

Ms Sarah Green,

Vale of White Horse District Council,

135 Eastern Avenue,

Milton Park, Abingdon,

OX14 4SB

17 April 2015

Planning Application: P16/V0727/O

Proposal: Outline Application for demolition of existing buildings used for class B1 and B8 purposes and erection of 33 new dwellings at Chowle Farm Industrial Estate, Great Coxwell, Faringdon, SN7 7SR

Introduction

Great Coxwell Parish Council supports local businesses and welcomes the opportunity to improve the quality of the site at Chowle Farm, ideally for business use, on the footprint of the existing commercial buildings, subject to high quality design.

However, Great Coxwell Parish Council **objects** to this outline application because there is insufficient protection afforded to the sensitive habitats to the west, insufficient respect for the surrounding countryside and its vistas, the application does not adequately address the issue of sustainability in a rural environment, the relationship of the development to the A420 main road has not been examined sufficiently and some of the supporting documentation cannot be relied upon because it is out-of-date.

The District Council considered many local concerns in its examination of planning application P13/V0717/FUL for a garden centre on the site of Chowle Farm, and in giving its approval raised a number of conditions that remain of importance today. Some of those concerns and conditions are summarised as part of this response.

Planning Policy

In the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In their Neighbourhood Plans, Paragraph 16 expects Parish Councils to:

‘Plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan’.

In objecting to this application we have taken into consideration these requirements.

Paragraph 24 of the NPPF says that:

‘When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre’.

This proposed development would be located in a sensitive part of the lowland Vale/corallian ridge edge, with views of the Uffington White Horse and the Grade II* listed Great Coxwell parish church of St Giles. Paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy HE4 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. The Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan, Part 2

lists important vistas eastward from the village towards this site (Map 3 on page 7) and ‘of the ancient setting of the village and church on its promontory’ (paragraph 5.1 on page 10).

The Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan established a ‘green buffer’ to prevent coalescence with Faringdon. The site of this application is wholly within this area (Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan Policy EDQ1 and Map 5 on page 27).

Policy BE3 (page 21) supports ‘redevelopment of brown-field sites and derelict buildings’ that will replace ‘poor design... with high quality design’ and improvements to the natural and historic environment’ and ‘conversion of existing buildings to residential use will be supported if no business opportunity is presented’.

The design of residential accommodation in the countryside must adhere to the Vale of White Horse Design Guide, Sections 2 and 6.

This Application

There has been no public consultation on this speculative application for development on a site not allocated for homes in either the Vale of White Horse Local Plan or the Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan.

Site Plans A and B

Two different site plans are dated 15 September 2015. One of these (A) has a shorter red site boundary that doesn’t include the wildlife habitats to the south-west or the screen planting to the south, nor is it labelled ‘wildlife habitat retained’. This plan shows a hedge in place of the screen planting. In the Application, paragraph 12 states that surface water disposal will include the use of a pond/lake, but the pond/lake is not part of the site. This plan visually invites a potential purchaser of the land to purchase a smaller area, outlined in red, within which this undertaking regarding drainage cannot be fulfilled. There are trees and hedges within the development site that are not shown.

The second of these (B) includes all of the owner’s property, outlined in red. This plan shows 15 metre-wide screen planting to the south of the proposed housing. There is part of a designated Ancient Woodland and sensitive wetland wildlife habitat within the area outlined in red.

The reports accompanying the application submitted for a garden centre on (part of) the site need to be updated to take into account the many differences with the new proposals. The planning conditions for the garden centre proposal included a phased Contaminated Land Risk Assessment.

Green Buffer

The property and the development site lie within the Green Buffer described and illustrated in the Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan 2014, adopted by the Vale of White Horse District Council in 2015. The Green Buffer preserves the rural environment of the parish and prevents coalescence with Faringdon. The Plan encourages economic development in Sub-Area C of the parish, and the change of use of brown-field sites where necessary, on condition that the rural character and environment are retained or enhanced.

The proposed development extends beyond the brown-field site, in both (A) and (B), and involves a change of use from commercial to residential. The rural vistas and design implications have not been addressed.

A Hamlet of Great Coxwell

St Giles church is a grade I listed building that is clearly visible and prominent in views north across the site from the A420. Residential development would have an adverse impact on the setting of this grade II* listed building. The proposal is considered contrary to policy HE4 of the adopted Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

The proposal is for a smaller outlying development of the village – in effect a hamlet, **unsustainable** in its isolation. It would be a dependency of Great Coxwell for its community life and of Faringdon for its services, but no pedestrian access to either place or cycle routes for children are proposed. From an environmental point of view and the need to reduce CO₂, this is not acceptable.

If the residents wanted to utilise the bus routes to Swindon, they would have to cross the A420 to the bus stop opposite the site. This is a busy 50mph road and very dangerous for pedestrians, especially in rush hour. The last five years of available ‘crashmap’ data (2010-2014) indicates that of the 5 fatal pedestrian casualties of road traffic incidents in the Vale of the White Horse during that period two were on the A420 in the Faringdon area, both within 2.5 miles of the proposed development entrance. In addition, the location of the proposed development entrance is on curved portion of the road causing reduced visibility as evidenced by the double white line markings on this stretch. See google streetview images from proposed entrance below.



Google streetview images from proposed development entrance. Left panel looking North along A420 towards Oxford. Right panel looking South along A420 towards Swindon.

Therefore an adequate pedestrian crossing would need to be installed. With the traffic lights already planned at the turning for Great Coxwell, traffic lights at this site could be inappropriate. A pedestrian crossing could also be inappropriate due to the speed limit of the road. A pedestrian bridge, with a footpath the other side of the road could be the only practical way of getting around this and ensuring the safety of the residents.

Should the application go ahead, occupation would represent a ~20-30% increase in the parish population (assuming 2-3 person occupancy) and thus significant increase in demand for parish facilities such as the Reading Room and park. A 36 housing development in Uffington attracted a standard £100K parish contribution plus additional contributions for specific identified causes both inside and outside that parish.

Drainage

The application indicates that surface water run-off from the 33 houses and the residential area will drain into the pond/watercourse (that supports otters/newts etc.). If a waste treatment plant were to be installed, 33 houses would have their treated waste going into the pond/watercourse.

This was the solution offered by the adjacent Faringdon Golf course application (P14/V2888/FUL), ie to drain surface water to the same watercourse along with the treated waste. The Environment Agency states in its reply dated 21 August 2015 (*attached*) that ‘an Impact Study should be carried out to identify what improvements are required to facilitate the development’s connection to the mains’ and that ‘there should be justification as to why a development cannot discharge to mains before proposing discharge to watercourse/ground’. The response goes on to say ‘A lack of capacity in the infrastructure is not justification enough to go straight to package treatment plant; developers are usually expected to make a contribution to infrastructure upgrades’.

Even surface water run-off causes silt to build up, damaging the watercourse. If both sites had treatment plants and surface water run-off, this one pond/watercourse would need to support around 70 properties.

The stream that runs out of Great Coxwell towards the A420 disappears into the same watercourse.

The Steeds and Fernham Fields developments, if their surface water ponds overloaded, would lead to the lifting of a gate that would discharge the water into the drain that runs westwards along the road towards the roundabout. It seems likely that it runs along the A420 before turning into Faringdon Golf Course and into the same little pond. The District Council drainage engineer has been asked to check the pattern of the watercourses in the area as the cumulative impact of these four significant developments could be significant.

Environmental Issues

Front of the site

The change of use of the site will require a new assessment of traffic movements to and from the development and a new proposal for the junction layout. The proposal relies on the bus service between Swindon and Faringdon but this was not part of the junction layout approved in 2007. There is no mitigation of noise and pollution given the close proximity of the proposed housing to the A420 roadside and air quality and noise assessments are essential. The junction layout did not envisage the proximity of pedestrians to the main road.

West of the site

There is no acknowledgement of the designated Ancient Woodland (Turfpit Copse), which wraps around the back of the site to the north, west and south, almost up to the edge of the pond. The proposed development would have a significant impact, including a noise impact, on this unique area that adjoins/is within the site. There may also be an impact from the proposal to reinstate the watercourse through the designated Ancient Woodland.

This area and the remaining area to the south are labelled 'Wildlife Habitat Retained' on plan (B) but not on plan (A).

South of the site

The screen planting shown on plan (B) is adequate to separate rural fields from a housing development. The hedge on plan (A) is not.

Land contamination

The application states that the land is not contaminated. This needs to be checked by way of an on-site assessment, as we are aware of illegal activities on the site, such as the burning of tyres recently, and of a previous use of the site as a livestock transfer depot.

Conclusion

Should consideration be given to granting this application, the most important conditions are:

- Conservation of the designated Ancient Woodland and the retention and enhancement of the wildlife wetland area, with a 25 metre separation from the development.
- Provision of the screen planting to the south of the site, as shown on plan (B) and provision of a minimum of 25 metre screen planting around all the remaining boundaries of the site, including the roadside interface, as described in the adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

- Restriction, allowing for screen planting, of development to the area outlined in plan (A).
- Safe pedestrian/cycle routes appropriate for families along the A420, to provide links with Faringdon and Great Coxwell.
- Housing design (in all its respects) that reflects the surrounding rural environment in the NPPF, the Vale of White Horse Design Guide, Sections 2 and 6, and the Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Design Statement.
- Drainage from the site to enter by way of the public sewer and not be allowed to run into the stream and lakes that form part of the sensitive wetland habitat.
- A Contaminated Land Risk Assessment is carried out – a desk-based assessment is not considered acceptable or safe in this case.
- The supporting documentation to be updated and air quality and noise assessments provided.
- The three houses on the 'lorry park' to be re-sited to enable the woodland to be restored to this area, simplifying and improving the separation between the natural and built environment.
- In determining developer contribution and allocation, due consideration of the significant (20-30%) increase in parish population and consequent demand on parish services that would result if the development were to proceed, to be given.

For the reasons set out above, we **object** to planning permission being granted due to the loss of and damage to the rural environment of Great Coxwell. The site is in Great Coxwell parish. It is neither in Great Faringdon Parish, nor adjacent to it.

Great Coxwell Parish Council