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# Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion Request

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Land East of Ploughley Road, Ambrosden



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is a request to Cherwell District Council ('CDC') as local planning authority to adopt a screening opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 in respect of development proposed at Land East of Ploughley Road, Ambrosden ('the Site').
- 1.2. This request has been made on behalf of the Archstone Ambrosden Ltd, Bellway Homes Ltd and Rosemary May, who applicants for a planning application on the Site.
- 1.3. The gross area of the Site is 9.46 hectares. Figure 1 below shows the location of the Site.



Figure 1: Site Location

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- 1.4. The Site is the subject of a planning application reference: 22/02866/OUT, which was registered by CDC on 21 September 2022.
- 1.5. The description of the proposed development under this planning application is:  
  
Outline planning application for up to 120 dwellings, vehicular and pedestrian access off Ploughley Road, new pedestrian access to West Hawthorn Road, surface water drainage, foul water drainage, landscaping, public open space, biodiversity and associated infrastructure. Access off Ploughley Road is not reserved for future consideration.
- 1.6. This description is referred to as 'the Proposed Development' and it is the subject of this screening request.

## 2. The Approach to EIA Screening

- 2.1. Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ('the Regulations') enables an applicant to request the relevant planning authority adopt an EIA screening opinion. In accordance with the EIA Regulations this request for CDC's EIA screening opinion includes:
- a) a plan sufficient to identify the land;
  - b) a description of the development, including in particular—
    - (i) a description of the physical characteristics of the development and, where relevant, of demolition works;
    - (ii) a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
  - c) a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
  - d) to the extent the information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the environment resulting from—
    - (i) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and
    - (ii) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
  - e) such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including any features of the Proposed Development or any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.
- 2.2. EIA is only required for categories of development outlined in the Regulations if it is considered that implementing the project would be 'likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location'. The Regulations set out a process through which it can be decided whether a proposal is 'EIA development' for which an assessment is required.
- 2.3. In determining whether or not the Proposed Development requires an EIA, the local planning authority is required to follow the Regulations and the relevant schedules. The Planning Practice Guidance 'Environmental Impact Assessment' section (PPG) provides additional guidance.
- 2.4. Initially, it should be established whether the project is of a type listed in Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 of the Regulations. The Proposed Development (page 3) does not qualify as a Schedule 1 development, but it does fall within the description in Schedule 2 Part 10(b) 'Urban development projects'.

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2.5. As the Site is greater than 5 hectares in size, it is considered relevant for the local planning authority to undertake EIA screening to establish whether the Proposed Development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This takes account of the selection criteria in Schedule 3, in accordance with Regulation 5(4)(c), together with any information provided by the applicant (Regulation 5(4)(a)).

2.6. The Site does not lie within a sensitive area as defined in Regulation 2(1). Therefore, the test of whether the proposal is EIA development is whether it would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of its characteristics, location and potential impact in the context of the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations, which are:

Characteristics of development;

- size and design of the whole development;
- cumulation with other existing and/or approved development;
- use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;
- production of waste;
- pollution and nuisances;
- the risk of major accidents and/or disaster relevant to the development;
- the risks to human health.

Location of development; and

Type and characteristics of the potential impact.

2.7. The PPG provides advice on taking into account mitigation measures at the screening stage. Paragraph 023 (ref. 4-023-20170728) states:

'Developers are encouraged to identify any features of their Proposed Development and any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment and to include these with the information required to inform the screening decision (see Regulation 6). The extent to which mitigation or other measures may be taken into account in reaching a screening opinion depends on the facts of each case. The local planning authority must have regard to the amount of information available, the precautionary principle and the degree of uncertainty in relation to the environmental impact. However, there may be cases where the uncertainties are such that Environmental Impact Assessment is required.'

2.8. We have identified features of the Proposed Development and any standard measures envisaged that will avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment as identified by the PPG guidance at Paragraph 023.

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- 2.9. The following sections are structured around the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development as set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations.



## 3. Characteristics of Development

3.1. The Proposed Development to be screened comprises the following:

- Residential development of up to 120 dwellings, or fewer depending on detailed design;
- Building heights of 1 to 2 storeys;
- Vehicular and pedestrian/cycle connections with Ploughley Road and West Hawthorn Road;
- Play/recreational facilities;
- Drainage and utilities; and
- Public open space provision.

3.2. Figure 2 below is an extract of the Framework Plan (not to scale) which sets out parameters for the Proposed Development.



Figure 2: Framework Plan



### Access, Vehicle, Pedestrian and Cycle Movements

- 3.3. The proposed vehicular access is off Ploughley Road. There are proposed pedestrian/cycle connections to Ploughley Road and to West Hawthorn Road.

### Size and Design of the Proposed Development

- 3.4. Up to 120 dwellings are proposed. When completed and occupied, it could be expected to accommodate some 300 residents, depending on the detailed scheme.
- 3.5. Amenity areas, green space, play/recreation space, drainage features are proposed as part of the development.

### Cumulation with Other Existing and/or Approved Development

- 3.6. The Site partly adjoins the built-up edge of Ambrosden, which is a village that has experienced new development both within the built-up area and adjoining the built-up area.
- 3.7. Figure 3 below (not to scale) shows the Site within the context of existing and/or proposed development.

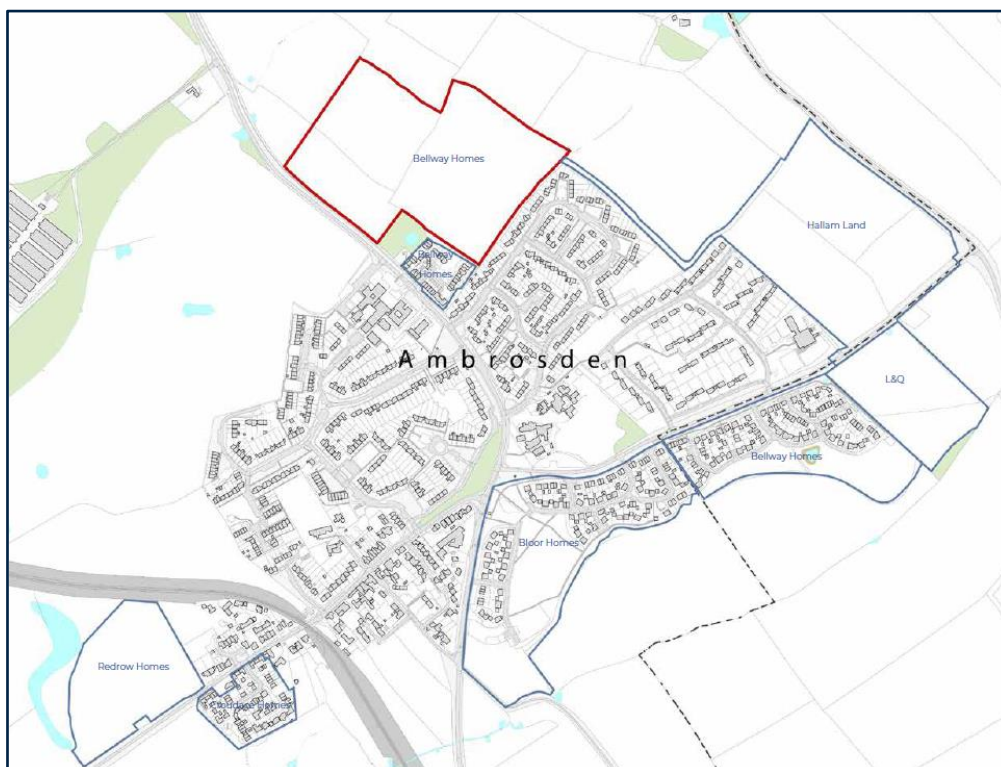


Figure 3: Development Sites

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- 3.8. The Site is outlined in red on this plan. In the context of this request for screening under the Regulations the Site is not a commitment in that the land is not allocated for development and it does not have planning permission for development.
- 3.9. Other sites at Ambrosden are outlined in blue in Figure 3. The base data shows where sites have been delivered such as sites off Blackthorn Road and Merton Road.
- 3.10. There is a site north of Merton Road being developed by Redrow Homes which is an existing commitment having planning permission (reference: 18/02056/OUT).
- 3.11. There is a planning application (reference: 22/01976/OUT) by Hallam Land Management located off Blackthorn Road which is not a commitment in that the land is not allocated for development and it does not have planning permission for development. The proposal is for up to 75 dwellings, etc.
- 3.12. There is a planning application (reference: 22/01976/OUT) by Hallam Land Management located off Blackthorn Road which is not a commitment in that the land is not allocated for development and it does not have planning permission for development. The proposal is for up to 75 dwellings, etc.
- 3.13. There is a planning application (reference: 22/02455/F) by L&Q Estates located off Blackthorn Road which is not a commitment in that the land is not allocated for development and it does not have planning permission for development. The proposal is for up to 55 dwellings, etc.

## Use of Natural Resources

- 3.14. MAGiC Maps indicates that the Site is likely to be variable in agricultural terms and hence not fully best and most versatile.
- 3.15. Ground investigation has been undertaken including infiltration testing. The results were generally as expected as per the geological maps, although the distribution of clay and limestone was not as expected, with the Kellaway Clay being of lower strength than is typical. There was no presence of Made Ground encountered or visual indications of contamination during the investigation. In terms of infiltration testing this showed variable results due either to the soil being clay or having a high clay component.
- 3.16. The drainage strategy accounts for the ground investigation results comprising sustainable urban drainage with surface water run-off attenuated to appropriate rates.
- 3.17. The proposed development is able to demonstrate at least 10% net gain in biodiversity through provision of masterplanning which includes green and blue infrastructure.

## The Production of Waste

- 3.18. No demolition is required prior to construction. The construction operation will produce waste, but it is not considered that this would generate any unusual or complex waste requiring specialist control or management. Mitigation and management measures are described below in the next section.
- 3.19. Once complete, the development would generate household waste. The residents would be provided with the means to segregate waste in accordance with local policy.

## Pollution and Nuisance

- 3.20. During construction there may be some release of dust and noise from equipment and activities. However, the use of good site practice in construction can minimise such temporary impacts to acceptable levels. Restrictions and management requirements can be secured in a Construction and Environment Management Plan (CEMP) which will ensure that any construction activities will be in accordance with environmental protection legislation which will limit disturbance as far as reasonably practicable.

## Risk of Major Accidents or Disasters

- 3.21. No potential for major accident or disaster is considered likely from construction on this site. The potential for accidents or disasters resulting from the occupation and use of the Proposed Development is considered to be negligible.
- 3.22. When considering the risk of disaster caused by climate change, the Site is not in location that will be affected by coastal storms or sea level rise. The projected general trends of climate change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century shows a progressive increase in mean air temperatures during summer and winter months, a reduction in the rate of precipitation during the summer months but an increase during the winter months, with a slight reduction in average wind speed in the summer and a small increase during the winter period. Whilst the detailed design of the buildings will need to account for the for the comfort of occupants, it is not considered that such issues pose a disaster risk.

## Risks to Human Health

During construction

- 3.23. A development on land used for agriculture would not be expected to require anything more than industry standard best practice for construction site health and safety management.

Upon completion

- 3.24. There are not any anticipated risks to human health from the proposed use of the land.

## 4. The Location of the Proposed Development

- 4.1. The Site is situated to the north of Ambrosden, located off Ploughley Road.
- 4.2. Ambrosden Parish has a resident population of some 2,763 based on an ONS 2019 mid-year estimate published by CDC.
- 4.3. Since the Second World War Ambrosden has housed British Army personnel stationed at St. George's Barracks, which is at Arcott village to the south of Ambrosden. The Ministry of Defence had many houses built at Ambrosden in the early 1950s.
- 4.4. Ambrosden is located around 3 km south east of Bicester linked by the A41 and some 21 km north east of Oxford. The nearest train stations are Bicester Village and Bicester North Railway Stations which are located approximately 3.3km and 4.5km from the centre of the Site respectively.
- 4.5. The Site fronts onto Ploughley Road, in part adjoining the built-up area of Ambrosden, comprising West Hawthorn Road and Briar Furlong to the south / south-east of the site. The Site comprises agricultural land.
- 4.6. The land slopes gently from the eastern boundary at circa. 77-78m AOD to the western boundary, at circa. 65m AOD.
- 4.7. A Public Bridleway, reference: 105/6/20, runs near to part of the southeast boundary of the Site. The route connects to the site from West Hawthorn Road.
- 4.8. According to the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning, the Site is located within Flood Zone 1, meaning it has a low risk of flooding.
- 4.9. In planning policy terms, the Site is unremarkable, not being covered by any national or regionally significant policy restrictions.

## 5. Types and Characteristics of Potential Impacts

- 5.1. This section considers the potential of the proposal to affect aspects of the environment that might be significant in this location and identify mitigation that would be employed where necessary to avoid or reduce effects.

### **Control of Construction Activities**

- 5.2. Construction would proceed in accordance with industry-standard best practice techniques and all legislative requirements will be met. During site clearance and construction, the approach to working will seek to optimise construction methods and material use, retain excavated material within the development area, and implement best practice waste management.
- 5.3. The potential for pollution or nuisance to be caused during construction will therefore be controlled and managed. Standard measures can be secured through planning conditions and for such a proposal usually include site waste management and construction management implemented via a Construction Environment Management Plan.
- 5.4. Waste would be minimised primarily through re-use on the Site itself, and where this cannot be achieved, by recycling elsewhere, if possible, with disposal to a licenced facility used as a last resort. In order to minimise the volume of construction waste, use of site waste management will ensure that adverse effects from the management of waste will be unlikely.
- 5.5. In the unlikely event that contaminated material is identified during the demolition/construction process, the contractor would follow following standard procedure to:
- notify the Environmental Health Officer of the discovery;
  - secure the area / take action to prevent the release of contamination;
  - appoint a specialist / identify the substance and appropriate containment/disposal options;
  - dispose in accordance with applicable legislation / obtaining the necessary consents and / or licenses;
  - record waster transfer / disposal certificates.

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- 5.6. There are no neighbouring land uses that are likely to be affected by residential development on the Site. The risk of water contamination should be low given that the design of any approved surface water drainage system would include the necessary protective measures.

## Soils

- 5.7. The extent of soils that may remain undisturbed is likely to be limited principally to the area at the perimeter of the Site and within open spaces planned through the layout of the scheme.
- 5.8. Soil is an important component of the ecosystem and also has a role as a store of carbon. Its functions can be impaired or lost as a result of development if it is not managed properly. The inherent quality of soil, as distinct to its agricultural value, is recognised in the Government's 'Soil Strategy for England – Safeguarding our Soils' which seeks to encourage the sustainable management of soil resources. Appropriate management of soil resources during construction can help with the re-establishment of soil functions following their storage or movement.
- 5.9. Measures to mitigate the loss of soil resources during the construction phase will identify the most appropriate re-use for the different types of soils and proposed methods for handling, storing soils on-site. The aim will be to ensure the re-use of surplus soil in accordance with Defra's Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites. The quality of soils retained on-site would be maintained by following good practice, particularly to avoid compaction and biodegradation of soils that are temporarily stockpiled. This will ensure that the soil retains its ecosystem functions. Any surplus soils will be re-used in a sustainable manner (i.e., as close to the Site as possible and to an after-use appropriate to the soil's quality). This will ensure that significant effects to soils would not result from the development.

## Traffic and Transport

- 5.10. A transport assessment and addendum has been prepared which identifies there is not a severe residual cumulative impact on the road network from this proposed development.
- 5.11. In transport terms the Proposed Development should be considered acceptable subject to planning conditions and where relevant any planning obligations.
- 5.12. In respect of the vehicular access off Ploughley Road this is proposed as a simple priority t-junction with wider . A residential travel plan accompanies the planning application.

## Drainage

- 5.13. Surface water drainage will be designed to SUDs with attenuation on site and outfall to an appropriate run-off rate. In part the proposed surface water attenuation feature can contribute towards landscaping and biodiversity elements for the Proposed Development.
- 5.14. Foul water drainage will require pumping to the existing mains system within the village. An indicative location for pumping is shown on the development framework plan within the south west of the Site towards Ploughley Road



## Air Quality

- 5.15. Construction activities and traffic generation are the two primary considerations when determining whether proposals will have a potential impact on air quality.
- 5.16. Dust generation during the construction phase would be temporary and can be managed to acceptable levels through standard good practice (such as dust suppression techniques) implemented through a CEMP. The Institute of Air Quality Management guidance on the assessment of dust from construction indicates that receptors within 350 metres of a site have the potential to be affected by dust generated during the earthwork and construction phases. The nearest existing receptors are the properties adjacent to the Site off Briar Furlong and West Hawthorn Road.
- 5.17. Concentration-based limit values and objectives have been set for the PM10 suspended particle fraction, but no statutory or official numerical air quality criterion for dust annoyance has been set at a UK, European or World Health Organisation (WHO) level. Construction dust management uses a risk-based method, focusing on the appropriate measures to be used to keep dust impacts at an acceptable level. By adopting this approach, the implementation of standard best practice dust mitigation measures would be suitable response in this location. Effective measures can be secured by planning condition and would be implemented prior to works commencing in order to manage potential dust impacts to an acceptable level.
- 5.18. The Site is not located within an Air Quality Management Area. There is the potential for development-generated traffic to influence pollutant concentrations in the local area, however, the preliminary junction capacity analysis has not indicated that development traffic unduly affects road junctions within the AQMA to the extent that improvements are necessary. The Institute of Air Quality Management and Environmental Protection UK guidance provides indicative criteria to determine whether a detailed road traffic emissions assessment is required for a proposed development.

## Noise and Vibration

- 5.19. The noise generated during construction may be experienced at nearby sensitive receptors. Levels of vibration decrease very rapidly through the ground within a few metres, it is considered that any vibration effects as a result of construction activity are unlikely to result in a significant impact at nearby properties.
- 5.20. Any noise is likely to be a short-term, temporary impact, and can be controlled through a suitably worded CEMP. Once the construction phase is complete and the development is occupied, it is not anticipated that effects from the proposed residential use is likely to result in significant noise or vibration effects.

## Landscape and Visual Effects

- 5.21. The Site is not protected under a landscape policy designation, and it is not considered to be part of a valued landscape.
- 5.22. The masterplanning for the Site has taken into consideration key views and settlement pattern and a proposed landscape strategy accompanies the planning application.

## Heritage

- 5.23. The Site does not contain any world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields or listed buildings. There is no potential for the Proposed Development to result in harm to any designated heritage assets beyond the boundaries of the Site, in terms of changes to their setting.
- 5.24. With regard to archaeological remains, based on an analysis of the known resources the assessment has identified that the Site has the potential for late prehistoric, Roman, medieval, and post-medieval deposits to survive within the Site. If present, these will mostly likely relate to historic agricultural practices, such as ditches and plough furrows. Such remains would be of low value, and it is unlikely that they would be of such significance that they would preclude development of the Site, subject to the implementation of appropriate mitigation strategy, if necessary.

## Trees

- 5.25. An arboricultural assessment including a tree survey has identified 29 individual trees, nine groups of trees and 13 hedgerows totalling 51 items. Of these 51 items, three have been categorised as A, of high quality; 21 have been categorised as B, of moderate quality; and 21 have been categorised as C and are of low quality. In addition, six items have been categorised as U and are considered unsuitable for retention.
- 5.26. The category A trees can be readily accommodated within the development proposals and protection put in place for the trees that are within the site. T44 an English Oak, is located just outside of the area on the boundary of the Site. It has been identified as both ancient and a veteran due to its age, size and condition. Masterplanning for the development follows the statutory guidance and recommendations by including the recommended buffer to ensure the protection of this tree which is next to proposed open space and not next to built development.

## Biodiversity

- 5.27. The Site comprises agricultural land with existing hedges and trees. Where possible within the context of the proposed development framework plan, the existing hedges and trees within the Site will be retained with new planting included within greenspace. The western area of the Site is proposed to be kept as open space, which will form a buffer to the open countryside beyond. It is considered highly unlikely that the development proposed would result in 'significant' effects on ecological receptors due to the requirement to meet local and national planning policy and relevant wildlife legislation. Given that the proposal incorporates a large area of open space that could provide new habitat such as species rich grassland, it is considered likely that the Proposed Development will be able to achieve an overall 10% net gain in biodiversity over the existing situation.

## Climate Change

- 5.28. During the design and construction process, materials will be selected in accordance with sustainability principles, reducing waste and the carbon intensity of new buildings as part of the construction process, and when occupied to help minimise greenhouse gas emissions. The Government has pledged to bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. With respect to this proposal, an effective approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the use of efficient designs and insulation products to achieve high levels of thermal efficiency - the 'fabric first' approach.
- 5.29. New buildings that benefit from the latest heating systems, high levels of thermal insulation of walls, floors, ceilings, windows and doors can achieve a substantial reduction in energy demand, and therefore, of CO2 emissions. The focus of the design will limit the energy consumption and CO2 emissions through optimising the building performance together with energy efficiency measures following the energy hierarchy.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The size of the Site exceeds the threshold criteria for an 'urban development project' as set out in Schedule 2 of the Regulations, but it is not within or partially within an environmentally sensitive area as defined by the Regulations.
- 6.2. The Site is not considered to be sensitive to new development and environmental impacts are unlikely to be complex or experienced beyond its locality. This has included the consideration of cumulative impacts of existing and approved development in the vicinity of the proposal.
- 6.3. Most of the principal environmental effects of development arise during site clearance and construction and would be mainly restricted to the immediate area where activity is underway. A construction environmental management plan is proposed to provide appropriate protection of amenity and the environment with the implementation of simple and effective mitigation measures regularly used with the construction and occupation of residential development.
- 6.4. Potential environmental effects associated with transport, noise and vibration, air quality, landscape and visual amenity, built heritage, soils, biodiversity, flood risk and the interaction of changes resulting from the Proposed Development are not expected to result in significant effects. This has taken account of the nature and scale of the Proposed Development, its location, the sensitivity of the existing environment and the types/characteristics of potential impacts.
- 6.5. Regulations 6(6) of the EIA Regulations advises that a local planning authority shall adopt a screening opinion within three weeks of the date of receipt of a request, and Regulation 5(5)(a) requires the main reasons for its conclusion to be identified, with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Schedule 3.
- 6.6. We look forward to receiving the Screening Opinion of Cherwell District Council in response to this request.

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