

## 23/01586/REM Himley Village Phase 2A

### Urban Design Comments

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#### Introduction and Context

These comments relate to a reserved matters application for Himley Village Phase 2A for 123 homes of approved outline scheme 14/02121/OUT for up to 1700 homes. A reserved matters application for the internal primary and secondary street has been submitted and approved under application reference 23/01493/REM. Himley Village forms part of the North-West Bicester Eco-Town, which will comprise 6000 homes in total.

Condition 8 of the 14/02121/OUT and the subsequent Non-Material Amendment 22/02375/NMA requires a Masterplan and Design Code to be submitted and approved in writing prior to the determination of the first reserved matters application apart from where this relates to infrastructure. The Masterplan and Design Code was submitted in June 2023 under application reference 23/01496/DISC and is yet to be determined.

Condition 12 of the permission requires each Reserved Matters Application to be accompanied by details showing how Building for Life 12 has been used to inform the design process. Building for a Healthy Life (June 2020, Homes England) is the latest edition of Building for Life 12 and Streets for a Healthy Life (Issue 2) is a companion guide to Building for a Healthy Life.

Pertinent design policy and guidance includes:

- The NPPF Chapter 12 Achieving Well-Designed Places, which amongst other things expects development to function well and add to the overall quality of the area; be visually attractive; sympathetic to local character and history; and maintain a strong sense of place.
- The National Design Guide (2021), which sets out ten characteristics of well-designed places. These include Understanding of context; Responding to and creating character and identity; Compact development and appropriate built forms.
- Saved Policies C28, C30 and C31 of the Cherwell Local Plan, which require development to be sympathetic to local context and character.
- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-31 Policy ESD 15, which requires development to be informed by an understanding of site context and meet high design standards.
- Cherwell Local Plan 2021-31 Policy Bicester 1, which amongst other things requires:
  - High quality exemplary development and design standards including zero carbon;
  - A high degree of connectivity that prioritises active and sustainable modes of transport; and
  - Development that respects the landscape setting including enhancement, restoration or creation of wildlife corridors.
- North West Bicester SPD (2016), which amongst other things expects development to be sensitive to the existing landscape and townscape character whilst creating a unique image for the eco town.
- Cherwell Design Guide SPD (2018), which amongst other things describes Cherwell's special character. The north-west Bicester expansion area lies within the Ploughley Limestone Plateau Countryside Character Area. Materials include Limestone rubble coursed and thinly bedded; red brick; and red and occasionally blue bricks used for quoins and detailing in 19<sup>th</sup> century estate cottages. Roofing materials include thatch and stone slate, many of these have

now been replaced by local clay and Welsh slate. The guidance recognises that North-West Bicester is undergoing significant change and growth. It states that within sustainable exemplars, the development of new building typologies, architectural styles and materials may be appropriate. Chapter 8 of the SPD sets out guidelines for sustainable urban form, such as street and roof orientation to maximize solar gain are set out within

### **Understanding of the Proposals**

The application site lies to the south-west of the wider Himley Village scheme to the north of Middleton Stoney Road. Between Middleton Stoney Road and the site lies Lovelynych House, a proposed care home and proposed mixed-use neighbourhood centre; to the east is an employment area and to the north is the wider residential allocation, which includes a proposed primary school, allotments and village green. A Design and Access Statement (December 20214) was submitted with the outline scheme that sets out the vision and broad principles for Himley Village.

The following application design drawings and documents have been reviewed:

- Phase 2A Design Statement, July 2024
- Street Scenes
- Floor Plans and Elevations
- Materials, Tenure, Heights, Boundary Treatment, Parking Plans
- Landscape Concept Plan
- Drainage Strategy

### **Design Comments**

**Holding objection:** The design documents and drawings do not fully demonstrate that they have been informed by Building for a Healthy Life, which is required by Condition 12. The application cannot be determined until the Masterplan and Design Code has been approved. Separate Urban Design comments dated 31/07/24 have been submitted in relation to the Design Code Application 23/01496/DISC.

#### Masterplan

It is unclear how this phase of development would reflect the vision and principles set out within the DAS that accompanied the outline application.

The proposed development boundaries do not clearly articulate how they would respond to the existing and proposed land uses to the south and east. To the south, it is noted that the proposed relationship with the Neighborhood Centre shown on the application plans is different to that indicated within the submitted Design Code. The application proposal suggests a boundary comprising a shared surface road and visitor parking and side garden boundaries. Adjacent to these garden boundaries, left over space is labelled as 'space for possible drainage use'. The drawings do not demonstrate how integration and connectivity between the residential and neighbourhood centre land uses would be achieved.

#### Public Realm

The requirements of vehicular movement and parking dominate the proposed shared surface streets and secondary streets. This results in deflected pedestrian routes and left over spaces where public/private ownership is unclear. This does not reflect good design as set out within BfHL, which expects streets to balance the requirements of vehicle movement alongside the need for people to move along streets with ease. Highway engineered details that make pedestrian and cycle movement more

complex and difficult are not acceptable. BfHL also states that the space between the back of pavement and the face of buildings has a significant impact on the quality of a place. Poorly considered spaces erode the quality of the street environment.

The public realm proposals do not integrate planting and SuDS features. Features such as channels and secondary swales or rain gardens are key elements of the drainage strategy illustrated in the outline DAS and drainage parameter plan. The planting and drainage scheme does not reflect the standards of good design as set out in BfHL, which states that creative surface water features enrich the public realm and help improve a sense of wellbeing and offer interaction with nature.

### Street Scenes

The proposed appearance is a generic reflection of Elmsbrook rather than the distinctive interpretation of local character and sustainable forms expected by policy and guidance. The design relies upon a large palette of brick colours, cladding and roof tiles to differentiate character within standard house types. Variations in roofscape and height appear to relate to specific house types rather than sustainability criteria and legibility. Ancillary building such as cycle and bin stores also need to be integrated into the street scene. The built form proposals do not reflect BfHL, which expect places with locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character. BfHL states that development should not attempt to create character through poor replication of architectural features and details; or arrange buildings next to each in a manner that does not create a cohesive street scene.

### House Types

In general, building forms and façade proportions should reflect the guidance set out with the Cherwell Design Guide.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Overall, the proposals do not adhere to Design Condition 12 (Building for a Healthy Life). The scheme does not demonstrate how it would be integrated as part of the wider allocation and Himley Village. In particular, further consideration should be given to prioritising pedestrian movement, public realm design and developing a distinct character.