

JPPC ref: AG/6002

18th September 2014

Planning Services
Vale of White Horse District Council
Benson Lane
Crowmarsh Gifford
Wallingford
OX10 8ED

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

RE: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ON LAND TO THE WEST OF BESSELS WAY, BLEWBURY

Please find enclosed a request for pre-application advice in respect of the development proposal described above. We are keen to seek advice from the Council's Officers in respect of the principle of development, as well as feedback upon the more detailed planning issues which such development would be likely to raise. The Council has been provided with the following documents to enable the enquiry to be dealt with:

- A Site Location Plan, identifying the proposed development area, edged in red;
- An indicative site layout plan;
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Strategy Report (prepared by Matt Lee Landscape Architecture);
- Phase 1 Habitat Survey Report (prepared by Windrush Ecology);
- Transport Note (prepared by Odyssey Markides LLP);
- Technical Note on Drainage and Flooding Issues (prepared by Odyssey Markides LLP)

A payment of £1080 is due in this instance, for a meeting and follow up written response, and will be made by card over the phone.

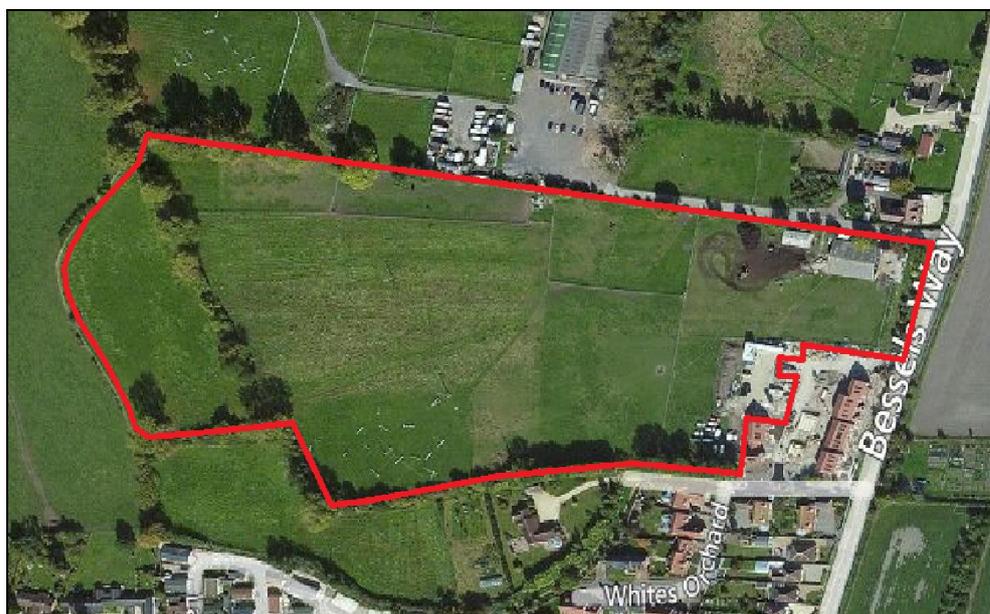
BACKGROUND

The site in question amounts to approximately 6.2ha and sits on the western side of the B4016 (Bessel's Way), abutting the northern flank of the village. The site is currently used for rough grazing and equestrian activity associated with the land to the north.

Immediately to the south of the site is Chailey House, where outline planning permission was granted earlier this year for the demolition of the existing bungalow and the erection of 30 new dwellings, along with

Bagley Croft
Hinksey Hill
Oxford OX1 5BD
T: 01865 326823
F: 01865 326824
E: planning@jppc.co.uk
W: www.jppc.co.uk

improvements to Bridus Way and an extension to the existing access (VOWHDC Ref: P13/V0458/O). On the south-eastern flank of the site is Cossicle Mead, comprising 14 units of affordable housing approved in October 2010 (VOWHDC Ref: P10/V01301) and operated by Sovereign (this can be seen in the course of construction in the bottom right-hand corner of the second aerial photograph extract below):



The site lies outside of the boundary of the Blewbury Conservation Area, however, as with the rest of the settlement, it is washed over by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Nevertheless, the accompanying LVA (prepared by Matt Lee Landscape Architecture) identifies that the modern barns in the north-eastern corner of the site, the adjacent equestrian centre of the north and the urbanisation of the south-eastern corner of the site give the eastern paddock “an urban fringe character and an unremarkable appearance”.

The LVA also notes that the “*outgrown hedgerows and wet ditches immediately adjacent to the site boundaries and dividing the two paddocks are the best of the Site’s landscape resource*”.

Clearly the adjacent urban influence will become even more apparent in coming years when the land to the south (Chailey House) is developed.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Principle

JPPC has been instructed Landmaze Ltd to seek pre-application advice from the Council’s Officers in respect of the potential for future residential development upon the site.

At this stage, only indicative layout information has been provided and, therefore, no detailed consideration has yet been given to the number or type/size/tenure of units that could be provided. Given the site’s transitional urban edge character it is, however, felt that a fairly low density development with significant areas of public open space/landscape buffers (including the retention of existing hedgerows) would be most appropriate and, in this context, it is considered that the site might be suitable for the provision of something in the region of 60-80 houses.

Although not assessed in the most recent iteration of the Council’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (February 2014), the Council’s position as to its 5-year housing land supply would be a material consideration which ought to be accorded significant weight in the determination of any planning application.

The Council’s most recently stated position as to its housing supply was set out in its “Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement” (dated August 2013). This concluded that with a 20% buffer applied (as required, due to the Council’s persistent under-delivery of housing) the Council was not able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply; this position has been further weakened by the requirement to provide an additional 7,430 dwellings in the District over the period 2011-2031, identified by the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Consequently, in accordance with national planning policy (set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) the relevant policies in the Adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan cannot be considered up to date and, in turn, those in the Emerging Local Plan have not yet been subject to scrutiny at a Local Inquiry.

Consequently, our view is that any forthcoming application would need to be considered in accordance with Paragraph 55 of the NPPF which identifies, inter alia, that in rural areas, sustainable development should be promoted by locating housing where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

The categorisation of Blewbury as a Larger Village in the Emerging Local Plan indicates that the Council views it as a sustainable location for new housing development and suggests an intention to support an appropriate quantum of new housing here in order to sustain local facilities.

We are aware that Blewbury Parish Council has begun the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish. Whilst a Neighbourhood Area has been identified, work on the policies and allocations that would be

contained within the document are still at an early stage and, therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan is not a material consideration at this juncture. Additionally, it is relevant to note that the Neighbourhood Plan could not realistically be adopted until the Vale of White Horse District Council has an up-to-date Local Plan in place.

Please also note that the intention is to fully engage with the local community prior to the submission of any application.

Landscape Impact

Extensive visual impact analysis has been undertaken by Matt Lee Landscape Architecture in their Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) – the work they have undertaken begins with an analysis of the landscape “baseline”, identifying the characteristics of the Landscape Character Area.

The LVA identifies that Blewbury is surrounded to the south, east and west by higher downs and forms part of a transitional landscape (the Moreton Plain), sitting between chalk uplands to the south and the clay vale of the Thames valley to the north. These topographical constraints have directed the historic growth of the settlement of Blewbury in a northerly direction (the historic map extracts enclosed as **Appendix One** show this clearly).

The visual analysis contained within the LVA identifies that views of the site from public vantage points are limited, restricted to elevated public viewpoints to the southwest, south and southeast, as the site lies at the northern edge of the village and is generally surrounded by mature trees. At Paragraph 6.1.3, the LVA identifies that the “*site is considered overall to have moderate/low visual prominence*”. At Paragraph 7.1.1, the LVA goes on to note that “*Given the existing limited nature of the landscape resource within the Site and the generally urban fringe character of the existing edges to the Site, the larger eastern paddock is considered to have moderate/high capacity for appropriate development*”.

The LVA also makes a number of recommendations for a landscape strategy for new development. These include:

- The creation of public open space on the frontage to the B4016 (Bessel’s Way) with views of Blewburton Hill to the east;
- The implementation of a robust framework of new planting within the site;
- The retention of the smaller western paddock as public open space;
- A residential layout informed by the characteristics of the Blewbury Conservation Area;
- Ensuring an adequate landscape setting for all existing trees;
- Exploring opportunities to deliver additional green infrastructure benefits elsewhere within Blewbury.

In respect of the final point (as identified by Paragraph 8.1.15-8.1.16 of the LVA), it is within my clients’ power to provide additional public open space elsewhere within the village, which would provide additional benefits in terms of leisure provision and provision for green infrastructure and biodiversity, namely on the land known as ‘Church Moor’.

Flood Risk

A preliminary assessment of the site's flooding and drainage potential has been undertaken by Odyssey Markides. This has identified that the site is located within Flood Zone 1 (having a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of river or sea flooding in any given year). The Environment Agency's on-line mapping indicates some surface water flooding within the site and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Council also identifies a risk of ground water emergence in the vicinity of the site. Whilst the report acknowledges that further technical work will need to be undertaken, the report concludes that a suitable drainage strategy can be developed and implemented for the site which will be capable of minimising flood risk on site and to third parties off-site.

An initial response from the Environment Agency is also included which confirms its position with regard to the development of the site.

Highway Impact

The accompanying Transport Report, prepared by Odyssey Markides, identifies that a suitable access to the site can be provided which complies with the visibility standards that the County Council would seek as the Local Highway Authority. It concludes that the proposed development would not be expected to have a significant impact upon trip generation or traffic flow along Bessel's Way and, in addition, it assesses the other modes of transportation which are available for local residents as alternatives to journeys by private car.

Ecology

The pre-application submission is also accompanied by a Phase 1 Habitat Survey Report, prepared by Windrush Ecology. The field survey identified that the grazing of the paddock has left a short sward, dominated by common grass species and the habitat would not meet the criteria for a valued grassland habitat.

The field survey did note the ecological value of the boundary hedging, mature trees and ditches around the edge of the site - the trees and hedgerows around the site are considered to offer nesting opportunities for birds, whilst ditches provide a habitat for species such as hedgehogs. The report notes that mature trees could provide shelter for bats, although there was no evidence to suggest that any of the modern agricultural buildings within the north-eastern corner of the site have been used by roosting bats. Overall, the report considered that no further surveys are necessary at this stage, although a bat survey ought to be undertaken if it is proposed that mature trees are to be removed.

The report also recommended a number of protection and mitigation measures and advises that future planting and landscaping should be designed and managed to maximise its value to wildlife, including native planting, bat boxes, log piles, the creation of ponds and avoiding external lighting where possible.

CONCLUSION

It is our view that the development of the site would be broadly consistent with the District Council's emerging strategy for the District, within which Blewbury has been identified as a larger settlement, capable of sustaining new homes. The information submitted with this request for pre-application advice identifies that the site has the capacity to accommodate development in a way which would not be harmful to the character of Blewbury, or to the wider AONB, and that development could bring about wider benefits, not only in terms of landscape management, but also in the ability to provide existing and future residents of Blewbury with good quality public open space.

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the development of the site could be undertaken in a way which would not increase flood risk upon the site or elsewhere and it has also been demonstrated that the site could be provided with appropriate access arrangements. Information has also been provided in respect of the biodiversity value of the site, and how future development could protect or enhance biodiversity interests.

We look forward to meeting with the allocated case officer at the earliest opportunity and, in the meantime, await the pre-application acknowledgement and fee receipt.

Yours faithfully



Adrian Gould DipTP MRTPI

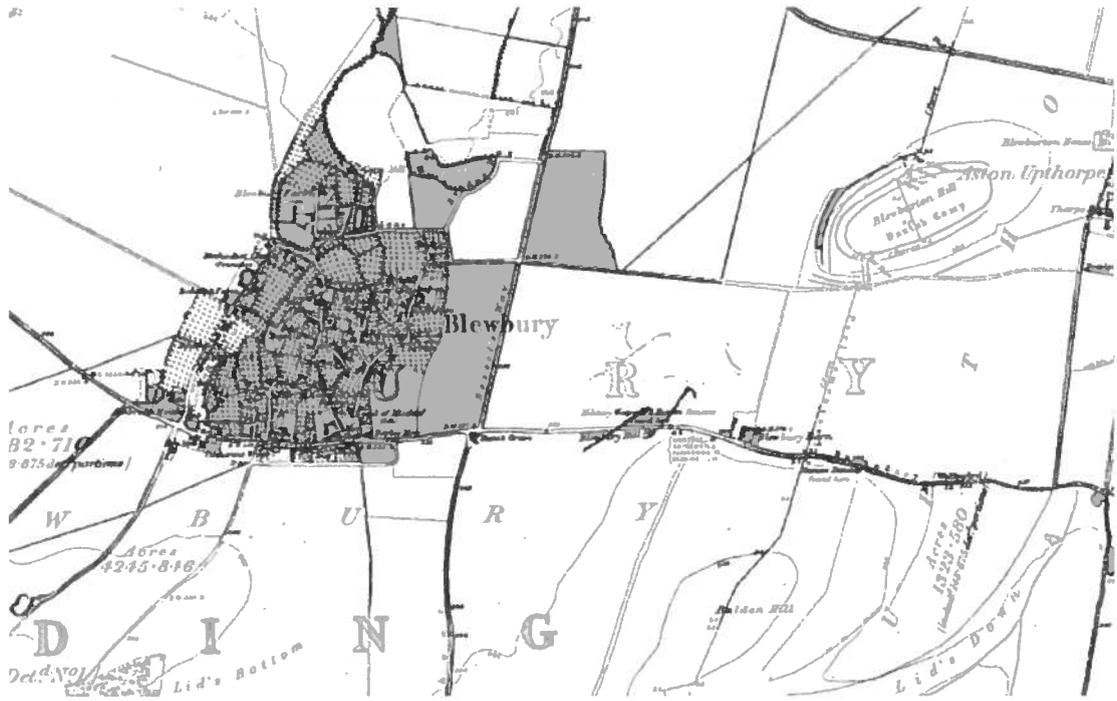
Principal

Director of Adrian Gould MRTPI Ltd, a Partner of JPPC

Email: adrian.gould@jppc.co.uk

Direct dial: 01865 322352

Appendix One



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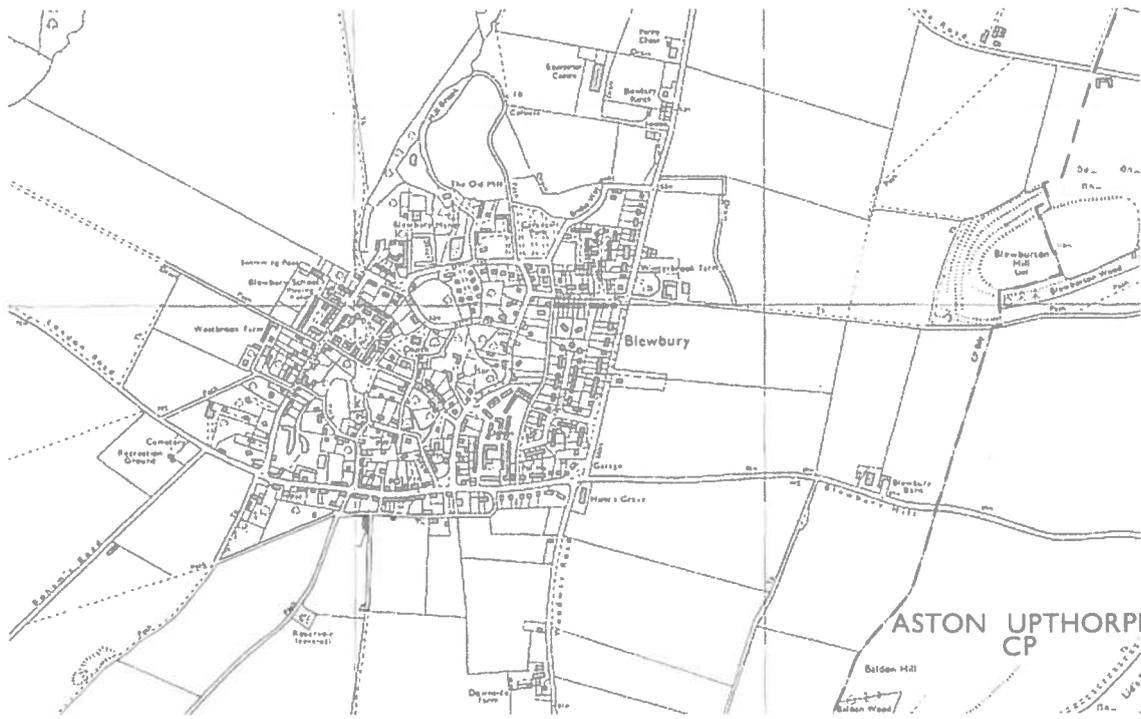
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