

APPLICATION NO.	P12/V2048/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	27 September 2012
PARISH	ASHBURY
WARD MEMBER(S)	Yvonne Constance
APPLICANT	Redcliffe Homes Ltd
SITE	Land off Walnut Trees Hill Ashbury
PROPOSAL	Erection of 18 new dwellings, including 7 affordable houses, 10 private houses and new village shop with apartment over.
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	426587/185233
OFFICER	Martin Deans

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site is approximately 2.5 hectares in area and lies immediately east of Ashbury village. It is surrounded by existing dwellings on Walnut Trees Hill, Station Road, Malthouse Close and Pound Piece. A site location plan is **attached** at appendix 1. There is an existing field entrance from the site onto Walnut Trees Hill, which is the main road into Ashbury from the east. The site is partly separated from this road by a relatively narrow strip of land in separate ownership containing a stable. The site falls gently from west to east and from south to north.
- 1.2 The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies to the south of Walnut Trees Hill. The site does not lie within the AONB but does form part of its setting.
- 1.3 The application comes to committee because more than three letters of objection have been received.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 It is proposed to build 17 houses and a flat over a new village shop on the southern half of the site, with a new vehicular access from Walnut Trees Hill, and to devote the rest of the site to a village playing field. The application drawings are **attached** at appendix 2. The new shop and playing field would be donated for community use. Seven affordable homes will be provided, which equates to 40% of the total. New pedestrian links would be created into Malthouse Close and onto the bridleway on the north boundary. A new footpath would be provided between the proposed vehicular access and the existing footpath on Walnut Trees Hill.
- 2.2 The proposed houses have been designed following a contextual analysis of the village. The application also includes reports on traffic, ecology, and drainage.

3.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 Ashbury Parish Council supports the application – full comments are **attached** at appendix 3
- 3.2 Local residents – Four letters of objection and three letters of observation have been received. The grounds of objection are:-

- This is too much development for the village and it will harm its character and

- overload services
 - The development is not in a sustainable location and will only promote additional use of the car
 - It will be harmful to the landscape character of the area
 - The proposed access will cause highway danger given its position and the speed of vehicles
 - Visitors to the proposed shop will park on the main road causing safety problems
 - The mix of houses is not sympathetic to the village – not enough small dwellings
 - There will be harm to the residents of 7 – 9 Malthouse from loss of light and overdominance
 - There will be harm from lighting and noise
 - It will detract from the AONB
 - Loss of a wildlife habitat
 - The proposed sub-station is in an unneighbourly position and there is the potential for unsightly overhead cables
 - The shop is unlikely to survive – a new village hall would be a better gain for the village (this is not a material planning consideration)
- 3.3 County Engineer – holding objection subject to submission of additional information concerning a feature to reduce vehicle speeds on Walnut Trees Hill and concerning parking for the proposed shop. These matters are under discussion with the applicants.
- 3.4 Housing Services – no objections subject to some amendment to the mix and spread of affordable housing, which is being discussed with the applicants.
- 3.5 Environment Agency – no objections subject to standing advice.
- 3.6 Principal Drainage Engineer – holding objection subject to the submission of additional information, which is being discussed with the applicants.
- 3.7 Landscape Officer – no objections
- 3.8 Arboricultural Officer – no objections
- 3.9 Countryside Officer – no objections
- 3.10 AONB Unit – no objections subject to considerations of external materials, layout, landscaping, and street lighting to minimise the impact on the AONB.
- 3.11 Thames Water – no objections
- 4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**
- 4.1 None
- 5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**
- 5.1 Relevant policies from the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan include H11 (new housing in larger villages including Ashbury), DC1 (design), DC5 (access), DC6 (landscaping), DC8 (impact on social infrastructure) DC9 (impact on neighbours), DC14 (surface water drainage), NE5 (protected species), NE6 (AONB), H17 (affordable housing) and H23 (public open space).
- 5.2 The recently published National Planning Policy Framework replaced all previous PPG's and PPS's. All of the policies mentioned above are considered to be fully

consistent with the framework, except policy H11 which is not up-to-date for the reason specified in paragraph 49, namely the council's current lack of a five-year supply of housing land.

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The current lack of a five year housing land supply means that the housing restraint policies of the local plan, including policy H11, are not considered to be up to date. The NPPF makes clear that, where the development plan is absent, silent or the relevant policies out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts would demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal. The proposed development, therefore, must be considered on its site specific merits and, in particular, whether it constitutes a sustainable form of development as defined in the NPPF.
- 6.2 The applicants contend that the site is relatively unconstrained and can be brought forward quickly to help meet the current housing land supply shortfall. Therefore, the main issues for committee to consider are, first, the impact on the character and appearance of the landscape and the visual impact of the proposal; second, the impact on local services and facilities; third, the provision of affordable housing; fourth, the impact on neighbours including surface water drainage; and fifth, highway safety and sustainability.
- 6.3 Regarding landscape impact, officers have made a careful assessment of the context of the site and locations from where views can be obtained. The local topography is dominated by the rising land in the AONB to the south, but the topography also inhibits long distance views of the site. In those views that are obtained the site is generally seen against the backdrop of the existing housing on three sides. The site is not in the AONB itself. For these reasons the council's landscape officer considers the proposal does not represent a harmful intrusion into the landscape and so does not object to the scheme. The design of the proposal, including the housing and boundary walling, has been closely informed by a detailed local analysis and officers consider it to be a high quality. The proposed layout has an intentional semi-rural appearance (for example through the use of hedges as plot boundaries) which successfully complements the building designs. One issue that is of local concern is the potential impact of street lighting. The applicants are discussing this with Oxfordshire County Council with the aim of achieving a minimum level of lighting suitable to the location of the site at the edge of the village. An update on this issue will be reported to committee. Subject to this issue, the visual and landscape impact of the proposal is considered to be acceptable and, for this reason, the proposal will not harm the character of the area or the setting of the AONB. In addition, the submitted ecological survey confirms that no protected habitats or species will be harmed.
- 6.4 The second issue is the impact on services and facilities. Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for assessing the impact of the development on social infrastructure and for calculating the financial contributions required to mitigate any deficiency. Information on what contributions would be necessary was not available at the time of writing the report and any further information received on this will be reported to committee. However, it is understood that the village primary school is operating under capacity, so it is unlikely that contributions will be required for this. Thames Water has no objection so there is capacity in the local sewerage network. It also has to be recognised that the proposal includes a village playing field and a shop, which will improve existing village services and facilities. The provision of both can be secured as part of any planning permission. The proposed mix of affordable housing on the site is to be slightly revised to provide a number of smaller two bedroom units. It is understood this can be achieved without significant change to the appearance of the proposed dwellings. A further update on this will be provided to committee. Subject to further information being

received from the county council, officers consider that there is no reason to refuse the application on the grounds of lack of capacity in local services or facilities.

- 6.5 The next issue is affordable housing. Seven of the proposed dwellings will be affordable, which equates to 40%. As originally proposed all of these dwellings were three-bedroom, but this mix is to be revised to add a significant proportion of two-bedroom units. This change will not materially affect the external appearance of the units. Concerns have been expressed that the proposed affordable units are all close to each other. It should be recognised that the housing site is relatively small, and that the proposed number of affordable houses is relatively small in absolute terms. In addition, the preferred housing association supports the proposed grouping of affordable units for management reasons. Given the small number of units involved, officers consider that spreading this relatively small number of affordable houses further through the site is not a reasonable requirement.
- 6.6 The fourth issue is the impact on neighbours. The existing dwellings that are most directly affected by the proposed housing are the detached houses facing the site on Walnut Trees Road, the bungalows at nos. 7 – 9 Malthouse, and the house at no. 2 Malthouse Close, to the west. The detached houses on Walnut Trees Road will face the site across the road, a relationship that is typical of most village streets. Almost all of these houses will also be separated from the site by the existing narrow strip of land containing the stable.
- 6.7 The nearest proposed dwellings to nos. 7 – 9 Malthouse are plot 11 (the shop and flat above) and plot 7. The side wall of plot 11 will face the rear wall of no. 7 Malthouse at a distance of 12 metres, which meets the council's adopted standard for this relationship. The rear windows of plot 7 look towards the rear wall of no. 9 Malthouse but this is at an angle. Moreover, this part of the rear wall of no. 9 Malthouse is obscured by an existing brick shed, built close to the back wall. Consequently, it is considered there will be no harm from potential overlooking from plot 7 into the rear of no. 9 Malthouse. The distance from plots 1 – 4 to the side of no. 9 Malthouse also complies with the council's standards.
- 6.8 The side wall of no. 2 Malthouse Close faces the site. It is proposed that plot 1 will lie alongside this house at a distance of between four and five metres. There will be no windows in the side of plot 1, and officers consider that the relationship will not cause harm to the residents of no. 2 Malthouse Close.
- 6.9 With regard to the surface water drainage of the scheme, the council's principal engineer is concerned that more information should be submitted to verify the proposed drainage strategy. The applicants are confident that their sustainable drainage strategy will provide adequate on-site storage of peak rainfall water to enable its subsequent release into local watercourses at the existing green field rate, and so avoid any increase in surface water flooding. A further update on this issue will be provided at committee.
- 6.10 The fifth issue is highway safety and sustainability. The existing field entrance is to be stopped up, and the new vehicular access from Walnut Trees Hill has been designed with visibility splays suitable for the 30 mph speed limit. However, the speed survey submitted with the application demonstrates that average vehicle speeds in the vicinity are over 40mph. To address this matter the applicants have discussed with the county engineer the provision of a gateway-type feature or road feature in the highway designed to reduce vehicle speeds. The details of this were still under discussion at the time of writing this report and an update will be reported to committee. The applicants are also in discussion with the county engineer about the level of parking for the

proposed shop, and an update on this matter will also be provided at the meeting.

- 6.11 Regarding the sustainability of the site, it is accepted that future residents on the site will be largely reliant upon the car for transport. However in light of the urgent need for additional housing across the district, and the advice provided in paragraph 37 of the NPPF about the desirability of a balanced land use strategy that aims to support rural employment and services, the provision of 18 dwellings in this location will not generate traffic levels sufficient to undermine the council's sustainable strategy for the provision of new housing.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 In light of the current lack of a five-year supply of housing land, the relevant housing restraint policy for Ashbury (policy H11) does not apply. The proposal has an acceptable impact on the local landscape, the setting of the AONB, and protected species. There is no evidence of a problem with local services or facilities that would weigh against the proposal. The ratio of affordable housing is policy compliant and the impact on neighbours is acceptable. The proposed access is considered to be safe and the provision of this amount of housing in this location is not considered to undermine the overall strategy of sustainable development. The proposal, therefore, complies with the relevant policies of the development plan, particularly policies DC1, DC5, DC6, DC8, DC14, NE5, NE6, H17 and H23.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

Subject to satisfactory progress being made on the outstanding issues mentioned in the report, it is recommended that authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the head of planning in consultation with the committee chairman and vice-chairman, subject to:-

1) The completion of section 106 obligations with the Vale and with Oxfordshire County Council to secure affordable housing, commuted sums for the maintenance of the public open space (to be transferred to the parish council), and to offset the impact of the development on local social infrastructure.

2) Conditions as follows:

- 1. TL1 – time limit – one year from the date of committee resolution**
- 2. MC2 – samples of materials**
- 3. RE7 – boundary details**
- 4. RE17 – slab levels**
- 5. HY2 – access in accordance with plan**
- 6. HY7 – car parking**
- 7. HY17 – closure of existing access**
- 8. LS1 – landscaping scheme submission**
- 9. LS2 – landscaping scheme implementation**
- 10. MC24 – drainage details – surface and foul water**
- 11. MC29 – sustainable drainage scheme**
- 12. Off-site highway works**
- 13. Details of street lighting**

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