



13 JUN 2016

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Stuart Walker
Principle Planning Officer
Vale of White Horse District Council
Abbey House, Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

8 June 2016

Dear Mr Walker

Planning Application: P16/V0246/FUL

I am writing on behalf of a number of my constituents who have contacted me with their concerns about the proposed redevelopment of West Way, Botley. As you will know, I have been closely involved in the planning process on this for some time, making written and oral submissions at Planning Committee where previous proposals for this area have been brought forward.

It is clear to me that local residents do support the redevelopment of the shopping centre, which is in need of investment, however they want to ensure it is done so in a way that is in keeping with the character of this much loved local area and is sustainable for the future.

I have been contacted by a number of local residents about the proposals now submitted and have met with West Way Community Concern. I have set out the main causes for concern which remain outstanding below.

Traffic

I have always been clear in my discussions with the developer that traffic flow is a key concern for local people. Many are concerned that the increase in commercial properties will mean that there will be a large number of heavy goods vehicles creating a number of problems for residents during construction phase and for deliveries once construction is completed. This area is already very busy at certain points of the day and on Saturdays as the Planning Committee will know, and many of the surrounding roads are taken by residents to access local schools.

I am encouraged that the developer has now submitted a series of Technical Notes, additional information and modelling to address some of these concerns, and that Oxfordshire County Council have re-submitted stating that previous concerns regarding traffic had been discussed in depth and amended accordingly.

Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) have been clear in their revised submission that a series of conditions must be met by the developer and in coordination with the District Planning Authority in order to ensure the viability of this planning application. I would stress the importance of a comprehensive Construction Traffic Management Plan to be developed in consultation with OCC and approved before construction begins, as well as a robust Construction Delivery Plan to keep disruption to a minimum.

In terms of sustainable traffic flows, OCC have been clear on the need for a Framework Travel Plan, submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. Thereafter and prior to the first occupation or operational use of any individual use element of the site a Supplementary Travel Plan or Travel Plan Statement is necessary linking back to the targets and objectives in the main Framework Travel Plan. I agree with the County Council that these management plans are essential.

Specifically on traffic resulting from deliveries, OCC have stressed the need for a Comprehensive Servicing Strategy, including Delivery Management System, for the whole site to be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority.

I would urge the Planning Committee to ensure these conditions are acted upon as OCC has set out in considering the robustness of the application.

Parking

On a similar issue, many of my constituents remain deeply concerned that parking provision at the site will be inadequate. The developer has slightly revised down the number of car parking spaces it will provide, and current plans propose 324 car parking spaces. There are concerns that with increased shops, 122 bed hotel and large number of students this is not a large enough increase from the amount at West Way presently. Currently, existing parking is 152 public and 162 private spaces. In addition offices at the site are vacant and so there are in effect 315 spaces available now.

County Council had also voiced concerns that it was not clear what will happen if these spaces are full in their initial response, and have now requested a comprehensive Parking Management Strategy for the whole site substantially in accordance with the Technical Note 2. Thereafter the car parking within the site is to be provided and managed in accordance with the approved Strategy.

I am pleased that each new home will have a car parking space and we will have 170 extra spaces for the public, but many local people have emphasised to me that convenience of parking is essential at a development of this nature, otherwise consumers will go elsewhere, and so I would urge VOWDC Planning Committee to carefully consider the efficacy of current proposals here.

Character and Scale

A key concern of mine and many other locals when the previous application was submitted by Doric two years ago was the loss of Elms Parade, Field House and the vicarage of St Peter and St Paul Church. I am relieved, therefore, that in this proposal the area excludes these properties, and I know local people have welcomed these important changes.

Further, the decision to remove the top storey from Building B has also been welcomed by community groups. There are some outstanding concerns, though, with regard to the height and massing of the proposed development. Many have expressed their desire to ensure the building is in

keeping with that of the local area, which is surrounded by two storey buildings and the area is much-loved for its 'openness' and connection to nearby countryside.

Infrastructure

i. Flooding

It is known that this area suffers with drainage issues. County Council's initial and revised submissions have highlighted the importance of a fully detailed foul and surface water drainage scheme to be developed, in coordination with the water authority, prior to the occupation of any dwelling to which the scheme relates, along with a fully detailed management and maintenance plan for the lifetime of the development.

I am encouraged to see no objections from Thames Water on the issue of water management infrastructure capacity.

ii. Local Schools

It goes without saying that a development of this nature brings more residents to our local area. Many local people are concerned about the pressures this would place on our local health services and schools- Botley School in particular. I am encouraged to learn of the agreement between Oxfordshire County Council and MACE in the form of a Section 106 contribution, and of course this has been made possible now that the school has expanded. Residents who have contacted me do remain concern about the sustainability of this in the longer term, if more and more people are to come to Botley and the associated pressure on our schools.

As the developer have acknowledged, Matthew Arnold School is over-subscribed, and while I am encouraged to note that the developer would also be required to make Section 106 contributions for the expansion of this school, I would urge the Planning Committee to carefully consider the implications of this development on our local infrastructure in this regard. As the Planning Committee will be aware, there remain concerns by community groups that the large number of residents the development would produce is over and above what has been planned for. Again, I know local groups would be grateful for reassurances of thorough forward planning in this regard.

iii. Affordable Housing (document)

West Way Community Concern have come to me with their concern that the application includes the statement that; *'There is a clear risk in this case that if an unviable level of affordable housing is sought then this will prevent this development from coming forward. The viability of the development is finely balanced having regard to the mix of uses and policy requirements and therefore it should not be unnecessarily burdened, which will in turn prevent the redevelopment of this underutilised brownfield site.'* Further, an 'Affordable Housing Viability Statement' is referred to has not yet been made publically available.


As the Planning Committee will know, availability of affordable housing in our area, and indeed across the County, is of the utmost importance. It would be helpful to have the final figures for the percentage of affordable housing to be provided ahead of the Committee Hearing. In the interests of full transparency, I would also recommend that the Affordable Housing Viability Statement is made available.

Conclusions

I have outlined above the key concerns that have been raised with me by Botley residents, and I know the Planning Officers will take great care to read the individual submissions and those of Parish Councils.

Clearly, the redevelopment of this area is very important to local people and it is essential that we get this right. Any development must be in keeping with the character of the local area; infrastructure must be able to cope and traffic demands must be able to be met.

I trust that the Planning Committee will carefully consider the conditions and contributions as set out in Oxfordshire County Council's response, and ensure that these are fully implemented to provide much needed assurance to local residents.

Law,


Nicola Blackwood

Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon