

MADDOX PLANNING

BICESTER GATEWAY: RETAIL SEQUENTIAL TEST

This statement is made in relation to the current application at Bicester Gateway 1B (ref: 20/00293/OUT) and undertakes a retail sequential test for the café element. This assessment relates to up to 177 sqm of proposed café space (Use Class A3) and is proportional on the basis of a small amount of floor space in the overall context of the proposal.

The description of development is:

Outline application (Phase 1B) including access (all other matters reserved) for approximately 4,413 sqm B1 office space (47,502 sqft) GIA, approximately 273 residential units (Use Class C3) including ancillary gym, approximately 177 sqm GIA of café space (Use Class A3), with an ancillary, mixed use co-working hub (794 sqm/ 8,550 sqft GIA), multi-storey car park, multi-use games area (MUGA), amenity space, associated infrastructure, parking and marketing boards

Policy and guidance

The NPPF states in paragraph 86 that where main town centre uses are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan, a sequential test must be undertaken. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.

The NPPG states that the application of the test will need to be proportionate and appropriate for the given proposal. Where appropriate, the potential suitability of alternative sites will need to be discussed between the developer and local planning authority at the earliest opportunity (Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 2b-011-20190722).

The NPPG also states that use of the sequential test should recognise that certain main town centre uses have particular market and locational requirements which mean that they may only be accommodated in specific locations. Robust justification will need to be provided where this is the case, and land ownership does not provide such a justification (Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 2b-012-20190722).

The adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (incorporating Policy Bicester 13 re-adopted on 19 December 2016) reiterates the requirement for undertaking a sequential test in Policy SLE2. It adds that the Council will consider if the proposals satisfy the sequential test and if they are likely to have a significant adverse impact on one or more of the factors in the NPPF.

Sequential test

The proposal to incorporate up to 177 sqm of café space in the overall proposal is directly linked to the concept of the knowledge hub being promoted as part of this application. This is intended to support the function of the knowledge economy sought in this location by Bicester Policy 10. This is the basis from which this sequential assessment is made.

In consideration of whether there are other sites available that are, in policy terms, more central sites, regard must be had as to whether a similar space in a different location would support the knowledge economy proposal at Bicester Gateway. Clearly, the best way for any café space to support the knowledge economy sought by Bicester Policy 10 is to be located on land associated with the policy designation. This also offers the most advantages from a sustainable accessibility and community-building point of view - material consideration in the planning balance.

In consideration of whether there is flexibility in the format and scale of the proposal that would allow it to be accommodated on another more centrally located site, again, the key consideration is how this use might best support the knowledge economy vision at Bicester Policy 10. In this regard, flexibility in scale and format is not a relevant consideration.

In applying guidance in the NPPG, we demonstrate that there are important particular market and locational requirements which mean that this use may only be accommodated in the proposed location in order to support the policy requirements of Bicester Policy 10 and the knowledge economy.

Conclusion

This sequential assessment applies national and local guidance in its application for a limited amount of café space (Use Class A3) to come forward in support of the knowledge hub and knowledge economy proposals at the site.

In this instance, there are important particular market and locational requirements which mean that this use may only be accommodated in the specific location proposed in relation to Bicester Policy 10 as part of the current application. Furthermore, the proposal is unlikely to have a significant adverse impact on one or more of the factors in the NPPF.

Since there are no alternative locations that fulfil these specific criteria, the sequential test is passed, and the retail element is compliant with national and local planning policy. Similar principles have been upheld for the hotel on Phase 1A and the David Lloyd Leisure on Phase 2.
