

ATLAS

PLANNING GROUP

PLANNING STATEMENT

Land at the Old Vicarage, Fringford Road, Caversfield, OX27 8TH

September 2019

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1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site, which is relatively flat and measures approximately 0.26ha, comprises part of the existing garden of the Old Vicarage. The Old Vicarage is a substantial dwelling with a detached triple garage, garden and parking area.
- 1.2 Access is via an unnamed road, known locally as Aunt Ems Lane (B4100). The site is well screened by trees and hedgerows to both the north and west boundaries.
- 1.3 To the north, beyond the established hedgerow is the garden of Prospect House. Beyond the Old Vicarage to the east is the Fringford Road. The site is bound by Aunt Ems Lane to the south and another mature hedgerow to the west, beyond which is open countryside.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the application site

2. PLANNING HISTORY

PLANNING APPLICATION - CHS.129/86

- 2.1 An application was submitted in 1986 for the erection of a garage and workshop for car repairs.
- 2.2 The application was refused on the grounds of potential neighbour impact, highway safety and the impact on the character and appearance of the area.

RETROSPECTIVE PLANNING APPLICATION - CHS.710/87

- 2.3 A retrospective application was submitted in 1987 to temporarily change the use of the drawing room to taxi communications office.
- 2.4 Temporary planning permission was granted for one year.

PLANNING APPLICATION - CHS.88/22

- 2.5 An application was submitted in 1988 for the construction of a double garage and carport.
- 2.6 Planning permission was granted.

OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION - CHS.646/88

- 2.7 An outline application was submitted in 1988 that sought the erection of two detached dwellings and access.
- 2.8 The application was refused and subsequently dismissed at appeal.

PLANNING APPLICATION - CHS.452/93

- 2.9 A planning application was submitted in 1993 for the two storey extension and conversion of existing double garage and carport to provide for boarding house accommodation (4 bedrooms).
- 2.10 The application was refused on the ground on extending the built-up limits and being detrimental to the rural character and appearance of the approach into the village.

REQUEST FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE – 19/00124/PREAPP

2.11 Written pre-application advice was received from the Cherwell District Council in May 2019 with regard to the prospect of constructing four dwellings at the site.

2.12 Although the pre-application response raised several concerns, the remainder of this Planning Statement seeks to demonstrate how the proposals constitute sustainable development.

3. THE PROPOSAL

3.1 The description of development is as follows:

“Erection of x4 dwelling houses together with associated garages, access and landscaping.”

3.2 The proposals will provide 2x semi-detached 3bed houses (55.8m² each) and 2x detached 4bed dwelling houses (72.5m² each).

3.3 All properties benefit from a garage, driveway parking and private gardens. Access to the properties will be via one point in the south-west corner of the site onto the B4100 (Aunt Em’s Lane).



Figure 2: Proposed Site Plan

4. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Cherwell Local Plan (CLP) Part 1 (2016) is the Council's primary Development Plan Document, and the starting point for determining planning decisions, in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. There are also a number of relevant 'Saved' Policies from the Cherwell Local Plan (1996). Additionally, a 'Partial Review' of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 is in preparation which is a specific Plan to provide Cherwell's share of the unmet housing needs of Oxford.
- 4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) provides a national tier of policy and decision-making guidance for the planning system and forms a material consideration for planning decisions. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, Paragraph 11 of the NPPF requires proposals that accord with the Development Plan to be approved without delay.
- 4.3 The policy and guidance contained within the statutory Development Plan Documents and all other relevant material considerations have been reviewed to ensure the proposal is an appropriate form of development for the application site.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 4.4 Paragraph 78 of the NPPF states:

*"To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should **identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive**, especially where this will support local services".*

- 4.5 Policy Villages 1 of the CLP 2031 provides a framework for housing growth in the rural areas of the district and groups villages into three categories. Within Caversfield, which is a Category C village, new residential development is restricted to conversions and infilling within the built-up area of the settlement. Category C villages are considered the least sustainable settlements, based on the following criteria:

- *Population size;*
- *The number and range of services and facilities within the village (shops, schools, pubs etc.);*
- *Whether there are any significant known issues in a village that could be materially assisted by an increase in housing;*

- *The accessibility (travel time and distance) of the village to an urban area by private car and public transport;*
- *Accessibility of the village in terms of walking and cycling; and*
- *Local employment opportunities.*

4.6 The Village Categorisation Update (2014) provides further detail on the sustainability criteria, which includes 'Distances to Urban Centres':

"If a village is close to a town this increases the opportunities for the use of public transport and walking and cycling to the town. It also means that car journeys made to the town will be shorter contributing to reducing carbon emissions".

4.7 Crucially, unlike any other Category C village, Caversfield is located within walking and cycling distance of Bicester town centre. The approximate walking distance from the site to Bicester North Railway Station is 1.3 miles along a footpath (26 minutes walking or 8 minutes cycling). The site is also directly served by the E1 bus, providing services to and from Bicester every 30 minutes.

4.8 Although Caversfield lacks local services, this is likely to be due to the village being within very close proximity to Bicester. The nearest convenience food shop is approximately a 4-minute cycle/ 17-minute walk from the application site at Tesco Express, Holm Way. There are also a range of local services at Buckingham Road which is within a 20-minute walk from the site, including:

- A pharmacy
- Medical surgery
- Co-operative food store
- Fast food restaurants
- A nursery
- Petrol filling station
- Betting shop

4.9 Southwold Primary School is located 0.6 miles from the site which is approximately a 13-minute walk. Additionally, both Gagle Brook and Bure Park Primary Schools are 0.8 miles from the site, which is an approximate 15-minute walk from the site.

4.10 The nearest secondary schools are The Cooper School which is located within 1.2 miles from the site and The Bicester School which is circa 1.7 miles away. The site's close proximity to Bicester also provides access to a range of employment opportunities.

4.11 As identified below, the other villages within a similar distance to Bicester (Launton, Ambrosden and Chesterton), are all either Category A or B villages. However, comparatively, Caversfield is closer and more accessible to and from Bicester.



Figure 3: Bicester's surrounding villages

4.12 Policy Villages 2 of the CLP details the Council's rural housing allocation. Pre-application feedback received on the 28th May 2019 states that the majority of the 750 dwellings allocated to Category A Settlements are already committed, however, the Local Plan sets out a separate windfall allowance of 754 homes on sites of less than 10 dwellings.

4.13 A recent appeal decision that allowed residential development at *Land off Blackthorn Road, Launton*¹, sets out how the housing delivery figures mentioned above are not ceilings and conflict would only arise if there was a material increase over and above the identified figures.

4.14 Although Cherwell District Council consider they can demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply and notwithstanding the bespoke 3-year arrangement that currently exists in Oxfordshire², *Crown House Developments v Wychavon District Council*³ establishes that,

*“the Framework [NPPF] seeks to boost significantly the supply of housing and the ability to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply **should not be seen as a maximum supply**”.*

4.15 Saved Policy H18 of the Local Plan (1996) sets out how planning permission will only be granted for new dwellings beyond the built-up limits of settlements when it is essential for agriculture, meets the criteria set out in Policy H6 (low-cost housing), or if the proposal would not conflict with other policies in the plan.

4.16 Caversfield does not have a defined settlement boundary and the proposed development will not result in harmful encroachment into the countryside. This is due to the existing transitional gateway between the village and the countryside being distinctly separated by the hedgerow, which is to be retained.



Figure 4: Existing view towards the site from Aunt Em's Lane, source: Google Maps

¹ APP/C1305/W/17/3188671

² Housing Land Supply in Oxfordshire: Written Ministerial Statement – HCWS955 (12/09/2018)

³ APP/H1840/W/15/3005494

4.17 Additionally, the North West Bicester SPD (2016) includes a Masterplan which shades the settlement boundaries of Bicester and Caversfield. The shading of Caversfield includes the application site, implying it forms part of the village. The planning permission that has been granted for major development at North West Bicester is of a comparable distance to Bicester town centre as the application site. It would therefore be illogical to consider the site to be an unsustainable location.

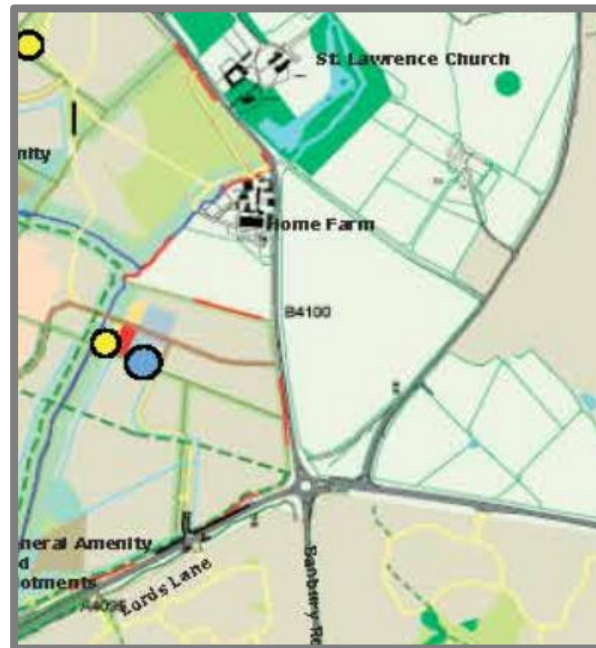


Figure 5: Extract from North West Bicester Masterplan (2016)

4.18 Saved Policy C8 of the Local Plan (1996) resists sporadic development in the countryside in order to maintain an attractive, open, rural character. However, as the site adjoins existing residential development in the broader village of Caversfield, the proposals cannot be considered sporadic development in the countryside. Moreover, they do not detract from the rural character adjoining the site to the north and west.

4.19 As the below historic map extracts show, the site has historically been detached from the adjoining countryside:

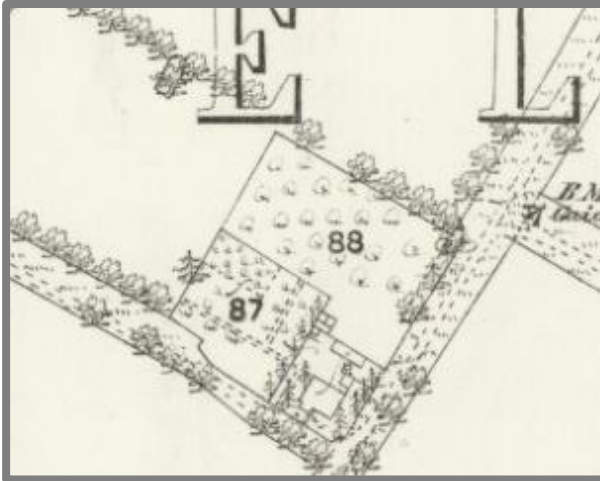


Figure 7: Oxfordshire XXIII.2, published 1881



Figure 6: Oxfordshire XXIII.2, published 1922



Figure 9: SP52 (include: Bicester), published 1951



Figure 8: Sheet 219 - Buckingham (Hills), published 1905

4.20 Overall, the village of Caversfield has no formally defined settlement boundary and the application site is well related to the village, forming part of the curtilage of an existing dwelling. It is also physically and visually separated from the adjoining countryside.

4.21 The site's proximity and connectivity to Bicester is a key factor that ensures the proposals represent a sustainable form of development. Furthermore, the proposed development strongly accords with paragraph 59 of the NPPF which sets out the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes.

DESIGN AND IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA AND LANDSCAPE

4.22 Policy ESD 15 '*The Character of the Built and Historic Environment*' requires new development to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high-quality design. Saved Policy C28 from the Cherwell Local Plan (1996) also requires layouts, design and external appearance, including the choice of external-finish materials to be sympathetic to the character of the development. Additionally, saved Policy 30 is concerned with the design of new residential development.

4.23 Policy ESD 13 '*Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement*' sets out how development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character, proposals will not be permitted if they would:

- *Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside;*
- *Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography;*

4.24 The impact upon the open countryside is limited by the existing mature hedgerow to the north and west, which provides physical and visual separation barrier between the site and the adjoining countryside. The hedgerow effectively results in the containment of the site and although there are no defined village limits, this landscape feature is considered to provide a clear edge to the village.

- *Be inconsistent with local character;*

4.25 The proposals seek to ensure that the scale and design are in keeping with the surrounding dwellings and Caversfield more generally which is largely characterised by traditional 2-storey dwellings.

- *Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquility;*

4.26 The site is close to other existing residential dwellings and the Fringford Road which is one of the main arterial routes into the urban area of Bicester. The proposals are therefore not considered to cause a significantly adverse impact on the tranquility of the area.

- *Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features; or*
- *Harm the historic value of the landscape.*

4.27 The impact on views from within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area boundary are limited by the fact there is already built form along the Fringford Road, which is closer to the Conservation Area than the application site. Grade II* Listed, St Laurence Church is located in the grounds of Caversfield House is 0.3 miles to the west. However, the Church benefits from significant woodland cover and is not visible from the application site.

4.28 Overall, the character of the area will not be unacceptably altered due to the context of existing residential dwellings adjoining the site to the east and the hedgerow that separates the site from the adjoining countryside.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

4.29 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF requires new development to be appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area impacts that could arise from the development.

4.30 Saved Policy C30 of the Local Plan (1996) also requires development to provide acceptable amenity and privacy standards. These are similarly included in Policy ESD15 of the Local Plan (2016):

“New development proposals should consider amenity of both existing and future development, including matters of privacy, outlook, natural lighting, ventilation and indoor and outdoor space”.

4.31 The pre-application response raised concern as to an, *“awkward relationship between proposed dwellings given the orientation of the site layout and separation distances”*. This has been positively addressed by the re-positioning of the dwellings.



Figure 10: Pre-application layout



Figure 11: Proposed layout

4.32 The only existing window at the Old Vicarage that faces the application site is a small bedroom window, however this is circa 27m from the proposed windows of plots 1 and 2. Although there are windows towards the application site from Aries, the back-to-back distance from Plot 3 (which is the plot closest to Aries) is approximately 30m, well exceeding the minimum 22m back to back distance set out in the Cherwell Residential Design Guide SPD (2018).

4.33 Appropriate boundary treatments are proposed including garden fencing and landscaping which will ensure acceptable amenity levels for future occupants, whilst also preserving the existing amenity of neighbours.

4.34 Overall, the proposals accord with Policy C30 and have been designed to ensure acceptable amenity levels for existing adjoining residents as well as future occupiers of the proposed dwellings.

IMPACT UPON ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY

4.35 CLP Policy ESD10 *'Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment'* sets out the intention for development to achieve a net gain in biodiversity. Proposals will be expected to incorporate features to encourage biodiversity and retain and where possible enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the site.

- 4.36 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been undertaken by Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd. The report concludes that the habitat and plant species observed on site are widespread and common and as such have no conservation importance from a botanical point of view. The exception to this is the species rich hedgerow which will be retained along the western boundary.
- 4.37 In line with local and national guidance, ecological enhancement measures are proposed, including a swift box, bat brick, and 5 different types of bird boxes to be installed around the site.
- 4.38 An Arboricultural Implications Assessment and Method Statement has been prepared by 'eco-urban' ltd. In summary, subject to the implementation of the identified tree protection measures, the proposed development is considered arboriculturally acceptable and there will be a relatively low risk of significant adverse impact on trees scheduled to be retained. The trees to be removed are small in size and as such their loss is unlikely to have any implications in the locality.
- 4.39 Landscaping is also proposed to the site, including new planting to the rear of the properties and a grass boundary edge to the site. Further detail is shown on drawing 4176-P-03.
- 4.40 Overall, the proposals maintain the species rich hedgerow that has been identified to the western boundary and incorporate an appropriate landscaping scheme as well as a variety of enhancement measures.

HIGHWAYS & PARKING

- 4.35 Policy SLE4 of the Local Plan *'Improved Transport and Connections'* requires all new development (where reasonable to do so) to facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. Encouragement will be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion. Development which is not suitable for the roads that serve it and which have a severe impact will not be supported.
- 4.36 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF sets out how development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 4.36.1 The Local Highway Authority was consulted at pre-application stage and their response was as follows:
"The access arrangements, presumably 3 dropped kerbs will need to adhere to 'Design Manual for Roads and Bridges' (DRMB) standards of visibility. Manual for Streets visibility splays do not apply here given the

road is 40mph. It may be preferable for the two dwellings that have their own access direct to the Highway to be accessed from the rear and a section 278 is applies for a single access point to the Highway”.

- 4.37 Oxfordshire County Council confirmed they would be unlikely to have an objection in principle to the proposals, subject to the above comments being taken into consideration. The proposals have therefore been amended to provide one vehicular access point from the B4100 (Aunt Em’s Lane).
- 4.38 The County Council’s Parking Standards for new residential development require a maximum of 2 allocated spaces per dwelling (for 2+ beds). In total, 6 driveway parking spaces are proposed and when garage space is taken into consideration, there are 11 spaces.
- 4.39 Each dwelling will benefit from a garage capable of accommodating both cars and bicycle storage.
- 4.40 Overall, the proposals are in accordance with Policy SLE4 and have been amended since pre-application stage to positively address the concerns raised by the Local Highway Authority.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of x4 dwelling houses and associated garages, access and landscaping.
- 5.2 In accordance with S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the starting point for determining the application must be the policies of the adopted development plan.
- 5.3 The development proposals represent development in a sustainable location very close to Bicester. The site is visually contained and will not be of significant detriment to the adjoining open countryside.
- 5.4 The proposed development would represent sustainable development when taking into account the range of social, economic and environmental benefits in the short and long term. The development would provide short term economic benefits through employment during the construction period, whilst sustained benefits would occur through the contribution the new residents would make to the local economy into the future.
- 5.5 The development would provide social benefits in the form of 4 new dwellings for the housing market, and the contribution the new residents would bring to the local community.

5.6 From an environmental perspective, the proposals will lead to a net increase in biodiversity through the provision of various enhancement features and a detailed landscaping scheme.

5.7 As such, we commend the proposals to you.