

Chapter 2 The site

Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter describes the area of proposed land take associated with the development and the land uses on the site and the surrounding area. Consideration has been given to the policies, plans and designations that are relevant to the site and its surroundings.
- 2.2 The chapter also describes how the affected land would be expected to develop without the proposal and the future status of the land in the absence of the project.

The location of the application site

- 2.3 The site is located to the south-west of Bicester to the west of the A41 / Oxford Road. The application boundary is shown on figure 2.1. The site is bordered by the A41 / Oxford Road to the east and Middleton Stoney Road to the north. Immediately north of the site Middleton Stoney Road is the A4095. This changes to the B4030 to the west of the junction with Howes Lane and the A4095 to Chesterton. Adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site, outside of the application boundary, lies a petrol garage and restaurant.
- 2.4 Further to the south lies the village of Chesterton, which is separated from the proposed development by retained agricultural land.
- 2.5 To the west of the proposed development area is the Whitelands Farm complex and retained agricultural land. The perimeter road extends further west of the development area linking the A41 / Oxford Road to the A4095 to Chesterton and Middleton Stoney Road.
- 2.6 The proposed access roundabout and junction improvements also include a small area of land to the east of the A41 as shown on figure 2.1. This land mainly comprises overgrown scrub and grassland.

The characteristics of the site

- 2.7 The site covers an area of approximately 117.6 ha. It consists principally of agricultural land, a mixture of arable and pasture, mostly grazed by cattle. The quality of the agricultural land is mainly grade 3b, with a small area of grade 3a.
- 2.8 The site occupies an area of gently undulating topography that grades down from west to east. The western end of the site lies at about 80m above ordnance datum (AOD), with the eastern end at around 65m AOD. To the south of the site, the land falls noticeably down to Gagle Brook. This creates a 'shoulder' in the land limiting views north across the site from the south.
- 2.9 The site is primarily arable fields divided by native hedgerows. Within the site there are several copses, the most significant being Foxey Leys Copse east of Whitelands Farm. Numerous mature trees can be found within the hedgerows and in the area around Whitelands Farm. The majority of the trees are indigenous species.
- 2.10 Pingle Brook lies in the north-east corner of the site and several drainage ditches cross the site along field boundaries.

- 2.11 The site forms part of the Whitelands Farm landholding. The farmhouse and associated agricultural buildings are located west of the proposed mixed use development area, outside of the application site. These buildings will not be affected by the development proposals.
- 2.12 Whitelands Cottages are situated north of the main farm complex and are in residential use. These two residential dwellings are within the application area and will be removed as a result of the proposals.
- 2.13 Two footpaths cross the site. One links the A4095 at Bignell House to the centre of Bicester and the other crosses the south-eastern corner of the site.
- 2.14 The key characteristics of the site are shown in figure 2.2 and an aerial photograph is included as figure 2.3.

The site's immediate surroundings

- 2.15 The northern boundary of the site is delineated by Middleton Stoney Road. Immediately north of this road are residential properties which comprise the southern edge of Bicester. This area is known as the Highfields Estate. Further to the north, within the residential area, there are a number of neighbourhood centres which provide local retail facilities for residents. Parts of the northern section of the site fall within 400m of these centres.
- 2.16 Bicester town centre is located to the north-east of the site, approximately 1km away. Immediately north-east of the site, there is a petrol station, restaurant, public house and Tesco superstore. Further to the east is the Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area. These facilities are shown on figure 2.2.
- 2.17 To the west of the site there is agricultural land and the A4095. Further to the west is Bignell Park, which is a private estate mainly comprising open woodland and parkland. Agricultural land lies to the south and south-west of the site and further to the south-west is the Bignell Park Hotel.
- 2.18 Gagle Brook, which flows north-west to south-east, is located to the south of the site and further to the south is the village of Chesterton.

Site sensitivity

- 2.19 The site itself is not covered by any nature conservation, landscape or cultural heritage designations and no site-specific local plan policies apply, except policy H13 which relates to the mixed use allocation. However, there are a number of sensitivities associated with the site that have been examined in detail in the ES.
- 2.20 The Environment Agency's flood plans indicate that the 1 in 100 year floodplain associated with Pingle Brook extends into the north-east corner of the site. In addition, the downstream watercourses of Wendlebury and Merton also flood causing the build up of water back into the site. The site is therefore sensitive in terms of its flooding constraint.
- 2.21 The site lies in an area of significant Roman archaeology and is therefore sensitive with respect to uncovering finds from the Roman and Iron Age periods as well as Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Saxon and Medieval periods. In addition, due to the close proximity

of the site to the conservation areas in Chesterton and Bicester, consideration needs to be given to the views of the development from these areas and the setting of the associated listed buildings both in terms of cultural heritage and landscape and visual interests.

- 2.22 The site may be sensitive in terms of ecology. **Surveys have been undertaken to assess the potential for protected species at the site. The results have been assessed in chapter 14.**
- 2.23 The site is also located in a nitrate vulnerable zone and is therefore sensitive with respect to agricultural use. In addition, part of the eastern area of the site falls within the Countryside Stewardship Scheme Target Area. The site will not be as sensitive in these respects once it has been developed as housing.

Future in the absence of the proposals

- 2.24 In the absence of the proposals, it can be assumed that the site will continue to be used as agricultural land and managed as a mixture of arable and pasture.
- 2.25 The site is allocated in the non-statutory Cherwell District Council Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan (July 2004) for mixed use development (policy H13). Unless there is a change to local plan policy, future mixed use development on-site would be supported by planning policy. Therefore it is likely that in the absence of the current proposals, alternative mixed use schemes would come forward in the future to meet the housing requirements identified by local and regional planning policy.