

Planning application 20/01933/F Comment from Wigginton Parish Council

Wigginton Parish lies in National Landscape Character Area 107 Cotswolds.

This proposal will impact on the openness and aesthetic of the countryside surrounding the Wigginton Conservation Area. The Appraisal in August 2017 states “views into, out of and within the Conservation Area are essential to the special quality of the place. Their protection and enhancement will be an important consideration in the determination of any proposed development.” The view to the west of the village, which provides expansive views onto open countryside is specifically identified as “a key component in the character of the conservation area”. The Parish Council questions whether the proposal meets the Cherwell Local Plan Policy C28/ C30.

This application proposes exploiting the gaps in the boundary of the property to open up views to the north, south, east and west to obtain long and medium distant views. The documents acknowledge that ash die back is present on and round the site and is going to have a significant impact on this landscape. What impact this will be is of course unknown but it is unwise to dismiss concerns about the visual impact from the north and east which should be safeguarded under Cherwell Policy ESD 13 (Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement).

The CDC Landscape Architect has not visited the site which is disappointing because the proposal uses a net gain in biodiversity and an increase in the ecological value of the woodland, pond and meadow as a benefit and starting point for a Para 79 scheme which does not seem appropriate. Developing the site will require substantial clearance to accommodate re-shaping the pond, the new buildings, hard-standing, access and a contractors' compound. Further buildings will be required to store garden tools and machinery for maintenance of the site and wetland. Replanting of the woodland will be on a reduced area, confined mainly to the perimeter of the site, yet is claimed to be a benefit. A Para 79 development should contribute to the setting but this has little relationship to the wider landscape; the scheme with proposals to reduce its visibility seeks to avoid a strong relationship with its surroundings and cannot be said to be landscape-led.

It is proposed to lay the hedge to the south of the buildings to open up the view which overlooks the Public Right of Way. This footpath is used by many villagers, locals and visitors who enjoy the tranquillity so rare today and the unspoilt nature of the valley which should be protected under Cherwell Policy ESD 13. It is important this is preserved for future generations. The buildings will be visible from the footpath but this is dismissed as being of 'No significance' and 'Neutral' to users; the Parish Council disagrees.

Wigginton and the surrounding countryside is considered to be an area of “Dark Sky”, an intrinsically dark landscape valuable for nature conservation. There is already too much light pollution from new houses on the east side of the village. Here in a large development with three separate entrances and linking pathways over and around water the necessary lighting is likely to be conspicuous. Government guidelines draw attention to the need to avoid light pollution particularly near water which can affect behaviour of protected species eg bats and the deer which use the pond during the summer when other natural sources have dried up. The disruption and destruction of this tranquil oasis during construction and the presence of three households subsequently could lead to the deterioration of this habitat.

The Parish Council was broadly supportive of the conversion of the existing barn (18/00063/Q56) considering it to be the optimal viable use of a valuable piece of rural heritage. Other stone barns in the parish have been made into modern dwellings usually within the existing footprint. The scale and extent of this development will diminish the openness, leave the barn subservient to the new building and detract from the rural heritage of the site. The Parish Council questions whether the proposal satisfies the Cherwell Local Plan Policy C28/ C30.

In 2018 the Parish Council did comment on the awkward entrance onto the road and Highways set out conditions at that time. The new proposals will entail much more heavy traffic during construction and with three households in the long term there would be a significant increase in the number of cars using this narrow entrance. The Parish Council is surprised Highways have not asked for further alterations.

According to the National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2019) a Para79 house is a single dwelling which is permitted in an isolated position. This application is clearly for three households with three large kitchens, three front doors and three separate terraces for outdoor seating. The measurement from the lake front to the back of the second house is over 80 metres and the height is up to 9 metres. They are referred to as the ‘three volumes’ in one supporting document, ‘three building elements’ in another. Two households are linked and the third is completely separate. They could simply be sold on as three separate dwellings.

A Para 79 house should raise the standard of design and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the area. There are several new houses in the immediate vicinity which fulfil these criteria but this is not one of them. Cherwell Policy ESD 16 demands respect for the area’s context. No one can doubt that ironstone buildings built in locally quarried Hornton stone are an integral part of this landscape and red cedar cladding is alien.

The application’s Landscape Evaluation document asserts there will be no significant impact on the landscape character and it will be an opportunity to conserve an historic environment, protect the expansive views and the river meadowlands. The Parish Council

demurs and considers the scale and extent of the proposed development will have a detrimental effect on the timeless beauty of the valley.

Amongst the copious detailed plans there is scant regard for how the provision of domestic services might affect the local environment. Despite the innovative proposal for heating only fleeting mention is made of the need to be attached to the National Grid and pylons are indicated in a very small diagram on p39 of the Heating Power & Ventilation Strategy. In the Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy reference is made to the disposal of foul water from three households as 'a package treatment works in a suitable location' which 'might be a discharge to the watercourse'. We are not told where this could be sited but it needs to be 'accessible by tanker' though discharge might be to 'a water course which does not run dry or to a partial drainage field'. This is a Drinking Water Safeguarded Zone.
(General Binding Rules)

The architect says we must consider this application as a holistic approach then completely ignores the provision of domestic water, provides a passing comment on the need to join the National Grid and gives no information about the disposal of foul water other than needing a treatment plant somewhere. This is disingenuous to say the least.

16 September 2020