

Andy Preston  
Head of Public Protection and Development Management  
Cherwell District Council  
Bodicote House  
Bodicote  
Banbury  
OX15 4 AA

29<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Dear Mr Preston

**PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT LAND SOUTH OF PERDISWELL FARM AND  
EAST OF WOODSTOCK, SHIPTON ROAD AND OXFORD ROAD, SHIPTON  
ON CHERWELL, NR WOODSTOCK.  
CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL 14/02063/OUT  
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL 14/02004/HYBRID**

ICOMOS-UK is the UK National Committee of ICOMOS, which has a special role as the official adviser to UNESCO on cultural World Heritage Sites. ICOMOS-UK plays a leading role in implementing the World Heritage Convention 1972 (the Convention) within the UK and promoting best practice in the management of UK World Heritage Sites. The maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the UK World Heritage Sites and their settings is a key objective.

*Introductory remarks*

The proposed development site lies close to the south eastern boundary of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

In line with the terms of the Convention, we consider that its potential impact needs to be assessed both on the World Heritage Site itself and also on its setting.

However, we consider the impact assessments that have been provided are far from satisfactory. Details of impact on the historic landscape in the documentation are very thin, with more attention given to ecology and the scheduled Roman villa site, than to the historic landscape of the World Heritage Site and its setting, despite the location of the proposed development being immediately adjacent to a site of world importance and within its immediate setting. Moreover for a development of this size, a full Heritage Impact Assessment is needed that analyses impact on the attributes of OUV in line with ICOMOS Guidance and World Heritage Committee decisions. Such an impact assessment would cover more than visual impact.

*Impact on the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site*

From the documentation provided, it appears unlikely that the development would be visible from within the World Heritage Site in the area of the Lower Park to the south east of the Palace provided that the belt planting within and beyond the park wall was maintained and with the new avenue and screen planting proposed along the east side of the A44. We would, however, expect the applicant to demonstrate that the development would not impact adversely on the OUV of the World Heritage Site in winter when the leaves are off the trees and from other viewpoints within the World Heritage Site, particularly from the higher ground to the north of the Palace, in the area of the Victory Column and from the upper windows of the Palace. The replacement of open farmland with the major development proposed would have a negative impact on the tranquillity of the closest part of the WHS, from increased traffic flows and from lighting, particularly for floodlit sports pitches. This would be greater in the winter when the leaves are off the trees and in the evenings.

*Impact on the setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site*

Even less analysis of potential impact on the setting of the World Heritage Site is provided. Although Blenheim does not have a formal buffer zone to protect the immediate setting of the World Heritage Site, there is still an obligation to protect the setting of the World Heritage site, which provides an essential context for the Palace and landscape and an approach to it.

The proposed development site lies alongside an important approach to the World Heritage Site and forms part of this immediate setting. Even in the absence of a buffer zone, it is critical that the impact of the proposed development on the setting of the Palace and Park is adequately considered.

Even with the planned new avenue along the east side of the A44, and planting to screen the proposed development, it is difficult to argue that the replacement of open fields by a large area of mixed development would enhance the setting of the WHS or its approach from the south. The increased traffic and lighting already referred to would impact equally on the setting of the World Heritage Site.

The history of Woodstock is bound up with the history of Blenheim. Their relationship is crucial part of the setting of the World Heritage Site and should be considered in a symbiotic way. By doubling the size of the town and providing a new alternative focus to the historic centre of a very different, self-contained, character, the proposed development would significantly alter the balance of this relationship and thus the context of the World Heritage Site. While some smaller scale development on part of the proposed site could be acceptable, we believe that it should be organic in character and of a quality and design that acknowledge the significance of its location next to a World Heritage Site and important historic town.

Even more importantly we consider that any expansion of Woodstock should be considered in a sustainable way, through acknowledging social and cultural as well as environmental considerations, including the inherent dynamism of the town, in order to

strengthen its current structures rather than provide new ones. The whole of the World Heritage Site and its setting needs to be seen as a sustainable unit that has the potential to deliver considerable benefits if its assets are sensitively nurtured and developed. We do not consider that this proposed development in any way respects these approaches.

Yours sincerely



**Peter Marsden**  
**Chair, ICOMOS-UK World Heritage Committee**

