



CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

**PLANNING, DESIGN, ACCESS AND HERITAGE
STATEMENT incorporating Statement of
Community Involvement**

**Demolition of existing buildings. Construction of
replacement business units and associated
external works. (Resubmission)**

**Hatch End Industrial Estate, Fir Lane, Middle Aston,
Bicester OX25 5QL**

March 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This application is submitted following the withdrawal of planning application reference 20/01127/F which proposed 'Demolition of existing buildings. Erection of replacement business units, ancillary hub and associated external works.' The scheme has been amended since that time in order to address matters that were raised during the course of that application.
- The site is an existing employment site which is currently vacant and thus not contributing to the vitality and viability of the North Oxfordshire economy.
- The proposal seeks to replace the existing 2,246m² of commercial floorspace and replace it with 2,215m² of commercial floorspace. Thus, the scheme is of a similar scale when compared to the existing and much reduced from the previous scheme.
- The design and scale of the buildings has been revised to address comments that were made regarding the height of the buildings and their impact on the character and appearance of the area. The proposed buildings will be single storey with heights ranging between 4.1m and 5.5m compared with 6.5m for the previous scheme.
- Oxfordshire County Council as highways authority raised no objection to the previous scheme and the supporting highways technical information now submitted shows that the current scheme will have reduced highways impacts.
- The submitted marketing report confirms that, despite the pandemic, there is a demand for commercial accommodation of this type in North Oxfordshire.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany the planning application by Middle Aston Limited for demolition of existing buildings, construction of replacement business units and associated external works at Hatch End Old Poultry Farm, Middle Aston. In addition to this Planning, Design, Access and Heritage Statement, which incorporates the Statement of Community Involvement, the application comprises the following:

10949 PL-001 Existing Site Plan and Location Plan
 10949 PL-002 Existing Site and Topographic Survey
 10949 PL-003 Existing Ground Floor Plan
 10949 PL-004 Existing Building Plans 1
 10949 PL-005 Existing Building Plans 2
 10949 PL-006 Existing Site Sections
 139990_P101 A Proposed Site Plan
 139990_P102 A Proposed Site Plan – Overall
 139990_P103 Site Sections 1
 139990_P104 Site Sections 2
 139990_P105 Proposed Site Elevations (East)
 139990_P106 Unit 1 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P107 Unit 2 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P108 Unit 3 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P109 Unit 4 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P110 Unit 5 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P111 Unit 6 Plan and Elevations
 139990_P112 Hub Plan and Elevations
 139990_P113 Visual Images
 139990_P114 Proposed Landscape Plan
 Transport Statement, Travel Plan and CTMP by Mode
 Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Root Protection Areas Plan, Theoretical Shading Plan, Tree Crowns Plan and Tree Retention and Protection Plan by BJ Unwin Forestry Consultancy
 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Windrush Ecology
 Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy by Link Engineering
 Energy Assessment Report by Silcock Dawson
 BREEAM Assessment Report by Silcock Dawson
 Marketing Summary Letter from Carter Jonas

- 1.2 With reference to the character of the application site and surrounding area, an appraisal of the prevailing planning policies and planning history and an assessment of the planning issues raised by the proposal, this statement sets out why the proposed development is deemed to be acceptable.
- 1.3 The application is submitted following withdrawal of a previous scheme on 27th July 2020 under application reference 20/01127/F for 'Demolition of existing buildings. Erection of replacement business units, ancillary hub and associated external works.' Prior to this pre-application discussions including a site meeting took place with the Council. Since the withdrawal of the previous application, further consultation has taken place with stakeholders within the local community and these have also helped inform the current scheme.

2.0 Site Description, Planning History and Proposals

- 2.1 Hatch End Business Park is located to the western side of Fir Lane, between Middle Aston and Steeple Aston. To the north of the site is a new dwelling, to the west a further group of commercial buildings in separate ownership and to the south a further commercial building and then the playing field for Dr Radcliffe's Primary School, separated from the site by a public footpath.



- 2.2 The site consists of a group of former poultry buildings which have been converted to provide rural business units. They are fairly low range and sited in the northern part of the site. The eastern boundary to the road is marked by a line of trees, the western part of the site rises and is used for outside storage and parking associated with the units. There is a scout hut store building in the north western corner of the group of buildings.
- 2.3 The site is not the subject of any specific designation, apart from being situated in the countryside. The trees in the north western corner of the site, that continue the avenue leading south from Middle Aston House, are the subject of a tree preservation order.

- 2.4 The application site is not set within an area at risk of flooding.
- 2.5 There is a public footpath (364/5) to the southern boundary of the site which heads west towards Steeple Aston as shown on the following extract from the Oxfordshire Definitive Footpath Map by the black dashed line.



- 2.6 Although the buildings on the site are not listed nor within a conservation area, the site is adjacent to the Steeple Aston Conservation Area and there are two Grade II listed buildings within the grounds of Middle Aston House which is to the north of the site. Middle Aston House Park and Garden is a locally registered heritage asset.



- 2.7 The site was originally the subject of an application for a change of use of the buildings in 1997, to a variety of B1, B2 and B8 uses. The buildings have individually been the subject of a number of different applications over the subsequent years – all still remaining though in the mix of business uses originally permitted.
- 2.8 In August 2019 under application reference 19/00185/PREAPP, a pre-application advice request was made to Cherwell District Council in relation to the site. This request sought advice on proposals to demolish the existing buildings and replacement with purpose built commercial units. The advice given highlighted a range of issues that should be considered during the course

of a subsequent application including the principle of development, impact on the character and appearance including heritage assets, highway safety, residential amenity, protected species and other matters including sustainability.

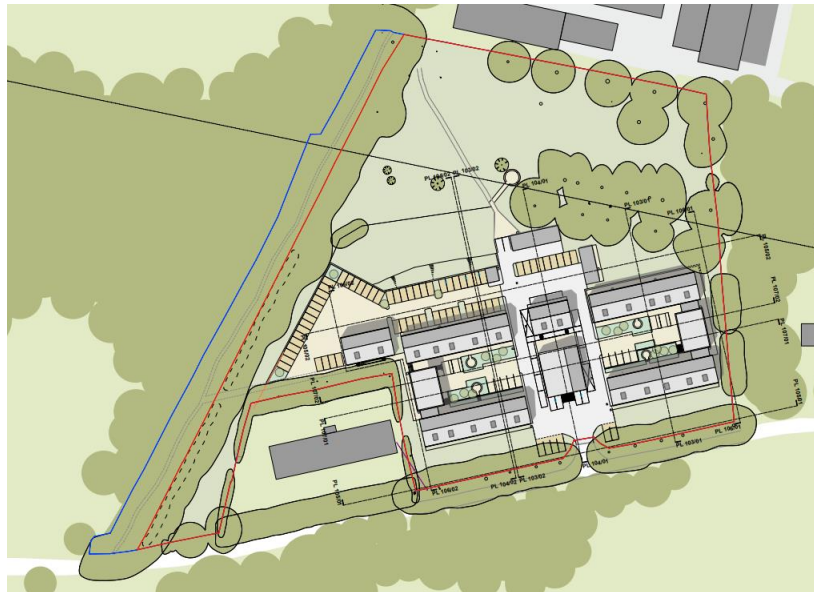
- 2.9 Following this pre-application advice, a planning application was submitted under application reference 20/01127/F for 'Demolition of existing buildings. Erection of replacement business units, ancillary hub and associated external works.'. That application proposed the demolition of all of the existing buildings, retaining and re-using existing floor slabs where possible, (totalling some 2297 sq.m of floorspace) and constructing purpose-built units with a total floor space of 3,198 sq.m of B1 business space, comprising 29 units and a central shared space. The development was to be served by 97 car parking spaces distributed around the site alongside 48 dedicated cycle parking spaces. The proposed buildings would have been between 1 and 2 storeys in height taking into account rising ground levels from the front to the rear of the site. It was intended that the accommodation would be split between 8 separate buildings and sub-divided into a range of unit types and sizes ranging from 66sqm to 199sqm.
- 2.10 That application was subsequently withdrawn to allow the applicants to consider the proposal in more detail and address the comments that were made by various parties during consideration of the application. The table below provides a summary of the consultation responses that were received.

CONSULTEE	COMMENTS
Recreation & Leisure Team	No comments
Arboricultural Officer	No objection subject to conditions
Policy Team	No comments
Conservation Officer	Concerns regarding the impact on the setting of the Steeple Aston conservation area as a result of the proposals.
Environmental Protection	No comments
Ecology	No objections subject to conditions
Rights of Way	No objection
Mid Cherwell NP Forum	Objection based on policy PC1: Local Employment
OCC Highways	No objection subject to conditions
OCC LLFA	Objection – further information required
OCC Archaeology	No identified constraints
Middle Aston PC	Objection – Support principle of redevelopment but objected to design, scale, highways matters.
Steeple Aston PC	Objection – Intensification of use, parking, construction access, vehicle movements, impact on neighbouring school, design and lack of consultation.
Thames Water	No comments
Thames Valley Police	Comments

- 2.11 Comments received from the public in relation to the previous application related to matters such as scale of development, traffic, highway safety, demand, accessibility, impact on character of the area and ecological impact. However, a number of respondents were supportive of the principle of redevelopment.
- 2.12 Middle Aston Parish Council had no in principle objection to redevelopment of the site but considered the scale and design to be inappropriate. They also expressed concern about increased traffic levels, lack of accessibility and the impact on the local highway network. They also commented on the design, height and density of the scheme. They were supportive of the Construction Traffic Management Plan routing proposals. Steeple Aston Parish Council raised matters such as conflict with planning policy SLE1, lack of justification for demand, lack of parking, highway safety and the design, height and scale of the buildings. They did not support the proposed construction traffic route through Steeple Aston.
- 2.13 The feedback received from James Kirkham, the Officer dealing with the application, confirmed that there was no in principle objection to the broad principle of redeveloping the site but that he had some concerns regarding specific elements of the scheme. This included the proposed flexible B1 use and the perceived extension of the commercial site into undeveloped surrounding land. He also expressed concerns about the height of the proposed buildings, when compared to the existing buildings, in terms of bulk and prominence which would result in a more built up and be out of context with the verdant and rural character of the area. Regarding the proposed hub building, it was commented that it was imposing and of an 'uncomfortable' scale. It was also considered that the materials and detailing were overly complex and urban in appearance.
- 2.14 Overall, it was considered that the 'form, height and detailing of the buildings would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the areas and setting of the Conservation Area and needs to be reconsidered to be more sensitive to the rural characteristics of the locality. The buildings should be restricted to single storey and be simpler and rural in their appearance.'
- 2.15 The current proposal has been formulated in consideration of the comments made by statutory consultees and local residents and has attempted to overcome the matters raised such that the scheme now being brought forward is considered to be of a more suitable scale, more in keeping with the character and appearance of the area and most significantly offers up a small reduction in floor area when compared to the existing development.

Proposal

- 2.16 The current scheme which is the subject of this application is brought forward in consideration of the comments that were received in relation to the previous scheme and attempts to address those concerns where required. The site plan drawing extracts below provide a comparison between the previous and current schemes.



Extract from the previously submitted Site Plan



Extract from the submitted Site Plan

- 2.17 This application proposes a scheme of 2,214.81 sq.m of Class E and B8 floorspace compared to the previous scheme of 3,198 sq.m and the existing floor area of 2,246.44 sq.m. This equates to a reduction of approximately 32 sq.m between the existing floorspace and that proposed in this scheme and a reduction of approximately 983 sq.m between this scheme and the previously proposed scheme.
- 2.18 This application proposes the demolition of all of the existing buildings, retaining and re-using existing floor slabs where possible and constructing purpose-built units with a total floor area of 2,214.81 sq.m of Class E and B8 commercial space. The development will be served by 79 car parking spaces distributed around the site alongside 34 dedicated cycle parking spaces. The proposed buildings will be single storey with heights ranging between 4.1m and 5.5m, compared to a maximum ridge height of approximately 6.5m for the previous scheme, depending upon the unit type taking into account rising ground levels

from the front to the rear of the site. The accommodation will be provided within 7 separate buildings located across the site and sub-divided into a range of unit types and sizes compared to 7 buildings currently.

- 2.19 Since the previous application was withdrawn, there have been changes to the Use Classes Order such that B class uses have been replaced by a wider Class E which also includes other commercial uses. The intention of this change is to provide more flexibility for commercial uses and thus this application seeks planning permission for flexible uses across the units including the types of uses that previously fell within B2 and B8 uses. Such an approach will help to provide full occupancy across the site without restricting particular users to particular units.
- 2.20 The application is accompanied by a comprehensive landscaping plan and a number of specialist reports to deal with technical matters including highways, trees, drainage, energy efficiency and sustainability.

3.0 Planning Policy

- 3.1 Under Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 there is a statutory obligation to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations can include Government guidance and any other matters relevant to the use and development of land.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019

- 3.2 Paragraph 2 of the NPPF states that planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of the development plan and is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 3.3 Paragraph 8 provides the three overarching objectives to achieving sustainable development namely economic, social and environmental.
- 3.4 Paragraph 10 confirms that at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In respect of decision-taking it states that this means:
- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; or
 - where there are no relevant development plan policies or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out of date, granting permission unless: – the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed ; or – any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

- 3.5 Section 9 of the NPPF sets out the ways in which sustainable transport can be promoted. Paragraph 109 confirms that 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.
- 3.6 Section 12 of the NPPF sets out the requirements for achieving well-designed places confirming that *'The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.'* Good design can create better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interested parties is also seen as an essential part of the planning process.
- 3.7 Paragraph 127 of the NPPF requires that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:
- *function well and add to the overall quality of an area over the lifetime of the development;*
 - *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
 - *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
 - *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
 - *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount of mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and;*
 - *create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.*
- 3.8 In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in the area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings (paragraph 131).
- 3.9 The NPPF states at Paragraph 189 that *"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should*

have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary”.

- 3.10 Annex 2 to the NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as *“The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral”*

Development Plan

- 3.11 S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that:
‘If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the Plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.
- 3.12 The Development Plan for the site comprises:
- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1
 - ‘Saved policies’ of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996
 - The ‘made’ Mid Cherwell Area Neighbourhood Plan

Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031

- 3.13 Policy SLE1: Employment Development supports employment development on existing employment sites and in the rural areas intensification of existing uses will be permitted subject to compliance with other policies in the Plan.
- 3.14 Policy SLE4: Improved Transport and Connections supports more sustainable locations for employment and housing growth.
- 3.15 Policy ESD1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change, sets out what measures, at both a strategic and site-specific level, will be expected on order to mitigate the impact of development within the District on climate change.
- 3.16 Policy ESD3: Sustainable Construction, states that all new residential development will be expected to incorporate sustainable design and technology to achieve zero carbon development. Policy ESD4: Decentralised Energy Systems encourages the provision of DH or CHP and requires a feasibility assessment to be accompany applications for non-domestic developments above 1000 sqm floorspace. Policy ESD5: Renewable Energy is supportive of the use of renewable and low carbon energy sources and requires applications for non-domestic development above 1000 sqm floorspace to be accompanied by a renewable energy feasibility assessment report.
- 3.17 Policy ESD6: Sustainable Flood Risk Management and Policy ESD7: Sustainable Drainage Systems seeks to reduce flood risk as a result of developments and set out the requirement to use SuDS to manage surface water run-off.

- 3.18 Policy ESD10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment, sets out the ways in which biodiversity and the natural environment will be protected and enhanced.
- 3.19 Policy ESD13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement, seeks to enhance the character and appearance of the landscape through restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscape features and new landscaping.
- 3.20 Policy ESD15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment, sets out criteria for new development.
- 3.21 Policy ESD17: Green Infrastructure seeks to maintain and enhance the District's green infrastructure network.
- 3.22 Policy Villages 1, categories Middle Aston as a category B village and Steeple Aston as a category A village. The parish boundary runs through the application site.

Cherwell Local Plan 1996

- 3.23 Policy EMP4 is a permissive policy supportive of employment generating development subject to a number of criteria including *'(a) within an existing acceptable employment site, including redevelopment.'*
- 3.24 Policy TR7 is not supportive of development that would regularly attract large commercial vehicles or large numbers of cars onto unsuitable minor roads. Policy TR10 deals with proposals involving heavy goods vehicle movements on rural roads and the impact on the amenity of residential areas or villages.
- 3.25 Policies C8 restricts sporadic developments in the open countryside. Policy C15 seeks to prevent the coalescence of settlements.
- 3.26 Policy C28 aiming to control new development seeing high standards of layout, design and external appearance.

Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan 2019

- 3.27 Policy PD4: Protection of Important Views and Vista, requires development proposals to demonstrate sensitivity to identified important views and vistas and consider the impact of development on the character and appearance of conservation areas.
- 3.28 Policy PD5: Building and Site Design, requires a high standard of development which responds to the site and surroundings subject to a number of criteria including biodiversity and use of traditional materials.
- 3.29 Policy PD6: Light Pollution, seeks to minimise the risk of light spillage.

- 3.30 Policy PC1: Local Employment, encourages the retention of commercial premises that provide local employment.

Statement of Community Involvement

- 3.31 Paragraph 40 of the NPPF advises that applicants should be encouraged to 'engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.'
- 3.32 The Council's Statement of Community Involvement 2016 sets out who Cherwell District Council will engage with and aims to encourage community and stakeholder involvement and accords with the guidance in the NPPF.
- 3.33 The applicant has engaged with the Council through the pre-application advice request process which suggested that discussions should be undertaken with Steeple Aston and Middle Aston Parish Council.
- 3.34 The applicant has, from an early stage, involved the community in the redevelopment project through liaison with both Middle Aston and Steeple Aston Parish Councils.
- 3.35 The previous scheme was discussed with Middle Aston and Steeple Aston Parish Councils prior to submission of a formal planning application. Since withdrawal of the previous planning application, consultation has continued with both Parish Councils despite the difficulties caused by Covid.
- 3.36 In August 2018, both Parish Councils and Dr Radcliffe's CofE Primary School were that the previous application had been withdrawn and of the intention to work up a revised scheme. In November 2018, the revised scheme was provided to these bodies with the changes highlighted as being:
- Single storey units;
 - Removal of the link building and replacement with additional planting;
 - Reduction in the heights of the buildings;
 - Reduction in floor area;
 - Use of more traditional materials;
 - Enhanced landscaping;
- 3.37 Generally, the changes were welcomed but there were still some concerns regarding highways matters and ecology. These matters are considered later in this Statement.

4.0 Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

- 4.1 The site is an existing employment site where in planning policy terms continued use is supported subject to consideration of other matters including amenity impact, highways impact. Policy SLE1 of the Local Plan Part 1 states, inter alia that:

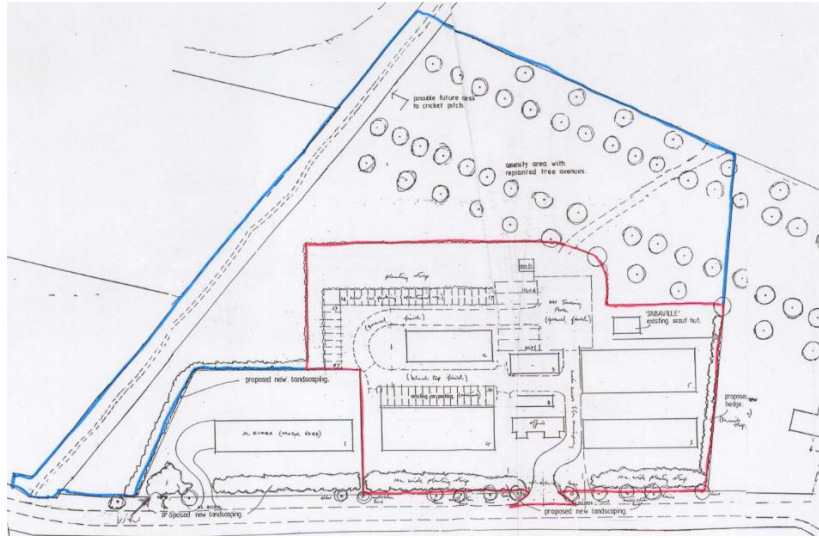
‘Employment development will be focused on existing employment sites. On existing operational or vacant employment sites at Banbury, Bicester, Kidlington and in the rural areas employment development, including intensification, will be permitted subject to compliance with other policies in the Plan and other material considerations.....Unless exceptional circumstances are demonstrated, employment development in the rural areas should be located within or on the edge of those villages in Category A (See Policy Villages 1). ‘

- 4.2 Policy PC1 of the made Neighbourhood Plan is supportive of continued commercial use of premises providing local employment with the neighbourhood plan area or otherwise benefiting the local economy where they:

- a) *Provide diverse employment opportunities for people living in the neighbourhood area or otherwise benefit the local economy, or enhance agricultural production.*
- b) *do not have an adverse affect on the surrounding built, natural or historic environment that is not clearly outweighed by the economic benefits of the development.*
- c) *are unlikely to generate a volume of goods traffic that would have a significantly harmful effect on road safety or congestion or cause unacceptable noise and disturbance for local residents or to the rural environment and would not adversely affect on-street residential parking.*

- 4.3 Taking these criteria in turn, the proposed development would provide diverse employment opportunities for the local population due to the proposed flexible use of the units and varying unit sizes. The scheme has been re-designed to ensure that it does not have an adverse impact upon its surroundings or the natural and historic environment. Finally, there were no objections to the previous scheme on highways matters including traffic and parking. The current scheme proposes a reduced floor area and thus it is assumed that it will also be acceptable in highways terms. There is therefore no conflict with policy PC1 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

- 4.4 The pre-application advice confirmed that Officers are supportive of the broad principle of redeveloping the site and thus there are not considered to be any in principle objections to the proposed scheme subject to design and technical details. It was indicated that the proposed buildings should not go beyond the extent of the commercial site as was agreed as part of the 1997 planning consent for change of use of the buildings for B1, B2 and B8 purposes under application reference 97/01419/F. The plan extracts below show that the proposed scheme does not extend the site area when compared to the current situation.



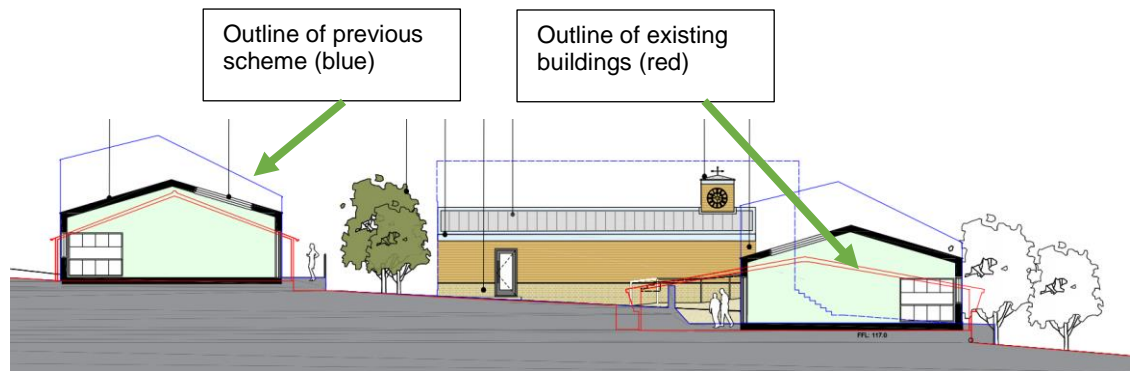
Extract from the 1997 Site Plan



Extract from the submitted Site Plan

Design and Access

- 4.5 The scheme has been designed to reflect the existing layout of buildings with a central hub building which will act as a focal point for visitors to the site and provide a shared space available for use by all occupants of the site. Landscaped courtyards between buildings will provide an attractive setting for the buildings. The buildings will be served by vehicle and bicycle parking and good pedestrian access. The units are now designed as single storey units with flexibility in terms of internal fit out. Some of the units (Block 1) will have larger roller shutter type doors to provide full flexibility for incoming tenants. The height and distribution of units across the site addresses the concerns raised regarding these matters during the course of the previous application with the heights of the building reduced so that they are closer in height to the existing buildings. The drawing extract below provides a comparison of the heights of the building in the previous scheme and the current scheme.



- 4.6 The fenestration detailing has been carefully considered to ensure that it is more in keeping with the agricultural type building design. It is intended to use a simple palette of materials which have been carefully selected to fit with the location of the site and style of buildings.
- 4.7 The units will have private access through personal / pedestrian doors with thresholds that provide level access with secondary escape doors to the rear of the units. The hub building will be accessed by steps at the front of the building with a secondary ramped access to the side of the building. Disabled parking will be provided to the front of the hub building, as well as spaces provided to serve the individual units. Main circulation routes will be around the centre of the site linking with the parking area to the rear of the site. The site slopes from east to west so where required ramped access with appropriate handrails and/or steps will be provided.
- 4.8 The units will be of steel frame construction clad in timber on the frontages with a stone cladding plinth and stone quoins to the corners. The roofs will be slate coloured roof sheets. Retaining walls around the site will be rendered in a light stone colour finish. Internal site access roads will be laid to light coloured hoggins to retain a low key, rural appearance.
- 4.9 Refuse storage has been provided at the front of the site within a dedicated refuse storage building which will be easily accessible for tenants and collection teams.
- 4.10 In relation to site security and the design of buildings, outside of 'normal' working hours, it will be possible to secure the site by providing a gate at the site entrance. The position of the refuse store at the front of the site also provides a level of natural surveillance from people passing and entering and exiting the site which will make it less vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. Lighting can also be designed to aid security and it is likely that each occupant will also have its own security measures in place too.

Heritage Impact and Impact on the Character of the Area

- 4.11 Whilst the buildings within the site are not on the listed buildings register, the site abuts the Steeple Aston Conservation Area and is close to Middle Aston House, where the gardens and parkland surrounding it are locally listed.

- 4.12 The Steeple Aston Conservation Area appraisal identifies the part of the conservation area closest to the application site as a 'peripheral area'. Peripheral areas are described as 'areas set at the extreme edges of the historic core and have a less formal feel to them when compared with the traditional streets. Despite being separated, these entrances to the village are similar in their low-key rural approaches to the historic areas.'
- 4.13 The existing buildings are in poor condition so the proposed scheme provides the opportunity to improve the appearance of the site and have a positive impact on the 'peripheral area'. The scheme will create a high-quality entrance to Steeple Aston village but through sensitive design of a low-density scheme the proposals will maintain the rural, low-key approach to the village. The buildings have been positioned to respect the existing envelope of development in order to ensure that the proposals do not result in coalescence of settlements maintaining the existing undeveloped gap between Middle Aston and Steeple Aston.
- 4.14 The proposed scheme would not impact the key characteristics of Middle Aston as identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. The proposed buildings would remain in the currently developed area and away from important trees to the east and south of the site which make a significant contribution to the character of the area. In addition, proposed landscaping has been designed to ensure that it does not compete with these important features.
- 4.15 The Conservation Officer confirmed in consideration of the previous scheme that, *'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'* and concluding that *'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.'*
- 4.16 The Conservation Officer also stated that due to the heights and design of the buildings that they would appear more dominant and thus affect the approach to the buildings have been designed to take advantage of Steeple Aston and the entrance to the Conservation Area. In the latest scheme, the heights of the buildings have been reduced to mirror more closely the existing buildings and thus there will be an acceptable relationship with the conservation area ensuring that the low-key character of the site will be retained.
- 4.17 The Conservation Officer also expressed concerns regarding the choice of materials. The design of the buildings in the current scheme is such that they will have a gentle, more rural feel provided by a mix of materials to include local stone, timber and metal cladding and metal sheet roofing. Externally, the site will be sensitively landscaped with planted areas to help soften the development with planted courtyard areas between the buildings. Parking at the front of the site will be screened by existing planting along the boundary which will be

managed as required. This will ensure an attractive working environment is provided and will make a positive contribution to the appearance of the site.

- 4.18 Overall, it is considered that the proposed development will enhance the character and appearance of the area resulting in a positive impact on the adjacent conservation area. However, should it be concluded that the development will result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area due to the impact on the setting of the conservation area, there are public benefits that will arise as a result of the development.
- 4.19 Such benefits include the opportunity to replace buildings are no longer fit-for-purpose due to poor construction and the opportunity to provide good-quality accommodation for start-up and existing businesses within the locality meeting the three overarching objectives of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF namely economic, social and environmental. Economic - by contributing to a strong economy through provision of commercial accommodation that can support growth and innovation in the area. Social - by contributing to a strong and vibrant local community through people working locally and supporting other local businesses and Environmental - by replacing buildings that do not meet current building standards or meet with current low-carbon objectives.

Highway Safety

- 4.20 The submitted Transport Statement has considered the following matters:
- whether the application site is well placed to integrate with its surroundings and a variety of local facilities and amenities in Middle Aston and Steeple Aston;
 - what the travel demand will be in comparison to the existing situation and the potential impact on capacity of the highway network and from a safety perspective; and
 - suitable access and parking strategies for the proposed development.
- 4.21 It is proposed that the development will be served from the existing access off Fir Lane. 79 no. car parking spaces will be provided to serve the proposed units and 34 cycle parking spaces.
- 4.22 The development traffic impact on Fir Lane has been analysed and the report concludes that given the development proposals will generate fewer vehicle movements than the previous scheme which was deemed by the local highways authority 'to be unlikely cause a significant adverse traffic or road safety impact on the surrounding transport network' that the development will have no adverse impact on the operation or safety characteristics of the local highways network and less impact than the previously submitted scheme.
- 4.23 The site is well placed to integrate with its surroundings and sustainable travel infrastructure in Middle Aston and neighbouring areas. The proposed access strategy is considered to be suitable for all travel modes and can meet the forecast travel demand in a sustainable way. This includes suitable access provision for larger vehicles as demonstrated by the submitted swept-path

analysis. The proposed parking strategy for both vehicles and cycles is in-line with OCC standards and feasible from an operational perspective.

- 4.24 In consideration of the above, it is concluded that in terms of paragraph 109 of the NPPF, the development will not cause an unacceptable impact on highway safety nor will the impacts on the road network be severe and thus the application should not be refused on highways grounds.
- 4.25 The previously submitted Framework Travel Plan was considered acceptable and the Construction Traffic Management Plan submitted previously has been updated to address the matters raised during the previous consultation process.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 4.26 Windrush Ecology carried out a further Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in March 2021 comprising a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and a Preliminary Roost Assessment. Habitats present within the site were found to include buildings, improved grassland, scrub, hedgerows, tree belts, ruderal vegetation, ephemeral vegetation and hardstanding.
- 4.27 Two of the buildings have already been assessed as having the potential to support roosting bats and in due course further surveys will be carried out to inform the Bat Mitigation Class Licence that will be required for the development to proceed.
- 4.28 The updated report concludes that no further ecological surveys are considered necessary at this time and that there will be no foreseeable impacts on statutory or non-statutory sites nor on priority habitats. Subject to management of improved grassland to prevent the habitat developing into suitable amphibian terrestrial habitat, there are no foreseeable impacts on amphibians including great crested newts.
- 4.29 A series of ecological protection and enhancement measures has been recommended including inclusion wildflower and tree and shrub planting, grassland management and bird and bat boxes. External lighting will also be carefully designed to minimise the impact of light spillage on bat roost features.
- 4.30 The Council's ecology officer raised no objection to the previous scheme subject to appropriate conditions dealing with the requirement for a bat licence, that the development should be carried out in accordance with the submitted ecological mitigation measures and that a scheme for biodiversity enhancement should be agreed.

Arboricultural Matters

- 4.31 A tree survey report was produced at an early stage which was used to inform the design process. 227 trees and groups of trees were surveyed and an updated assessment of arboricultural impact has been prepared based on the latest submitted proposals. This concludes that in terms of above ground impact

no trees will require removal although some trees should be subject to necessary periodic maintenance.

- 4.32 Regarding root protection areas, the parking bays along the eastern boundary will be constructed within the root protection areas of a group of lime trees but any potential impacts on the rootzone can be minimised using a minimal dig approach. Over the wider site during the construction phase areas of temporary ground protection may be required.
- 4.33 The application is accompanied by a tree shading diagram. There are no significant shading implications as a result of the proposed development.
- 4.34 The report provides an arboricultural method statement and tree protection measures that will be implemented during the construction process. In respect of the previous scheme, the Council Arboricultural Officer raised no objection to the scheme subject to conditions in respect of retained trees and mitigation measures. From an arboricultural perspective, there are also no reasons why the currently proposed development cannot proceed.

Amenity

- 4.35 The nearest residential property, Millbrook House, is located approximately 27m north of the site. Due to the distance between Millbrook House and the proposed buildings, there is unlikely to be any significant loss of amenity to Millbrook House as a result of the development. The site is already in employment use, but in buildings that are not constructed to the current standards in respect of noise insulation. The proposed new construction will ensure the amenity of the neighbouring occupiers to the north is protected.
- 4.36 There was concern raised previously regarding proposed windows in the northern (side) elevations of the proposed buildings. Within the submitted scheme, buildings 4 and 5, located closest to the northern boundary of the site, have no windows in their side elevations.
- 4.37 Historically the site was a poultry farm and the farm buildings were repurposed for business use. They are however in a poor state of repair and fall well below current standards for workspaces. The proposed redevelopment provides an opportunity to create high quality workspaces that will ensure a comfortable working environment for future occupants in an attractive location.
- 4.38 Any requirement to produce a Construction Environmental Management Plan to ensure there are no undesirable impacts during the construction phase can be dealt with by the imposition of an appropriately worded planning condition.

Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy

- 4.39 The submitted report dealing with flood risk and providing a drainage strategy for the proposed development concludes that two existing flood risks require mitigation as part of the development namely from existing, defective surface

water drainage systems and overland flow from higher land to the west of the site.

- 4.40 It is proposed to reuse the existing piped outfall to an off-site watercourse to serve approximately 23% which is a significantly smaller area than the piped outfall serves currently. The remaining catchment will be drained by a combination of permeable external areas and trench soakaways. Sewage will discharge to the Thames Water foul sewer in Fir Lane as the current situation and the previous scheme where there was no objection from Thames Water.
- 4.41 More detail regarding these matters is provided in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment Report prepared by Link Engineering which also addresses matters that were highlighted during the previous consultation process.

Other Matters

- 4.42 The submitted Energy Assessment Report provides an assessment of a range of fuel and site infrastructure options in respect of capital cost, running costs, carbon emissions and ongoing management. As a result of this assessment process, which included renewable and low carbon technologies, it was concluded that the installation of air source heat pumps is the most viable technology for the Class E units which as part of a reverse cycle refrigeration system can provide space heating and cooling. Because of the nature of the proposed B8 buildings and likely occupiers, cooling is not proposed within the main part of the units but space air to water heat pumps would be a viable heat source.
- 4.43 The application is also accompanied by a BREEAM pre-assessment report. This demonstrates that the scheme is able to achieve the required 'very good' rating with a rating of 60.15% against a target rating of 55% and optimum potential rate of 65.07%.
- 4.44 Prior to submission of the previous application, an environmental screening opinion request was made to the Council under application reference 19/02596/SO. This confirmed that an EIA was not required for that scheme and it is assumed that the situation is the same in respect of this latest development.
- 4.45 The Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Forum indicated that, in their view, the buildings were never particularly suitable for business use and that their replacement with new ones that meet current standards is understandable. Policy PC1: Employment is support of such changes. It has been demonstrated in section 3 of this Statement that the proposal would not result in any conflict with the criteria set out in policy PC1 being a scheme that will provide accommodation for local businesses, provides a reduction in floor area when compared to the existing development and that there was no objection on highways grounds to the more intensive previous scheme.
- 4.46 The up-to-date marketing report from Carter Jonas has indicated that, despite the pandemic, there is a demand for commercial space in the north of the county

and that similar, existing small-scale schemes in local villages are nearly fully occupied and thus that the proposed scheme is likely to be attractive to potential occupiers.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 This statement has examined the planning background of the site and the relevant national and local planning policy framework in respect of the proposals.
- 5.2 The range of technical studies undertaken to support this application have confirmed that there are no reasons why the proposed development cannot be delivered and that any potential impacts can be successfully mitigated where required.
- 5.3 The scheme would create well-designed, attractive commercial buildings that would secure the long-term viability of the site contributing to available employment space within the district and providing valuable smaller, flexible employment spaces suitable to meet the needs of local businesses.
- 5.4 The proposed development has been sensitively designed to fit with the rural surroundings and is considered to have a positive impact on the character and appearance of the adjacent conservation area when compared with the existing buildings and overall site appearance.
- 5.5 The proposed scheme overcomes previous objections through a design which is more akin to the existing development and of appropriate materials thus resulting in little or no harm to the character and appearance of the area. Notably, the proposed scheme results in a reduced floor area when compared to the existing development and significantly less than the previously submitted scheme.
- 5.6 It has been demonstrated that there is no conflict with relevant national and local planning policy and the Council is therefore requested to approve this application.