

APPLICATION NO.	P12/V2316/O
APPLICATION TYPE	OUTLINE
REGISTERED	20 November 2012
PARISH	WANTAGE
WARD MEMBER(S)	Charlotte Dickson John Morgan Fiona Roper
APPLICANT	Croudace Strategic Limited
SITE	Land east of Chain Hill Wantage
PROPOSAL	Outline application for residential development (up to 85 dwellings), access onto Chain Hill, internal estate roads, parking, landscaping and open space
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	440339/187512
OFFICER	Laura Hudson

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application relates to land to the East of Chain Hill, Wantage which lies on the southern edge of the town adjoining the existing built-up area.
- 1.2 The site is currently open agricultural land which slopes relatively steeply upwards away from the town towards the North Wessex Downs.
- 1.3 The site area amounts to approximately 4.15 hectares with the area closest to the town lying outside the North Wessex Downs AONB, however the northern most part of the site lies within the AONB. The northern most part of the site lies in the Lowland Vale.
- 1.4 The site is bounded to the north and east by sporadic planting and the existing residential area beyond, with a small paddock area at the north-east edge. The western site boundary is marked by a mature hedgerow and Chain Hill which sits at a lower level to the site. A small collection of isolated dwellings sits to the south-west of the site with open downland beyond.
- 1.5 The application comes to committee as Wantage Town Council objects and 28 letters of objection have been received.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 This application seeks outline planning permission with all matter reserved other than access, for up to 85 dwellings and associated estate roads, parking, landscaping, and open space. The application has been submitted to help address the Councils five year housing supply deficit and is a departure from the development plan.
- 2.2 Access to the site would be gained via a new access onto Chain Hill located approximately half way along the site frontage. Given the relative levels of the site, which is higher than the road, the land would need to be graded on either side in order to achieve a suitable road gradient and the necessary visibility splays.
- 2.3 An illustrative plan has been submitted with the application which shows an internal road layout and areas of residential development and planting. This layout includes all of the proposed residential area outside the AONB (amounting to 2.44 ha), and a large

area of public open space at the south-eastern end of the site (amounting to 1.71 ha) within the AONB.

- 2.4 The illustrative layout includes provision within the residential area for a local area of play (LAP) and a balancing pond which forms part of the drainage strategy and would be landscaped to serve as a wildlife area. The layout also shows the residential development set back from the Chain Hill frontage to provide a green entrance into the site. This area also includes a footpath link into Alfredston Place, and then a new footpath link along Chain Hill will enable pedestrian access into the town centre, which lies about 600m away.
- 2.5 Although details of the proposed dwellings do not form part of this outline application, it is envisaged that they would be 2 and 2.5 storeys depending on site topography, and they would be a mix of two, three and four bedrooms. Up to 85 dwellings within the residential part of the site equates to a density of about 35 dwellings per hectare. 34 of the proposed dwellings will be affordable housing, which equates to 40% of the total.
- 2.6 Extracts from the application drawings are **attached** at appendix 1.
- 3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**
- 3.1 Wantage Town Council objects. Concerns over the vehicular and pedestrian access given the terrain of the site, and the proposed level of affordable housing which at 40% is considered to be too high given the high proportion of affordable housing on the nearby St Mary's site. The town council's full comments are **attached** at appendix 2.
- 3.2 County Highways Engineer – Initial concerns over the feasibility of a footway link on Chai Hill, however now considers that this can be achieved. No objections are raised subject to conditions requiring full details of the proposed footway link, traffic calming in the vicinity of the site, submission of a residential travel plan, construction traffic management plan, and drainage details. In addition, S106 contributions are requested towards strategic infrastructure and public transport improvements.
- 3.3 Environment Agency – No objections.
- 3.4 Thames Water – Concern over the inability of the existing waste water infrastructure to accommodate the needs of the development. A drainage strategy is required to address this issue. A time frame to carry out the necessary infrastructure improvements is being discussed between the developer and Thames Water, and an update will be provided at the meeting.
- 3.5 Council Drainage Engineer – Initial holding objection due to insufficient information in the submitted flood risk assessment. Additional information has been provided and no objections are now raised subject to conditions.
- 3.6 Council Landscape Architect – Concern over the use of land within the AONB to meet the required public open space provision for the development. Acceptability will depend on how this area is landscaped. Open space should be provided within the housing layout also and the area where the LAP is contained should be larger. Concern over the loss of the hedgerow to accommodate the site access – care will need to be taken over the design of this area. Details of the landscape buffer at the southern end of the site and how it will be managed are required. Concern over the visual impact of 2.5 storey housing.

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- 3.7 Council Arboriculturalist – The significant trees are around the border of this site and appropriate protection is required during construction.
- 3.8 Council Ecologist – The site is mainly arable farmland with small sections of hedgerow along the road. The site was not found to support any legally protected species or habitats of value. The public open space, new hedgerows and pond have potential to enhance biodiversity if planted and managed appropriately. A condition is recommended requiring the submission of a biodiversity enhancement strategy.
- 3.9 AONB Officer – Given the comments of the previous local plan inspector that there were other suitable sites available, this site should be considered through the core strategy process. Great care will be needed over the treatment at the edge of the developable area where it meets the AONB as there is a risk of harming its setting given there is currently no defined edge on site. Concern also that the proposed open space in the AONB could become an urban style parkland – whilst the proposed planting is supported, this area may better be used as a meadow area rather than woodland given the agricultural character of the wider landscape. If the above points cannot be resolved then the AONB Officer objects.
- 3.10 County Archaeologist – Requested an archaeological field evaluation prior to determination of the application. This has been carried out and no significant features have been found. There are, therefore, no archaeological constraints to the proposed development.
- 3.11 CPRE – Concern that the development is inappropriate on this greenfield land within and adjacent to the AONB. There are more suitable brownfield sites in Wantage and Grove. The local plan inspector rejected allocating the site for this reason. A plan for the protection of the AONB is necessary to maintain its character. Concern that the highways problems will be exacerbated on this steep hill.
- 3.12 Thames Valley Police – contributions required towards remote IT facilities and provision of bicycles.
- 3.13 County Developer Funding Officer – contributions required towards education, youth services, library, museum resource, waste management and social and health care.
- 3.14 Council Waste Team – no objections subject to contributions to waste collection and bins.
- 3.15 Public Art Officer – contribution towards provision of public art required.
- 3.16 Housing Officer – 40% affordable housing required equating to 34 dwellings. These should be 75% rented (26 units) and 25% shared ownership (eight units).
- 3.17 28 Letters of objection and comment have been received from local residents raising the following concerns:
- Chain Hill is unsuitable for additional traffic.
 - Cars already park along the road in Chain Hill.
 - There is insufficient school and doctor's surgery capacity in the area.
 - The proposal will cut out light to existing dwellings adjacent to the site.
 - There is wildlife in the field.
 - The proposal will result in noise pollution for existing residents.
 - Development should be targetted on brownfield sites and scrubland not

agricultural land adjacent to the AONB.

- The land is steep and elevated and the proposed housing will be visible from around Wantage.
- The proposal will lead to additional flooding in the area given gradient of the hill.
- The proposal will set a precedent for other greenfield development in the area.
- Chain Hill is not wide enough to construct a footpath.
- Alfredston Place is a private estate with no public right of way running through to the town centre.
- There is already too much social/affordable housing in the area, therefore 40% is too high a provision on this site.
- The development would create a natural built up boundary to the town in line with Larkdown.
- Concern over boundary treatment adjacent to existing properties.
- Who will maintain the landscaped areas and pond?
- The balancing pond will be dry for much of the year.
- The proposed boundary planting will overshadow existing houses.
- The proposal will destroy the rural outlook for existing properties.
- The proposal will result in light pollution in the area.
- The houses will dominate the existing dwellings and surrounding area.
- There is no need for additional housing in Wantage.
- The proposal will have a harmful impact on the character and setting of the AONB.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 The site was considered as part of the local plan adopted in 2006 as a possible housing allocation. Whilst the site was not allocated for housing, the inspector made a number of comments:

The site was “in a relatively sustainable locationand that new housing on the northern part alone would not be particularly visible in wider views from the south, due to the slope of the land....there would be no major landscape impact arising and any visual effects of new dwellings would be limited to the immediate locality albeit from Chain Hill itself....subject to high quality design and layout...new housing here need not be unduly visually intrusive or out of character with the locality.”

4.2 However the inspector raised queries over the pedestrian links into the town centre, the loss of agricultural land, and the greenfield status of the site which ultimately resulted in the site not being allocated for development. The availability of other sites was also noted, particularly the potential redevelopment of St Mary’s School which was a brownfield site within the town centre and so was sequentially preferable.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan*

Policy H10 refers to development within the built-up areas of the main settlements including Wantage as defined by the development boundaries on the local plan proposals map. Development within these boundaries will be permitted subject to criteria including the impact on the character of the area.

Policy GS1 provides a general locational strategy including concentrating development within the five main settlements of the district as defined by the development boundaries.

Policy GS2 indicates that outside the built-up areas of settlements new building will not be permitted unless it is on land identified for development or is in accordance with other specific policies.

Policy DC1 requires new development to be of a high design quality in terms of layout, scale, mass, height, detailing, materials to be used, and its relationship with adjoining buildings.

Policy DC5 requires safe and convenient access and parking and suitable access from the public highway.

Policy DC6 requires hard and soft landscaping to protect and enhance the visual amenities of the site and surroundings and to maximise nature conservation and wildlife habitat creation.

Policy DC9 seeks to ensure development will not unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment.

Policy H17 requires 40% provision of affordable housing in schemes of more than 15 dwellings in the larger settlements.

Policy NE6 refers to development within the North Wessex Downs AONB and says that it will only be permitted if the natural beauty of the landscape is conserved or enhanced.

Policy NE9 refers to development in the Lowland Vale as defined on the local plan proposals map.

5.2 *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*

At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraphs 14 and 49). Paragraphs 34 and 37 encourage minimised journey lengths to work, shopping, leisure and education, and paragraphs 57, 60 and 61 seek to promote local distinctiveness and integrate development into the natural, built and historic environment. Paragraph 109 requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

Paragraphs 47 – 49 require local planning authorities to identify a five year supply of housing sites. Where this cannot be demonstrated relevant local plan policies for new housing development should not be considered up-to-date until the shortfall is rectified.

5.3 The *Residential Design Guide* was adopted in December 2009.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues to consider in determining this application are: i) The principle of the proposed development in this location in relation to planning policy; ii) the design of the proposed development and its landscape and visual impact; iii) access and highway safety considerations; iv) drainage and flooding issues; v) impact on neighbouring properties; vi) ecology and wildlife issues; vii) archaeology; viii) contributions and delivery.

Principle of the proposed development

6.2 The site currently consists of undeveloped agricultural land located outside the

Wantage development boundary on the southern edge of the town. The proposed developable area of the site is contained to a certain extent by existing development to the north and east and is in line with the cemetery to the west, therefore the proposal could be considered to be a rounding off of the existing settlement pattern. However, the site is currently open agricultural land in character. Given the location of the site outside the town's development boundary, the proposed development is clearly contrary to policies H10, GS1 and GS2 of the local plan.

- 6.3 However, the council does not currently have a five year supply of housing land, as required by paragraphs 47 – 49 of the NPPF. In these circumstances, the relevant local plan policies, including policies H10, GS1 and GS2, are not wholly consistent with the NPPF and so, in relation to the proposed development they hold limited weight. The NPPF makes clear that, where the development plan is absent, silent or the relevant policies are 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.
- 6.4 The site is located immediately adjacent to the existing built-up area of Wantage and a short distance from the shops and facilities of the town centre. In terms of the site's location and its relationship to the existing settlement pattern the proposal is considered a sustainable form of development under the terms of the NPPF.
- 6.5 Although the site was not allocated in the 2006 local plan, the inspector acknowledged its sustainable location and the acceptability in landscape terms of the northern part of the site being developed (i.e. as currently proposed). The local plan process seeks to assess available sites against one another and rank the most preferable options in terms of location and constraints. At that time a previously developed town centre site was available which the inspector concluded should come forward first. That site was St Mary's School, which has now been developed. Currently the council does not have a five year supply of housing land and, therefore, this site must be considered on its own merits under the terms of the NPPF.
- 6.6 The site is currently in agricultural use and is classified as best and most versatile land. Whilst the loss of such productive land must be considered as a potential constraint, this needs to be balanced against the current lack of a five year housing land supply. In this case, the proposal involves the loss of a relatively small area of agricultural land and, therefore, the harm resulting from its loss is relatively small. Refusal on this ground alone could not be justified.

Visual and landscape impact

- 6.7 The site is located immediately adjacent to the existing built-up area of the town and, although on rising land, the developable area lies towards the northern end of the site in line with existing housing. From the wider landscape, therefore, the proposed development would be set against the backdrop of the existing built-up area and would not appear prominent in the landscape or out of keeping. Public views would also be available from Chain Hill, however again it is considered that the proposal would largely be seen in the context of existing built development.
- 6.8 The proposed development would certainly be visible from existing housing in Orchard Way, however the impact of a proposal on a private view is not a material planning consideration.

- 6.9 The illustrative layout includes a large area of open space towards the south-east end of the site which sits further up the slope than the proposed housing area to the north. This part of the site falls within the AONB. Currently there is no defined southern site boundary and the proposal seeks to create a landscape buffer around the development. There is concern from both the AONB officer and the council's landscape officer over the treatment and management of this area. However, this is an outline application and the detailed planting scheme would form part of the reserved matters. It is considered, however, that appropriate planting and management of this area can be achieved without harm to the wider landscape. As part of the reserved matters it is also expected that more open space will be available within the built-up area of the proposed development and that the total open space provision should not be provided on the periphery of the site as currently shown.
- 6.10 There is also local concern over the site access and the impact on the character of Chain Hill. However, whilst works will be required to create a suitable gradient for the entrance and meet the required visibility, a new hedgerow is proposed behind the visibility splays and the development would be set back in the site to provide a green frontage to the road. It is therefore considered that, with suitable planting and sympathetic treatment of the banks, the proposal would not have a harmful visual impact when viewed from Chain Hill.

Access and highway considerations.

- 6.11 The proposed vehicle and pedestrian access into the site has been the subject of lengthy discussions with the County Highways Engineer. The vehicular access is now considered acceptable and the required visibility and gradient can be achieved. Conditions requiring additional traffic calming measures on Chain Hill and full details of the access are recommended.
- 6.12 There is local concern over pedestrian access from the site into the town centre, an issue that was raised by the local plan inspector. The application proposes a pedestrian footway through the front of the site to the entrance of Alfredston Place which would then link with existing footways. An uncontrolled crossing with dropped kerbs is proposed where the footway crosses to the western side of the road and a new footway is proposed to complete a 25m stretch where there is currently no footway. Whilst the County Engineer has queried the submitted details, it is considered that this can be achieved, therefore a condition is recommended requiring details and that the footway is in place prior to commencement of the rest of the development.
- 6.13 Subject to conditions and S106 contributions to strategic transport improvements and public transport, the County Engineer raises no objections.

Drainage and Flooding

- 6.14 The council's drainage engineer is now satisfied with the submitted drainage strategy, subject to conditions.
- 6.15 Thames Water has raised capacity concerns in relation to the existing waste water infrastructure and recommended a condition to prevent development commencing until a satisfactory solution has been agreed. The acceptability of this development is reliant on it being able to be delivered early in order to meet the current housing land supply deficit. Given that the drainage capacity issue could take some time to resolve this may not be feasible within the required one year permission imposed on permissions for

non-policy compliant sites. However, in discussions with Thames Water a time frame for the resolution of this issue has been agreed and which consists of the following;

- A scoping report into the impact study that will take two weeks to complete.
- A detailed impact study which will identify Thames Water's preferred solution and could take up to a maximum of 24 weeks to complete.

Thames Water have confirmed that there is a desire to survey the existing network to confirm that the capacity is available for the development. The survey work will be undertaken as part of the impact study which will take a maximum of 6 months to resolve and therefore well within the time frame of a one year permission. A Condition is recommended to ensure that development cannot take place without the required survey works.

Residential Amenity

- 6.16 Concern has been raised by local residents over the impact of the proposed development on residential amenity in terms of overshadowing and over-dominance, particularly those dwellings in Orchard Way which adjoin the site. This is an outline application with no details in relation to the final layout and building heights. The rear gardens of the existing dwellings in Orchard Way are about 35 metres in length, therefore the site boundary is some distance from the existing houses themselves. However the final layout will be expected to provide sufficient distance so as not to have any harmful impact on these neighbours. The applicants have provided a day light assessment which demonstrates that, even with over-exaggerated building heights of around 11 metres, the proposal would not have a harmful impact in terms of loss of light. However, as stated above, this would be determined at the reserved matters stage.
- 6.17 Concerns over additional lighting and noise again would be addressed at the reserved matters stage. However, given the proposal would abut an existing relatively dense residential area, it is not considered that these impacts would be any worse than existing.

Ecology

- 6.18 The application submission included an ecological assessment which did not identify any specific wildlife constraints on the site. Whilst residents have referred to a number of species seen on the land, the council's ecologist has raised no objections to the proposal stating that the public open space, new hedgerows and pond have the potential to enhance biodiversity if planted and managed appropriately. A condition is recommended requiring the submission of a biodiversity management plan.

Archaeology

- 6.19 An archaeological field evaluation has been carried out which has not identified any significant archaeological finds. The County Archaeologist, therefore, has confirmed that there are no archaeological constraints to developing the site.

Contributions and delivery

- 6.20 The application includes 40% affordable housing in accordance with local plan policy H17 and an agreement to provide the necessary contributions towards local services and facilities. The site is deliverable and, therefore, would help contribute to reducing

the current housing land supply shortfall. A one year permission from the date of the committee resolution, to include submission and approval of reserved matters, is recommended to ensure the development is delivered quickly.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 It is accepted that the application does not accord with the development plan, however in light of the current housing land shortfall the proposal has to be assessed against the NPPF. The proposed development lies immediately adjacent to the existing built-up area of one of the five main settlements of the district with its associated shops, employment opportunities, facilities and public transport, and the illustrative layout demonstrates that the proposal would have a limited impact on the character of the area or the landscape beauty of the AONB.

7.2 It is considered that the proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development within the definition of the NPPF, and the housing can be delivered quickly to help address the current housing land shortfall.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

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 completing a section 106 agreement with both the county council and the district council to secure contributions towards strategic highway improvements, local infrastructure, and the affordable housing, and to the following conditions:

1. **Time limit – Outline application (implementation within 12 months of the date of the committee resolution)**
2. **Standard outline condition (excluding access) – Reserved matters to be submitted within 6 months of the date of permission**
3. **Approved plans**
4. **MC24 - Drainage details (surface and foul)**
5. **MC29 - Sustainable drainage scheme**
6. **Submission of biodiversity management plan**
7. **HY3 – Submission of visibility splays**
8. **Provision of footpath and crossing prior to commencement on site in accordance with details to be submitted**
9. **LS1 – Landscaping scheme (submission)**
10. **LS2 – Landscaping scheme (implementation and management)**
11. **Construction traffic management plan**
12. **Full details of the proposed new access including regrading the bank both along the roadside and within the site**
13. **Submission of residential travel plan**

- 14. Submission of waste water drainage strategy including time frame for implementation**
- 15. Submission of traffic calming measures along Chain Hill**
- 16. LS4 – Tree protection scheme**
- 17. Provision of a Local Area of Play within the site**
- 18. Boundary treatment details**
- 19. No development shall commence until Thames Water survey works have been undertaken.**

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