

Objection to 19/01705/OUT from Steve Craggs

Submitter: S T Craggs, 4 Gascoigne Way, Bloxham OX15 4TL

I object to the referenced application from Gladman proposing up to 95 new houses surrounding the Bloxham recreation ground. My reasons for objecting follow.

General comment on Section 4.5 of Gladman Planning Statement

I disagree with the attempt by Gladman to sideline the Bloxham Neighbourhood Development Plan (BNDP) in section 4.5. There is clearly no conflict between BL1/BL2 and the Cherwell Policy Villages 2. Since the Total of 750 has been met, with the BNDP allocation of 85 houses in BL1 included, there is no conflict. Note that BL1 allocates 85 houses outside of the building line, while BL2 specifies that further building should be within the building line and small developments / infill only. How can this be in conflict with Policy Villages 2 given the Total provided in Policy Villages 2 is covered? At that point, PV2 ceases to be relevant.

Specific objections

General

- The proposal contravenes **BL2** of the BNDP because it is outside the building line and is a large number of houses.
- The 750 houses specified in **PV2** has already been allocated so no more are needed
- Cherwell has a 5-yr housing supply so no more houses are required
- This site was assessed in the Cherwell 2018 HELAA report as unsuitable for development
"Greenfield site outside the built-up limits. Bloxham is a Category A village in the adopted Local Plan Part 1, the category of the most sustainable villages in the district. The adopted Local Plan makes provision for some development (10 or more homes and small scale employment) at Category A villages. The site is considered to be unsuitable for development as it would likely to have a detrimental impact on the views of the village when approaching from the south east along South Newington Road. In the main, the site is removed from the built-up area, development on the site would be difficult to integrate well with the remainder of the village. There is a made neighbourhood plan. With regard to assisting oxford with its unmet housing need, Bloxham lies outside Areas of Search A and B."

Sustainability

While Bloxham is a Category A village, indicating it is viewed as sustainable with good services and infrastructure, the rapid growth (50% in the last 10-15 years) has made it no longer able to sustain significant housing increases. Even in the last few years, appeals have resulted in Bloxham taking an additional 231 houses. As a result the roads, drainage, services, facilities and schools are all at or over capacity. Specific policies that this proposal contravenes include:

- **NPPF para 84** *"It will be important to ensure that development....does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads"* and **NPPF para 108** *"In assessing ...specific applications for development, it should be ensured that ...(c)any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively*

mitigated to an acceptable degree” and BNDP BL9 “All development shall...(c)ensure that the impact of any additional traffic likely to be generated by the development has been satisfactorily mitigated and will not adversely affect the road network”

The A361 is a very busy road used by large HGVs. Bloxham’s growth has rendered the South Newington roundabout at or above capacity. This point is confirmed by the fact that during the Appeals process a few years ago for the previous Gladman application in Bloxham, the traffic report stated that the mini roundabout was operating at about its theoretical capacity. Indeed, it was for this reason that the development contributed thousands of pounds to mitigate the problem. OCC subsequently agreed that there was no feasible solution to the capacity problem with the South Newington roundabout. This proposal WILL therefore have an unacceptable impact on local roads.

On the safety point, the T junction at that proposed location on the A361 will make the A361 even more dangerous. There have been 3 major accidents this year so far between the entrance to the village and the mini roundabout:

1. A car went straight through the fence into the Rec (speeding from South Newington)
 2. A car crashed into the VAS and destroyed it (the location was almost exactly where the proposal places the entrance/exit to the new site)
 3. A major crash occurred on the South Newington side of the mini roundabout opposite the petrol station
- On the drainage front, when Thames Water came to resolve some flooding issues two years ago they said the drainage infrastructure could handle perhaps another 25 houses. Even Gladman admits the infrastructure will not be able to handle the foul water needs of the 95 houses, and their report is 2-3 years old
 - **NPPF para 122** *“Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account...(c)the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential further improvement. “*

The Dentist and Doctor’s practices are at NHS capacity. The Bloxham Primary School is full, and OCC confirms there is no possibility for it to grow further. The road network through Bloxham is congested particularly around the shops. For the past two years, as the other three new developments have come on stream, the most common resident complaint is congestion on the A361 around the shops. Residents are already complaining that cars on the side roads are blocking driveways, and the on-A361 parking is bad enough that an Ambulance on a call this year had to radio back to base to send out a replacement because they were stuck in Bloxham due to an HGV coming the other way and parking on the A361. The recent approval for the new SEN School in Bloxham off the A361 will make the traffic situation even worse. Finally, there is a great deal of concern over the congestion and air pollution with so many children around that area.

- **NPPF para 94** *“It is important that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities” and BNDP BL9(d) “For new housing developments, ensure that a sufficient supply of local primary school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new residents”*

The Bloxham Primary School is completely full with no possibility of further expansion. The Warriner has grown substantially but is now oversubscribed and reaching its limit of expansion, especially having given up land for the new SEN School.

- **BNDP BL3** policy on connectivity requires sustainable modes of transport to connect to village services. Gladman claim people will walk or cycle to the shops. In today's world, there is no way people will walk that distance along a busy road carrying shopping bags. As for cycling, many cyclists refuse to cycle through the middle of Bloxham because it is so dangerous. There is one pinch point where there is no footpath but instead a sheer wall squeezing the cyclist into the path of oncoming HGVs.

Biodiversity

- **ESD 10** "*...Development which would result in damage to or loss of biodiversity...will not be permitted unless the benefits of development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause*" and **NPPF para 174** in total and **BNDP BL11** "*All development should...(i)Take opportunities to protect and wherever possible enhance biodiversity and habitats*"

The Slade is a registered Natural England nature reserve and also a Cherwell Wildlife site, contrary to the erroneous claims made by Gladman in its documentation. It forms a rare wet woodland area supporting a wide range of species. The proposed development joins on to the Slade. In addition, it is important to remember that species that inhabit the Slade roam the adjoining fields to forage; their presence is not restricted to the Slade confines. Placing a residential estate next to the nature reserve is nothing short of ecological vandalism. Suggesting the eventual site builders might place a shield of trees does nothing.

It should also be noted that the focus on nature continues to increase, see **National Trust State of Nature Report 2019**. From that report, the following quotes draw a situation of real concern.

"15% of wildlife species are under threat from extinction. 2% of species have already gone for good...Butterflies and moths are down 17% and 25% respectively...The average amount of mammals has fallen by 26 per cent and the wild cat and greater mouse-eared bat are almost extinct...Only a robust approach to environmental protections and law making can deliver... for England Wales and Northern Ireland."

Destroying the rural nature of Bloxham

- **BNDP BL11** "*All development should...(c)Make a positive contribution to the character of Bloxham and its rural feel;...(f) Preserve existing open space*" and **BNDP BL12** "*...(b)All development shall demonstrate that it does not result in harm to the rural or heritage character of the village. This will include consideration of the impact of the development on:...(II)The open character of the five amenity spaces*" and **ESD13** "*Proposals will not be permitted if they would: cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside...be inconsistent with local character...impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity*"

The Bloxham Recreation ground is a true open rural space. Being on the edge of the settlement, as it is currently, it provides views around more than 180 degrees of the countryside; fields, hedges, the Slade, the countryside Circular Walk PROW. In the summer in particular, families picnic there and elderly residents spend their afternoons sitting on the benches looking out over

the countryside. You definitely feel you are in the country, although on the edge of 'civilization' (there are houses on one side, being the start of the built up area). The proposal encircles the Rec with the new housing development. Whether there are shields of trees or not, the effect is the open rural space will be transformed in nothing more than a typical urban park; a green area with houses and the A361 bounding it, just as you might find in any town. There will be increased noise since the Rec will now be surrounded on all sides, the countryside views will be lost and the tranquillity shattered.

Flooding

- **BNDP BL7** "*Development should not increase flood risk*"

As identified in the plans, part of the site is a flood risk area, but it is more the effect the new development would have on the rest of the flood plain that is the concern. The north-west corner of the Rec is prone to flooding, with deep flood water in bad years. The brook that runs through the Slade rapidly becomes swollen in heavy rains, threatening other parts of Bloxham such as Hyde Close. Building on areas of Greenland always reduces the absorption of rainwater. The proposal includes suggestions about pools and Suds to counteract this problem. However it is worth noting that when Gladman forced through approval of the site on Barford Road a few years ago, the resulting new houses flooded as soon as we got heavy rains. The lesson is learned.

Is there a need?

This section is not tied to planning law, but instead is directed to the Gladman claim that housing, and in particular affordable housing, is needed in Bloxham. As of today there are 50+ houses for sale on Rightmove in Bloxham, with the most affordable being £105K and £110K, prices way below the average for the area. Affordable housing in the new developments has proved so difficult to sell that some has been leased back to the Council for use as social housing. The Tadmarton development has I believe stopped before finishing its building because they have had such trouble selling the houses already built.

Summary

For all these reasons, I believe it would be totally irresponsible to allow this development to go ahead. I believe planning law is firmly against it, even though I also know Gladman has lawyers who strike fear into most villages' hearts.

I believe the residents of Bloxham and the Cherwell District Council have dutifully followed the process of trying to control the growth of Bloxham to something manageable and sustainable. Having lost a number of appeals, they have followed 'good practice' by building a Neighbourhood Development Plan in conjunction with the District and made contributions to ensure the overall housing supply required of Cherwell is delivered. Even with the huge amount of housing growth Bloxham has experienced over the last 5 or 6 years, villagers were still prepared to accept providing yet another 85 houses as part of the NDP. If this application succeeds, it makes a mockery of the National Planning Process.