

**COMMENTS ON 19/00457/OUT: UP TO 8 DWELLINGS AT THE BEECHES,  
HEYFORD ROAD, STEEPLE ASTON**

We wish to comment as follows: THE SCHEME SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN SO THAT IT CAN BE AMENDED TO AVOID AS MANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONCERNS AS POSSIBLE BEFORE RE-CONSIDERATION, OR ELSE THE APPLICATION - IF UNAMENDED - SHOULD BE REFUSED.

**1. Previously-developed land**

The application could be classed as a possible "windfall" development, which Local Plan policy Villages 2 can permit under certain circumstances. The site is a former paddock attached to the garden of a small "country house". The application documents argue that because CDC granted planning permission in 2003 for a narrow-gauge railway and its associated structures on the paddock, the land is classed as "previously developed" (which is one of the criteria under CDC's policy Villages 2).

MCNP considers that there is room for debate over the definition of previously-developed land: a garden railway is a very unusual form of development, and should not necessarily be used to justify replacement with a substantial residential development.

**2. Settlement area**

MCNP policy PD1 on new market housing in Steeple Aston allows for the possibility of housing development outside the settlement area (as this would be) if various criteria can be met. One of these is that the development should be "immediately adjacent to the settlement area". The house and its paddock were deliberately excluded from the village settlement area map for Steeple Aston (Fig.18), as approved by CDC and the independent examiner, on the grounds that the site does not form part of the continuous frontage of dwellings along the south side of Heyford Road.

It can be reasonably argued that the house and its surrounding grounds are immediately adjacent to the settlement area. However, it is stretching a point to say that the paddock behind the house and garden is also adjacent. Large gardens were excluded from settlement areas in the MCNP to discourage this type of backland development. New housing on the paddock land would significantly change the shape of the settlement area, allowing it to encroach on open countryside behind the Heyford Road housing. MCNP therefore questions whether the proposed development succeeds in complying with the required criteria for approval under its policy PD1.

**3. Housing Mix**

MCNP policy PH1 strongly encourages all developers to favour dwellings with fewer bedrooms, in response to local housing need in the MCNP area and in Cherwell. The current scheme would not meet the intentions of this policy. A pair of semi-detached 3-bed dwellings is proposed in front of the Beeches (the original house), on the part of the site that is adjacent to other houses on Heyford

Road. The other six houses proposed are 5-bedroom dwellings, all located on the former paddock.

Policy PH1 sets out an optimal mix for new housing, which in this case should be: two 4- or 5-bedroom houses, four 3-bedroom houses, and two 1- or 2- bedroom dwellings. MCNP Forum wishes CDC to apply this policy, and to ensure that if permission is to be granted as requested for “up to eight dwellings”, that later exclusion of the smaller dwellings be not permitted.

#### **4. CDC’s Residential Design Guide**

One of the criteria that CDC uses in considering the suitability of sites for housing development is "the ability to build communities". CDC's Residential Design Guide published in 2018 (in the section titled "Settlement Pattern") states: "*New development should follow the historic pattern of settlement growth in the local area and read as a natural continuation of the settlement’s evolution. For example: historic growth along movement routes is evident in linear settlements, with homes fronting the street. This arrangement should be replicated in new development with new homes fronting the street. .... The development of individual sites as discrete housing estates, off a single main access with little lateral connectivity into the surrounding street network is to be avoided. It fails to reflect historic patterns of settlement growth, reduces the potential for community interaction and creates disconnected places with increased reliance on the car.*"

As currently proposed, the application would create an exclusive residential enclave on the edge of Steeple Aston, up a wooded lane that would most likely feel like private property and not a part of the village, an attribute that would most probably be its major selling point to future residents of its large houses. In MCNP Forum’s view, this would not meet the CDC Design Guide’s intention to encourage integration with the rest of the village and its community.

#### **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS**

The proposed development of 8 new dwellings in this part of the village could in principle be acceptable. It is a reasonable number in respect of the indicative total of extra dwellings for Steeple Aston (20 up to the year 2031) set out in MCNP policy PD1.

However, the application scheme: a) does not respect the historic pattern of settlement growth, b) could be regarded as not immediately adjacent to the settlement area, c) does not have a street frontage, d) has insufficient smaller dwellings to address local need, and e) would fail to encourage integration of its residents with the existing local community.

**IN THE OPINION OF MCNP FORUM, THE SCHEME SHOULD THEREFORE BE WITHDRAWN SO THAT IT CAN BE AMENDED TO AVOID AS MANY OF THESE CONCERNS AS POSSIBLE BEFORE RE-CONSIDERATION, OR ELSE THE APPLICATION - IF UNAMENDED - SHOULD BE REFUSED.**