

Comment for planning application 24/00245/OUT

Application Number	24/00245/OUT
Location	South Lodge Fringford Road Caversfield Bicester OX27 8TH
Proposal	Outline application for demolition of existing structures and erection of up to 99 dwellings, access, open space and associated works with all matters reserved except for access
Case Officer	Andrew Thompson
Organisation Name	St Laurence's District Church Council
Address	St Lawrences Church, Banbury Road B4100, Caversfield, OX27 8TQ
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour
Comments	<p>Reasons for objection:</p> <p>Negative impact on the local landscape and existing buildings</p> <p>St Laurence's District Church Council (DCC) agrees with the planning inspector's findings following the planning enquiry in 2014, that a development on this site would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the local area, specifically:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The setting of the nearby listed buildings comprising St Laurence's Church and Home Farm and the linked Caversfield House and remains of the former village and ponds (The Planning Inspectorate appeal decision dated 27th May 2014 by David Nicholson describes the detrimental impact in paragraphs 23, 24, 26-28 and 42).2. The distinct character of Caversfield is to be in the countryside and separate from Bicester. The 2014 planning enquiry finding referred to Cherwell District Council's intention to maintain a green buffer between the developing NW Bicester and the village, and to the fact that Fringford Rd is a country road with agricultural land to its west and unobtrusive housing related to the former RAF Bicester to its east. The DCC considers it is essential for the local community to maintain a clear rural zone between Bicester and Caversfield and to avoid urban sprawl. Furthermore, Fringford Rd and the land to either side provides a valuable green corridor for walkers, runners and cyclists from Bicester into the countryside and the villages to the north and is the only safe route in this direction for active travel. Housing development, a new road junction and increased motor traffic would damage this asset. <p>Reasons 1 and 2 of the local authority's refusal of a previous application at the same site dated 4th October 2013 confirm this position and with the subsequent development of NW Bicester these reasons are even more cogent.</p> <p>Local housing need</p> <p>The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031, adopted Dec 2016, identifies large areas of land in Bicester for building, including 3,293 new houses in the nearby NW Bicester, by 2031 and more, to a total of 6,000 in NW Bicester, after that date. Therefore the local authority, following public consultation, has allocated a more than adequate land supply for new housing for many years to come. In addition the emerging updated local plan, Cherwell 2040, is expected to allocate more land for new housing though not in Caversfield. The houses envisaged in this application are not necessary and to approve the application would be contrary to local council policies.</p> <p>The outline application refers to 99 houses to be sold on the open market. Even though 35 are described as "affordable" these are unlikely to benefit local families, whose need is for genuinely social housing.</p> <p>Little contribution to the existing village community</p> <p>The application offers no new amenities to the village, so will not enrich the wider local community or facilitate integration between the existing village and the new development.</p> <p>Sustainable travel</p> <p>The application recognises the paucity of local amenities by emphasising potential sustainable and active travel links with Bicester in order to support the claim that journeys by the residents of the proposed development would not be predominantly by private car. However the X5 bus stop near Bicester Heritage main entrance is a substantial walk away from the entrance to the site along an unlit footpath. The pedestrian crossing on Banbury Rd has not yet been built; if and when it is built the detail of footways to the nearest bus stop have not yet been designed but it is unlikely that distance and streetlighting will make this a practical option.</p> <p>Regarding cycling as an option, distances to any new amenities in NW Bicester are such that cycling will be more practical than walking, yet no cycle track is envisaged to the potential</p>

Banbury Rd crossing and it is unlikely that there would be space for provision of facilities which meet modern standards. There is a proposed track to Bicester but this is shared with pedestrians, which is unpopular with cyclists and walkers alike, so not recommended in modern guidelines. It is not clear whether there is space for good quality provision. In the light of the above it is probable that the development would result in a significant increase in motor traffic, particularly along Aunt Ems Lane to and from Banbury Rd.

Threat to biodiversity

For several years St Laurence's churchyard and the grounds of Caversfield House have been managed in such a way as to maximise opportunities for conservation of plants and wildlife. This area is directly adjacent to what is currently open farmland eastwards to Fringford Rd. To urbanise the unlit farmland, even if there were some planting and maintenance of a green corridor, is likely to be detrimental to the biodiversity of this area close to Bicester.

Overall, the disadvantages of developing this site look to far outweigh the advantages so we would oppose it going ahead.

However, if outline planning permission is granted we ask that firm conditions be applied.

1. As a church, we recognise that people need to places to live and welcome appropriate, thoughtful and sensitive housing developments in and around Bicester. These need to provide for all income levels and we would ask for a significant level of social, as well as affordable, housing to form part of the development.
2. We also embrace our role in helping the communities of 'old' and 'new' Caversfield maintain and develop a community identity rooted in the deep sense of place offered by St Laurence's Church and other heritage buildings. The footpath to the crossing by the church (not yet in place) needs to be suitable for cyclists as well as pedestrians.
3. The church mission statement is summarised as 'Worship, Welcome and Wildlife' and we offer both a beautiful setting for people and a valuable range of habitats for flora and fauna of many kinds, linking to those offered by Caversfield House and beyond. It is important that biodiversity is supported with the provision of wild areas and substantial 'green lanes' to allow wildlife to move with natural cover through the development.

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Attachments