

1 Introduction and EIA methodology

Background

- 1.1 In May 2006 Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd (hereafter referred to as Countryside Properties) submitted an outline planning application for a mixed-use scheme (application number 06/00967/OUT) at South West Bicester (also known as Kingsmere). The location of site is shown in figure 1.1 and the site boundary is shown in figure 1.2. Outline planning consent for the scheme, which included up to 1,585 residential dwellings, 2 ha of employment land, a primary school, land for a second primary school, land for a secondary school, a local centre, land for a hotel, outdoor playing space, a safeguarded site for a health village, a perimeter road and junction improvements, was granted in June 2008.
- 1.2 Countryside Properties subsequently submitted reserved matters applications for a number of the elements of the scheme including roads, strategic landscaping and services. Other developers have obtained approvals for development on a number of land parcels. A number of these elements have been built out or are currently under construction.
- 1.3 During the consideration of the outline application for the mixed-use scheme, Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) confirmed that a second primary school was not required (land previously shown as 'potential land for a primary school' or referred to as the reserved school site). This parcel of land was subject to an outline application for up to 46 units, application 11/01502/OUT, which was consented in July 2011.
- 1.4 Following recent discussions with other developers on site and through advice from land agents, it was concluded that there was a market for more small housing units on the site. It was also considered that the delivery of the South West Bicester scheme could be speeded up with a greater variety of housing mix / smaller units. The overall density of the outline scheme was also revisited earlier this year. It was concluded that an increase of up to 100 dwellings across the site was appropriate in terms of optimising land use, whilst remaining within the density parameters set out in the consented application 06/00967/OUT.
- 1.5 This environmental statement (ES) has been produced to support the section 73 planning application to vary condition 16 of consented application 06/00967/OUT, which limits the total number of dwellings to 1,585. It is required under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (the EIA Regulations). It contains detailed information needed by the local planning authority to assist in its determination of the application.

Background to the South West Bicester mixed-use scheme

- 1.6 The site, immediately to the south west of the urban area of Bicester, presented an opportunity to develop a high quality urban extension to the town, providing essential housing and associated local facilities including education and recreational opportunities.
- 1.7 The key aims and objectives of the proposal were:
- 1) To create a successful neighbourhood that offers a choice of housing and complementary uses and facilities.
 - 2) To create an integrated, not an isolated, community. This means a neighbourhood that is ‘walkable’ and is linked up with streets and other public routes to reinforce desire lines and that is safe and overlooked by building fronts.
 - 3) To create a place which is distinctive, attractive and sustainable by responding positively to the topography, landscape and ecology of the site.
 - 4) To create a place which considers the local context and builds on the diverse townscapes and landscapes of Oxfordshire.
- 1.8 Further detail on the original mixed-use scheme and the background to the re-evaluation of the housing density can be found in the Planning Supporting Statement.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA)

Definition

- 1.9 EIA is defined by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in Circular 02/99 as being:

“a means of drawing together, in a systematic way, an assessment of a project’s likely significant environmental effects. This helps to ensure that the importance of the predicted effects, and the scope for reducing them, are properly understood by the public and the relevant competent authority before it makes a decision.”

- 1.10 The inclusion of the term “significant environmental effects” implies that the EIA process need not address the more mundane or inconsequential effect of a project. EIA methodologies are not explicitly set out in the EIA Regulations nor in Circular 02/99, though the EIA Regulations state that the EIA only needs to have regard to current knowledge and methods of assessment.
- 1.11 The EIA Regulations implement the requirements of the European Directive 2011/92/EU.

- 1.12 The EIA Regulations contain two schedules of development types. EIA is mandatory for development listed in Schedule 1, whilst a development listed in Schedule 2 may or may not require EIA, depending on whether it is likely to cause significant environmental effects.
- 1.13 This development falls under Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations and the process of screening was carried out to ascertain if the proposal was likely to cause significant environmental effects and thus require EIA.

EIA screening and scoping

- 1.14 For the section 73 application to vary condition 16 of the consented outline mixed-use scheme, CDC issued a detailed screening opinion upon receiving a screening request on 5 April 2012 (both documents are contained within technical appendix A).
- 1.15 The screening request set out that the section 73 application sought to increase the maximum number of dwellings by up to 100 units across the site bringing the total to 1,685 (excluding 11/01502/OUT). It highlighted that this increase would be within the parameters set out in the 2006 outline application and associated ES: the majority of the site being of up to 2.5 storeys (maximum height of 9 m) with a road frontage of up to 3.5 storeys (11.5 m), and maximum heights around the local centre of 4 storeys (14.5 m).
- 1.16 It also noted that the small increase in unit number would not alter the densities set out in the building density parameter plan which was assessed through the 2006 ES (as shown in figure 2.4).
- 1.17 The screening request went on to review the 2006 ES and set out where the proposed change to the total unit number was considered likely to alter the conclusions.
- 1.18 The screening opinion (25 April 2012) from CDC advised of the following:
- An ES was necessary in respect of the outline application (06/00967/OUT) on the basis that a development of that size and nature would have significant environmental effects, as the proposal is to exceed the consented dwellings (up to 1,585 dwellings)
 - The need to consider the cumulative effect of the proposal for an additional 100 dwellings together with the 46 dwellings granted on the reserved school site
 - The age of the original ES giving rise to concerns about the validity of the baseline (changes on the site and within the Bicester area)
- 1.19 CDC accepted that some of the issues considered under the previous ES are unlikely to change with the additional development proposed, and specified the issues that needed to be updated and re-assessed in an ES as:
- i) Hydrology and water quality (including flood risk assessment and drainage)

- ii) Social and community effects
- iii) Traffic and transport
- iv) Air quality (related to changes in traffic and transport)
- v) Natural heritage

- 1.20 As the screening opinion set out details of the scope of the EIA, no separate scoping exercise was undertaken. Accordingly, this ES considers only hydrology and water quality, social and community, traffic and transport, air quality and natural heritage.
- 1.21 An ES is a document prepared for the purpose of enabling the determining planning authority to assess the likely significant environmental effects of a particular development proposal. It reports the findings of an EIA and forms an integral part of a planning application. It is good practice to include additional information by way of explanation or amplification.

Structure of this ES and chapter format

- 1.22 Table 1.1 shows the structure of this ES. A glossary (chapter 9) is included at the end of the ES to explain essential terminology used in the text. Where there is additional and / or supporting information that is considered too specialist or detailed for the ES, it is included as a technical appendix.

| |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Non-technical summary |
| 1. Introduction and EIA methodology |
| 2. Site description and proposals |
| 3. Air quality |
| 4. Natural heritage |
| 5. Social and community |
| 6. Traffic and transport |
| 7. Hydrology and water quality |
| 8. Summary |
| 9. Glossary |
| Technical appendices |
| A: Screening request and CDC screening opinion |
| B: Proposals chapter of the 2006 ES (printed) and an electronic version of the 2006 ES |
| C: Air quality |
| D: Natural heritage |
| E: Transport assessment |
| F: Flood risk assessment |

Table 1.1: ES structure

- 1.23 The environmental issues chapters (3-7) of this ES are generally structured as follows:

- Introduction
- Legislation and policy
- Methodology
- Baseline – description of the current baseline and the future baseline
- Potential effects during and post-construction

- Mitigation measures
- Residual effects

1.24 Whilst there is no statutory format for an ES, the matters set out in table 1.2 must be included to satisfy the requirements of the EIA Regulations; for ease of reference the second column in the table indicates where in this ES these requirements have been met.

| Required topic | Location in this ES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| A description of the development comprising information on the site, design and the size of the development. | Chapter 2 |
| A description of the measures envisaged in order to avoid, reduce and, if possible, remedy significant adverse effects. | Chapters 3-7 (mitigation sections) |
| The data required to identify and assess the main effects which the development is likely to have on the environment. | Chapter 3-7 (baseline and predicted effects sections) |
| An outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant or appellant and an indication of the main reasons for the choice made, taking into account the environmental effects. | Chapter 1 (alternatives section) |
| A non-technical summary of the information provided. | See the non-technical summary preceding this chapter |

Table 1.2: Information that must be included within an ES. Taken from Part 2 of Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011

1.25 Table 1.3 shows the further information that an ES may include.

| Topic | Location in the ES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>A description of the development, including in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the physical characteristics of the whole development and the land use requirements during the construction and operational phases • A description of the main characteristics of the production processes, for instance nature and quantity of the materials used • An estimate, by type and quantity, of expected residues and emissions (water, air and soil pollution, noise, vibration, light, heat, radiation etc) resulting from the operation of the proposed development | Chapter 2 |
| An outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant or appellant and an indication of the main reasons for the choice made, taking into account the environmental effects | Chapter 1 (alternatives section) |
| A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development, including, in particular, population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors | Chapters 3-7 (baseline sections) |
| <p>A description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment, which should cover the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects of the development, resulting from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existence of the development • The use of natural resources • The emission of pollutants, the creation of nuisances and the elimination of waste, and the description by the applicant or appellant of the forecasting methods used to assess the effects on the environment | Chapters 3-7 (predicted effects sections) |
| A description of the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment | Chapters 3-7 (mitigation sections) |
| A non-technical summary of the information provided | See the non-technical summary preceding this chapter |
| An indication of any difficulties (technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered by the applicant in compiling the required information | Chapters 3-7 (methodology sections) |
| Table 1.3: Further information that an ES may include. Taken from Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 | |

Assessment methodologies

- 1.26 The evaluation of the significance of an environmental effect is an essential part of the EIA process. An environmental effect is an alteration, positive or negative, to some aspect of the environment occurring as a result of the development. The level of significance determines the resource that should be deployed in avoiding or mitigating an adverse effect, or identifying the actual value of a positive effect.
- 1.27 Specific discussion of assessment criteria are set out in each chapter as appropriate, clearly showing how any final assessment of the significance of an effect has been determined. Any assumptions made during the assessment process have been reported in the text.

- 1.28 The assessment of the significance of a potential effect takes account of timescale, permanence and whether the effects are adverse or beneficial as appropriate. Where significant adverse potential effects are identified, mitigation measures are proposed where possible. The mitigation measures aim to either alleviate the adverse effects, or reduce their significance.
- 1.29 The development proposed through this section 73 application will only come forward as part of the consented outline application for South West Bicester. A number of elements of the outline scheme have already been built out and Countryside Properties is committed to building out all of the remaining elements. Therefore the current conditions (baseline) on the site are considered to be interim. Countryside Properties is also committed to building out the consented application for 46 dwellings on the reserved school site, and the site's future baseline therefore includes both the completed consented outline application and the additional 46 dwellings. The baseline scenarios examined the assessments are set out in more detail in the individual topic chapters (chapters 3-7)
- 1.30 To ensure potential construction effects are fully considered it is assumed that the construction period for the section 73 application will overlap with the final stages of the outline application and the development of the reserved school site. It should also be noted that the envisaged completion of the consented development has been extended from 2014 to 2019 in response to current economic conditions.

Cumulative effects

- 1.31 The ES will include consideration of the potential for the proposals to give rise to cumulative effects with permitted (but not implemented) developments or other proposed developments (where a reasonable level of information / data is available). All existing development will be incorporated into the baseline.
- 1.32 The following schemes have been considered cumulatively where appropriate (figure 1.3):
- NW Bicester Eco Development – first phase of 393 residential units, energy centre, access, car parking, landscape, amenity space, community centre, primary school and 1,100 m² of B1 office space. Outline application consented August 2011.
 - Graven Hill – 1,900 residential units, a two form entry primary school, community facilities, retail units, pub / restaurant / hotel, employment (office, light industrial, research and development, storage and distribution) and public open space. Outline application submitted October 2011

Alternatives

- 1.33 This ES is submitted in support of a section 73 application to vary condition 16 of the outline planning consent for South West Bicester mixed-use scheme (06/00967/OUT), which limited the number of dwellings to 1,585. The additional number of dwellings proposed has been established following a review of the original scheme and would sit within the parameters set out in the 2006 ES.
- 1.34 In the context of this section 73 application, the location and nature of the scheme must remain as previously submitted, with the density being the only variation. Countryside Properties has not considered any other changes in density beyond the 100 dwellings as this was considered to be the optimum quantum. Therefore, no alternatives are considered within this ES.

The applicant

- 1.35 Countryside Properties is a specialist developer recognised in particular for the creation of sustainable new communities and urban and rural regeneration. The group's developments comprise a mix of uses, including both private and affordable housing, commercial property, and recreational and community facilities.

Consultant team

- 1.36 Countryside Properties commissioned an independent EIA of the proposed section 73 application for the South West Bicester scheme, with a team of specialist consultants carrying out the work. Terence O'Rourke Ltd (members of IEMA's EIA Quality Mark scheme) undertook the co-ordination of the ES, the social, economic and community assessment and the natural heritage assessment. WSP undertook the other technical elements (air quality, hydrology and traffic and transport).

Further information

- 1.37 Copies of the ES and technical appendices have been sent to CDC and relevant consultees. Full paper copies of the planning application can be viewed at CDC's offices. The planning application can be viewed online at CDC's website (www.publicaccess.cherwell.gov.uk/online-applications/)
- 1.38 Comments should be addressed to Linda Griffiths at Cherwell District Council and copied to Adrian Barker at Terence O'Rourke Ltd at the following addresses:

Cherwell District Council
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX15 4AA

Terence O'Rourke Ltd
Everdene House
Deansleigh Road
Bournemouth
BH7 7DU