

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

1.1 Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd (hereafter Countryside Properties) has submitted an outline planning application to Cherwell District Council for a proposed mixed use development on land south west of Bicester in May 2006. The location of the site is shown on figure 1.1. **Since submission, Countryside Properties has undertaken extensive archaeological site investigations and further ecological surveys, and has had discussions with officers from Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council regarding the outline application. As a result of the archaeological site investigations and discussions with officers, Countryside Properties has amended the outline planning application and master plan. As a consequence of the environmental impact assessment has been revised and updated to take account of the amendments. This environmental statement has been amended to reflect the revised and updated EIA. The changes are highlighted in red in the text**

1.2 The proposals as amended are set out in detail in chapter 3 and comprise the following elements:

- up to 1,585 residential dwellings, 30% of which will be affordable
- 2 ha of employment land to be located in the north-east of the site, with a further 1000m² within the local centre
- outdoor playing space including formal outdoor sports, sports pavilion and changing facilities, children's play areas and informal open space
- a primary school and land for a second primary school
- land for a secondary school
- a local centre including a community centre, and land reserved for a children's day nursery, retail area, a family- friendly pub and office space
- 1ha reserved for a hotel
- a safeguarded site for a health village, which will include a **nursing home** and could include a community hospital, GP surgery and complementary uses, which will revert to employment uses if not taken up
- a perimeter road and junction improvements
- access to a potential site for park and ride (potential site outside application boundary).

An opportunity

1.3 The site lies immediately to the south west of the urban area of Bicester and presents an opportunity to develop a high quality urban extension to the town, providing essential housing and associated local facilities including education and recreational opportunities.

1.4 The key aims and objectives of the proposal are:

- 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.

Need

- 1.5 The need for the proposals is determined by national, regional and local plan policies. The development proposals are in accordance with national policy as set out in Planning Policy Statement 1: Creating Sustainable Communities (PPS1) and Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (PPG3).
- 1.6 PPS1 encourages integrated mixed use communities with access to jobs, health, education, shops, leisure, community facilities, open space, sport and recreation. The proposals for South West Bicester include a variety of uses on-site. These minimise the need to travel for local services, increasing the likelihood that alternative modes of transport to the private car will be used.
- 1.7 PPG3 recognises the importance of achieving good design and layout within new residential developments and the importance of urban extensions in achieving sustainable housing development. The proposals therefore create an opportunity to accommodate development within Bicester in a sustainable manner and in compliance with national policy. There is a need for sustainable development that meets the criteria set out by national policy.
- 1.8 Planning policy at the regional and county level is set out in RPG 9, Regional Planning Guidance for the South East and the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. This outlines the need for residential development in Bicester. Within the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 (October 2005), Bicester is highlighted as one of the main locations for new housing with about 3,300 dwellings to be provided between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2016. In order to achieve this level of housing, the South West Bicester site has been identified within the unadopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011 (Review) as an urban extension to Bicester.
- 1.9 The Draft South East Plan, which in the future will supersede RPG9 and the Structure Plan as the strategic planning framework for Cherwell District, draws on principles laid down by PPG3 and also supports significant development at Bicester, of which the proposals at South West Bicester will be an important part. The idea of urban extensions as a sustainable form of development, as outlined within PPG3, is being used in the case for South West Bicester to provide for the town's housing need over the local plan period.
- 1.10 At the local level, the site is identified through Policy H13 of the unadopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011 as part of the urban extension to South West Bicester. Although this policy is not adopted, it sets out the Council's preferred area for development.

Environmental impact assessment

- 1.11 In view of the scale and nature of the development proposals, an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is required under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (hereafter referred to as the EIA Regulations). EIA is defined by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) Circular 02/99 as:

'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.'

- 1.12 An ES is a document prepared for the purpose of enabling the determining planning authority to assess the likely environmental impacts of a particular development proposal. It reports the findings of the EIA and forms an integral part of the planning application. To satisfy the requirements of the EIA Regulations, an ES must address the matters listed in figure 1.2. It may also, by way of explanation or amplification, include further information on any of the matters listed in figure 1.3.
- 1.13 This revised and updated ES has been produced in accordance with both the EIA Regulations and best practice guidance issued by government departments and other organisations such as the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). It has been prepared by Terence O'Rourke based on information gathered during a formal EIA of the development proposals, **and addresses the amendments made to the planning application since May 2006.**
- 1.14 The scope of the EIA was the subject of consultation with planning and environmental officers from Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), and a wide range of organisations including Bicester Town Council, Chesterton Parish Council, English Nature, the Environment Agency (EA), the Highways Agency and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. The scoping process is discussed in more detail in chapter 4 and a copy of the scoping report has been reproduced as technical appendix 1.

Schedule 4 Information for inclusion in Environmental Statements – Part II	
1.	A description of the development comprising information on the site, design and size of the development.
2.	A description of the measures envisaged in order to avoid, reduce and, if possible, remedy significant adverse effects.
3.	The data required to identify and assess the main effects which the development is likely to have on the environment.
4.	An outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant or appellant and an indication of the main reasons for his choice, taking into account the environmental effects.
5.	A non-technical summary of the information provided under paragraphs 1 to 4 of this Part.

Figure 1.2 The information that must be included in the environmental statement

Schedule 4 Information for inclusion in Environmental Statements – Part I	
1.	Description of the development, including in particular: (a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole development and the land-use requirements during the construction and operational phases; (b) a description of the main characteristics of the production processes, for instance, nature and quantity of the materials used; (c) 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.
2.	An outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant or appellant and an indication of the main reasons for his choice, taking into account the environmental effects.
3.	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.
4.	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: (a) the existence of the development; (b) the use of natural resources; (c) the emission of pollutants, the creation of nuisances and the elimination of waste, and the description by the applicant of the forecasting methods used to assess the effects on the environment.
5.	A description of the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment.
6.	A non-technical summary of the information provided under paragraphs 1 to 5 of this Part.
7.	An indication of the difficulties (technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered by the applicant in compiling the required information.

Figure 1.3 The information that may be included in an environmental statement by way of explanation or amplification

The applicant

- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 Countryside Properties creates architecturally dynamic, highly innovative homes in urban and rural environments. Their expertise means that they can imaginatively create and deliver a bespoke solution to every development opportunity.

The consultant team

- 1.17 Terence O'Rourke was commissioned by Countryside Properties to undertake the planning strategy and master plan design work for the development proposals.
- 1.18 The co-ordination of the EIA and the preparation of the ES have also been undertaken by Terence O'Rourke, along with the following specialist assessments – air quality, cultural heritage, land use, landscape and visual effects, natural heritage, noise and vibration, social and community effects and waste. WSP assessed the potential traffic and transport, hydrology and water quality, drainage and utilities, and the ground conditions and contamination impacts associated with the development proposals.

Structure of the Environmental Statement	
<i>Non-technical summary</i>	
Part 1 Background to site and proposals	
1.	Introduction
2.	The site
3.	The proposals
4.	Defining the issues
Part 2: Environmental effects of the proposals	
<i>Primary Issues</i>	
5.	Cultural heritage
6.	Hydrology and water quality
7.	Land use
8.	Landscape and visual effects
9.	Noise and vibration
10.	Social and community effects
11.	Traffic and transport
<i>Secondary Issues</i>	
12.	Air quality
13.	Ground conditions and contamination
14.	Natural heritage
15.	Waste
Glossary	
Technical appendices (bound separately)	
Technical appendix 1	Scoping consultation exercise
Technical appendix 2	Cultural heritage: Aerial photography analysis by Air Photo Services, Geophysical Survey by Stratscan, 2a Archaeological evaluation by Wessex Archaeology, 2006
Technical appendix 3	Hydrology and water quality 3a Flood Risk Assessment
Technical appendix 4	Landscape and visual effects
Technical appendix 5	Ground conditions and contamination 5a Pell Frischmann ground investigation report
Technical appendix 6	Natural Heritage

Figure 1.4 Structure of the environmental statement

The structure of this ES

- 1.19 The structure of the ES is set out in figure 1.4. Chapters 1 to 4 provide the background information on the site, the proposals and the environmental issues to be examined in the assessment. Chapters 5 to 15 describe the assessment of environmental effects for each of the specialist areas, for example traffic and transport, natural heritage, land use and landscape and visual effects.
- 1.20 A glossary is included at the back of the document to explain essential terminology used in the text. Technical appendices have also been produced providing detailed information on the environmental issues.
- 1.21 A non-technical summary has been produced which summarises the findings of the EIA. The NTS can be found at the front of the ES and is also available as a separately bound document.

Further information

- 1.22 Copies of this ES and the technical appendices have been sent to Cherwell District Council, the statutory consultees and those organisations who responded to the initial scoping exercise carried out in July 2005.
- 1.23 The full ES with its technical appendices and the planning application may be inspected at:
- Cherwell District Council
Planning and Development Services
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
Oxon
OX15 4AA
- 1.24 Comments on the planning application and ES should be addressed to the Principal Planning Officer (Implementation) at the above address, and copied to Terence O'Rourke at the address below.
- 1.25 Free copies of the NTS are available (while stocks last) from Cherwell District Council. Additional copies of the ES and any further information about the project may be obtained at a reasonable charge to reflect printing and distribution costs, by contacting:

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