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<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	10/02344/FUL
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL
<b>REGISTERED</b>	10 January 2011
<b>PARISH</b>	Radley
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Bob Johnston
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Mr H Barton, The Northmoor Trust
<b>SITE</b>	Sandles, Thrupp Lane, Radley
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Change of use from C3 residential to recreational use. Demolition of existing residential structure and erection of new wetlands visitor centre building, associated external works including provision of a 45 no space car park, new path networks and external decking adjacent to the visitor centre.
<b>AMENDMENTS</b>	7 April 2011
<b>GRID REFERENCE</b>	452037 197710
<b>OFFICER</b>	STUART WALKER

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the redevelopment of the residential property known as Sandles to create a new visitor centre with associated car park, external landscape works, new paths and a timber deck along the lakeside of Thrupp Lake.
- 1.2 Thrupp Lake is one of a series of former gravel pits, known as ‘Radley Lakes’ which are situated about 2km east of Abingdon and 1.5km south of Radley village. A site location plan is attached at appendix 1. The application site is situated on the southern side of Thrupp Lane (which joins up with Thrupp Road leading to Radley village) and is accessed via the well used BOAT (by-way open to all traffic) connecting Abingdon and Radley that adjoins the east boundary of the application site. The site lies within the Oxford Green Belt and the Lowland Vale, a local landscape designation. It is also located with flood zone 2.
- 1.3 The application comes to committee because Radley Parish Council fully supports the proposal.

## 2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The Northmoor Trust manages Thrupp Lake as a wildlife conservation area and the site is regarded as one of the best in Oxfordshire for breeding birds. In order to improve facilities, the scheme proposes to demolish the existing two storey dwelling (now derelict) and provide a new visitor centre with a strong sustainability agenda. The centre would provide a range of facilities to enable the trust to educate visitors on the wildlife habitats which exist within the wider site.
- 2.2 The proposal would be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 includes demolition of the existing building and provision of both the ‘services pod’ and the pavilion structure. These elements will meet the immediate needs of the trust on the site. Phase 2 proposes a rotunda and link building incorporating a multi-use space and formal interpretation spaces.
- 2.3 The new buildings are contemporary in their design and single storey, with ridge heights approximately 3m lower than the existing dwelling. Cumulatively the new

buildings have a smaller footprint and lower volume than the existing building. They are, however, closer to the water's edge than the existing building, to provide visitors with a 'connection' to the water which is a key element of the intended educational programme.

- 2.4 It is proposed to retain the existing access and provide car parking on the north east corner of the site, with a series of footpaths linking the buildings and the wider trails that exist within the site. Phase 1 proposes parking for 30 cars including two for disabled use. Phase 2 will see the provision of a further 15 spaces, taking the total to 45. Covered and secure cycle parking will also be provided.
- 2.5 The applicant has provided a traffic statement, flood risk assessment, habitat and protected species surveys and a sustainability statement. A copy of the plans showing the location of the proposal, elevations and design of the buildings are attached at appendix 2. Extracts from the traffic statement are attached at appendix 3. A table showing predicted visitor numbers is attached at appendix 4.
- 2.6 The plans have been amended in response to the county highway engineer's comments.

### 3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 Radley Parish Council fully supports the proposal: "The Council believes that the proposed wetland centre will be of significant benefit to the Parish and the surrounding community and fully endorses the change of use of the site from residential to recreational purposes."
- 3.2 County Engineer: objection. Full comments are attached at appendix 5.
- 3.3 Drainage Engineer: no objections, subject to conditions.
- 3.4 Environment Agency: standing advice applies.
- 3.5 Ramblers Association fully supports: "This will be a great asset to the area, will get rid of an eyesore and access around the lake will benefit everybody and the integration with the existing right of way is brilliant."
- 3.6 Friends of Radley Lakes fully support: "Proposal will improve the appearance of the site, and will enable local people to enjoy Thrupp Lake and its surrounding area and will safeguard it for the future."
- 3.7 Countryside Officer: no objections, subject to conditions.
- 3.8 Four letters of objection have been received citing concerns over traffic generation, inadequate access, and highway safety; new buildings and the large car park being out of keeping with the locality; the proposed use being unsustainable and too intensive for this quiet rural location; no need for a visitor centre and the site should be left as it is; and that the existing house should be retained and refurbished.
- 3.9 Three letters of support have been received stating the design is fit for purpose, attractive and in keeping with the area; conservation work already being undertaken is most encouraging; and the proposal will help preserve this area for wildlife.

### 4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 Radley lakes were formed from gravel extraction which started during the 1960s. The dwelling was built around 1975 as a managers dwelling for a water ski centre. It

became vacant around 2005 and was used to accommodate security personnel in connection with the RWE NPower's proposal to infill Thrupp Lake with Pulverised Fuel Ash from Didcot power station. That proposal has since been abandoned and the temporary use of the property ceased in March 2009, with the site subsequently being leased to the Northmoor Trust.

- 4.2 Since taking possession of the site, the trust gained planning permission for a timber shelter in May 2010, and a bird hide and boardwalk giving access around Thrupp Lake in September 2010.

## 5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

### 5.1 *Government Policy*

The site lies in the Oxford Green Belt and, therefore PPG2 "Green Belts" is relevant. PPG2 is the Government's policy on green belts and states that the general intention is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and helping to protect the countryside from encroachment, be it in agricultural, forestry or other use (paragraph 1.4). It confirms that the openness of green belts must be protected as far as can be seen ahead, and maintains a presumption against inappropriate development. Inappropriate development is by definition '*harmful to the Green Belt*' (paragraph 3.2).

- 5.2 New buildings in the green belt are discussed in paragraph 3.4 of PPG2 where it states that the construction of new buildings in the green belt is inappropriate unless it is for specific purposes, including small scale essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.

- 5.3 Such 'essential facilities' should be genuinely required for uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. Possible examples include small changing rooms for outdoor sport, or small horse stables for outdoor recreation.

- 5.4 Paragraph 3.15 says that the visual amenities of the green belt should not be injured by new development.

- 5.5 PPG13 "Transport" is also relevant and seeks to promote more sustainable transport choices and reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

### 5.6 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011*

Policy GS2 (development in the countryside) states that outside the built-up areas of settlements, new building will not be permitted unless it is on land which has been identified for development in the local plan or is in accordance with other specific policies.

- 5.7 Reflecting national advice, Policy GS3 (development in the Oxford Green Belt) sets out the council's general presumption against inappropriate development in the Oxford Green Belt. It states that development will only be permitted if it does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the green belt and it preserves openness and the special character of Oxford and its landscape setting. New building will only be allowed for small scale facilities essential for outdoor sport, recreation and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the green belt.

- 5.8 Policy GS6 (redevelopment of buildings outside settlements) states that redevelopment of buildings will only be permitted where: the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; the existing buildings were not originally constructed for agriculture or forestry; it does not involve the creation of an additional dwelling; it is for a new dwelling which replaces an existing dwelling on a one for one

basis, subject to a size limit set out in Policy GS3 for dwellings in the Green Belt; the redevelopment would not have a materially greater impact on the countryside than the existing buildings, and where possible would have a lesser impact; the new use would be at least as sustainable as the current use; and it is on the same site as the existing buildings.

- 5.9 Policy NE4 (sites of nature conservation value) states that development likely to harm a site of nature conservation importance will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the reason for the development clearly outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation value of the site and adequate compensatory habitats will be provided.
- 5.10 Policy NE9 deals with development within the Lowland Vale, a locally designated area of high landscape value. It states that development will not be permitted if it would have an adverse effect on the landscape, particularly on long open views within or across the area.
- 5.11 Policies DC1, DC5, DC6, DC8, DC9, DC13 and DC14 (quality of new development) are also relevant and seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design / landscaping; does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours; suitable social and physical infrastructure exists for the development, or will be provided; the development is acceptable in terms of highway safety; and it will not result in adverse flood risk or harmful surface water run-off.
- 5.12 Policy TR5 (national cycle network) states that planning permission will not be granted for development which inhibits the use of any or part of the existing footpath or cycle network, unless a safe and convenient alternative can be provided.

## 6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Officers consider the proposal meets the requirements of PPG2 in respect of 'essential facilities' for outdoor recreation, and therefore is not inappropriate development in the green belt. The new buildings are small scale, having a reduced footprint and volume to the existing building to be removed, and provide key facilities for visitors. Therefore, the main issues in this case are considered to be: 1) the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, 2) the impact of the proposal on neighbouring uses, 3) wildlife issues, 4) flooding issues and 5) highways issues.
- 6.2 The proposal is not considered to be harmful to the character of the locality. The buildings are of a high quality design and the amount of accommodation proposed is considered acceptable, especially as it is less than the existing dwelling's built volume. The new buildings are set back within the site and will be screened by extensive planting. As such the buildings will not be overly prominent. Consequently, the visual impact of the proposed development and its impact on the character and appearance of the locality are considered acceptable.
- 6.3 Regarding the second issue, there are no nearby residential dwellings and it is considered that no undue harm would be caused to those neighbouring commercial uses that are sited near to the site from the use of this site for nature conservation.
- 6.4 The applicant has provided comprehensive habitat surveys in relation to protected species within the site. The countryside officer has assessed these and raises no objections. The proposed mitigation measures are acceptable and the relevant licence tests are considered to have been met. Any impact on other wildlife (i.e. that is not protected under EU directives or UK law) is considered acceptable.

- 6.5 The applicants have provided a detailed flood risk assessment which confirms that the change of use from residential to recreational reduces the vulnerability of users to flooding and that the access is 1.3m above known flood levels. The council's drainage engineer raises no objection and, consequently, the risk of flooding has been satisfactorily addressed.
- 6.6 The remaining issue is highways. Whilst the applicant is keen to keep the provision of car parking to a minimum to promote more sustainable means of travel by visitors to the site, the proposal will result in an estimated increase in traffic of 4.8% on Thrupp Road and 9.3% on Thrupp Lane. Full details of likely traffic generation are set out in the transport assessment (see appendix 3). This concludes, despite the increase in traffic, that the site is reasonably accessible by a range of transport modes and that the existing highway infrastructure can accommodate the traffic arising from the proposed development without the need for any mitigation.
- 6.7 However, the county engineer disagrees and has objected to the proposal (see appendix 5). The county engineer says the road network cannot accommodate the additional traffic without detriment to the safety and convenience of road users.
- 6.8 In response to this objection, the applicant has amended the scheme to include coach parking within the site and provided additional technical information. The applicant's full response is attached at appendix 6. The county engineer has assessed this additional information, but maintains an objection on highway safety grounds for the reasons stated at appendix 7. In the light of this, the application is considered to be detrimental to highway safety.
- 7.0 **CONCLUSION**
- 7.1 Whilst the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of green belt policy and does not harm the character and appearance of the locality or neighbouring uses, the increased traffic using Thrupp Lane would be detrimental to highway safety.
- 8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**
- 8.1 **It is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reason:**

**The proposed visitor centre with its associated traffic generation would be harmful to highway safety. In the opinion of the local planning authority, Thrupp Road and Thrupp Lane cannot accommodate the additional traffic without causing safety, congestion and environmental problems. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policies DC5 and TR5 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 and to advice contained in PPG13 'Transport'.**

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