

GCO/8308/11-X – H J Webb

**Construction of 4 x 2 storey dwellings. Demolition of existing barn.
Pear Tree Farm, Great Coxwell, Faringdon.**

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application seeks outline planning permission (with all matters reserved) for the erection of four dwellings on land at Pear Tree Farm, which is currently occupied by a wood storage and distribution business (B8). The use is one that has emerged over time starting as an ancillary activity to farming on the site. However, current evidence appears to indicate that the use is lawful in its own right, being separate from the farming activities carried on by the applicants. The proposal would be a redevelopment of the site, with the removal of a large agricultural style barn and the business relocating elsewhere.
- 1.2 The site, approximately 0.6ha, is situated on the western side of The Holloway Road in the south of the village, and partially lies within the Great Coxwell Conservation Area. It is bounded by dwellings to the east and by agricultural land on all other sides. Part of the site has already been redeveloped with the erection of two dwellings on the eastern side (in the area marked 'Jenners House' on the OS plan).
- 1.3 Whilst all matters are reserved, the applicant has suggested two indicative options for redevelopment. Option 1, promotes three large dwellings in a cul-de-sac arrangement. Option 2, promotes 10 dwellings in a courtyard arrangement, to illustrate how a density of 30 dwellings per hectare (as stated in PPG3 'Housing') could be achieved. This option also promotes the idea of the dwellings being 'low-cost'. Comments on both schemes have been made by the Consultant Architect and the Architects Panel, which are reported in section 4. For clarification the current application is seeking permission for 4 dwellings only on the site.
- 1.4 A copy of the plans showing the location of the proposal, the indicative options for redevelopment and the conclusion of the applicant's supporting statement are attached at **Appendix 1**. A plan showing the boundary of the Great Coxwell Conservation Area is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 1.5 The application has been referred to Committee because the observations of Great Coxwell Parish Council differ from the recommendation.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 In July 1999 planning permission was granted for the construction of two dwellings to replace agricultural buildings on the eastern side of the site (which lies in the Conservation Area). In December 1999, planning permission was granted for amendments to plot 1, and in June 2002 planning permission was granted for amendments to the design of plot 2.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 *PPS1 'Delivering Sustainable Development'*
Paragraph 3 confirms that sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning.
- 3.2 Paragraph 5 states that planning should facilitate sustainable patterns of rural development by protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside and existing communities; ensuring that development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community.

- 3.3 *PPG3 "Housing"*
Paragraphs 1 and 2 of PPG3 stress the need to create more sustainable patterns of development by making more efficient use of land and by increasing accessibility by public transport to employment, education, shops, and other facilities, and so reduce dependence on the private car.
- 3.4 Paragraph 31 sets out a list of criteria against which the suitability of sites should be assessed. These include the location and accessibility to jobs, shops and services by means other than the private car.
- 3.5 *Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011*
The adopted Structure Plan provides guidance for the location of new dwellings in Policies G1 and H1 which favour locations where the need to travel, particularly by private car, can be reduced and where walking and cycling and the use of public transport can be encouraged. Policy H1 stresses in particular that most new development should take place in larger settlements where a reasonable range of services and facilities exist or can be provided.
- 3.6 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan*
Policy H6 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan provides for small scale development of no more than one or two dwellings within the village of Great Coxwell provided it does not extend the village into the surrounding countryside, or create a fragmented pattern of housing.
- 3.7 Policy H8 refers to development in the open countryside and states that it will not be permitted without special or exceptional justification.
- 3.8 Policy HE8 provides for development affecting the setting of a conservation area, and confirms that the Council will only permit such development if there is no adverse effect on the character of the conservation area.
- 3.9 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 Second Deposit Draft*
Similar policies to those above have been included in the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011. The corresponding policies are H11, H12 and HE1.
- 3.10 However, there has been a fundamental change in policy to accord with the sustainability requirements of PPS1 and PPG3 (both published after the adopted Local Plan), where the village of Great Coxwell has been removed from the list of villages identified in Policy H11 as a settlement that can accommodate 'limited infill' of 1 or 2 dwellings. It is now a settlement that has to be considered against Policy GS2 – Development in the Countryside and H12 – Development Elsewhere.
- 3.11 The Local Plan 2011 also strengthens the protection to retain small scale commercial premises in settlements (Policy E15), and redevelopment proposals will only be permitted where the premises are occupied by an enterprise known to be un-neighbourly or badly sited and the proposal would result in its relocation to a more appropriate location.
- 4.0 **Consultations**
- 4.1 Great Coxwell Parish Council supports the proposal and their comments are attached at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.2 County Engineer – No objections in principle as it would reduce large vehicle movements into and out of the village. However, sustainability may be an issue.
- 4.3 Drainage Engineer – No objections.
- 4.4 Eight letters of support have been received stating:

- There would be a reduction in the volume of traffic using the village, many of which are HGVs.
- The proposal would almost eliminate heavy traffic to the bottom of the village, and will increase safety for children using Great Coxwell Park.
- The dwellings would eliminate the existing use as a wood and fencing supply depot. The current use is undesirable and detrimental to the quality of life in Great Coxwell.
- It is understood that the current business has another location nearby to which it could relocate, so there would be no loss of employment.

4.5 Two letters of objection have been received stating:

- The proposal will affect the definitive line of footpath 14 which crosses the site from north to south adjacent to the barn on its western side. The blocking of the footpath must not be allowed to happen.
- Whilst 4 dwellings are considered acceptable, the alternative illustrative plan shows 10 which would give little benefit to the village. The forecast number of traffic movements from 10 dwellings is little less than that generated by the timber yard.

4.6 Architects Panel – Option 1 – dwellings layout is suburban and inappropriate. Option 2 – courtyard style could be successful but only 4 – 5 houses, part single part two storey modelled on Victorian farm buildings, with cars under open ‘barns’ to keep the courtyard free of cars.

4.7 Consultant Architect – comments attached at **Appendix 4**.

4.8 Arboricultural Officer – No significant trees would be lost.

4.9 Archaeological Officer – Fieldwork in the immediate vicinity of the application has revealed evidence of a historic settlement, with large quantities of Iron Age pottery and Roman coins having been recovered. Just to the west of the site, a crop mark has been identified through aerial photography which appears to be an enclosure. In accordance with PPG16, the applicant will need to implement an archaeological field evaluation prior to the determination of this application.

4.10 Rights of Way Officer – Objection - Public footpath 14 passes through the site and appears to be greatly affected by the illustrative schemes. If the applicant wishes to divert the footpath, any diversion application must be confirmed and available on the ground before the definitive route can be built on or otherwise obstructed.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 The main issues to consider in relation to this application are whether, in policy terms, the principle of residential development in this location is acceptable and, if not, whether there is sufficient justification to outweigh the policy objection.

5.2 The Structure Plan’s general strategy accords with PPG3 and seeks to provide a sustainable planning framework for development in ways which favour locations where the need to travel, particularly by private car can be reduced; where walking cycling and the use of public transport can be encouraged; and where a reasonable range of facilities exist or can be provided.

5.3 It is not considered that the proposed development meets these criteria as Great Coxwell is a village that has no facilities. In the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan, Great Coxwell village has been removed from Policy H11 (housing development in smaller villages) on these grounds. Your Officers, therefore, do not consider this constitutes a sustainable location for a development of this scale.

5.4 Further guidance in PPG3 relates to making efficient use of land, and the applicants draw support from the fact that the site is ‘brownfield’ or previously developed land, having been

used for the storage and distribution of wood products since around 1967. It is, however, unclear as to when the use became established in its own right (i.e. became separate from the farming activities on the land), and in the absence of a Certificate of Lawfulness, your Officers can only give limited weight to the site being 'previously developed' at this point in time. If it can be proven that the primary use is trading lawfully as a wholly independent commercial storage and distribution use, then greater weight could be given to the merits of redeveloping a 'brownfield' site. Notwithstanding this, however, 'previously developed land' does not necessarily qualify the land for redevelopment at the expense of the general planning strategy; the development would still need to meet the sustainable criteria. In this respect, your Officers consider this site to perform poorly against the criteria set out in paragraph 31 of PPG3.

- 5.5 In addition, your Officers consider that the application site lies outside the built up area of the village. Whilst policy H6 of the adopted Local Plan allows the limited infill and minor redevelopment that has taken place on the eastern part of the site, the remaining part extends beyond what could reasonably be considered to be the built up area of the village. Housing development along the lines suggested on this land would erode the character of the linear pattern of the village, extending development into the countryside. Furthermore, residential development of the site could also lead to pressure for further 'in depth' development to the rear of properties in The Holloway Road; the cumulative effect of which would undermine the special quality of the village and its rural setting. The provision of 4 dwellings (or 10 units as shown on the illustrative drawing if PPG3's density requirements are applied at 30 dwellings per hectare) also does not constitute limited infilling as specified under Policy H6.
- 5.6 Officers also consider the development is contrary to the planning policies of the development plan which seek to safeguard the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The special character of the village derives not only from the form and unity of its buildings, but also from the setting of the buildings within the landscape. The existing buildings on site provide an 'agricultural' (albeit modern in their appearance) foreground to the Conservation Area. Their replacement with perhaps 2 storey residential units would change this relationship and create a residential extension into the countryside which would not preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area or its setting in the landscape.
- 4.7 In terms of setting aside the policy conflicts, the applicants have provided information relating to the nuisance caused by the existing use, where they have claimed there is an average of 600 vehicle movements a week. Further detailed information in relation to traffic movements has been requested and will be reported at the meeting. Certainly traffic movements, in particular HGV movements, appear significant and are a direct cause for the level of support to redevelop the site from both the Parish Council and local residents. The applicants have also confirmed that the business could be relocated to a dedicated industrial site where access for commercial vehicles would not present a problem. However, your Officers do not believe the removal of the business, to an as yet unspecified location, is sufficient justification to allow a development that would be unsustainable and contrary to planning policy. The lack of objection and indeed support for the proposal is not, in itself, an overriding reason for allowing the development on the basis that traffic movements would be reduced.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *That planning permission be refused for the following reasons:*

1. *In the opinion of the District Planning Authority, the proposal would result in an unsustainable form of development outside the built-up limits of Great Coxwell and extending into the open countryside without special or exceptional justification. As such it is contrary to the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan in particular policies G1 and H1, the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan, in particular policy H6, the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 Second Deposit Draft, in particular policies GS2 and H12, and to advice in PPS1 'Delivering Sustainable Development' and PPG3 'Housing'*

2. *The proposed development would result in an undesirable form of development that would detract from the setting, character and appearance of the Great Coxwell Conservation area. As such it is contrary to the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan, in particular policy HE8 and the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 Second Deposit Draft, in particular policy HE1.*