

20/01127/F

## **Development within the setting of a conservation area**

### **Application Site**

Hatch End Old Poultry Farm, Steeple Aston Road, Middle Aston, Bicester.

### **Understanding the heritage assets affected**

The site is in a rural location to the north of the village of Steeple Aston between Steeple Aston and Middle Aston. The site is outside the Steeple Aston conservation area but the northern boundary of the conservation area along Steeple Aston Road comes almost to the edge of the site. To the north is Middle Aston Park, this park associated with Middle Aston House is on the local (Oxfordshire) register of parks and gardens. The site is considered to be within the setting of the conservation area.

### **Significance**

The rural approaches to the Steeple Aston conservation area have been identified as contributing to its character and appearance. As a result the significance of the application site lies in its position and the contribution it makes to the setting of the Conservation Area.

### **Proposals**

Demolition of existing buildings. Erection of replacement business units, ancillary hub and associated external works.

### **Appraisal of issues**

The existing buildings have no historic merit, but they largely have an agricultural character and therefore are relatively inconspicuous within the countryside. There are no concerns with regards to the removal of these buildings, but the replacements need to respond to the area in a complementary way.

The proposed new buildings although on a similar footprint to the existing buildings, because of their height which is partly due to the land levels and their design will appear larger. The link between the buildings has the effect of mimicking a much larger square building particularly when viewed from the side. Consequently it is considered that the buildings will be more dominant than the existing and will therefore affect the approach to Steeple Aston and the entrance to the conservation area.

The materials proposed and the landscaping treatment are considered to result in a commercial character for the 'business park' that detracts from the rural nature of the site. It is accepted that timber cladding is proposed which is used on the existing buildings and metal cladding is also found on agricultural buildings; but the cumulative impact of the design and character of the proposed buildings is considered to result in a development that degrades the rural character of this location. Furthermore the proposals have the potential to further impact on the setting of Middle Aston Park which is to the north.

Although there are concerns regarding the proposed development overall the redevelopment of the site is supported, and it is acknowledged that there may be consequential public benefits. It is also considered that the scheme could be amended to address the concerns raised. The Conservation Team would welcome further involvement to find a solution that is acceptable to all.

### **Level of harm**

The development in its current form is considered to result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area through development within its setting. The NPPF paragraph 196 states that this harm should be weighed against the public benefit.

### **Policies and Guidance**

The relevant local and national policies are as follows:

#### Cherwell District Council Local Plan Policy ESD15

This policy states that new development proposals should: Conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated 'heritage assets' including buildings, features, archaeology, conservation areas and their settings,

and ensure new development is sensitively sited and integrated, furthermore development should respect the traditional pattern of the form, scale and massing of buildings. The development is not considered to, sustain or enhance the setting of the Conservation area and therefore does not comply with policy ESD15.

#### NPPF – Chapter 16

Paragraph 193 requires that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

Paragraph 194 outlines that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 196 requires that where development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

#### Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 72 of the Act requires that 'with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

#### Historic England Advice – The Setting of Heritage Assets

Historic England Advice – The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning note 3, highlights the importance of the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced and how this contributes to its significance.

#### **Recommendation**

There are concerns regarding the impact on the setting of the Steeple Aston conservation area as a result of the proposals.

#### **Officer / Date**

Emma Harrison

17/07/2020