

RESPONSE TO PLANNING APPLICATION 19/02948/F
Erection of ten residential dwellings off South Side, Steeple Aston

Thank you for consulting Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum (MCNPF) on this application. **Please see our comments in the right-hand column below**, which state our current view in relation to points raised in our objection to the previous application (shown in the left-hand column).

Previous comments on non-compliance with MCNP policies	Comments on revised application 19/02948/F
<p>Policy PD1 criterion d) - <i>The development should conserve and, where possible, enhance the special interest, character and appearance of the conservation areas and the significance of other heritage assets (see Appendix K: Heritage and Character Assessment).</i></p>	<p>We are now satisfied that significant changes have been made to the appearance of the scheme, and that it could potentially enhance the village entrance.</p>
<p>Policy PD4 The applicants have not supplied a Heritage Impact Assessment as required, and should be asked to do so in order to comply with this policy, and to demonstrate that the benefits of the scheme outweigh any harm to the Conservation Area. In particular, it is noted that the street scene drawing P224.SS.01E fails to show the existing buildings immediately adjacent to the proposed development at each end of the site; it is therefore difficult to assess the impact of the scheme in its proper context. A revised drawing should be requested.</p> <p>MCNP Forum is also concerned that the applicant makes no reference to the appearance and impact of the proposed development as seen from the public footpath across the fields to Hopcrofts Holt, or whether it will be seen from the A4260, especially in winter. The impact on these views could have a harmful effect on the setting of the Conservation Area. Visibility of the new houses from the A4260 could be harmful to the rural character of the village, which is currently not visible from that road.</p>	<p>The applicants have still not supplied a Heritage Impact Assessment.</p> <p>However, three photomontages are now supplied, which show the extent to which the scheme will be seen from different viewpoints. These appear to show an acceptable situation, particularly with regard to the view across fields from the South, and in respect of the impact of the scheme as the new gateway to the village.</p>

Policy PD5

confirms that development should respond *“to the distinctive character of the settlement and reflects the guidelines and principles set out within the Heritage and Character Assessment (see Appendix K).*

In particular:

The separation of the semi-detached pair of 2-bedroom dwellings (in an earlier scheme) into two dwellings attached by their garages has resulted in elevations of unacceptable proportions, a form alien to the village, and usually only found in some modern housing estates where design quality is largely absent (see images below). This error, which applies also to the adjacent 3-bed house, does not support the applicants’ view that the scheme is “of the highest architectural quality”, nor does it meet the similar requirements of policy PD5.

There appear to be three different colours of roofing materials proposed. Red tiles are not characteristic of the village. Grey slate is almost universal.

Limestone external walls appear to be limited to the front elevations. The view of the development from the public footpath to the rear of the site will be of brick facades, which may be considered to be inappropriate on the edge of the Conservation Area.

The design uses a number of building forms that are not represented in the village. For example, the use of hipped roofs on the garages (see image below).

The deliberate use of several different building forms within this relatively small scheme, and the proposed changes of roof colour, are familiar devices deployed by many developers to provide variety across the scheme and to provide each house with its own individual character. While these may play a role in selling the houses, they are not consistent with the stated aim of “careful reference and respect for the existing village context.” The most frequently found building form in the village is that of the small villa, shown in the photo

The scheme has been redesigned so that the semi-detached dwellings are now paired in a more conventional manner.

The remaining half-pair (plot 10) still jars as an alien form, and will mar the otherwise much-improved street scene. This pair of dwellings also noticeably lacks the chimney that has been added to the other houses: it would be better if it too were to be enhanced in this way.

Grey slate has been adopted throughout.

Brick has been replaced by stone throughout.

The scheme is much-improved in this respect.

The scheme has been redesigned in a more consistent style suitable for its location. It is, however, unfortunate that the application documents refer to Coneygar Fields as one of the examples that have been drawn upon. MCNP Forum does not consider that scheme to be a design exemplar.

<p>below. There are many examples of these, with some variations of detail, in the village. A more thoughtful approach would therefore, in MCNP Forum’s opinion, be based on a more limited and consistent use of building form and materials, reducing the rather “forced variety” of the current proposal. A good example is the Shepherds Hill scheme on Fenway, built in 2000 (shown below).</p> <p>We consider that the application scheme might achieve the MCNP policy aim of <u>enhancing</u> the Conservation Area if it reflected the most characteristic materials and forms in the consistent manner we have discussed here.</p>	<p>The revised scheme has a better chance of achieving this aim than previous versions.</p>
<p>Policy PD5 Criterion a) covers landscape mitigation measures and a net gain in biodiversity. The applicants have proposed a “planted buffer strip” along two of the site boundaries. MCNP Forum suggests that in view of concerns already expressed regarding views of the site from the south and south-west, it would be beneficial in several respects if these “strips” were in fact to be deep multi-species hedges created along the entire length of the southern and eastern edges of the site, outside the boundaries of the residential gardens, and nurtured to ensure complete screening of the development within a few years.</p> <p>Criterion c) regarding a footpath and cycleway linkage to the rest of the village.</p>	<p>The application now includes considerable new work on landscape measures and biodiversity, which is considered to result in significant improvements to the scheme.</p> <p>The Safety Audit carried out by the applicants has resulted in further improved proposals, which are considered to be acceptable. The scheme should result in an improved level of safety by comparison with the present situation.</p>
<p>Revised planning guidance from MHCLG (July 2019) on Natural Environment <i>“An applicant may also propose measures to achieve biodiversity net gain through a unilateral undertaking. The work involved may, for example, involve creating new habitats, enhancing existing habitats, providing green roofs, green walls, street trees or sustainable drainage systems. Relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, such as incorporating ‘swift bricks’ and bat boxes in developments and providing safe</i></p>	<p>The reports included in the revised application address the issues of habitat and species retention and enhancement. Numerous suggestions made in the NHCLG guidance have been adopted by the applicants.</p>

<p><i>routes for hedgehogs between different areas of habitat....Care needs to be taken to ensure that any benefits promised will lead to genuine and demonstrable gains for biodiversity. Discussions with local wildlife organisations can help to identify appropriate solutions....."</i></p> <p>(Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 8-023-20190721). MCNP policy PD5 also promotes (in its rationale section 3.2.30): <i>"New buildings should wherever possible incorporate special bricks or boxes designed for swifts....."</i>.</p> <p>MCNP Forum would like Rectory Homes to consult with Wild Oxfordshire or other local wildlife bodies and to see the resulting proposals for responding to the MHCLG guidance.</p>	
<p>Policy PH1</p> <p>The scheme has been altered since an earlier application (18/01482/F) to which we objected. The current application now proposes three 4-bedroom, five 3-bedroom, and two 2-bedroom dwellings. The proposed mix would offer more affordable homes to local people, which is a key objective of the neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>We are slightly concerned to note that, by comparison with the other dwellings, the two 2-bedroom dwellings have very tightly planned internal layouts on a small footprint. There is very limited storage space and no utility room, for example. MCNP Forum considers that, being market housing, they would be more successful if they had rather more generous space standards, which would appeal to local people downsizing, but who are used to rather more generous room sizes.</p>	<p>It appears that the applicants have had a late change of mind regarding housing mix. While all the documents submitted refer to 4No. four-bedroom houses, the drawings for houses on plots 1 and 3 show that these are both now intended to be 5- bedroom houses. Whilst this may not be of major significance in complying with policy PH1 (which refers to "4 or more" bedrooms), it is disappointing in that it is a reversal of the applicant's previous acceptance of the spirit of the policy.</p> <p>The floor plans of the 2-bedroom dwellings have not been enhanced, and they still have no utility rooms.</p>
<p>Policy PH3</p> <p>The applicants make no mention in their Design and Access Statement of which standard in Part M(4) they intend to apply to this scheme. In MCNP Forum's view, in a development of 10 market homes, a number of them should be designed to the highest standards of accessibility - M4(3), while the remainder should be to M4(2). This is to reflect the likely demand for these new homes from an older generation of local people who are keen to downsize, but who in later life may have issues</p>	<p>There is still no mention of accessible standards in the design of the dwellings. MCNP Forum considers that, as previously requested, this policy should be enforced. For example, in at least some of the dwellings there should be the possibility of a ground floor room being adapted to become a bedroom. The applicants should be required to demonstrate that this is feasible.</p>

<p>with mobility. We would like CDC to apply a condition, relating to this MCNP policy, to any approval.</p>	
<p>Additional points: The close proximity of the 3-bed dwelling on plot 1 to the industrial use adjacent, being a car maintenance workshop, with planning approval for a large extension.</p> <p>the absence of any communal green space or play area for small children on the site; the popular play and recreational facilities adjacent to the Village Hall in Fir Lane are a considerable distance from the application site, and probably too far for parents and young children to walk. CDC policy BSC11 requires that developments of 10 dwellings or more must provide a Local Area for Play to the defined standards.</p> <p>a modest contribution to climate change concerns would be the inclusion of electric car charging points, well-designed photovoltaic panels on the south-facing roof slopes of each dwelling (which should be largely unseen from the road), and low carbon heating systems. MCNP Forum would like to see Rectory Homes providing an exemplar scheme in this regard.</p>	<p>The applicants have now addressed this potential issue with a noise barrier.</p> <p>MCNP Forum accepts that it is a reasonable alternative for a S.106 agreement to make a financial contribution towards improving the existing play facilities in the village. It is understood that the Parish Council is actively considering what contributions to village amenities would be appropriate.</p> <p>Car charging cables are now to be included. There is no mention of other climate change-related measures.</p>

SUMMARY

MCNP Forum is pleased that the applicants have made significant changes to respond to earlier comments made by us and others.

It is disappointing that our Policy PH3 has been ignored, and that the spirit of compliance with Policy PH1 has now been watered-down.

However, on balance, the application is now SUPPORTED.

MCNP Forum