

By Email:

Suzanne.Taylor@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

24th March 2023

HLM063/CB

Dear Suzanne,

RE: NW Bicester: Hawkwell Village: Outline application (with all matters reserved except for Access) for a mixed use development of up to 3,100 dwellings, local centre, employment areas, schools, green infrastructure and associated infrastructure (reference 21/04275/OUT)

The above planning application was submitted to Cherwell District Council (CDC) by David Lock Associates, on behalf of Hallam Land Management. CDC validated the application on 23rd December 2021 and since that time, a number of consultation responses and letters of representation have been received.

The applicant team have already responded to a number of technical consultations as and when received to resolve individual technical matters and it has been agreed with the Council that these are also published on the public record and relevant re-consultations undertaken at that time. We are submitting this letter and enclosed documents in response to other responses received with a view to resolving outstanding items and would request that this letter and enclosures are treated in the same way.

In the interests of clarity, this letter and enclosures do not constitute Further Information in regard to the EIA Regulations 2017 but seek to reach a resolution and provide clarification on a number of matters. Any subsequent implications to the ES and its conclusions, Framework Plan and development proposals and Description of Development will be submitted formally in due course and in accordance with the EIA Regulations.

Technical responses

Extensive discussions are ongoing and will continue both with CDC and OCC on Transport and Highways matters including the design, delivery, phasing and timing of the Strategic Link Road, since the public funding for the OCC approved scheme was redirected (Dec 2021). We are also working with OCC to secure an interim solution to enable the construction and occupation of homes within the Hallam application site on the basis of interim mitigation measures allowing the important early delivery of homes, prior to the implementation of the strategic link road. We therefore, wish to continue to discuss the potential use of Grampian conditions to facilitate this and particularly in the context of the ongoing discussions regarding the delivery of the SLR. We do though intend to provide a separate note on this matter for your consideration.

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The full suite of Technical Notes submitted to OCC to date were submitted to CDC on 21st March and the content of each was explained in the summary cover note. Comments from National Highways, British Horse Society and Bicester BUG are also being addressed in parallel.

Brookbanks Technical Note 3 (dated June 2022) and submitted to CDC on 26th August 2022 successfully addressed comments raised by the LLFA as confirmed in their response dated 15th September 2022. Submission of a Biodiversity Impact Assessment on 12th August 2022 along with Defra metric calculation has been confirmed as acceptable in principle in comments dated 3rd November 2022 from CDC Ecology.

Brookbanks Technical Note 4 Rev 1 (dated 15th August 2022) was submitted on 26th August 2022 in relation to comments from the Environment Agency and as explained at our meeting on 8th March, flood modelling work is ongoing for future submission under separate cover to address their objections received. Feedback from the Environment Agency, via CDC was helpfully supplied on 21st March.

The following comments are provided in relation to Sport England comments received:

Sport England provided a response dated 7th January 2022 which wasn't published until 1st November 2022 and which advised there was insufficient information to enable Sport England to adequately assess the proposal or to make a substantive response advising of their interim position as a holding objection. Information was requested in relation to; the nature of the formal playing fields proposed; evidence to support the statements that the sports pitches for the NW Bicester allocation is expected to be delivered in the Himley Village element and to clarify where expected contributions will be directed.

The masterplan embedded in the SPD set out the proposed land uses across the allocation. This showed the positioning of the majority of sports pitches in the parcel of development to the south of the railway with one sports pitch shown on land which relates to this application. The Development Framework plan indicates a LEAP and NEAP and informal sports provision in the equivalent position of the sports pitch. The formal sports pitches (aside from those associated with the school playing fields and which are confirmed as adhering to the required specifications) are to be positioned centrally (south of the railway) on the wider allocation to enable a higher standard of sports provision and associated facilities which will also allow for better long term management and maintenance to be provided. This will also allow for inclusion of facilities such as a more durable hybrid pitch. This approach has been supported by CDC officers as confirmed in their consultation response to this application (21/04275/OUT). The sports provision to the south of the railway is considered to be adequate to cater for the increase in number of dwellings to the north of the railway. It is expected that financial contributions will be negotiated towards the provision of the sports pitches and fixtures, fittings and maintenance as well as towards indoor and outdoor sports facilities more widely in accordance with policy and the CIL Regulations.

We would be grateful if this position could be relayed to Sport England to seek the removal of their holding objection.

Response to Officer comments

Following an initial review of the application material, comments were received from the previous case officer Katherine Daniels on 17 October 2022. Some of these points overlap with those raised in the comments from Bioregional (published 11th May 2022) and also the two sets of Conservation comments (published 25th July 2022 and 3rd August 2022).

This covering letter is accompanied by a Heritage Statement and Archaeological Desk Based Assessment prepared by Orion to address Conservation officer and Archaeology comments.

In addition, we would like to offer the following comments to address the officer points:

Policy Bicester 1 CLP Part 1 (2011-2031)

In 2009, the site at NW Bicester was identified as having potential as an eco-town location in the relevant Planning Policy Statement. In 2014, a masterplan and supporting vision document was submitted to the council by developers A2Dominion setting out the spatial land uses for up to 6,000 homes and which was used as the basis for the NW Bicester SPD (2016) which supports the implementation of Policy Bicester 1 of the Cherwell Local Plan adopted 2015.

However, the boundary followed the arbitrary administrative boundary between Bicester and Bucknell (rather than the historical boundary) and the arrangement of land uses reflects that in the 2014 application for 2,600 homes which received a resolution to grant, but which stalled pending completion of a S106 agreement, owing to issues of viability and deliverability.

Hallam Land Management, who are now promoting the site, are seeking to bring forward a viable and deliverable scheme. A landscape led approach has been adopted which uses the existing field boundaries on the ground as a key structuring element to the proposals and which form the edge of the site boundary, as detailed in the Design and Access Statement submitted. By increasing the densities of development in parts of the site, from the very low assumptions previously made, a more efficient use of land has been possible resulting in a proposed total of up to 3,100 homes. The proposals significantly better facilitate the achievement of sustainable development objectives, better supporting services and facilities (including public transport) and reinforcing walkable neighbourhoods.

This will deliver more much needed houses in Cherwell District and help ensure a five year housing land supply can be maintained. The emerging draft Local Plan, whilst still at an early stage, and recognising that this has not yet been agreed by Members, also recognises the potential increased capacity and site area of the allocation which is proposed to expand in area. As proposed, the emerging site allocation will exactly reflect the current boundary of this planning application and proposes a total number of dwellings proposed across the allocation to increase from 6,000 to 7,000.

The historic impact from the change in the boundary has been assessed fully and is set out in a Heritage Statement, prepared by Orion and which accompanies this letter.

Net zero

A response to the Bio-regional comments focusing on energy and net zero is being prepared by Brookbanks and will follow under separate cover. This will include information explaining how the development will be capable of adapting to future climate scenarios whilst also balancing the deliverability and viability of the development. It will also confirm that all commercial buildings will be constructed to BREEAM standard 'Excellent' which exceeds the requirement of policy Bicester 1. A condition to that effect would also be acceptable.

We also highlight that the Council also accepted during the appeal hearing for the Albion land application (APP/C3105/W/22/3304021 in relation to application ref 21/03177/F) that there was a need to be more flexible with the policy requirements particularly with respect to affordable housing, environmental requirements, and eco-town build standards.

The application is at outline stage and further information will be provided at detailed stage and in response to anticipated conditions to any approval and which will reflect the viability of the scheme as well as available technologies.

Employment and other land uses

The Planning Statement submitted with the application included a section under the heading of Economic Strategy and the socio-economic chapter of the ES also estimates the broad number of jobs which are likely to come forward as a result of the development (both in its construction and once it is completed). The application seeks consent for some 9,000sq.metres of retail, commercial and community uses within the mixed use and employment area and which has the potential to generate a wide range of jobs through new employment space, in schools and service jobs and which will be sustainably located and easily accessible for both new and existing residents of Bicester. At this outline stage of development, the end users and therefore breakdown on the types of jobs cannot be accurately provided. However, the development will undoubtedly contribute to jobs growth in the district. The applicant is also content for a Skills and Training Plan to secure apprenticeships to be negotiated as part of the Heads of Terms for the Section 106 Agreement or to be attached as a planning condition.

The Description of Development includes extra care as well as residential and care accommodation allowing for these land uses to be accommodated in the final development should they be required. The applicant is willing to hold discussions with relevant officers at the appropriate time.

Site specific design and place shaping principles and relationship to SPD

The DAS includes a section on vision and design principles as well as on design and placemaking. The NW Bicester SPD has been largely followed but there are some differences in the arrangement of uses shown on the Development Framework Plan which officers have cited as not being fully explained within the submission.

The Framework Plan has been structured around the aim to retain and enhance the existing green and blue infrastructure on site. This objective underpins the landscape-led approach to the masterplan with the hedgerows retained with associated buffers and green corridors provided (as explained in the ES and p71 of the DAS). The adjustment in position for some of the land uses are based on sound place making principles and reflect the desire to provide a green edge to the north west of the site. The new location for the burial ground which will be verdant, low key and rural in nature, with minimal urbanising elements, as is described in page 75 of the DAS, will provide an appropriate edge to the development. Whilst it is noted that it now does not fall within Bicester Town boundary, this is not a sufficient rationale to revert to its previous position as our understanding is that there is potential for the administrative boundary position to alter (as has been previously undertaken as part of Community Governance Reviews).

The low key and informal green edge to the northern boundary is substantial and coupled with the separating fields to Bucknell village, means there is an approximate 900m separation distance between the crossroads of Bucknell and the nearest new home. We can provide further visual material to aid this understanding of the scale and nature of the park (including a comparison of size with other local parks) and the treatment of the edge of the site if helpful. The exact nature of the community park can take differing forms but the extent of this area is illustrated in the community park edge transect which is included on p83 of the DAS. The intention is that at the edge of the site, it is particularly informal in nature but this detail will come forward following further engagement and as part of design development for future stages of the planning process.

The positioning of residential parcels and the employment area between Bucknell Road and the railway line will facilitate integration between development parcels to the south side of the railway (which are shown to be acceptable in principle in proximity to the railway line) and which is important as it is conceived as a coherent place; there are no objections from Environmental Health officers in this regard (following review of the noise assessment accompanying the application) and these parcels will positively connect to development parcels the opposite side of Bucknell Road and the dedicated pedestrian/cycle route as it is intended to be traffic calmed/stopped up in part, as part of the development proposals. The proximity of more residential parcels around the mixed use centre will also help integrate the uses aiding the success and vibrancy of the local centre.

Officers in their comments have recognised that the application is at outline stage but refer to requiring further information to inform future Reserved Matters applications.

For clarification:

- To demonstrate that community facilities will be within 15 min walk criteria, p48 of the DAS includes a 15 min walking distance concentric circle. The furthest properties are approximately 1400m away from the local centre which is slightly more than a 15 min walk (1200m).
- The DAS at p49 and p90 refers to public transport in the form of provision of high quality bus routes and includes a plan indicating bus stop locations advising that the majority of dwellings will be within 400 metres of a bus stop with all dwellings within 600 metres of a bus stop. Appropriate public transport provision and walking and cycling routes will help facilitate a modal shift away from the private car. The TA also includes information on the Access and Movement Strategy, Public Transport Strategy, Mobility Hubs and a Travel Plan, further detail to which can be secured by condition.
- Building for a Healthy Life criteria will be used for the detailed masterplanning elements going forward with the aim of achieving green or amber for all 12 criteria. Streets for a Healthy Life will also be used as the companion design guide for the 'Streets for All' theme.
- Approximately 81.5ha of the site is proposed as green infrastructure (in excess of 40% as required by policy). This consists of a network of high quality green/open spaces including parks (approx. 30ha), burial ground (approx. 4ha), allotment/community farm (approx. 4.4ha) and watercourse open space areas (assumed as linear parks)

(approx. 27ha). This indicative breakdown of the open space typologies demonstrates that more than half of the green space will be publicly accessible as required by policy.

- The grain stores and the two farmsteads are outside of the application site boundary and to our best knowledge, are to be retained. Detailed proposals for those areas will be provided as part of future applications. Development surrounding the existing farms and buildings was expected as shown on the SPD masterplan and it is intended that buffers will be provided as referred to in the Heritage Statement.

It is also relevant to highlight some of the Inspectors conclusions in the consideration of the recent appeal by Albion Land for employment development on part of the NW Bicester allocation site (APP/C3105/W/22/3304021 in relation to application ref 21/03177/F). The Council refused the scheme, in part due to the conflict with the LP Policy Bicester 1 as employment land in this part of the allocation would not be in accordance with the masterplan within the SPD.

The Inspector allowed the appeal and in the conclusions notes that; "The SPD states that it supports the implementation of LP Policy Bicester 1 and will be a material consideration in determining planning applications on the North West Bicester site. Since the masterplan is embodied within the SPD rather than the LP, it is not part of the development plan and therefore carries comparatively reduced weight".

The Inspector also further reduced the weight to be attributed to the SPD due to the uncertainty of the funding of the Strategic Link Road (SLR) and therefore its delivery as the SPD also shows the A4095 diverted through the site [although we note that this point on the road reflects the current position at the time of the appeal].

Infrastructure needs

Although the application seeks outline consent only, the applicant team has been discussing the details of the extension to Gagle Brook Primary School with Oxfordshire County Council. We have now reached agreement on this matter and discussions are now taking place on the level of contributions/land required in relation to education provision with an initial meeting having taken place on 2nd March 2023. We await further background information on pupil generation, proposed triggers to justify the current land and financial requests.

The Section 106 draft Heads of Terms received on 21st February 2023 reflect a number of consultation responses already received and the applicant team are reviewing these currently. We also look forward to an updated version which you referred to finalising asap at our meeting on 8th March 2023. We would welcome the early progression of formal negotiations on these provisions and also on drafting of proposed conditions.

We trust this letter and additional documents will aid the progression of the assessment of the application as we work towards its timely consideration at planning committee. As referred to, a response to Bioregional comments will be provided under separate cover. Please also be advised that a revised Health Impact Assessment is also being prepared for future submission.

Hallam Land Management are committed to providing a deliverable scheme on this allocated site and we look forward to continuing to positively work with you and your colleagues. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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Encl: Heritage Statement
Archaeological Desk Based Report