

REF: 24/00295/PIP

Location: Islip Railway Station Bletchingdon Road Islip
OX5 2TQ

04 March 2024

Dear Seva,

Thank you for consulting me on the above application. I have reviewed the submitted documents and crime statistics for the local area. Whilst I do not object to the principle of residential development in this area, I have fundamental concerns with the illustrative layouts and masterplan provided. I highlight at this point, were the illustrative layouts provided submitted for planning permission, Thames Valley Police would object. I have fundamental concerns in terms of the potential for crime and disorder, due to the highly exposed and vulnerable block structure of the residential dwellings. I provide the following comments in relation to the illustrative site plan provided, to ensure forthcoming applications meet the requirements of;

- The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 paragraph 96(b); which states that Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion...
- The National Planning Policy Framework 2023, paragraph 135(f) which states that “Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible... and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience”.

Residential block structure

- I have fundamental concerns that all residential dwellings within the proposed scheme would be at elevated risk of high harm crime such as burglary, due to the significant amount of exposed vulnerable boundaries for all plots within the scheme. The vast majority of all residential burglaries are committed when entry is gained via the rear, after gaining access over a vulnerable exposed side or rear garden boundary. Side and rear garden boundaries must be provided high levels of protection, which is usually achieved by fully enclosing them within a secure back to back block layout. Whenever this is not possible, such as a corner turning plot, the exposed boundary must be protected utilising defensible space and planting (see below), and must also be well overlooked by surveillance from surrounding dwellings. In the submitted scheme, not only are boundaries exposed and unprotected, but they also lack any surveillance from surrounding development.
- These dwellings would also be at higher risk of crime given the isolated rural location of the proposed development, where there is not a high level of activity and surveillance from other surrounding residential development.
- The green space to the south east of the development creates vulnerability for the same reasons described above. Whilst outside of the red line of development, this space is a risk that creates vulnerability for the residential units and must be addressed by the proposed development. It is unclear what use or function this space has, leaving it very vulnerable to crime, antisocial behaviour and fly tipping.
- I have fundamental concerns with the proposed parking court to the north of the development, with overlooking from only one dwelling, creating significant vulnerability and crime risk.

- The “Community green” at the entrance to the development lacks purpose or function, and is not well overlooked by surveillance from the development that it serves, leaving it vulnerable to crime, antisocial behaviour and unauthorised vehicular incursion.

Commercial block structure

- The proposed commercial development introduces anonymity to the development as a whole, whereby an offender will be able to gain direct access to vulnerable residential rear boundaries whilst being difficult to identify as an offender and unchallengeable due to being in uncontrolled space (i.e. the commercial car park).
- The large commercial car park, which is shielded from view by the building, will be vulnerable to crime and antisocial behaviour in hours of darkness unless fully secured to prevent vehicular access.
- Any doors or windows facing into the car park would be vulnerable to concealed entry attempts when the building is not in use.

I provide the following general comments to assist the applicant when refining plans.

Parking

Wherever possible, in curtilage parking is preferred. In any case, a parking space must be covered by active surveillance from the dwelling that it serves, providing parked vehicles with a capable and appropriate guardian. Windows should be included at ground floor level in elevations overlooking parking to maximise surveillance opportunities over parked vehicles and garages. Locating parking to the rear boundary of the plot should be avoided, as it restricts the opportunities for surveillance and leaves vehicles vulnerable to crime.

As rule, parking courts should be avoided as they can attract those intent on crime and antisocial behaviour. Rear parking courts should be completely avoided, as they undermine the security provided by a secure perimeter block. They are often poorly lit with a lack of surveillance, providing access to vulnerable side and rear boundaries, which is the point of entry for the majority of residential burglaries. Parking courts are often abandoned by residents (especially after incidents have occurred) in favour of parking in front of dwellings where people can see and actually want to park their vehicles, leading to conflict between neighbours, parking on footways and access problems. Recessed areas and a lack of surveillance within parking courts creates an ideal gathering location for non-residents to meet whilst providing a legitimate excuse to be there.

Where parking courts are necessary (such as for apartment blocks), to mitigate the issues mentioned above it will be critical that:

- The parking courts are well lit with column lighting - lighting in parking court areas is a contentious issue as the question around who pays for the power usually arise, therefore these column lights will need to be fed from the adopted highway.
- Tree planting within parking courts must be a clear stemmed variety clear to at least 2m to facilitate clear sightlines and surveillance, and they must be designed and located holistically with the lighting scheme to avoid shadowing and pooling of light.
- Bollard lighting is not appropriate and must not be used, as they can be damaged by reversing vehicles and more critically they do not provide sufficient light at the right height to aid facial recognition and reduce the fear of crime. It does not deter crime and antisocial behaviour.
- They must have a high level of active surveillance from adjoining dwellings, and defensible space must be provided between the parking bays and any abutting property boundary.
- Defensible space must also be provided to the boundaries of properties forming the entrance to a parking courts.
- Parking spaces within parking courts must be directly adjacent to the property that they serve.
- All spaces within parking courts must be allocated – no casual or visitor parking should be provided within a private parking court. Unallocated parking makes it difficult for future residents to identify and challenge the presence of an offender or suspicious activity and is inappropriate in a rear parking court.

- Visitor parking should be provided on-street where it is covered by surveillance from surrounding dwellings.
- Parking courts must not be excessively permeable, and should only have one single combined entry and exit point.
- The entrance to a parking court must be overlooked by active surveillance.
- Where on-street parking is provided, it must be located where it is overlooked by active surveillance from dwellings.
- Where coach house/FOG style entrances are utilised as entrances to private parking courts, these should be secured by electronic gated access.

Rear access routes

All rear access routes must be secured to the front of the building line, and secured with a robust key operated lock operable from both sides. Rear access routes should be singular and must not run in parallel with the rear access for another plot. Shared rear access points should be avoided, but where they are unavoidable they should serve no more than 4 dwellings.

Defensible Space

There should be clear definition between the public and private realm. Where the public or semi-private realm adjoins private areas of the development, defensible space and planting to a depth of at least 1m should be provided. This will provide an area of 'stand-off', marking the change of ownership and therefore the acceptable activity that is associated with it, protecting the privacy and security of occupants whilst reducing the potential for neighbourhood disputes. This is particularly important where parking areas or public spaces abut vulnerable side or rear residential boundaries. Side and rear boundaries are the entry point for the majority of residential burglaries, and should be secured within a secure perimeter block wherever possible to prevent easy access. Consideration should be given to specifying thorny species where defensible planting is required to provide additional physical protection to boundaries.

Surveillance

It is vital that public areas are well overlooked by natural surveillance from surrounding dwellings, and active frontage to all streets and to neighbouring open spaces should be a key aim in all developments. Surveillance should be provided at ground floor level from active rooms within dwellings. Active rooms include Living rooms and kitchens, which are most likely to be occupied throughout the day. Blank gable ends that face the public realm must be avoided, as they can be attractive to crime and antisocial behaviour.

Corner plots must be exploited to maximise surveillance over the public realm, with dual aspect windows from active rooms (kitchens or living rooms) added to "turn the corner". They should be orientated to maximise the surveillance opportunities they provide.

Bin and cycle stores

Residential bin and cycle stores should ideally be located within the secure boundary of the property. Where this is not possible, they should be located where they are covered by good natural surveillance, but cannot be used as a climbing aid over a boundary. Internal bin stores should be robustly secured with a single leaf door to a minimum standard of LPS 1175 SR1 or equivalent. Plots without a garage must have secure cycle storage provided within the rear garden of the plot.

Commercial bin stores must be completely separated from residential bin stores.

Public Open Space

Areas of POS/play should be designed and located to incorporate a high level of natural surveillance from neighbouring dwellings. The occupants of these dwellings could act as capable guardians to play areas, but need to be able to observe the area from active rooms in the dwellings to do so effectively. Clear stem trees (clear to 2m), and hedging maintained below 1m should be used in the planting to facilitate clear sightlines. Areas of green space adjoining the highway must also have sufficient landscaping and/or design features to prevent unauthorised vehicle incursion, to protect them from unauthorised encampments.

Lighting

Lighting throughout the development should meet the general standards of BS5489-1:2020. Lighting plans should be provided which should set out how this standard will be achieved not only on adopted highways, but also un-adopted roads and parking courts. Note above, parking court lighting should be included within the plan, and be fed from the main highway. Bollard lighting is not an appropriate lighting method, and should be avoided. Not only can they be damaged by reversing vehicles, more critically they do not provide sufficient light at the right height to aid facial recognition and reduce the fear of crime. It also does not deter crime and antisocial behaviour.

Excessive permeability

Excessive permeability introduces anonymity, making it difficult for residents to identify and challenge who should or shouldn't be there. Residential areas should primarily be formed of secure perimeter blocks, which protect the vulnerable side and rear boundaries of properties. Clear and direct routes through developments are important, but they should not undermine the defensible space of neighbourhoods:

Maximising Legitimate Activity - Perhaps the most important factor is that footpaths should have a high level of legitimate usage, deterring those intent on crime and anti-social behaviour with the risk of being observed or challenged. To ensure pathways become well used, they must lead to places people need to go, preventing desire lines through the development likely to undermine private space. They should promote a feeling of being a 'safe route' encouraging their usage further. Providing an excessive number of footpaths through developments dilutes activity and usage levels, leaving them vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour and providing a network of escape routes for an offender.

Maximising Surveillance - To help deter those intent on crime and anti-social behaviour footpaths should in general terms be as straight and as wide as possible, maximising surveillance along the route and allowing people to pass with ease. Landscaping should support clear sightlines and take into consideration surveillance from the residential dwellings (incorporating visibility from active rooms) to the public realm and vice versa.

Identifying Primary Routes – It is important that primary pedestrian routes required to navigate the site on a day to day basis are identified. These must be located where sufficient surveillance and lighting can support them to deter crime and anti-social behaviour and provide the user with a sense of security. Those located where lighting or surveillance will be restricted due to ecology and landscaping requirements should be avoidable if the user wishes.

Cycle routes

The principles in terms of the footpaths and pedestrian access should also be applied to these cycle ways. Providing dual purpose routes (pedestrian/cyclist) would be beneficial in attracting higher levels of legitimate activity and casual surveillance and should be promoted.

Utility Meters

Unless smart meters are specified, private utility meters must be located where they are easily accessible and visible from the public realm. They must not be located behind a secure boundary or within the rear garden or rear access routes. Locating the boxes in private areas creates a risk of distraction burglary for occupants, particularly elderly or vulnerable residents. Utility boxes must not be deliberately hidden, as this gives a burglar or criminal a legitimate excuse of "trying to find the meter to read it", whilst being in private spaces

Planning Conditions

I ask that the following or similarly worded condition be placed upon any future planning approval;

Condition 1:

Prior to commencement of development, an application shall be made for Secured by Design accreditation on the development hereby approved. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details, and shall not be occupied or used until confirmation of SBD accreditation has been received by the authority.

Condition 2:

Prior to commencement of development, details of a proposed external lighting scheme shall be submitted to the local planning authority. The scheme shall set out the steps that will be taken to ensure that external lighting, including zonal/security lighting and column lighting within parking courts promotes a secure environment and does not cause a nuisance to local residents.

Informative

Whilst not a material planning consideration at this point, I highlight to the applicant the future risk of the proposed new Oxford United stadium, to be located one train stop away in Kidlington. Should this development come to fruition, there is a risk that football fans may seek to park within Islip to use the train to get to the stadium, due to the lack of parking that will be present on site there.

The above comments are made on behalf of Thames Valley Police and relate to crime prevention design only. I hope that you find these comments of assistance. If you have any queries relating to crime prevention design, please do not hesitate to contact myself.

Kind regards
Kevin Cox.