

<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P13/V0971/FUL</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL APPLICATION
<b>REGISTERED</b>	3.5.2013
<b>PARISH</b>	CHILDREY
<b>WARD MEMBER</b>	St John Dickson
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Mr & Mrs I Rea
<b>SITE</b>	Dropshort Farm, Stowhill, Childrey, OX12 9XQ
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Demolition of existing buildings. Erection of four new houses.
<b>AMENDMENTS</b>	None
<b>GRID REFERENCE</b>	436432/187482
<b>OFFICER</b>	Peter Brampton

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Childrey is a rural village located around 2.5 kilometres west of Wantage. The village is served by public transport, and benefits from a number of amenities, including a church, village hall, shop and primary school.
- 1.2 The village has a historic core, which is designated as a conservation area. Dropshort Farm is located on the eastern edge of the village, outside this conservation area. The site is around 0.88 hectares in size and consists of modern barn structures located loosely around existing hardstanding. The farmhouse lies to the north, with a paddock to the south and open farmland to the east. A mature tree line defines the western boundary, which restricts views into the site from the main core of the village, which lies to the west and south.
- 1.3 The site is accessed from Stowhill, a narrow single track road that serves only a few properties beyond the village. This road is currently in a poor state of repair; the top surface is damaged and there a number of pot holes.
- 1.4 Currently, the buildings on the site are used for stabling, storage of agricultural goods and as an HGV depot, due to the large amount of hardstanding with the site. This use was established via a lawful certificate of existing use application in 2004. The council understands that regular HGV movements occur along Stowhill as part of the ongoing enterprise at the site.
- 1.5 The application comes to committee at the request of Councillor St.John Dickson.
- 1.6 A location plan is attached as **Appendix 1**.

## 2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The applicants propose to remove all of the existing buildings from the site, ceasing the existing commercial enterprise and erecting four family homes. Each house benefits from five double bedrooms, with separate kitchen, living, dining and family rooms on the ground floor. The ridge heights range from around 8.3 metres to around 9.8 metres. Each property has an individual design. The range of materials proposed includes stone, render, brick and timber for the walls and slate, thatch and tiles for the roofs. Car parking is provided within car ports or attached single storey structures.
- 2.2 The four dwellings have a loose informal arrangement around a central access drive. Each plot will have its own turning and manoeuvring space, with parking for four cars

and cycling.

- 2.3 The houses are pushed towards the eastern part of the site, to allow space for a gradual rise into the site, as the existing access from Stowhill is noticeably steep and needs altering to be suitable for residential use.
- 2.4 Extracts from the applications plans are attached as **Appendix 2**. Documents submitted in support of the application, including the design and access statement, are available on the council's website.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 **Childrey Parish Council** – Raises no objections to the proposal, but has a number of comments and concerns to take into account. The full comments of the parish council are attached as **Appendix 3**
- 3.2 **Neighbour Representations** – Six letters offering general comments and areas of concern received. Main issues can be summarised thus:
- The width and condition of the road leading to the proposed properties
  - Road leading to proposed properties is also subject to flooding
  - Erection of four large houses will further exacerbate the uneven housing mix in the village, which has a lack of affordable housing
  - Concerns over foul water drainage
  - Increased noise from construction traffic
- 3.3 **Landscape Architect** – *“Visually the demolition of the existing buildings and erection of four new dwellings will enhance this area of the village. The Design and Access Statement refers to planting within the site to promote biodiversity. There does not seem to be a planting plan for the development. It would be good to see native trees and shrubs used, especially for the boundary planting adjacent to the open fields.”*
- 3.4 **Highways Liaison Officer (Oxfordshire County Council)** -  
*“Four dwellings are proposed replacing a number of large farm buildings. The submitted design and access statement suggests this will result in a reduction in traffic, including HGVs. Further information is required to enable this to be fully assessed, including an assessment of existing and predicted vehicle movements. The blue-lined area is significant in size and clarification of whether existing activities will continue is required.*

*The majority of Stowhill is public highway, but the last section approaching the gates at the edge of the blue-lined area is 3<sup>rd</sup> party land. Therefore the application site as proposed does not connect with the public highway.*

*The section of 3<sup>rd</sup> party land leading to the gates is in poor condition, with potholes that were filled with water during my site visit. In order to provide safe, convenient, and inclusive access, repairs and improvements are required.*

*Within the blue-lined area the access lane was muddy and in poor condition in places. Again, improvements are recommended. The extent of the access works and improvements will be dependent on the predicted traffic levels.*

*The access into the redlined area is very steep. The LHA recommends gradients no steeper than 1:12, in line with ‘Inclusive Mobility’ guidance. Significant ground works will be required to reduce the level of the site, and it is*

*not clear whether an appropriate gradient can be achieved. Further information is required. Given the above comments, a **holding objection** is recommended until further information is submitted for consideration.”*

- 3.5 **Conservation Officer** – No objections
- 3.6 **Countryside Officer** - No objections
- 3.7 **Drainage Engineer** – No objections
- 3.8 **Waste Management** – General comments provided about the council’s waste contract

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 [P04/V1288/LDE](#) - Approved (27/01/2005)  
Certificate of lawfulness for an existing use of yard and buildings for storage and distribution.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 policies;**

- GS1 - Developments in Existing Settlements
- GS2 - Development in the Countryside
- DC1 - Design
- DC3 - Design against crime
- DC5 - Access
- DC6 - Landscaping
- DC7 - Waste Collection and Recycling
- DC9 - The Impact of Development on Neighbouring Uses
- DC13 - Flood Risk and Water Run-off
- H11 - Development in the Larger Villages
- H15 - Housing Densities
- H16 - Housing Mix
- H17 - Affordable Housing
- NE9 - The Lowland Vale

5.2 **Emerging Vale of White Local Plan 2029, Part One**

5.3 **Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/SPG)**

- Residential Design Guide – December 2009
- Sustainable Design and Construction – December 2009
- Open space, sport and recreation future provision – July 2008
- Affordable Housing – July 2006
- Flood Maps and Flood Risk – July 2006
- Planning and Public Art – July 2006

5.4 **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** – March 2012

- Paragraphs 14 and 29 – presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Paragraph 17 – Make full use of public transport, walking and cycling
- Paragraph 29 – Sustainable travel modes
- Paragraphs 34 & 37 – encourage minimised journey length to work, shopping, leisure and education
- Paragraph 47 – five year housing supply requirement
- Paragraph 50 – create sustainable inclusive and mixed communities
- Paragraph 55 – Housing in rural areas
- Paragraphs 57, 60 & 61 – promote local distinctiveness and integrate development into the natural, built and historic environment

Paragraph 111 – encourage the effective use of land

**6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

*Current policy position*

- 6.1 Under the current Local Plan 2011, Childrey is designated as a larger village. Consequently, this scheme is contrary to Policies GS2 and H11 of the Local Plan, which combine to restrict housing developments outside the built up limits of the larger villages of the district. Thus, ordinarily, the council would only consider the potential development of this land through the local plan process given the site's location.

*Emerging policy position*

- 6.4 Under the emerging Local Plan 2029 Part One, Childrey is designated as a smaller village. The sustainability credentials of the village have diminished in recent years, as the hourly bus service to Faringdon, a local service centre, has ceased, and the post office has closed.
- 6.5 As a consequence, the emerging policy position is that only very small scale residential development will be permitted in Childrey. Such development will be limited to within the existing built up areas of the village. Proposals for resident development will only be supported where they seek to meet local housing needs. Thus, it is clear that the emerging position weakens the case for residential development outside the built up limits of Childrey, an issue discussed later in this report. However, it is important to note the emerging Local Plan Part One has only very limited weight at this time.

*Principle of development*

- 6.6 Paragraph 47 of the NPPF confirms the need for a council to have a demonstrable five-year supply of housing land. It is well documented this council does not currently have this five-year supply.
- 6.7 As outlined in Para 6.1, It is clear this application is contrary to local plan policies GS2 and H11. However, whilst the council does not have a five-year housing land supply, these two policies are inconsistent with the NPPF. Therefore, the council must assess the proposed application on its site-specific merits and whether, under the NPPF, it is a sustainable form of development.

*Sustainability credentials*

- 6.8 The NPPF's tests of sustainability primarily relate to location, design, landscape impact, drainage and highway safety.
- 6.9 Given the current and emerging Local Plan stance, the key to this proposal is how the site relates to the village. Despite its rural location, Childrey is a reasonably compact settlement. Most of the remaining facilities of the village are contained within its core and within the conservation area. Beyond this core, development has a more disparate "ribbon" appearance, and this lies outside what it considered the built up limits of the village. Stowhill is a good example of this type of development outside the built up limits.
- 6.10 The application site lies noticeably beyond the part of Stowhill which has houses on both sides. There is a clear gap between the existing housing and where these houses would be built. In short, the application site is divorced from the village and so is not a sustainable location for residential development.
- 6.11 Generally, where housing developments have been accepted in the district to address the housing supply shortfall, those developments have been contiguous with the existing settlement and so represent a natural extension to the built up limits of the

village. The application site is not contiguous with the village. Mount Pleasant, Cress Cottage and Stow Cottage form the edge of the built up part of Stowhill. The dwellings thereafter are largely isolated. This application site is one of these.

- 6.12 Particular weight can be given to the fact there is open land between the site and the main village to the west. This land appears to be agricultural and is largely undeveloped. It creates a clear break between the village and the application site that further reinforces the impression that the site is outside and separated from the village.
- 6.13 The fact is Stowhill is a single track access road also reinforces the impression the site lies outside the village and is part of the countryside. Standing within the site, the impression is of a farmstead outside a village, not an area forming an integral part of the settlement.
- 6.14 Given the above, the likely outcome is that any resident living at the new properties would have to rely heavily on access to a private car. Paragraph 17 of the NPPF confirms that one of the core national planning principles is to, *“actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling.”* Paragraph 29 of the NPPF states, *“The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel.”* The residents of this development would not have easy access to public transport, having to walk along the inappropriate access road, which does not have a footpath or space for a cycle way. It is likely to be at least a 10 minute walk to the heart of the village and its facilities.
- 6.15 Given these core principles, Paragraph 55 states, *“To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.”* It goes on to say, *“Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside, unless there are special circumstances...”* None of the special circumstances in Paragraph 55 apply to this proposal, particularly as the existing business use will be removed from the site to accommodate the new houses.
- 6.16 For the reasons outlined above, this site is not a sustainable location for housing development when it is assessed against the tests of sustainability contained within the NPPF. In contrast, it would go against the fundamental planning principles of the NPPF by creating a residential enclave removed from existing facilities and dependant on the private car. Furthermore, this scheme would provide only four additional units to the housing stock. This relatively small contribution to the overall shortfall of housing in the district would not be sufficient to overcome the fundamental objections to residential development in this location.

*Use of land*

- 6.17 Policy H15 outlines the residential densities that proposals for housing developments need to adhere to. Outside the larger settlements of the district, a density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare is a minimum requirement, subject to the impact on local character. Proposals that do not make efficient use of the land will not be permitted under the remit of Policy H15.
- 6.18 The application site is 0.88 hectares in size and four family homes are proposed. This represents a density of around 4.5 dwellings per hectare. This is extremely low. The proposed houses are all very large, each benefiting from 5 double bedrooms (many with ensuite bathrooms) and separate living, dining, kitchen and family rooms. These houses can only be described as executive family dwellings. There is no variety in the housing mix, contrary to the aspirations of Local Plan Policy H16.

- 6.19 Clearly, this proposal represents an inefficient use of the land. There is clear scope for the site to accommodate more houses and achieve a density more in-keeping with the area, and provide a housing mix more in line with the housing needs of the district.
- 6.20 It is important to note that, in Childrey, a proposal for 5 dwellings or more would be required to provide affordable housing. If this site were considered appropriate for housing, it is clearly capable of accommodating at least 5 units, and likely more. (For example, 10 dwellings on the site would represent a density of 11.4 dwellings per hectare).
- 6.21 District wide, there is a need for more affordable housing. This is exacerbated by the housing shortfall. As one neighbour has correctly pointed out, this proposal would not provide any smaller units that are more affordable for local residents. There are plenty of large dwellings in Childrey, and this proposal would exacerbate, rather than improve, this imbalance. It is important to reiterate that, under the emerging Local Plan, residential development in Childrey will only be permitted where it meets an identified housing need.
- 6.22 Policy H17 is clear that, on sites in the larger villages that are capable of accommodating 5 or more dwellings, 40% of those dwellings should be affordable. Given the extremely low density, this site is capable of accommodating the requisite number of houses to trigger the affordable housing requirement. Therefore, the lack of affordable provision, coupled with the inefficient use of the land, represents a further reason for refusing this proposal.

*Visual impact, character and appearance*

- 6.23 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan states that development will be permitted provided that it is of high quality and inclusive design. The layout, scale, mass, height, detailing, materials and relationship to adjoining buildings should not adversely affect those attributes that make a positive contribution to the character of the locality. Policies DC5, DC6 and DC9 seek to ensure that all new development is acceptable in terms of highway safety, include hard and soft landscaping measures and does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours. Policy NE9 seeks to protect the distinctive landscape character of the Lowland Vale area.
- 6.24 From observations on site, the existing site has little architectural merit, consisting of extensive hardstanding and modern farm structures. These functional buildings offer little to the quality of the appearance of the area and the wider landscape, and so there can be no objection to their removal.
- 6.25 In consultation, the council's landscape officer has confirmed their view this proposal would enhance the contribution this proposal makes to the character of the area. In particular, the reduced footprint overall creates allowances for additional native planting. This planting would help screen the development within wider views, creating a nicely self-contained residential enclave. If this scheme were acceptable, this landscaping would need to be carefully controlled by condition to ensure a sympathetic planting solution.
- 6.26 There is ample scope for the proposed houses, for reasons discussed above. Each house has its own distinctive style, but they are all traditional designs, using materials appropriate to the area. The applicant has done a good deal of work identifying the characteristics of the village and these are reflected in the final design.
- 6.27 Overall, if this scheme were acceptable, there would be no significant concerns about

its impact on the character and appearance of the area, or the quality of the wider landscape. Any consent would need carefully conditioning, with details about site levels, materials, boundary treatments necessary, alongside the landscaping discussed above.

*Highway Safety*

- 6.28 As outlined in Para 1.3, the road accessing the site is in a poor condition. On a steady incline, the top surface has been broken up consistently along its length. There is evidence of pot holes, and it is poorly drained. Policy DC5 makes clear that any new development must allow for a safe and convenient access to the highway network. This proposal fails on both of these counts.
- 6.29 In consultation, the Highways Authority has confirmed that, in its current condition, the road is entirely unsuitable to provide access to a new residential development. The poor condition and the poor drainage combine with the narrow width to make it extremely difficult to use, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore, it would be difficult for two cars to pass on the road.
- 6.30 In these respects, the access road is neither safe nor convenient. Local residents have repeatedly raised this issue in consultation and these objections are valid. The difficulties pedestrians would have accessing the village to use public transport further reduces the sustainable credentials of the site.
- 6.31 The applicant argues that the reduction in HGV traffic should outweigh these concerns. It is clear the cessation of the current business operations on the site would be welcome in the village, and would reduce further wear and tear on the road. No evidence of the overall existing and proposed level of vehicular movements have been put forward in support of this notion. Furthermore, this reduction is not central to the assessment of this issue. What is most important is whether the existing access is suitable for serving this proposed development. For the reasons outlined above, it is not.
- 6.32 It is entirely possible that the road could be repaired and upgraded to overcome these concerns. Unfortunately, part of the worst section of road lies outside the applicants' control and it is not clear who owns it. Therefore, it does not form part of this application. If it did, the council would have the option of a stringent pre-commencement condition to secure the necessary improvements prior to occupation of the new dwellings. As it does not, the council does not have the appropriate level of control and a condition can not overcome this reason for refusal. Therefore, the poor quality and drainage of the road represents a further reason for refusal.

*Future living conditions and neighbouring amenity*

- 6.33 From observations on site and a review of the plans, there are no concerns that the new occupants would suffer from inadequate privacy and amenity, nor would existing neighbours have their amenity significantly affected.

*Drainage and flooding issues*

- 6.34 In terms of surface water drainage, there have been no objections. Given the overall size of the site, there is plenty of scope for a SUDS scheme that will not exacerbate flooding on the road or on adjoining land. This would be secured by condition if the scheme were acceptable.
- 6.35 The applicants have confirmed in discussions with the council's drainage engineer that the new houses would be able to connect to the existing Thames Water sewer network in Childrey. Again, a detailed foul drainage strategy would be secured by condition in

respect of an acceptable scheme.

*Other Issues*

- 6.36 The council's countryside officer has confirmed the existing structures on site do not provide appropriate habitats for important species and there are no concerns on this point.
- 6.37 There is ample space within the site for appropriate waste and recycling storage provision.
- 6.38 The proposed houses would incorporate sufficient sustainability measures to achieve Level Four when assessed against the Code for Sustainable Homes. This is in excess of what the council can currently require under the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD
- 6.39 If this application were acceptable, a pre-commencement condition would be necessary to secure the prior agreement to a contaminated land assessment. This is important given the previous agricultural and commercial use of the sites. However, for the reasons outlined above, this application is recommended for refusal.

**7.0 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The proposed application site is an unsuitable and isolated location for new residential development, being divorced from the built up part of the village, accessible only by a single track road. This will result in new residents having to rely on their cars to access local facilities. This makes the residential development of the land unsustainable when assessed against national and local policies.
- 7.2 Furthermore, the provision of four large dwellings on the land would represent a density of around 4.5 dwellings per hectare. This is too low, representing an inefficient use of the land. Five or more dwellings on the land would trigger the need for affordable housing. Given the extremely low density, it is very likely this site could accommodate five or more dwellings. This inefficient use of the land is contrary to local and national policies.
- 7.3 Finally, whilst acknowledging the desirability of reducing the number of HGV movements along Stowhill, the existing access road to the application site is unsuitable for serving a residential development, given its width, drainage and current condition. Some of this access road lies outside the application site, so the council has no powers to compel its improvement as part of this scheme. Therefore, this inadequate access represents a further reason for refusal.

**8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**8.1 Refusal of Planning Permission for the following reasons:**

- 8.2 That, having regard to the isolated nature of the application site, the proposed development would introduce new residential development into a rural location detached from Childrey. As such, the site is poorly located in terms of access to essential facilities and any new resident would rely heavily on the use of the private car. As such, the proposal represents an unsustainable form of development that is contrary to the provisions of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011, in particular Policies GS2 and H11, and advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 8.3 That, having regard to the size of the site, the proposed provision of four large dwellings represents an extremely low density of development that would constitute an inefficient use of the land. This is particularly the case as, in the council's opinion, if this site were acceptable for housing development; it could accommodate a sufficient



number of dwellings to trigger the need for affordable housing provision. In this regard, the proposal is contrary to the provisions of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011, in particular Policies H15 and H17, and advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 8.4 That, having regard to its width, current condition, and poor drainage, the proposed shared surface access road to the application site is of insufficient quality to serve the proposed residential development. Part of this road lies outside the application site and so the applicant does not have the ability to deliver the required upgrades to the road. As such, the proposal would result in an unacceptable risk to highway users, does not enhance to the sustainability of the site, or provide inclusive access. In this regard, the proposal is contrary to the provisions of the Vale of White Horse Local plan 2011, in particular Policy DC5, and advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

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