South West Bicester

Design and
access statement

NOVEMBER 2006

Terence O'Rourke

Countryside
Properties
(Bicester) Ltd

'Good design ensures attractive usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning.'

PPS1 (ODPM London 2004)

South West Bicester

Design and access statement

Outline planning application for
a sustainable new quarter for Bicester
by Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd

Produced on their behalf by Terence O'Rourke Ltd
in association with WSP

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Terence O'Rourke

WSP

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1.1 This design and access statement has been prepared for Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd, henceforth referred to as Countryside, in support of their application for outline planning permission for 1,585 new homes, new schools, a mixed-use local centre, commercial developments, healthcare uses and public open space on land at Whitelands Farm south-west of Bicester, Oxfordshire.

1.1.2 The site is located to the south west of Bicester. It is bounded to the east by the A41 Oxford Road, to the north by the B4030 Middleton Stoney Road and to the west by the A4095. The northern boundary and part of the eastern boundary abut the built-up edge of Bicester. The southern boundary of the site is open fields that abut Gagle Brook to the north of Chesterton village. The application area extends to some 117.6 ha. It is gently undulating and contains three small copses and is crossed by two public footpaths. Pingle Brook runs across the north-east corner of the site.

1.1.3 At the centre of the site are the buildings of Whitelands Farm. From this point, the Bicester town centre is around 1.5km to the north-east, and to the south-west is the small village of Chesterton.

Whitelands Farm

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1.2 Scope and content
of design and access statement

1.2.1. This statement explains and justifies the master plan. The proposed design of, and access to, the new quarter are explained through a description of the assessment and evaluation of the site and surroundings, how public involvement has taken place and how these factors have informed the design of the master plan. The design process included the following steps:

Assessment and evaluation

1.2.2 This stage assessed the physical, social, economic and policy context. Both the immediate surroundings and the wider context were considered. The information of the site was then evaluated and the opportunities and constraints identified. This is set out in Section 2 of this statement.

Community engagement

1.2.3 The consultation undertaken included consultation with the local community and with local planning and transport officers. How the findings of the consultation have been taken into account and how this part of the design process has informed the master plan is set out in section 3 of this statement.

Figure 1.1 Site location plan. The red line shows the planning application boundary

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Design and access

1.2.4   The process then began to balance the various conflicting issues and started to formulate the vision and design principles for the development. This stage took the results of the 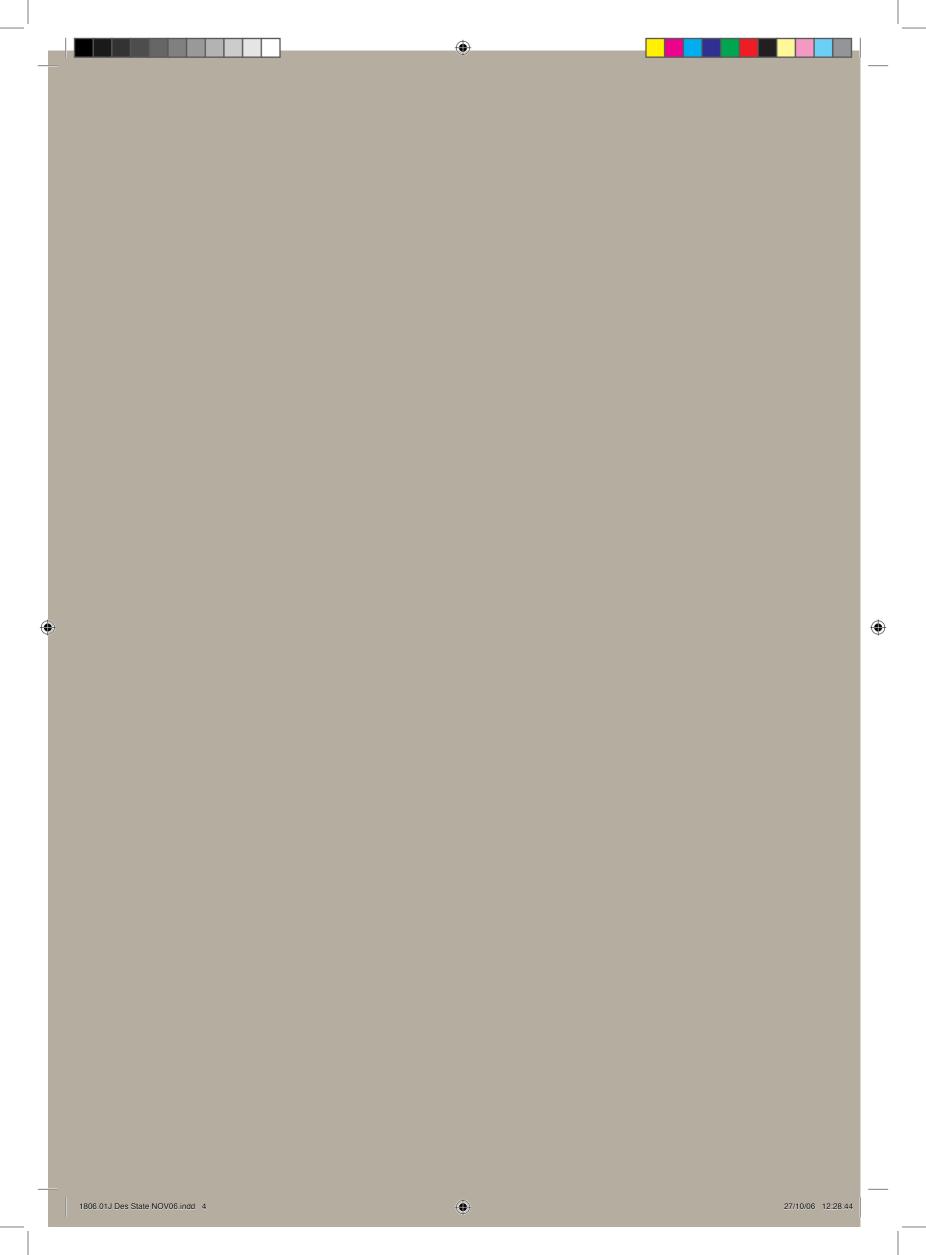assessment and evaluation stage and produced the master plan. The understanding of the immediate and wider context obtained earlier was vital to producing a robust design and access strategy. The vision for Bicester and the design principles underpinning the master plan are set out on section 4. Section 5 describes the design of the master plan, and section 6 highlights the ease of access considered for the area.

1.2.5   Other technical documents deal with wider issues, such as planning policy (the planning statement), the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, the environmental statement (ES) and detailed issues associated with access and movement (the transport assessment). These documents are referenced throughout this statement as and when further technical details are considered to be useful in the understanding of the proposals.

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The Whitelands Farm complex in the centre of the site

Market Square and the church tower, Bicester

3

2   Assessment and evaluation
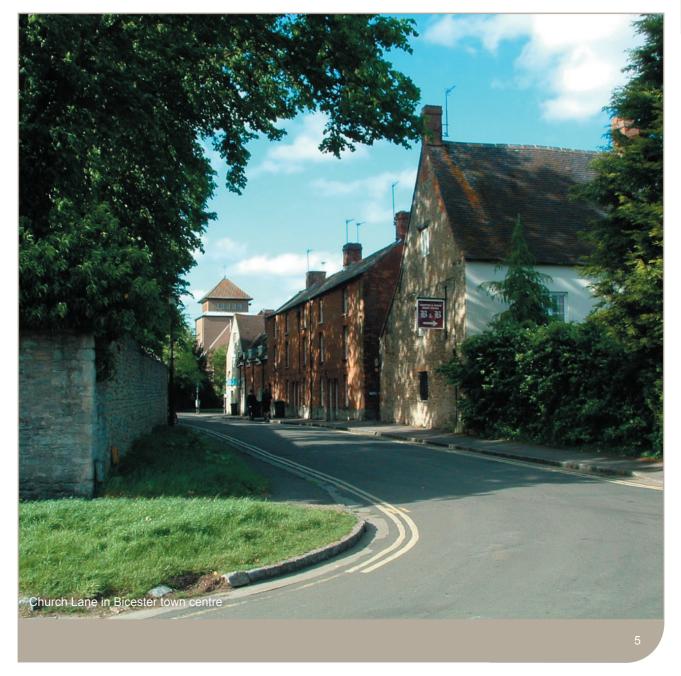
2.1   Physical context

2.1.1   The assessment covered the site and its surroundings, Bicester and surrounding villages. This analysis contributes to the understanding of the nature of Bicester and surrounding villages aiming to inform the appropriate design and access of future development.

The Bicester context

2.1.2   Bicester is an attractive market town with a lively mixed-use centre located in the heart of Oxfordshire, close to the M40 motorway, midway between London and Birmingham. The town's development has mainly been focused along the

principal historic routes, which bisect at the town's market square. Along these main routes, the urban form has primarily consisted of terraced buildings, rich in detail and using a wide range of materials including render, brick and stone. The continuity of building form creates an intimate sense of enclosure along these main routes.

2.1.3   Bicester has a network of secondary routes radiating from the main routes. These develop into a complex and irregular pattern of narrow lanes, fronted by semi-detached buildings, which lead out to green open spaces. Outside of the core central area,, are a series of suburbs with local centres that provide residents with a variety of services and facilities.
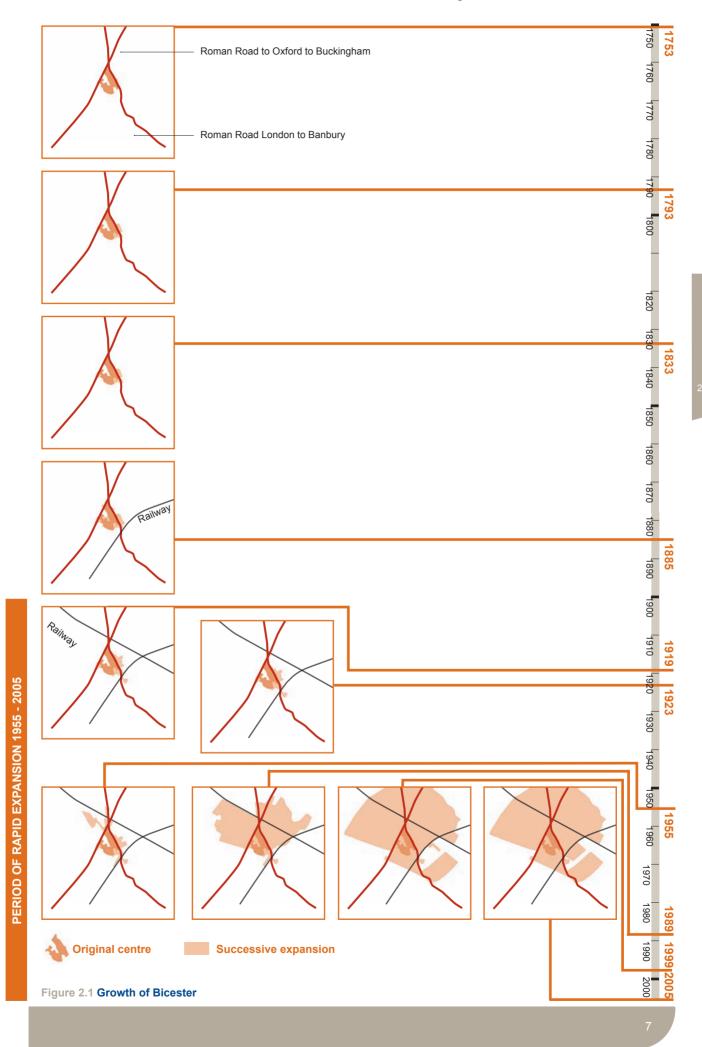
2

Church Lane in Bicester town centre

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2

2.1.4 The history of Bicester goes back to Saxon times. Its origins are as a market town which grew up at the junction where the Banbury, London and Oxford roads met. For much of the last 300 years, Bicester remained a small market town with little change in its size or scale. However, the town has experienced rapid growth over the last 50 years, without the commensurate growth in services and facilities. The town centre is much the same size today as it was 300 years ago, yet the size of the settlement is much greater. This rapid growth is shown in the sequence of diagrams.

2.1.5 The proposed development at south west Bicester, while expanding the town further still, is an opportunity to redress this balance and provide a range of services to benefit the whole town.

2.1.6 The assessment of Bicester revealed the following positive features, primarily found in the older parts of town, that the master plan has drawn on for inspiration:

• An area rich in detail and character

• A diverse range of building types creating continuous frontage

• A clear distinction between public and private space

• A good definition of space generally

• A network of views and vistas

• Good visual mix comprising built-form, stone walls, parks, green open space

• Squares overlooked, good places to watch the world go by

• Different types of space – informal and green; formal, triangular and paved

• Clear gateways that create a sense of arrival

• An intimate sense of enclosure formed by narrow lanes

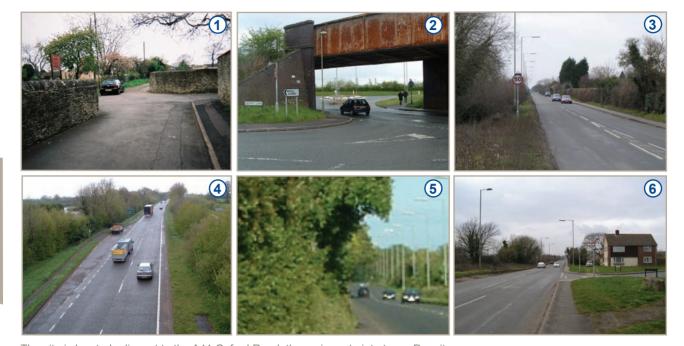• Wider expanses of green space on the edge giving a feeling of open country

2.1.7 The assessment also revealed the following negative features, predominantly found in the more recent parts of town. The master plan strives to avoid these features in the design:

• Poor connections between the suburbs and the centre

• Poor internal connections within the suburban areas

• Indirect pedestrian routes that do not feel safe or secure

• Pockets of incidental or uncared for 'left-over' space

• Poor quality edges that 'turn their back' to open country

• Wide fast roads that are difficult for pedestrians to cross

• Housing which fails to face the street, instead leaving backs on display

• Lack of gateways to define entrances and arrival points

• A general visual monotony due to lack of variety in colour, texture and appearance

• Layouts that accommodate the car at the expense of other users

• Lack of visual landmarks and views to aid orientation

2.1.8 Analysis of the different forms of development in Bicester show that the more historic parts provide a better quality living environment.

2.1.9 Development in the last 30 years is mainly in the form of cul-de-sacs, while older parts of Bicester are made up of a series of connected streets and spaces.

2.1.10 This assessment of the town has assisted the master planning process by capturing the essence of different parts of town and providing an easily identifiable guide to the sort of place that should be created by the south-west urban extension.

Roman Road to Oxford to Buckingham

Roman Road London to Banbury

Railway

Railway

PERIOD OF RAPID EXPANSION 1955 - 2005

Original centre

Successive expansion

Figure 2.1 **Growth of Bicester**

1750 1753
1760
1770
1780
1790 1793
1800
1820
1830 1833
1840
1850
1860
1870
1880
1885
1890
1900
1910
1919
1920 1923
1930
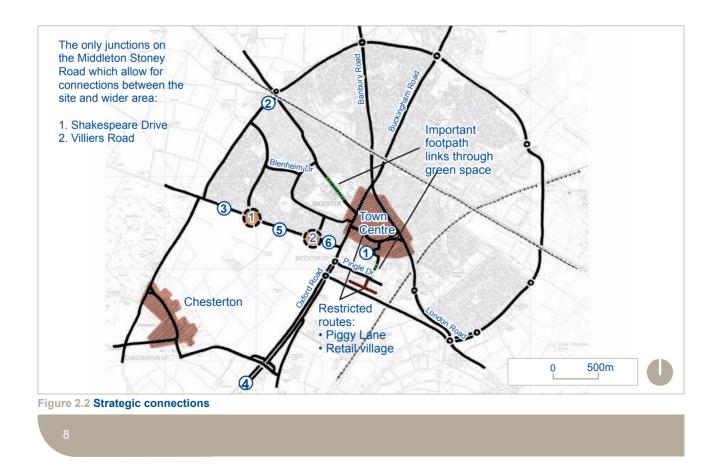1940
1950
1955
1960
1970
1980 1989
1990 1999
2000 2005

2

The site is located adjacent to the A41 Oxford Road, the main route into town. Despite the proximity of the site to the town, there are limited opportunities to connect to the wider area and routes to the town centre (eg Piggy Lane) are often restricted. The two junctions on Middleton Stoney road are the only opportunity to connect to the residential areas to the north. New connections to the Oxford Road will provide the primary points of access.

The only junctions on the Middleton Stoney Road which allow for connections between the site and wider area:

1. Shakespeare Drive
2. Villiers Road

Banbury Road

Buckingham Road

Important footpath links through green space

Blenheim Dr

BICESTER

Town Centre

BICESTER CP

Oxford Road

Pingle Dr

Chesterton

Restricted routes:
• Piggy Lane
• Retail village

London Road

CHESTERTON CP

0   500m

Figure 2.2 Strategic connections

Bicester has a series of local neighbourhood centres, the focus of which is often a few shops, a pub or post office. These provide services to the residents within an approximate 400m walking catchment while the town centre serves a wider area of 800m or so. Many of the local centres are not located on 'through-routes' and therefore do not benefit from passing trade. As such, they have remained small in scale and marginal in viability. The new development needs to learn from this. It must also ensure that it does not undermine the viability of these existing centres.
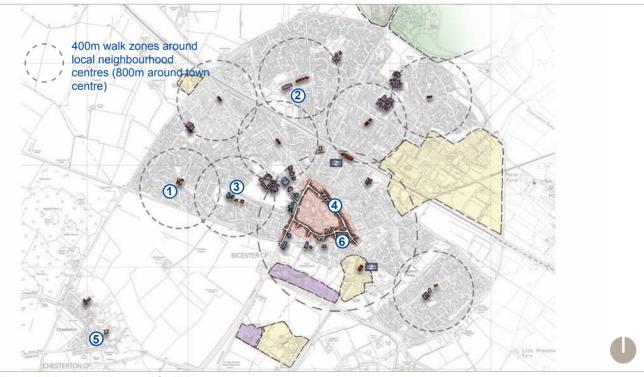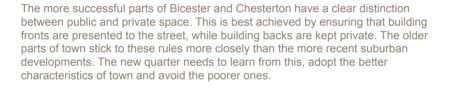

400m walk zones around local neighbourhood centres (800m around town centre)

Figure 2.3 Local services and facilities

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Two examples of streets where houses fail to positively address the public realm.

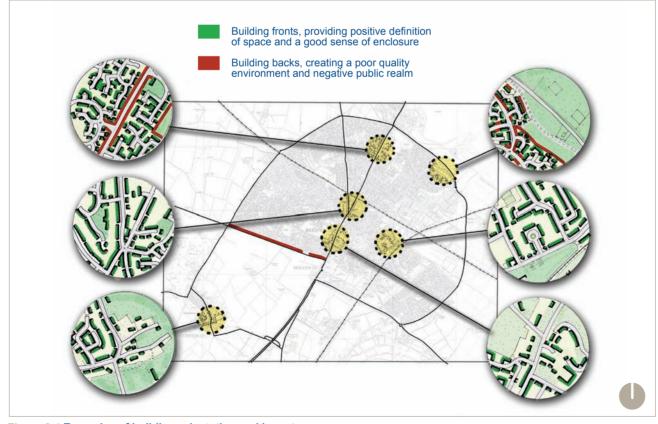Two examples of streets where houses provide positive definition and face the public realm.

The more successful parts of Bicester and Chesterton have a clear distinction between public and private space. This is best achieved by ensuring that building fronts are presented to the street, while building backs are kept private. The older parts of town stick to these rules more closely than the more recent suburban developments. The new quarter needs to learn from this, adopt the better characteristics of town and avoid the poorer ones.

Building fronts, providing positive definition of space and a good sense of enclosure

Building backs, creating a poor quality environment and negative public realm

Figure 2.4 Examples of building orientation and layout