

## **Oxfordshire County Council's response to Cherwell District Council's consultation on proposals for the redevelopment of MoD Bicester (application no11/01494/OUT)**

### **Summary**

1. The application proposals have the potential to contribute towards a number of inter-related benefits, namely:
  - Enabling national government to meet its operational needs by selling off surplus government land to consolidate its defence logistics functions on one site and retaining a military presence in Bicester;
  - To act as a catalyst for the jobs-led economic growth that Bicester needs to stimulate the housing market and address the current housing/jobs imbalance, whilst contributing towards identified infrastructure needs across the town;
  - The sites are in the ownership of one landowner who needs to sell off surplus land – this will aid deliverability but there are still viability issues that will need to be overcome to ensure that the sites maximise their potential; and
  - The sites would deliver the sustainable redevelopment of brownfield land.
2. The application is in outline with a well-developed yet indicative masterplan that sets out broad principles for the development and demonstrates how it might work; the detail will follow at a later stage in the planning process.
3. Although viability issues need to be resolved it is important to also consider the likelihood of the scheme's deliverability and look at the benefits that economic-led growth will bring for Bicester.
4. On balance officers recommend that the County Council should inform Cherwell District Council (CDC) that, in principle, it **SUPPORTS** these proposals. However, this is subject to further clarification being provided, in particular how the viability issues can be collectively addressed.
5. Further details for this decision are provided in this paper.

### **Introduction**

6. CDC has consulted the County Council on outline proposals by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for:
  - Construction of a Fulfilment Centre on 'C' site to form the National Logistics Hub for the UK Armed Forces; the scheme would retain 420 existing MoD jobs and provide an extra 200 jobs; and
  - A sustainable mixed use development at Graven Hill which would deliver around 2,070 new jobs (primarily offices, research and development, light industrial, and storage and distribution) and 1,900

homes together with a new primary school, local centre, open space and highway and transport improvements.

7. A set of plans outlining the proposals are to be found in Annex 1.
8. Officers have been fully engaged in pre-application discussions with the MoD which have helped to shape the indicative masterplan supporting the application. The MoD has been advised of the range and scale of s106 requirements to which the County Council would seek developer contributions.
9. It should be noted that development proposals do not currently form part of CDC's emerging Core Strategy. However, it is intended that the application will be considered by CDC's Planning Committee on 5 January 2012.

### **Background**

10. Following the Government's Strategic Defence and Security Review, the MoD needs to rationalise and modernise its storage and distribution functions to reduce the capital costs of its estate, reduce operational costs and increase efficiency.
11. MoD has decided to withdraw logistics operations from D and E sites (Graven Hill) and consolidate functions on a smaller footprint on 'C' site, using the value from the disposal of the surplus land to fund the new facilities.
12. As part of the MoD's consolidation plans, they also plan to relocate other logistic facilities from across the UK to 'C' site at Bicester.
13. As implementation of the proposals for 'C' site are dependent on funding from the proceeds from Graven Hill, particularly the residential element, both sets of proposals are contained in this single application.
14. The MoD intends to sell Graven Hill with outline permission and work with a strategic partner(s) to deliver both sites.
15. The existing St David's Barracks (located at Graven Hill) is excluded from the application together with an adjacent expansion area safeguarded for future military development.
16. Details of the proposals contained in the application and the proposed phasing of the employment and housing development are in annex 2 to this report.

### **Relevant strategic policy**

17. The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) identifies Bicester as a key spatial priority and aims to align its work on economic development, transport and infrastructure, housing and skills such that the town is recognised as an international exemplar of sustainable development.

18. The application will also need to be considered in accordance with the still extant SE Plan and national policies such as PPG3 and PPG13. Weight should also be given to the emerging National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which emphasises the need to deliver sustainable development, particularly economic and housing growth together with the timely provision of supporting infrastructure.
19. CDC's draft Core Strategy (Feb 2010) proposes that Bicester should continue to grow and 5,550 dwellings should be built in the town between 2006-26. However, these proposals do not currently form part of this allocation.
20. In addition to this, the County's approved Local Transport Plan 2011 – 2030 outlines a transport strategy for Bicester taking account of the scale of development that is expected to take place in the town over the next 20 years.

### **Comments**

21. In addition to the strategic benefits outlined in the introduction to this report, the application raises some key issues which are summarised below (detailed officer comments are set out in Annex 3).

### **Economic Development**

22. Bicester needs employment development which creates high-quality job opportunities and provides existing and future residents with the choice to work locally, potentially reducing out-commuting and improving Bicester's image as a dormitory town. Jobs-led growth would stimulate the housing market, improving the viability of future housing developments.
23. The application is accompanied by an Economic Strategy which sets out how the proposals would contribute to jobs-led growth in the town (see annex 2).
  - Phase 1: The rationalisation of MoD's logistics footprint on to 'C' site would not only retain existing jobs but would also provide 200 extra jobs. A transition plan would be implemented for moving existing 'C' site tenants onto surplus land.
  - Phase 2: The vacation of Graven Hill buildings would result in premises of varying sizes being readily available for large and small businesses to move in to immediately, creating additional jobs as the housing development commences and provides a source of local labour. The rental income would also help the site to be viable until the residential development is built out and the market for commercial land is established. The development of a core logistics location on 'C' site and good access from the site to military bases eg Brize Norton could potentially act as a draw to defence suppliers. In turn, this could provide the focus for an employment cluster that would offer Bicester a competitive edge nationally.

- Phase 3: New speculative or purpose built commercial facilities would provide for a variety of occupants, taking advantage of the rail connectivity of the site together with the planned improvements in the town's transport system (Evergreen 3, East-West rail, M40 J9, planned improvements to the local network).

24. In addition to the 1,840 jobs created directly on the employment land, some 230 jobs would be generated in the local centre (retail/hotel) and primary school.

25. These proposals have the potential to make a significant and fairly immediate contribution to jobs-led economic growth in Bicester as well as contributing towards identifying the town as a prime location for investment.

### **Housing**

26. Economic development in Bicester needs to be supported by complementary housing.

27. Graven Hill would deliver 1,900 homes commencing in 2015/16 at 150 dwellings per annum and would be built out by 2027/28. The proposal would make a significant contribution to meeting local housing need in the short to medium term and add to the offer of housing choice available in the town.

28. The applicant has committed to ensuring that their proposals will meet the national codes for house building at the time of development. Given the changes to national standards, which are likely to come into force in 2014/15, this commitment by the applicant will enable them to meet the standards as set out in the Eco-Bicester "One Shared Vision".

### **Transport**

29. As these proposals are for brownfield land, there is an existing transport network on both sites which the applicant intends to utilise, whilst also making a number of on-site improvements.

30. A number of off-site improvements to mitigate against the impact of their proposals are also proposed. Whilst these improvements would be welcomed, the County Council would like to have further discussions with the applicant to ensure that the detailed proposals bring benefits for the development as well as the wider area.

31. Transport modelling suggests that these proposals would cause further congestion at the M40 junction nine. Whilst this junction is the responsibility of the Highways Agency, the County Council would like to work with both parties to resolve these issues.

32. The existing road serving warehousing on Graven Hill is to be upgraded to facilitate a potential south east perimeter road from the A41 in the north

east of the site to the A41 Oxford Road to the south west of the site. A perimeter road would bring substantial benefits in alleviating congestion on the network. It is not included as part of the application but it does future proof its provision: it would be for the County Council to lead on the scheme when funding allows.

33. It should be noted that officers continue to have discussions with the applicant and Chiltern Railways to ensure that the Evergreen 3 bridge works to the south west of the site are being designed to be capable of accommodating this future perimeter road.
34. Both of the sites are served by existing freight rail connections. The County Council would like to continue discussions with the applicant to ascertain how this relatively unique opportunity could be maximised, particularly for employment growth.
35. Comprehensive Travel Plans have been submitted for the two sites. The submitted Travel Plan for Graven Hill needs to further identify how the site will link in to existing walking and cycling networks in the town. The final layout will need to provide direct walking and cycling links across the site, especially between the residential and employment areas and officers will continue to discuss these issues with the applicant as the project moves forward.
36. The existing A41 underpass is to be improved to encourage pedestrians and cyclists to use this route to access routes into Bicester town centre and railway station etc. The routes to and from the underpass are not shown as public highway and may need more investigation as to land ownership.
37. There is also the potential to link Graven Hill site by walking and cycling means to the Bicester Business Park and South West sites. The County Council would like to continue these discussions with the applicant and the respective applicants for the other sites as well.
38. C site is in a rural location and is not a sustainable location. A 'Framework' Travel Plan has been submitted for C site; a full Travel Plan will need to be developed with the final site occupiers taking account of shift patterns/travel demands throughout the day.
39. To meet sustainability objectives in PPG13 and the aspirations of Eco-Bicester "One Shared Vision" the indicative masterplan for Graven Hill seeks to provide a public transport route within 400m walking distance from each property.
40. The Graven Hill development would be linked to key locations such as the town centre and railway stations through provision of a new bus service and diversion of the existing commercial S5 Oxford service, which also has connections to 'C' site.

41. The proposed employment parking is acceptable, in principle. It is proposed that the residential parking is set to a maximum standard and will be subject to “accessibility zones” with the lowest levels of parking around the local centre and other central areas of development. This is acceptable in principle and meets the aspirations for Eco Bicester and objectives of Local Transport Plan 3.
42. On and off-site green links enhance a development and make it more attractive to investors and residents. There are no public rights of way on the site but existing internal highway routes at Graven Hill offer the potential to be retained and incorporated into a layout which encourages walking and cycling. Green corridors would provide links through the development to Graven Hill wood from all sides of the hill which would encourage exercise and recreation within the new community and wider Bicester.
43. There are a number of footpaths/bridleways close to the site with the potential to connect and which would benefit from off-road links/upgrades to make the access safe for all non-motorised users. This would need to be subject to further discussion with the applicant.
44. The drainage proposals are broadly acceptable; however, further information on drainage design will be required to demonstrate that the proposed drainage strategy will work ahead of the position of buildings and other structures being confirmed.

### **Social and Community Infrastructure**

44. The application provides for a 2 Form Entry (2FE) Primary School on a 3FE sized site (3.4ha) to allow for future expansion to a 3FE school if pupil numbers require. The school would be built to zero carbon standards. The application proposes that the school site would incorporate a multi-use games area and parking areas. A community hall of 660sq.m would also be co-located with the school to form a hub adjacent to the Local Centre at the heart of the new community.
45. The following issues will need to be subject of further discussion with the applicant:
  - Timing of provision: Based on available information on housing mix, tenure and build out rates, pupil forecasting indicates that a large number of primary aged pupils would be generated early in the development requiring the early provision of an on-site 2FE school. Early provision would also help encourage sustainable travel patterns to school in line with Eco Bicester objectives and provide a focus for the new community.
  - Funding for the school: The County Council does not have funds available for the provision of the new primary school. The costs of its provision would need to be met from developer contributions (or funded and/or delivered in some other way). Further discussions will be

required as part of the overall s106 negotiations to agree the scale and phasing of payments for the new school plus contributions to the costs of temporary provision, including necessary transport arrangements, pending the opening of the new school on-site.

- School site: The application provides the general indication of the land for the school; detailed information is required to enable the site to be agreed and fixed for inclusion in a s106 agreement as set out in the Council's School Site Requirements for Residential Developments.
- Provision of Childrens Centre services: the proposed residential development would give rise to a need to increase the capacity of Bicester's children centre services. Further work is being done to establish whether this should be through provision of a new service operating as part of the proposed on- site school or community building
- Multi-use games area: the proposed provision of this facility on the school site would be a welcome addition to community sports facilities but it raises issues relating to responsibilities for its long term maintenance.

### **Ecology**

49. The County ecologist is generally content with the proposals for the management of the Graven Hill Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and the creation and management of other habitats on-site.

50. However, there is concern about their deliverability, particularly if the site is to be sold off in parcels to different developers. This could be overcome through:

- Inclusion in the s106 of a plan outlining the areas of habitat to be created as part of each phase of development
- Agreed costs for managing, maintenance and monitoring of the LWS and other habitats in perpetuity being secured through the s106 agreement to ensure that whoever takes on responsibility for management has the funds to do so.

### **Archaeology**

51. The application lies in an area of archaeological interest with Graven Hill itself located close to the Roman town of Alcester and evidence of Roman and Saxon settlement has been recorded in locations around the site. Development at Graven Hill is likely to encounter further archaeological deposits; this can be dealt with by the attachment of appropriate conditions (see annex 3).

### **S106 and viability**

52. The applicant has been advised of the range and scale of contributions that the County are seeking towards new and improved transport,

education and other social and community services infrastructure required to mitigate the impacts of their development proposals.

53. The applicant has offered total s106 contributions of £14,244,254: the sum is expected to cover County on and off-site transport, education and social and community services and facilities together with the provision of affordable housing and other district items and any other service provider's infrastructure requirements.

54. Viability is clearly an issue. The applicant needs to recoup a sufficient return from the redevelopment of Graven Hill to fund the development of 'C' site and available information would indicate that the full range of s106 items is unaffordable. It is hoped that through partnership working with CDC the list of infrastructure items will be prioritised and compromise can be reached with the applicant on the scale and phasing of contributions to enable the proposed development to be delivered.

### **Recommendation**

55. It is **recommended** that Oxfordshire County Council informs Cherwell District Council that, in principle, it **SUPPORTS** these proposals contained in application no11/01494/OUT. However, this is subject to further information and clarification being provided, with regard to economic development, transport, social and community infrastructure, ecology, and in particular how the viability issues can be collectively addressed.

Date: 9 November 2011

Linda Currie  
Daniel Round



## **ANNEX 2: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSALS AND PROPOSED PHASING**

The application seeks permission for the scale and mix of development and the access arrangements to the sites only. A potential layout with indicative scales and heights of buildings has been provided to demonstrate how the quantum of development could be delivered. Details of layout, design, scale and landscaping will be dealt with through Reserved Matters applications.

The principal elements of the scheme are as follows:

### **'C' Site**

- Demolition of buildings C1,C4, C7, C9, C11,C13, C21, C49, C60, C61 and C63 (totalling 35,836 sq.m)
- Erection of a 70,400sq.m fulfilment centre built to DREAM<sup>1</sup> excellent. The building would be 18.6m to ridge height but would be sunk into the ground by 2-4m and with a landscape bund and planting as a buffer between the building and adjoining properties
- Associated on-site access improvement works to remove HGVs queuing on the highway, hardstanding, 350 parking spaces and circulation areas.
- Existing freight rail tracks would be retained to the north of the new building and used as rail sidings with no connection out of 'C' site to the east. The main rail access would be on the west side of the site and connecting to a new Road Rail Transfer Area
- The centre would operate 24hours Mon-Fri over 3 shifts plus weekend working as necessary to deal with priority orders

### **Graven Hill**

The proposals comprise:

- Demolition of all MOD buildings
- 1,900 homes at an average density of 34 dwellings per ha and built to comply with sustainability standards applicable at time of construction.
- Local centre including:
  - 2Form Entry (2FE) primary school built to zero carbon standards incorporating a multiuse games area (MUGA) with sports pavilion and parking on a 3.4ha site to accommodate to allow for future expansion to a 3FE school
  - Community hall 660sq.m co-located with primary school
  - 5 local shops
  - grocery store 1,858 sq.m
  - pub/restaurant/hotel 1,000sq.m plus parking areas
  - energy centre 400sq.m
- Employment floor space comprising:
  - B1a (office) 2,160sq.m on a 0.6ha site (180 jobs)
  - B1c (light industrial) and B2 (general industrial) floor space up to 20,520sq.m (570 jobs) plus B1b (research and development) floor space up to 2,400sq.m (240 jobs) on a 5.7ha site

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<sup>1</sup> DREAM classification is specifically for defence buildings but mirrors BREEAM classification

- B8 storage and distribution floor space up to 66,960sq.m (890 jobs) on 18.6ha site
- Public open space of 62.41 ha comprising:
  - allotments (4ha),
  - accessible woodland (25.21ha)
  - playing pitches (5.87ha),
  - playspace (3.6ha)
  - natural green space (23.73ha)
- Associated off-site highway improvements which could include:
  - widening of A41/B4030 roundabout
  - upgrade of B4030/Middleton Stoney Road mini-roundabout
  - signalisation of Rodney House roundabout
  - upgrade A41/Pioneer Road priority junction to roundabout
  - partial dualling of A41
  - In addition the design of the internal access road will allow for the future provision of a perimeter road linking from the A41 in the north east of the site to the A41 Oxford Road to the south west of the site.
- Public transport improvements; provision of bus services to the town centre and railway stations; re-routeing the commercial service from Oxford to serve part of the site.
- On and of site cycling/pedestrian facilities, including at-grade pedestrian/cycle crossing on A41 and the potential to upgrade the existing underpass under A41
- Sustainable urban drainage systems
- Bio-diversity improvements including a Local Wildlife Site
- Upgrading of the utilities infrastructure

### **Phasing**

Year	Employment	Nos of jobs	Housing/Facilities
2013/14	Demolition of buildings on C site. Upgrade of railway and construction of RRTA. Construction of Fulfilment Centre.		
2014/15	Rationalisation of logistics footprint on to C site and relocation of existing tenants	+ 200	
2015/18	Construction of 2.8ha of B1(b), B1(c) and B2 light industrial units and /or leasing of	2,700	Housing development commences 2015/16 at 150 units p.a

	existing buildings on Graven Hill by large and small businesses.		Phase 1:300 dwellings- 2015/16-2016/17 Local centre (200 jobs in retail/hotel) Primary school (30 jobs)
2018/23	Construction of 11.7ha of B1(b), B1(c) and B2 light industrial units and B8 warehousing.		Phase 2: 840 dwellings - eastern neighbourhood 2016/17 - 2021/22
2023/27	Construction of remaining B8 warehousing		Phase 3 760 dwellings - western neighbourhood 2021/22 - 2027/28