

Updated Response of Middle Aston Parish Meeting to Planning Application 21/01123/F

Since our submission of 19th May 2021, revised proposals have been submitted by the applicant, necessitating an updated response from us. Whilst some of our objections have been addressed, the proposal as revised remains unacceptable, because of its threat to the safety of our residents and the damage to the rural nature of our village.

1. The application concerns the replacement of seven existing buildings at Hatch End Industrial Estate, in Middle Aston Parish, with seven new buildings divided into 25 units. The application is for Classes E (g)I, E(g)ii and E(g)iii uses (in 4 buildings), Class B8 (in 1 building); **two buildings (Building 3 and the Hub) do not have a use class specified.**

2. We oppose the redevelopment of the site on the basis proposed, for two key reasons: a. The increase in road traffic, and risk to pedestrian and vehicle safety, which would result from the scale and intensification of the redeveloped site; b. The urbanisation of its location and its visual impact on the rural space separating the parishes of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston

3. Road Traffic: The assessment by Mode consultants of the impact on traffic is, in our opinion, seriously erroneous in several respects:

a. Travel Demand, Business Units: This has been calculated by factoring up the floor area currently occupied to the floor area post-development. It applies no weighting to the increase in number of business units; currently each of the seven buildings is a single business unit, whereas the developed site would comprise 25 units, which will significantly increase the potential number of employees on the site. Allowing a very reasonable 12m² per person, the site could accommodate, fully let, around 180 people. This means that both the on-site parking requirement and the estimation of traffic flows relating to employee arrivals and departures in this application are greatly understated, even if the travel mode share assumptions were reasonable, which they are not (see below)

b. Mode Share: The document predicts that 18.6% of employee arrivals and departures will be by bus, train, bicycle or on foot. Consider the facts:

i. Bus: From the North, there are just three arrivals in Steeple Aston (0.5 miles from the site) in the period from 07.00 to 10.00; from the South, there are also three arrivals in the same period. At the end of the working day, in the period 16.00 to 18.30, there are likewise just three departures in each direction. There are no bus connections East or West at any time.

ii. Train: There are just two arrivals at Heyford (1.5 miles, 32 minute walk) between 07.00 and 10.00 from the North, and three from the South. At the end of the working day, in the period 16.00 to 18.30, there are two departures to the North, and just one to the South

iii. By bicycle or on foot: It might be reasonable to assume that employees would arrive by bicycle from no further than, say, 10km away. The pedestrian range is limited to Middle Aston and Steeple Aston. Both factors greatly limit the number of potential users of these modes. Given the lack of cycleways and footways, and the increase in vehicle traffic, the significant risk to personal safety will be a strong deterrent to their use.

iv. Items i to iii demonstrate, in our view, that the level of non-car modes of transport used by employees will be very much lower than assumed. OCC Highways Team's comments support our view.

v. It is a reasonable assumption that all visits by customers and suppliers will be by car, van or truck. No cognisance of this has been included in the traffic estimates provided.

c. On-site parking: 74 car parking spaces are proposed. If only 81.4% (presumed, but unlikely) of 180 employees travel by car in single occupancy, that would require 146 spaces. Given that all car parks within one mile of the site are fully occupied in weekday working hours, the employees, suppliers and customers unable to find a parking space will resort to parking on the already narrow road, creating a major safety hazard for children and parents, and serious congestion for through traffic

d. The local road network: The roads that run through Middle Aston are not well suited to the likely significantly increased levels of traffic, either from goods vehicles or increased commuting and customer journeys. The road into the village from the A4260 to the west is narrow, designated as unsuitable for HGVs (as noted at paragraph 5.2.6 of the Construction Traffic Management Plan) and has several pinch points. Middle Aston Lane, the road entering the village from the north, is a single track lane with high verges and few passing places. The road between Middle Aston and Steeple Aston has sharp bends and one blind summit, and beyond the village boundaries is subject only to the national speed limit (60mph). There are no cycleways, footways or streetlighting in our village

e. Our concerns therefore relate to this proposal's potential impact upon the safety of pedestrians, and most particularly, our children. We consider that this proposal would have an unacceptable impact on road safety, noise and disturbance, in conflict with Policy PC1 of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan and paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

f. The proximity of Dr Radcliffe's Primary School: As noted, the school is 310 metres from the site. Oxfordshire County Council has recently launched a School Streets initiative. The website states that "the aim of the programme is to create a safe, welcoming and attractive environment where children, parents and teachers can walk, cycle, scoot or park and walk to school with less risk of air pollution and traffic congestion". The increase in traffic that this development will cause is in direct opposition to those laudable objectives. Traffic congestion close to Dr Radcliffe's at the start and end of the school day is already a matter of great concern – this will make it very much worse and extremely hazardous. We note and support the statement of OCC Highways Department that, for approval to be given, "A footway between the site access and Steeple Aston will be required" as this would provide some protection for pedestrians on this section of Fir Lane. However the Transport Addendum submitted by Mode suggests that a footway **entirely within** the development site would satisfy this requirement, which is manifestly absurd in relation to the safety of parents and children at the school.

g. In summary, the proposed development will, in our view, create a substantial and totally unacceptable increase in vehicle traffic on the inadequate local highway network in and between Middle Aston and Steeple Aston, greatly threatening the safety and welfare of pedestrians, cyclists and other road users

4. Urbanisation: The Hatch End site currently has a strong rural feel, due to its agricultural origins. We would not want any development to detract from that character, or create a ribbon of continuity between Middle Aston and Steeple Aston. Appendix K of the Neighbourhood Plan includes a character assessment of Middle Aston which lists among its key features "the rural approaches to the settlement". The saved policy C15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 seeks to prevent coalescence of settlements. Our particular concern is that the likelihood of parking overspill on to the road will fill the green rural space that separates the two settlements.

6. Mitigation: If, despite the objections raised, this proposal is allowed to proceed, we think it essential that mitigating measures are implemented and enforced as conditions of approval, to include:

i. Absolute prohibition of all construction vehicle movements between 08.30 and 09.30, and between 14.45 and 16.00, on Mondays to Fridays in school term time

ii. signage at the northern end of Middle Aston Lane (Somerton Road junction) prohibiting all construction traffic

iii. similarly, signage at the Middle Aston exit from A4260 prohibiting all construction traffic in addition to the existing advisory notice on HGV unsuitability

iv. The creation of a footway along Fir Lane, from the site entrance to Dr Radcliffe's School, prior to the commencement of demolition and construction work