

## **BUILDING FOR LIFE ASSESSMENT RESPONSE TO HCA ASSESSMENT**

### **Background**

The application was the subject of a Building for Life assessment by the HCA in February 2011 (see schedule dated 18 February 2011). The PPS1 Supplement seeks an award of at least 14 points (Silver Standard).

Amendments were submitted in April 2011 with further illustrative and supporting material in June 2011. These amendments have not been the subject of a formal assessment. However, Anthony Keown at the HCA has informally reviewed his original assessment against the various amendments and in his email dated 30 June 2011, he identifies areas where he considers further clarification and evidence could assist in the scheme attaining Silver Standard based upon his assessment. Additional half points have been awarded in respect of architectural quality, adaption of internal layout and use of advances in construction technology. On this basis, the scheme achieves 12 points without further clarification.

In any assessment methodology that seeks to establish a quantative measure based upon qualitative assessment, there is always likely to be a variance in opinion. The applicants' review of the scheme has resulted in a higher score. However, for current purposes, we are keen to reach common ground with the HCA and Officers that the scheme can and does attain Silver standard, based upon the HCA's assessment.

The consultant team has reviewed the 18 February 2011 assessment would respond as follows:

### **Community Facilities (Feb 2011 0 points):**

**'Does the development provide for (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs and cafes?'**

We have made considerable progress with the draft heads of the s106 agreement and the report to Committee sets out Officers' recommended conditions relating to the timing of facilities. The draft heads are enclosed at Appendix A. The scheme provides for a new primary school, a local food-store plus additional retail units, a pub, community centre and nursery. These facilities are located within the southern fields but will be accessed by pedestrian and cycle routes, both 'on road' and through the river corridor and open space.

In terms of delivery:

- **School:** The draft heads provide for the transfer of the land for the first phase (i.e. 1FE) (subsequent phases to be provided in tandem with subsequent phases of the wider Eco Town) to the OCC. The heads also provide for the underwriting of the build cost of the school (that element attributed by the County to the development) by the developer;
- **Food-store:** Officers have been provided with copies of the heads of terms agreed with the Co-op and Grampian conditions control timing;

- **Other Retail Units and Nursery:** The Co-op will also build the retail units and nursery under licence from the developer and again, Grampian conditions control timing. The draft heads of the s106 are enclosed at Appendix A.
- **Community Centre:** In the immediate and short term, the community hall will be provided within the sales centre of A2D. A dedicated community facility will be built either with the retail units or, within the Eco Business Centre to be provided jointly with CDC or indeed, within the primary school;
- Pub Provision is also made for a pub and discussions are advanced with Hook Norton.

In addition, the schemes provides for play areas and open space, with the school providing further opportunity for formal sport. In our view, the scheme meets the Building for Life standards in this respect and a full point should be awarded.

In our view, **1 point** ought to be awarded.

#### **Residential Mix (Feb 2011 0 points):**

##### **'Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?'**

The issue here is how the needs and aspirations of the community are defined. The scheme provides for 30% of the units to be provided on an affordable basis, the mix of which reflects that requested by CDC. In this respect, the scheme must be taken to meet the needs and aspirations of the community and a half point awarded. The outstanding issue is the private sale mix and whether a full point should be awarded.

The adopted Local Plan does not contain a policy addressing residential mix. There is therefore no issue of non conformity with the development plan. In his assessment of February 2011, Anthony Keown points to the emerging Core Strategy (policy H6) and seeks clarification as to whether the scheme is compliant with policy. We make no comment at this stage as to the weight to be attached to this policy. However, I presume that the emerging policy is a reflection of the Council's response to the needs and aspirations of the community as defined by the evidence base that underpins the emerging Core Strategy?

Policy H6 of the emerging core strategy seeks new development to provide for a mix of homes to meet current and future requirements. The policy sets out a mix that will be used **'to guide decision making'**.

It is important to note that the policy is not prescriptive and is to be used as a guide. Further, the policy is intended to inform all applications, large and small scale, refurbishment and new build, Brownfield and green field, across the entire District. I also note that the AMR does not provide any basis of monitoring completions against the H6 target.

The policy is derived from the B Line Housing Information Report *'Assessing the Type and Size of Housing Stock in Cherwell'* (September 2009). The report followed the SHMA assessment prepared by Tribal (2006/7). The report seeks to apply the findings of the report to the household projections and identify the 'optimum profile output' for the period to 2026. This is split into three phases: 2016, 2021 and 2026, minor changes in the mix are proposed over that time period.

Clearly, each site will perform a different function in the housing market, and will be attractive to different types of occupiers. There is also a need to consider the type and

form of development that is suitable for the site. As a general rule, Brownfield, inner urban sites tend to be more likely to be developed for flatted development, with Greenfield generally being developed for a higher proportion of family housing. This is reflected in the table at page 2 of the B Line report which sets out the differing locations and dwelling type needs or demands by ageing group and lifecycle. The community's aspirations in terms of mix and location will vary, so that the 'flatted, first time buyer' market will generally seek more central locations, whilst those seeking family housing look towards more suburban locations.

In defining the scheme, the applicants also had regard to marketing evidence and undertook extensive consultation.

The marketing evidence was provided by Stubbings Property Marketing and advised that:

- The CACI demographic profile shows that the area predominantly attracts young-white collar couples with families;
- These are suburban communities with young families;
- There is low demand for apartments in the area;
- There is strong demand for family housing sized two and three bedroom housing;
- Based upon marketing trends, the mix should be weighted towards 2, 3 and 4 bedroomed houses;
- There is a ceiling price of £400,000 per property within the town.

There is a need to provide a range of housing types to accommodate the aspirations of all income brackets and to provide for 'trading up and down' as the community develops.

The scheme reflects the marketing advice and the commercial advice within A2D and is in general accordance with emerging policy H6, set out in the table below.

Housing Type	Draft Core Strategy Policy H6		NW Provision Bicester
1 bed flats	4%		2%
2 bed upsizing flats	8%	27%	34.6%
2 bed houses	19%		
3 bed houses and larger	35%	37%	36.1%
3 bed flats/ cluster homes	2%		
2 bed retirement/ downsizing homes	23%		0%
1 / 2 bed extra care homes	9%		0%
4 bed house	0%		15.8%
5 bed house	0%		11.5%

In formulating the planning application, extensive public consultation as undertaken which included workshops and questionnaires. The Statement of Community Involvement sets out the consultation and engagement undertaken and the issues raised. In terms of housing, there was broad support for the mix of homes, community and employment (see Q1a of the October consultation) and a general desire for a high level of affordable and family housing (see comments book from the Open Planning Weekend). We can of course provide further details if required.

The scheme provides for a range of dwelling types and tenures, reflecting market demand and the needs and aspirations of the community. It provides for a range of dwelling types, reflecting the 'guide' set out in the emerging policy as informed by the site and marketing evidence. Accordingly, it is our view that a full point should be awarded in this respect.

In our view, **1 point** ought to be awarded.

**Is Public Space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place? (Feb 2011 0.5 points):**

The assessment points to the lack of detail in prescribing the management arrangements to ensure that public spaces are maintained in the future. There does not appear to be a criticism or concern as to the design of the public spaces.

Since first submission, further work has been undertaken in respect of the design, form and function of the public realm, especially the home zones and river corridor area (see streetscape proposals and supporting sections 8019/8020/8025/8026/8029/8030/8031/8032/8034/8036/8037/8038/8039/8040/8041/8047/8048/ and also River Corridor and supporting sections 8043).

The draft heads of the s106 provide for the preparation and agreement of a management plan (see enclosed at Appendix A - refer to 'Outline Landscape and Ecology Conservation Management Plan') and for the developer to manage and maintain in accordance therewith. The s106 will also provide for a fall-back of transfer to the LPA with an agreed commuted sum. In addition, the agreement will also provide for transfer to the governance body (LMO). In addition, the scope of the biodiversity management plan has been submitted and will be tied to any permission granted.

In our view, **1 point** ought to be awarded.

**BARTON WILLMORE LLP  
AUGUST 2011**

List of background documents: