

ABG/19126/1-X – Mr M Watts & Mr M Chown

Demolition of existing houses and construction of 21 dwellings. 75 – 77 Northcourt Road, Abingdon

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 The application site comprises two detached houses on a combined plot of 0.5 hectare in Northcourt Road. The application is in outline with access and siting to be agreed. It is proposed to demolish the existing houses and construct a total of 21 dwellings. These would comprise ten 3-bedroom terrace and semi-detached houses, eight 2-bedroom flats, and three 4-bedroom houses, one of which would be detached. The existing access to No 75 would be closed, and a new central access created to serve all but the proposed detached house, which would use the existing access to No 77.
- 1.2 This application is a revision to a previous outline proposal on the same site which was withdrawn in July 2005 (ref ABG/19126-X). A comparison of the previous and proposed block plans is in **Appendix 1** together with a location plan. The essential differences are that the number of proposed dwellings has been reduced from 25 to 21 (through the loss of 4 flats), and the number of parking spaces has been increased to 2 spaces per dwelling. A detached garage is proposed in the front garden to Plot 1, and modification to the positioning of some of the proposed dwellings is also shown.
- 1.3 The application comes to Committee because of the objections of Abingdon Town Council and local residents.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 As in Section 1 above.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policy H4 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan allows for further residential development in Abingdon, while Policies D1, D2 and D3 seek to ensure that all proposals are acceptable in terms of design, impact on neighbours and highway safety. Policy H3 requires 25% provision of affordable housing on proposals of 25 dwellings or more.
- 3.2 Similar policies in the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011 are H9, DC1, DC5, DC9, and H16. Policy H14 states that, for Abingdon, net residential densities of 40 dwellings per hectare should be achieved for new housing development, while Policy GS6 states development will only be permitted if it makes efficient use of land and does not harm the locality or produce a poor quality environment for its occupants. Policy H16 requires that, for developments of 15 or more dwellings, 40% should be affordable.

4.0 Consultations

- 4.1 Abingdon Town Council object – “Contrary to Policies GS6, DC5, H9 H14 and paragraphs 4.15 and 8.85 of the Vale of White Horse Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011.”
- 4.2 Local Residents – 13 letters have been received making the following objections –
- i) Too much development / out of character with the area
 - ii) Increased traffic onto busy Northcourt Road, close to two schools, with potential danger to school children and cyclists
 - iii) Inadequate parking adding to the congestion that occurs during school peak times and due to inadequate parking for the flats opposite
 - iv) Loss of light
 - v) Loss of privacy
 - vi) Noise and disturbance from cars in rear garden area

- vii) Contravenes the building line
- viii) Will create drainage problems
- ix) Loss of attractive family houses
- x) Threat to the safety of schoolchildren / overlooking of school playground
- xi) Noise, congestion and environmental damage during construction
- xii) Loss of trees and hedges
- xiii) There has already been sufficient development on brownfield sites in Abingdon
- xiv) Precedent

4.3 County Engineer - comments to be reported at the Meeting.

4.4 Arboricultural Officer – no objection subject to conditions.

4.5 Principal Drainage Engineer – no objection subject to conditions.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 Five main issues arise from this proposal. The first of these is the effect on the character and appearance of the area; the second is affordable housing; the third is the impact on neighbours; the fourth is highway safety; and the fifth is financial contributions to social infrastructure such as schools.

5.2 The character and appearance of the vicinity can be described as diverse. The north side of the road contains two-storey detached houses in large plots, while opposite the site is three-storey flatted development. Members are aware of national guidance in PPG3, “Housing”, concerning the density of new housing development, which is now reflected in Policies GS6 and H14 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan. Bearing this in mind, together with the diverse nature of the surrounding area and the relatively large size of the site (0.5 hectare), Officers consider a density in accordance with national and local policies should be sought. The density of the proposal is 42 dwellings per hectare, which is in accordance with Policy H14 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011.

5.3 Officers have no objections to the alignment of the proposed development relative to the street – the concept of the “building line” is no longer applied. The proposed garage in the front garden to Plot 1 will lie behind the existing Beech hedge, which is approximately 3 metres tall. Provided the hedge is maintained and the garage restricted to no more than 4 metres in height (which can be secured via condition), the visual impact will be acceptable. Officers also consider that the reduced size of the proposed flats buildings, together with the reduced area devoted to parking in front of the flats, means that the development would have an acceptable visual impact on the locality.

5.4 Turning to affordable housing, Policy H3 of the adopted Local Plan requires a provision of 25% affordable housing for proposals of 25 or more. Policy H16 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan imposes a lower threshold and a higher quantum of affordable housing, and the Council has endorsed the Local Plan Inspector’s decision of a ratio of 40% on sites of 15 or more dwellings. However, this planning application was prepared and submitted some time before the publication of the Local Plan Inspector’s Report, at a time when the exact nature of the new policy was unknown and the adopted Local Plan policy was being applied. Officers, therefore, consider the new policy on affordable housing cannot reasonably be applied to this application. The application is for 21 dwellings and, under the terms of Policy H3 of the adopted Local Plan, no affordable housing is therefore required.

5.5 The third issue is the impact on neighbours, principally No 73 and No 79 to either side of the site. No 73 is a single-storey bungalow that is set well back in its plot. The nearest proposed dwelling to the rear garden of No 73 is Plot 10, a house which has been sited some 5 metres away from the boundary with no windows facing it. This distance, combined with the presence of domestic outbuildings in the rear garden of No 73 near to the boundary, means there should not be any harm to amenity from overshadowing or overdominance. The front garden to No 73

contains a seating area that is obviously used by the occupants. The backs of three of the proposed houses (Plots 11 – 13) would face this area, but any first floor windows would be at least 20 metres away, which, combined with the fact that front gardens cannot be offered the same degree of protection as back gardens, leads Officers to conclude that no harm would arise here from overlooking.

- 5.6 The other immediate neighbour, No 79, is a two storey house which has a single storey element alongside the boundary with the application site. The nearest proposed dwelling to No 79 is Plot 1, a 4/5-bedroom detached house. This proposed house has been sited forward of No 79 by 2 - 5 metres, and has been designed so that a 40-degree line drawn from the nearest front facing windows in No 79 is not breached. This is in accordance with the Council's adopted design guidance. There are four side facing windows on No 79, two on the ground floor and two on the first floor. The ground floor windows would lie 2 – 3 metres from the proposed house and serve a home office, which is also lit by full length patio doors in the front elevation. The first floor windows would lie 5 metres from the proposed house and serve a landing and a bedroom (the bedroom is also lit by a larger rear facing window). Given that one of these windows is to a landing and the others are secondary windows, Officers do not consider that the impact on these windows from the proposed house will be such that a refusal of planning permission is warranted.
- 5.7 The rear garden to No 79 is 55 metres long and, alongside it, progressing down the garden, the proposal would introduce first the rear garden to Plot 1, then a parking area for 6 cars set 3 metres off the boundary, and then Plot 2, a house. Members will be aware that maximum amenity in the rear garden of No 79 should be obtained in the vicinity of the house, but also that this level of amenity cannot be required further down the garden. Given the distance from the back wall of No 79 to the proposed parking area (21 metres), and to the front of Plot 2 (35 metres), Officers consider that the rear garden would have adequate levels of protection from noise and overlooking. Moreover, given the size of the site, Officers consider traffic using the proposed central access and driveway is unlikely to cause harm through noise or other forms of disturbance to neighbours due to the combination of intervening distance and boundary screening.
- 5.8 The fourth issue is highway safety. The County Engineer had not commented at the time of writing the report and his comments on the safety of the access will be reported to the Meeting. The proposed parking levels are 2 spaces per house (except for Plot 1, which has 4 spaces) and 2 spaces per flat. The Council's parking standards require a maximum of 2 spaces for a 2- or 3-bedroom dwelling. Provided the proposed access meets the necessary safety standards for visibility, drivers will have sufficient warning of pedestrians and there are no grounds for suggesting that the access will be dangerous. In terms of traffic generation, surveys have shown that Northcourt Road has a daily vehicle flow of approximately 5,000 movements. The proposed net increase of 19 dwellings on the site can be expected to generate 150 movements per day, an increase of only 3%.
- 5.9 The final issue is financial contributions to social infrastructure. Oxfordshire County Council has requested a contribution from the proposal, which needs to be secured via a Section 106 Obligation. The applicants are aware of this request, and an Obligation is being progressed. A further update on this matter will be relayed to the Meeting.
- 5.10 Of the other objections made, the issues of the loss of the existing houses and whether enough brownfield development has been permitted in Abingdon are not material considerations. The issue of precedent can be relevant if other opportunities exist for similar proposals in the locality and the wider implications for the area need to be considered. There are obviously other opportunities in the locality for similar applications, but given the thrust of Government policy on making more efficient use of previously developed land, Officers consider that precedent cannot be used to justify refusing permission.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *Subject to the County Engineer raising no objections and to the completion of the Section 106 Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council, it is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to the following conditions:*

1. TL2 *Time Limit - Outline Application*
2. OL3 *Standard Outline Condition (Excluding Siting and Access)*
3. RE7 *Submission of Boundary Details*
4. LS4 *Implementation of Landscaping Scheme (incorporating existing tree(s)) - to be submitted*
5. LS11 *Protection of Trees/Hedges during Building Operations*
6. LS9 *Retention of Existing Trees/Hedges*
7. HY3 *Access in accordance with Specified Plan*
8. HY25 *Car Park Layout (Building)*
9. HY29 *No Surface Water Drainage to Highway*
10. RE14 *Garage Accommodation*
11. HY18 *New Estate Roads*
12. HY19 *Estate Road to Specification before Occupation of Dwelling*
13. HY20 *Carriageways to be Constructed before Work on any Dwelling*