

Comment for planning application 19/01036/F

Application Number	19/01036/F
Location	Bicester Eco Town Exemplar Site Phase 2 Charlotte Avenue Bicester
Proposal	Development of a new Local Centre comprising Retail, Commercial and Community floorspace (flexible Use Class A1/A2/A3/B1/D1), and 38 residential units (use class C3) with associated access, servicing, landscaping and parking
Case Officer	Caroline Ford
Organisation	
Name	David Sean Tomlinson
Address	37 Charlotte Avenue, Bicester, OX27 8AS
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour
Comments	<p>I would like to express my strong objections to these proposed plans in their current form. My principal objection is that the 38 new flats in these plans will detract from the quality of life for existing residents in the community by contributing to current problems and creating new ones. Residents who bought homes on the estate were told that the area in question would be comprised of retail spaces, a community hall, an eco-pub, and other shared public spaces that would help create a vibrant heart of the community. However, in the current plans submitted by A2Dominion, much of that shared, public space is now lost. Instead of public spaces - and public spaces are indeed what one would want at the heart of the community - the area will now be predominantly private: comprised of residential spaces and private parking with a reduction of public retail and business space. Furthermore, the amount of green space has also been reduced from previous plans while conversely the amount of parking space has increased. Surely these changes are the opposite of what a fledgling eco-town should aspire to? The reduction of shared, public retail spaces and the decrease in green space with a corresponding increase in space devoted to cars and private dwellings is a net-loss for the community. Furthermore, the number of jobs which the original retail infrastructure would have supported has now decreased, which also diminishes what the community could become in future and suggests a myopic approach to the eco-town as a whole. There is evidence of mismanagement from A2Dominion in this case in particular. In the planning documents, A2Dominion have claimed that replacing the retail space with residential flats is necessary because the eco-town is commercially unviable at this stage. Yet they failed to undertake the requisite planning prior to beginning building work on the estate to determine what in fact would be commercially viable for the nearly 400 homes they had agreed to build. In the meeting held for residents at the Community House on 9 January 2019, Steve Hornblow conceded that A2Dominion did not undertake the research and consultation needed to establish whether the proposed shop, eco-pub, etc. would be commercially viable for the businesses they hoped to attract, yet they sold the lifestyle of that premise to prospective homeowners. Only now have A2Dominion determined that 800 homes (rather than the nearly 400 they committed to building) would be required before these businesses would consider the site viable. Residents in that meeting asked whether the originally planned buildings could be built now for temporary flexible use, such as pop-up shops, or whether the area could be turned into green space for a few years, with the intent that once a further 400 homes were built by the next developer the area could become the economic centre of the community as planned. One resident even suggested that A2Dominion could subsize the shop and pub in order to fulfil its promise to residents until such time as the businesses could operate self-sufficiently. However all of these suggestions were rebuffed by Mr Hornblow. A number of other concerns were raised at the meeting in January 2019, which are worth reiterating as part of my objection here, including the increase in traffic, parking problems, air pollution, and noise that would be exacerbated with the addition of 38 new families in such a small area. In particular noise is likely to be a significant issue, since retail space tends to be quieter in the evenings, whereas the number of families now projected to be living in the 38 flats will naturally result in more noise in the evenings and at weekends. This is partly because A2Dominion designed homes to trap heat and so have advised residents to keep their windows open at night in the summer to cool their houses (this is stated in the guide to new homes that are provided to residents). As a resident of one of the houses near the river corridor, which the flats will overlook, I can confirm that noise echoes loudly in the area, particularly around the children's play area. The noise is most noticeable when trying to sleep with the windows open during the summer. I and my partner raised concerns with A2Dominion about the anticipated rise in noise with the</p>

38 new flats and asked what steps they might take to mitigate it, but our concerns were dismissed and A2Dominion have not indicated they will take any steps to reduce the extra noise. Another point worth mentioning is that the planned flats on the south side of Charlotte Avenue will overlook the children's play area, which raises concerns about privacy. A2Dominion have not taken any steps to suggest, for example, planting a row of trees or some other barrier between the flats and the children's play area. Each of the flats on the south side of Charlotte Avenue will have large glass doors and balconies directly overlooking the outdoor gym equipment and children's play area. Parents might feel uneasy about this and indeed residents of the flats might equally wish to protect their own privacy from anyone in the children's play area or using the outdoor gym equipment. But A2Dominion do not appear to have taken any of these concerns into consideration in their current plans. With all of these objections in mind, I would strongly urge Cherwell District Council to reject the plans as they currently stand. I and other residents feel strongly that there are too many flats in the proposed plans and that the number of flats should be reduced. This is reflected in a poll on the community Facebook group, where 42 residents indicated their primary concern with A2Dominion's proposed plans was the large number of flats. If the plans to build all 38 new flats are approved, it will remove all future possibility for the area to become a more commercially successful hub as the flats are unlikely to become retail spaces in the years to come. I would also strongly urge the council to require A2Dominion either to remove the balconies from the flats on the south side of Charlotte Avenue overlooking the play area or to revise the plans in order to plant a barrier of tall trees that could reach the height of the three-level block of flats. Both measures would help to mitigate noise and would add additional privacy both for residents in the flats and for the people using true outdoor gym equipment and the children in the play area, who might not want to be watched by people with balconies overlooking the area. Finally, I would also strongly suggest that A2Dominion reduce the height of the flats. Three levels of flats towering over the play area and the rest of the estate (in contrast to most residential dwellings on the estate, which are predominately two-level structures) is very imposing, particularly for residential buildings where those on the top floor are likely to have views into other residents' back gardens. Such residential buildings are not in keeping with the calm, low-density concentration of residents elsewhere on the estate. I hope that you will persuade A2Dominion to do more to address residents' concerns by revising their plans. Thank you.

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Attachments