

4 Alternatives

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 During the design process environmental constraints and opportunities identified by the project team were considered and addressed by detailed application drawings, Parameter Plans and Development Specification document, where possible. This iterative design approach meant that there were limited reasonable design alternatives considered by the project team for the Development.

4.1.2 The alternatives that are discussed in this chapter include:

- Alternative sites;
- No development alternative; and,
- Design considerations.

4.2 Alternative Sites

4.2.1 The development opportunity for the Site arose due to the Applicant's ownership of the Site. The Application 1 site is allocated for employment development within the adopted CLP 2015 - Policy Bicester 10 (see Figure 1.3) and is considered a suitable site for the Development. Consequently, analysis of alternative sites was not undertaken as part of this ES and alternative sites are not considered further.

4.2.2 As part of the Local Plan process, alternative sites for employment development were considered by CDC, although these are not reported here as they were not considered by the Applicant.

4.3 The No-Development Scenario

4.3.1 In line with best practice, the consequences of no development taking place and the Site remaining in its present agricultural use is considered. This would be an unlikely scenario as the Application 1 site is allocated for uses falling within Use Class B1 by Bicester 1. The principle of developing the Application 1 site for the proposed use is, therefore, accepted by CDC through its strategic allocation.

4.3.2 In the context of the surrounding land being brought forward for development as part of Local Plan site allocations and other already permitted development, the Site would remain in agricultural use surrounded by development to the west, north and east. The functional value of the Application 1 site in agricultural terms would be marginal, while the existing poultry farm on the Application 2 site would continue to operate.

4.3.3 In the absence of the Development, short term disruption and temporary effects associated with construction of the Development would not arise, e.g. construction traffic, noise and vibration, and grassland and hedgerow loss / disruption.

4.3.4 The effects associated with the completed Development (as described within this ES), would also not arise. These effects include additional traffic, flood risk and water resources and habitat loss (albeit of low value). If the Development were not brought forward, the beneficial effects of employment creation (i.e. jobs) and environmental benefits, including net biodiversity gain through the creation of the recreational wetlands, would also not be realised.

4.3.5 The 'No Development' scenario is not considered a realistic prospect given the Application 1 site allocation for employment development within the adopted CLP 2015.

4.4 Design Considerations and Constraints

4.4.1 A summary of the main design considerations and constraints and how the design of the Development has responded to them are discussed below.

Surrounding built environment

- 4.4.2 The overall massing of the Development has sought to respect the surrounding built form.
- 4.4.3 The David Lloyd Club, which forms part of Application 1, abuts the Bicester Avenue Retail Park, situated immediately north of the Site. The proposed Clubhouse building and airdome have a maximum height of 7.780m and 9.100m, respectively. This replicates the heights of the Bicester Avenue Retail Park whose buildings average circa 7.8m in height.
- 4.4.4 The maximum ridge height of the Development Zones within the Parameter Plans for both Application 1 and Application 2 are circa 11-12m from development platform level (see Appendices 5.1 and 5.2). This is lower in height than the approved Bicester Gateway development to the west whose buildings range from 14m to 18.5m in height. The Development Zones will be marginally higher than the Bicester Avenue Retail Park buildings to the north.
- 4.4.5 The relationship of the Development's massing with these developments was a key influence in the siting and scale of the Development Zones, access into the Development, and the provision of landscaping along the western and northern Site boundaries.

Water Resources and Flood Risk

- 4.4.6 Much of the Site lies within Flood Zone 3, with a small proportion in Flood Zone 2 and the remainder in Flood Zone 1. This is a major constraint to development on the Site. The proposed layout of the Development takes into account flood risk and as a result only circa 8.5ha of the Site is proposed to be developed. The Development Zones, as outline within the Parameter Plans, are located in the west of the Site to maximise the amount of development in Flood Zone 1 and limit the amount of development in Flood Zone 3.
- 4.4.7 The eastern area of the Site is set aside for flood compensation, which will include recreational wetlands, swales and open space. The need to minimise surface water run-off will be managed by incorporating a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) in the Development that is designed to satisfactorily achieve the 1 in 100 year plus climate change storm event standard (Appendix 8.1: Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy).

Transportation and Access

- 4.4.8 Improved pedestrian/cycle permeability north-south along Wendlebury Road and through the Site is considered essential to the Development's successful functioning. Wendlebury Road is a Sustrans cycle route (NCN51), which was an important design consideration for the Development, in particular how the Development would tie into the existing cycle and pedestrian infrastructure without compromising safety and operation of the NCN51.
- 4.4.9 The Development was developed in line with the pedestrian and cycle strategy agreed for the Bicester Gateway development, and as a result, the Development will provide a new pedestrian and cycle link across the north of the Bicester Gateway development, within land controlled by the Oxfordshire Country Council, to connect to the upgraded pedestrian and cycle route being provided by the Bicester Gateway development. As the pedestrian and cycle strategy for the Bicester Gateway development has already been agreed with OCC and CDC, there are no other reasonably locations for this infrastructure to be delivered.

4.4.10 Vehicular and principal pedestrian/cycle access is proposed to come off Wendlebury Road with the formation of a new 4-arm roundabout. The new roundabout would serve the Wendlebury Road (north and south arms), Site access and the Vendee Drive roundabout link will form the east and west arms respectively. Where the road must be realigned to tie into the Site access roundabout, the cycle path along the existing alignment will be retained to link up to a crossing on the Vendee Link Road arm.

Biodiversity

4.4.11 To the east of the Site lies the Bicester Wetland Reserve Local Wildlife Site and policy Bicester 10 requires the floodplain land within the Site adjacent to Langford Brook to provide for a natural wetland buffer between any built development and the adjacent Local Wildlife Site.

4.4.12 Approximately 10ha of the Site is to be set aside as open space/flood compensation, an initial Biodiversity Impact Assessment calculation of the emerging illustrative Landscape Strategy has been undertaken using the Warwickshire biodiversity impact assessment metric. This has identified that the Development would not result in a net loss of biodiversity and that subject to detailed design and management, a measurable net gain could be achieved. The calculation will be reviewed at future design stages to ensure that opportunities to maximise the value of retained and newly created habitats are incorporated into the final scheme design where appropriate.

4.4.13 In addition, the Development seeks to retain ecological features, where possible, including hedgerows within the Site and boundary hedgerows and trees.

Archaeology

4.4.14 The Site does not contain any built heritage resources designated of national importance, such as Scheduled Monuments (SMs), listed buildings or Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. In addition, there are no locally listed buildings within the Site or within the immediate vicinity.

4.4.15 However, the Alchester Roman SM is located immediately to the south of the Site. Policy Bicester 10 requires that development should conserve and enhance the setting of the Alchester Roman SM and look at opportunities to better reveal its significance. However, the significance of the SM principally derives from those important evidential and historical illustrative values associated with its buried archaeological remains and surviving earthworks, rather than its setting. As the Development is not within the SM site and the Site will not affect the SM directly, there will be no change to, or adverse impact upon, those principal contributors to the monument's significance as a result.

4.4.16 In order to ensure that any indirect effects on the setting of the SM are mitigated, the Parameter Plans were informed by an archaeological desk-based assessment and geophysical survey. As a result, along the southern edge of the Site the Development Zones are set back and structural planting and a generous swathe of open space will be provided to create a landscaped buffer to this heritage asset.

4.4.17 It is also noted that the Application 1 site is allocated for employment development within the adopted CLP 2015 - Policy Bicester 10 and therefore CDC consider it is suitable site for a new multi-level development. In addition, the existing poultry farm buildings on the Application 2 site forms part of the existing baseline in terms of setting of the SM. The proposed Development will be of higher architecture quality and appearance than the existing buildings, and therefore in combination with the proposed set back and structural planting it is considered that there will be no change to, or adverse impact upon its setting.

4.4.18 A full description of the proposed Development upon which this ES is based, is included in Chapter 5: Description of Development.