

01 March 2011

Jenny Barker
Cherwell District Council
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Our ref: CSE-18719

Dear Jenny Barker

**Cherwell District Council: Northwest Bicester Eco-town – Exemplar Site
Planning application reference: 10/01780/HYBRID**

Thank you for coming to the meeting of CABE's design review panel, chaired by Sunand Prasad, on the 26 January 2011 in connection with this scheme. Following a site visit and a meeting with the design team and local authority, and a previous review, we are pleased to comment on the scheme in light of the presentation and the discussion which followed it. CABE's views, which supersede all views which may have been expressed previously, are set out below. This is our formal response to the planning application.

Summary

The execution of the first phase of the north-west Bicester masterplan will set a precedent for development in the area over the next 20 to 30 years; therefore it is crucial that the first phase sets high standards for the future. It is disappointing; therefore, that the eco-credentials of the scheme are limited and that there is little deviation from the standard suburban housing model. We think that the proposals must be more visionary in their approach if the requirements of the PPS1 Ecotowns supplement are to be met. In light of our following comments, we are unable to support this planning application.

Masterplan

It is unfortunate that the planning application for the exemplar phase has been submitted prior to the submission for approval of the overall masterplan. This is a back to front approach and makes it more difficult for the exemplar phase to be

considered as an integrated part of the masterplan development, given that the masterplan is still yet to be finalised and agreed.

Site layout

Convincing work has been undertaken to consider the flexibility of the landscape and to incorporate the existing field pattern into the site plan. This could successfully deal with the co-existence of the developed and undeveloped plots, by providing clear boundaries. It is inevitable that the phasing of the development will result in changes to the co-existence of different land uses, with fields directly adjacent to new homes when initial plots are developed, which overtime will be built upon.



We are encouraged that thought has been given to how the phases will link to one another by providing lanes that can continue into adjacent phases and not constrained dead ends. However we think that this work should be taken further. It is essential to the success of the masterplan that individual phases are not designed in isolation and we suggest that site layout plans are put together for adjacent plots from the outset in order to ensure that the design of different phases fit together. In light of this point, we question whether it is desirable to build right up to the site boundaries, which could lead the next phase to do the same which would then blur the development boundaries and loose sight of the original ethos of the site plan.

We find that the arrangement of clusters provides a structure to the development which is more manageable than the whole. We suggest that different clusters could create different characters or types of development, providing choices for the future community. However we query how the different clusters relate to each other and how the clusters relate to individual plots

We find the layout of streets and spaces interesting, such as the single carriageway streets with passing places that could add interest and variety to the public realm. It needs to be demonstrated that sufficient access will be provided for emergency services and refuse trucks. We question whether the levels of maintenance required for this form of street design can be sustained, or will these spaces be adopted and maintained by the local highways authority?

Density

We think that the density of the development is too low, lower indeed than that of the nearest areas of existing development. The idea behind an eco-town development is to provide an efficient and intensive scheme layout, however this scheme does not meet these requirements generated by the imperative of efficient use of infrastructure. The team has not demonstrated why such a low density development is being proposed as we see no reason why a higher density scheme would not be viable in this location. We are concerned that the low density will militate against the

principles of the EcoTowns PPS principally greater resource efficiency and the reduction of car use.

Architecture

We are encouraged to see that three different architects are working on the housing designs, but are disappointed that a greater variety of house types is not emerging to provide a greater choice for buyers. All the clusters of development are the same in terms of building typologies and architecture, and that there is limited variety in terms of the size of dwellings.

Conclusion

For the exemplar site, we would expect to see a proposal that captures the essential aspirations of an eco-town: the current proposals fall short of that mark.



Please keep CABE in touch with the progress of this scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Diane Haigh'. The script is cursive and fluid.

Diane Haigh
Director of architecture and design review
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cc	John Leatherland	Farrells
	Sarah Green	Environment Agency
	David Waterhouse	CLG
	Jodee Katalanos	HCA
	Antony Keown	HCA
	Stephen Hill	Atlas

Panel members

The CABE design review panel members who attended the meeting were as follows: Sunand Prasad (chair), Chris Baines, Richard Cass, Andrew Comer, Bill Gething, John Hopkins, Gerard Maccreeanor, Brian Mark, Duncan Painter.

Declaration of interest

Liz Peace is a CABE commissioner and is also chief executive of the British Property Federation. In this role, she does not have direct involvement in development schemes proposed by federation members.

Public scheme

As this scheme is the subject of a planning application, we will publish our views on our website, www.cabe.org.uk

Affiliated panels

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