame Conservation Area (TCA) is treated lightly by the Assessment. It states that Phase 2 development would sit outside of it, with only a small border in the western section, but that appears to be a conservative assessment. Within this open area the TCA would become enclosed by development, albeit with a small buffer of green on the southern edge. The openness provided by the Cuttle Brook valley, with its associated open space is seen as an important defining feature of the setting of this part of the Thame Conservation Area.
62. The Assessment makes reference to providing interpretation of the buried archaeology assets to the west in order to enhance its understanding. This should be encouraged.

Noise.

63. The applicant has submitted a noise assessment that focuses on the predicted noise levels for the Phase 3 housing close to the A418. It is stated that suitable noise levels can be achieved through the use of specialist glazing and ventilators for bedrooms and living accommodation. Regarding amenity space, it is explained that despite the 2 metre high bund some gardens will not be able to achieve the desired day-time upper limit for amenity areas. The Assessment declares the exceedance will, however, be relatively small, and undetectable to most individuals. While the District Council's Environmental Protection Team will have a view on this assessment it is recommended that the Town Council flags this as a concern.

Design

64. Within their Design & Access Statement the applicant has claimed it is their intention to develop new homes within a quality landscape with safe, connected pedestrian routes to Oxford Road and the existing development. The layout is claimed to logically extend and integrate with the existing development. It will use a similar form with development focused around blocks with active frontages.
65. For the Phase 2 area, the applicant claims to have set development back from the boundaries and reduced the density to create a more fragmented feel in recognition of the site's setting. Within the south west corner of Phase 2 bespoke dwellings of 1.5 storeys in

height will take up a more random layout to reflect the setting and style of build of Town Farm and its Barns.

66. For Phase 3 the strongest feature will be the bund along its north boundary with the A418. For both areas, it is proposed that shared surfaces and home zones will reduce traffic speeds while the streets have been designed to create vistas with either focal properties or views into the wider landscape. Properties on the field edges will be detached or semi-detached to prevent a terracing effect and allow incidental views outwards.
67. It is claimed each parcel will use different materials to help provide a sense of place. The outward facing perimeter houses will use heritage brick colours while internal houses will have buff bricks and grey roof tiles. Homes facing the Cuttle Brook and Conservation Area would all have red bricks and grey rooves or red brick, render and dark red roof tiles. The homes directly next to the Listed Buildings would have black weatherboarding and grey tile rooves.

Policy Considerations – the Development Plan and National Policy

68. This application significantly impacts on a site allocated within the TNP for housing and open space. A Masterplan approach was taken towards guiding the development, set down in TNP Policy HA1. Policy HA6 aimed to similarly guide allocations for housing and education use on the west part of the site. Unforeseen circumstances, however, mean that these policies can no longer be applied as intended. They largely reflect the design constraints and opportunities presented for each relevant part of the site.
69. The proposed development could be viewed as a natural progression of the Oxford Road Reserve Site, although this line of thought can only be taken so far. The application is for 154 homes, not the 78 envisaged through TNP Policy HA6. There is also no viable area now specifically allocated for the Reserve Site homes within either of the TNP Oxford Road Masterplans. The TNP is silent on what should happen to the housing allocation in such an instance.
70. It is, therefore, sensible to think of this application as a windfall application. This does not mean that all elements of site or allocation-specific policies should be disregarded. An example of what remains relevant would be parts of Policy H4, “Integrate allocated sites”. Much of that policy refers to the allocations in general terms, and mostly deals with ensuring good active travel routes within the site and to adjoining locations, which the development would be in conformity with. Within the attached appendix is a summary of how the proposed development performs against the relevant policies from the TNP. A summary of those from the 2035 Local Plan the Town Council is able to take a position on is also given.

Summary of main benefits

71. Subject to confirmation of the proposed site areas, the development could offer betterment in terms of providing BNG across some of the publicly accessible site. This should only be judged against the existing provision, however, as the applicant would have to achieve a minimum 10% gain in biodiversity (through habitat provision) due to recently introduced legislation, but it could be in conformity with national policy and Local Plan ENV3.
72. The proposal would offer a sizeable and fully accessible parkland as part of the overall package of open space. This would likely be in conformity with TNP Policy ESDQ4 and LP 2035 Policy CF3. There would also be opportunities to provide interpretation for and basic access around the unique archaeology underlying the west part of the site.

73. The scheme would provide for 154 homes against an outstanding requirement from the District Council for Thame of some 143 homes, including much-needed affordable housing, in line with Local Plan Policy H3.
74. The principle of the site's use for housing has been supported through TNP2 consultation.

Summary of main disbenefits / harm

75. The view across into the countryside from Oxford Road would be inappropriately constrained by the proposed development, contrary to TNP Policy H7. It would also cause harm to the Thame Conservation Area through the scale and location of the development in its setting.
76. The view from the proposed pathway through Rycote Meadow would be harmed. The Listed Buildings of Thame Farm would be harmed through the development's impact on their setting. The views of the Listed Buildings from this path would also be lost or severely impaired. As per the above paragraph, this would be contrary to Policy ESDQ16, ESDQ17, ESDQ21 and ESDQ22. It would also be contrary to LP Policy TH1 and H1 3.iii), ENV5 and ENV8.
77. The proposed arrangement and form of the affordable housing is contrary to TNP Policy H8, in that it is not well integrated with and is visually indistinguishable from market housing.
78. The noise from the A418 may mean that amenity space is unusable, contrary to TNP Policy ESDQ28.

Recommendation:

79. For the reasons given within the above report, it is recommended that Thame Town Council objects to this application.

Appendix

80. **Policy H6: Design new development to be of high quality.** It is a requirement that proposals for windfall sites are of high quality and designed to reflect Thame's character, while meeting the design policies outlined below. The general house design and scheme approach is similar to that used within the completed scheme, and reflect the immediately local character.
81. **Policy H7: Provide new facilities.** Open space is being provided for the housing areas and it is claimed it is to SODC's standards. This meets the requirement for windfall sites. This policy has supporting text, however, that notes the aim of the open space for the allocation sites is to:
- Protect areas of ecological value and extend areas of value, such as the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve
 - Create an appropriate edge to the town that makes a transition between the built area and the countryside
 - Provides amenity space for future and existing residents.
82. The proposal would be able to extend the area of the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve. As discussed under "Biodiversity" above, it may be able to do so to a better degree than the current arrangement which is passive in terms of enhancing and managing habitats. It would, however, cause ecological harm to existing habitats through, for example the removal of hedgerows. This must be flagged as a potential concern until the District's Ecologist has appraised the proposed scheme and expressed confidence that a net gain can be achieved.
83. The scheme would form a new edge to the town. While attempts have been made to soften the eastern side of the Phase 2 scheme, it is felt the narrowing of the meadow and urban creep would form an inappropriate transition to the area of the countryside adjacent to Rycote Meadow and the Cuttle Brook. The scheme is contrary to Policy H7.
84. **Policy H8: Provide affordable housing.** It is a requirement that affordable housing should be well integrated with market housing and be visually indistinguishable from the market housing. The affordable housing is predominantly terraced, or apartment in form with small gardens. They are also overly concentrated in blocks. This is contrary to TNP Policy H8.
85. **Policy ESDQ2: Allocated sites to provide open space in locations specified in Section 3.** This policy has been complied with, and the landowner has entered into a binding legal agreement to protect the publicly accessible open space associated with Policy HA1. This is a site-specific policy and the legal agreement similarly bound to the site and its form. For the reasons mentioned above, a mechanism exists to re-provide alternative publicly accessible open space in compensation for what would be lost to development.
86. **ESDQ4: Provide public open space on windfall sites** This proposal appears to be in conformity with this policy. This will be checked by the District Council, who define the standards and who will be best placed to comment on the assumptions made.
87. **ESDQ9: Sites C, D and F to provide riverside walks within natural green space.** The proposal would be in conformity with this policy.
88. **ESDQ11: Incorporate Sustainable urban Drainage Systems into new development** and **ESDQ12: Applications for new development to provide a drainage strategy.** The applicant has provided SuDS as a means for draining surface water from the site. The joint

expertise of the Local Lead Flood Authority and the District's drainage specialists will be required to judge the effectiveness of the proposed solutions.

89. **ESDQ15: Developers must demonstrate in a Design and Access Statement how their proposed development reinforces Thame's character.** The applicant has provided an adequate Design and Access Statement.
90. **ESDQ16: Development must relate well to its site and surroundings and ESDQ17 Development must make a positive contribution towards the distinctive character of the town as a whole.** As discussed above, the development does not form a positive relationship with Rycote Meadow and the adjacent countryside. While the density of properties on the eastern edge of Phase 2 is relatively low urban features including the proposed homes will remove the sense of openness that exists, now. The development does not give sufficient consideration to the Listed Buildings of Town Farm nor its impact on the Thame Conservation Area. The proposal is, therefore, contrary to both these policies.
91. **ESDQ18: new development must contribute to local character by creating a sense of place appropriate to its location.** The proposal is in conformity with this policy.
92. **ESDQ20: Building style must be appropriate to the historic context.** The styles of buildings proposed in the vicinity of the Listed Buildings and Thame Conservation Area are considered suitable.
93. **ESDQ21: Development proposals, particularly where sited on the edge of Thame or adjoining Cuttle Brook, must maintain visual connections with the Countryside.** For the reasons given above, it is not considered that appropriate visual connections with the Countryside would be maintained. The view from Oxford Road is considered a key one and should be preserved. The proposal is contrary to this policy.
94. **ESDQ22: The visual impact of new development on views from the Countryside must be minimised.** The key view that would be affected would be that from the proposed path in Rycote Meadow. The dominant features in the greatly foreshortened landscape would be urban in nature.
95. **ESDQ24: Pedestrian and cycle routes must link together potential destinations, such as new housing and the town centre.** The proposal would be in conformity with this policy.
96. **ESDQ27: Design forgotten elements from start.** The application is largely compliant with demonstrable storage facilities for bicycles and bin collection points. Bin stores and EV charging points are, however, absent.
97. **ESDQ28: Provide good quality private outdoor space.** It is not clear what private space is available for the affordable apartments, and some gardens may be unattractive due to road noise from the A418.
98. **LP 2035 STRAT5: Residential Densities.** Given the site's proximity to the completed development and the sensitivity of key landscape views, it would be inappropriate to require the net 45 dwellings per hectare required by this policy.
99. **LP 2035 TH1: The Strategy for Thame.** The scheme is not believed to conserve the Town's heritage assets and is therefore contrary to this policy.
100. **LP H1: Delivering New Homes.** Residential development on sites not allocated in the Development Plan will only be permitted where an important public view would be harmed. The proposal is judged contrary to this policy.

101. **LP Policy ENV4: Watercourses.** This policy requires development adjacent to a watercourse to protect and where possible, enhance the function and setting of the watercourses and its biodiversity. The proposal would likely cause harm to the setting of the watercourse. The NPCO is not, however, able to inform Members as to the degree of harm.
102. **LP Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure in New Developments.** Development proposals should protect, conserve or enhance the District's Green Infrastructure. In this instance, the development would cause harm to open space identified as Green Infrastructure within the TNP.
103. **LP Policy ENV8: Conservation Areas.** This policy is clear that development within or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area must conserve or enhance its special interest, character, setting and appearance. This includes taking into account important views associated with the Conservation Area (such as those into it) and important spaces such as paddocks and other gaps. There would be a requirement to weigh harm to the Thame Conservation Area against the proposal's benefits, as described within LP Policy ENV8.
104. **LP Policy CF3: New Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities.** The proposed parkland would be supported by this policy.
105. **LP Policy CF5: Open Space, Sport and Recreation in New Residential Development.** Subject to the views of the District Council, this proposal is likely to be in conformity with this policy, in providing new open space and play areas.