



8 Kerria Way, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9XA

Telephone: 01483 808983 **Mobile:** 07503 745 077 **Email:** enquiries@adnplanning.co.uk **Website:** www.adnplanning.co.uk

Ms Rebecca Horley
Public Protection & Development Management
Cherwell District Council
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
OX15 4AA

Your Ref: 13/01056/OUT
My Ref: C/0037/K

Date: 13th August 2013

Dear Ms Horley,

Re Planning Application: Outline Planning Application for up to 200 residential units, access, amenity space and associated works including a new village shop/hall at Land at South Lodge, Fringford Road, Bicester OX27 8TH

We write on behalf of the owners of Caversfield House to formally object to the above planning application. We will set out in detail why we consider that the application proposal to be wholly misplaced and ill-conceived for this location and as such it will be contrary to both local and national policy and harmful to the character of the area.

The site can be characterised as being open countryside. A small part of it is occupied by a dwelling and stables with the remainder being pasture land. It is accessed from Fringford Lane which is a relatively narrow road. To the south of the site is an unnamed road, whilst to the north-west and north-east is open land belonging to Caversfield House. This land has been managed for wildlife and plant habitat. To the north-east are open fields.

The site falls outside the settlement boundary of Caversfield which is located on the east side of Fringford Road. It is not designated for development in the Council's Development Plan; indeed the emerging Local Plan which has just completed its public consultation period has included it within the designation of Green Buffer. Policy ESD 15 of the Local Plan sees the function of these areas as creating clear green boundaries between the areas of growth on the edge of Bicester and surrounding villages to maintain its distinctive identity and prevent coalescence. The policy states that "*Green*

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buffers will be kept free from built development to protect the identity of settlements, vulnerable gaps between the existing or planned built up developments of Banbury and Bicester and neighbouring villages, and to protect valuable landscape or historic features". The green buffer clearly provides this function and the proposed development, if approved, would result in the coalescence between the village of Caversfield and the proposed Eco town. Further, the lack of any defensible boundary (road, water course etc.) to the north-east would make it difficult for the Council to resist further development into this open land beyond, resulting in additional sprawl and loss of valuable green space and countryside. Whilst the Local Plan has not been adopted and not examined by an independent Inspector, the aforementioned green buffer policy is built on sound planning principles and is unlikely to be recommended for deletion. It should therefore carry weight in the determination of this application.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 14 sets out, at its heart, a presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, it is clear that the site is not in a sustainable location. It is located well beyond walking distance of any amenities, the cycle routes are not good and the bus service infrequent. It is estimated that the Public Transport Accessible Level (PTAL) would be 1, i.e. poor. Consequently, all future occupiers of the development will be car dependent. The proposal will be contrary to 5 of the Council's strategic objectives for ensuring sustainable development. These being to minimize carbon emissions(SO11); to focus development in Cherwell's sustainable locations, making efficient and effective use of land, conserving and enhancing the countryside and landscape and the setting of its towns and villages (SO12); to reduce the dependency on the private car as a mode of travel (SO13), create sustainable communities by providing high quality, locally distinctive and well-designed environments (SO14); and to protect and enhance the natural environment and Cherwell's core assets, including protecting and enhancing cultural heritage assets (SO15).

In addition to policy SO14 of the emerging Cherwell Local Plan, paragraph 128 of the NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities, in determining planning applications, to require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The architect C.R. Cockerill designed Caversfield House which was built in 1842-45 on the site of the original manor house. Caversfield House which exists today is an attractive building set in 70 acres managed for the benefit of wildlife and habitat and includes hay meadows, wetlands, pond and streams, one of which borders the boundary. The north-west boundary of the proposed development borders the south-east boundary of Caversfield House. It presents a hard urban edge and an inappropriate and harmful relationship to this property. A hedge or landscaped strip will do little to soften this impact. It is worthy of note that the Bicester Green Buffer report prepared by LDA Design (18th March 2013) notes that the Green

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buffer designation will “ensure that the area of land that has historically been the parkland associated with Caversfield House remains free from built development”. The proposed development by virtue of its size, quantum and general form would be harmful to the setting of Caversfield House and its gardens and associated habitat.

There is, in addition, a right of way which is enjoyed by the owners of Caversfield House that crosses the application site. The development will impinge upon this right of way and preclude access. Whilst it is accepted that this is not strictly a planning matter, the owners of Caversfield House wish it to be recorded that they will pursue private legal action against the applicants should permission be granted, in order to protect their interests in this matter.

The Planning Statement (Cerdea Planning) sets out at paragraphs 6.8 - 6.10 that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites when assessed against the strategic housing requirement. Whilst this was the case until fairly recently, the introduction of new sites has resulted in this target now being met. The Council’s Housing Land Supply Update (July 2013) has a revised calculation of 5.8 years housing land supply (with a 5% buffer) for the five year period 2013-18. When a 20% buffer is factored into the figures a 5.1 years supply is still achieved. Consequently, the appellants’ assertion that paragraph 14 of the NPPF (presumption in favour of sustainable development) should become active is seriously questioned. In any event, as has been made clear in the preceding paragraphs, the development of this site in the manner described does not amount to sustainable development.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that the proposed development is wholly unsuitable for this site. The development would harm the character and appearance of this green field site and the countryside. It would also be harmful to the historical interest and value of the village and Caversfield House. The unsustainable location will also put additional pressure on the local road network and fail to comply with national and local policies in the need to reduce carbon emissions in new development. Given the Council’s ability to meet the five year housing land supply, there can be no planning justification to support the proposal which clearly breaches both national and local policy. We would urge the Council to refuse permission accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

David Norris
ADN Planning Ltd

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