

ABG/1175/23 – Cranbourne Homes Ltd
Demolition of petrol filling station and car showroom. Erection of 62 dwellings.
Abingdon Service Station / Crossroads Garage, Drayton Road, Abingdon, OX14 5HT.

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 The application site comprises the former Esso filling station and the former Crossroads car showroom and garage on Drayton Road. It is proposed to demolish all existing commercial buildings and build 62 dwellings in a mixture of flats and houses. The precise mix would be 6 x 1-bedroom flats, 35 x 2-bedroom flats, 8 x 3-bedroom houses and 13 x 4-bedroom houses.
- 1.2 The proposed buildings would be a mix of two-storeys, two-and-a-half storeys and three storeys. Extracts from the application drawings are in **Appendix 1**. The existing wide access to the former filling station would be closed. Access to the dwellings would be taken via the existing vehicle entrance to the car showroom. Parking would be provided at the ratio of 1 space per 1-bedroom flat, 1.5 spaces per 2-bedroom flat, and 2 spaces per house.
- 1.3 The site is surrounded on two sides by existing housing. To the east are two storey houses in Hermitage Road and Riley Close, while to the south are single storey bungalows in Ladygrove Paddock. Immediately north of the site are the Ock meadows which are a public open space. Across the road are commercial car showrooms and garages for Ford and Citroen. The Ock Bridge which carries Drayton Road over the river is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Along the south boundary of the site is a row of mature Pink Horse Chestnut trees which form an important local amenity feature. There are a number of mature trees, mainly Beech, in adjoining gardens on the east boundary.
- 1.4 Most of the site lies within the Ock flood plain and a Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted. Some parts of the site would be excavated down slightly to increase flood storage capacity. A Design Statement, Transport Assessment, and Noise Report have also been submitted.
- 1.5 The original plans have been the subject of negotiation and amendment to address concerns, including a reduction in the number of dwellings. Further negotiations were taking place at the time of writing the report to deal with other concerns.
- 1.6 The application comes to Committee because Abingdon Town Council objects and because of the number of local residents who have objected

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 There have been numerous applications on both commercial sites, mainly during the 1970's and 1980's. The most significant recent decision was made in 2004, when outline planning permission was granted for the replacement of the filling station with a car showroom. This outline permission is extant but has not been pursued any further to date.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policies DC1, DC5 and DC9 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan state that all new development should be acceptable in terms of design, highway safety and impact on neighbours. Policy DC8 requires financial contributions to be made if local services and infrastructure are inadequate to cater for the development, while Policy DC13 deals with development in flood plains. Policy DC4 promotes public art. Policy DC10 states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to be adversely affected by sources of pollution, including noise. Policy L3 seeks to protect the open character of the Ock Valley from intrusive development.
- 3.2 Policy H10 allows for new housing in Abingdon provided it does not result in loss of important facilities, makes efficient use of land and does not harm the character of the area. Policy H15

requires residential densities of at least 40 dwellings per hectare in Abingdon and Policy H17 requires 40% of new dwellings to be affordable. Policy H16 states that about 50% of new dwellings on larger sites should be 2-bedrooms or less, and 10% should meet lifetime homes standard. Policy H23 deals with the provision of public open space on housing sites.

4.0 **Consultations**

4.1 Abingdon Town Council – Objects for the following reasons:-

- “1. Contrary to Policy DC5(ii) – Drayton Road is oversubscribed in terms of usage now and this will add substantially to the congestion there
2. Contrary to Policy H10(ii) – overdevelopment of this small area of land
3. Contrary to Policy H15 – the Town Council would ask the District Council to check the density thoroughly on this application.”

4.2 Local Residents

5 letters of objection and 2 letters of observation have been received. The grounds of objection are as follows:-

- the height and density of the proposed dwellings is excessive
- increased traffic congestion on Drayton Road
- inadequate parking on the site
- dominance of adjoining dwellings
- loss of light
- loss of privacy
- the potential for increased flooding
- loss of property value (this is not a material planning consideration)

4.3 County Engineer – in view of the high level of traffic movement that could be expected from the former filling station and car showroom, he has no objections to the application subject to conditions

4.4 Consultant Architect – supports the scheme but has asked for some minor changes (see **Appendix 2**).

4.5 Environment Agency – no objections on flooding grounds subject to conditions

4.6 Deputy Director (Environmental Health) – no objection subject to conditions to control the impact of the level of vehicle traffic noise from Drayton Road

4.7 Arboricultural Officer – has concerns on the grounds of proximity of the proposed dwellings to some of the trees on the south boundary which are being discussed with the applicant

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 The principle of residential development on this site is considered acceptable. This aside, there are seven issues for Members to consider. These are:-

- The impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area
- The impact on neighbours
- Highway safety
- Affordable housing
- The amenities of future residents of the scheme
- Flooding
- Impact on local services and infrastructure

- 5.2 With regard to the impact of the proposal on the character of the area, Officers have paid due regard to the applicants' Design Statement. The applicants argue that the design philosophy for the frontage onto Drayton Road has been heavily influenced by the scale and mass of residential buildings in nearby Ock Street, where a three storey scale is evident. Three storey buildings have been used as focal buildings within the site, where the scale is generally two-and-a-half storeys. The proposed houses close to the boundary with the Ock meadow would be three storeys but would be set into the site by about 10 metres to provide a buffer space between the buildings and the meadow. This will help retain the open character of the Ock Valley. The scale of the proposed houses next to neighbouring two storey houses in Hermitage Road and Riley Close steps down to two storeys in height.
- 5.3 The proposal has been submitted by the same local architects who have been involved in successful housing developments elsewhere in the town, notably The Brewery and the developments currently under construction at Caldecott School and Thames View. The design of the proposed scheme is of similar high quality and has the support of the Consultant Architect. His concern about some of the detailing has been the subject of further discussion with the applicants and a further update on this will be reported to the Meeting. A piece of public art will be provided as part of the development.
- 5.4 Objections have been raised on the grounds of density. The density of the scheme is 73 dwellings per hectare. The applicant argues that, with the extant planning permission for a car showroom in addition to the existing showroom, the site has an alternative commercial value and that, in order to provide 40% affordable housing, a certain number of dwellings is required to make the scheme viable. Officers consider the headline density figure is only one indicator of the proposal, and that equal consideration needs to be given to the quality of the design and layout, the amenities of future residents, and the amount of parking, all as a package in order to fully assess the merits of the proposal.
- 5.5 The site lies on a principal traffic route into the town with modern commercial garage buildings opposite. In light of the aims expressed in the Design Statement, Officers consider the scale, massing and design of the proposed dwellings to be acceptable. The Arboricultural Officer has concerns regarding the proximity of some of the proposed housing to the mature Pink Horse Chestnut trees on the south boundary. This issue is to be the subject of further discussion and progress will be reported to the Meeting.
- 5.6 The second issue is the impact on neighbours from overlooking, loss of light, dominance and disturbance from manoeuvring vehicles. On the east side are houses in Hermitage Road and Riley Close. No 33 and No 34 Hermitage Road back onto the site at an angle, while Nos 24, 34, 35 and 37 Riley Close back directly onto the site. The amendments made to the scheme mean that the closest proposed houses to all of these have side walls facing these neighbours, have been designed with no first floor windows directly facing the rear gardens, and would be set at least 12 metres away from rear windows, which is the minimum distance in accordance with the Council's guidance.
- 5.7 To the south are the bungalows in Ladygrove Paddock, the closest of which are No 12 and 14. The side walls of these bungalows look towards the site and lie only 2 metres from the boundary, which is marked by a tall hedge. Principal windows in the bungalows look elsewhere. The proposed house at Plot 23 has rear windows that face the rear garden of No12, but these windows would be 21 metres from much of the garden, which meets the Council's standards for privacy.
- 5.8 The proposal needs to be considered in terms of loss of light and dominance. Officers consider the proposed dwellings would be sufficiently distant from neighbouring dwellings not to cause harm from either.
- 5.9 Some of the proposed parking areas would lie close to parts of the south and east boundaries. This raises the issue of potential disturbance from manoeuvring vehicles. However, the parking near to Ladygrove Paddock would not lie close to any of the bungalows, while the

parking near to Riley Close would adjoin an existing parking court. Originally, some parking was proposed near to the back gardens of No 33 and 34 Hermitage Road, but amended plans show this has been moved away from the boundary to a more acceptable position. Overall therefore, the impact of the proposed development on neighbours is considered acceptable.

- 5.0 The third issue is highway safety. It is proposed to close the existing wide access to the former filling station and to make use of the entrance to the showroom site for the proposed housing. Objections have been raised on the grounds of traffic generation and the impact of additional traffic on the busy Drayton Road. The congestion problems in Drayton Road are well known. The former filling station has been vacant for some years, during which time congestion on Drayton Road has almost certainly worsened. However, it is evident that any development on the site, residential or commercial, will have a level of traffic associated with it and will add to existing traffic on the road.
- 5.11 In making his assessment the County Engineer must have regard to the historic use of the site. National traffic statistics show that a filling station in an urban location can reasonably expect to have a considerable level of traffic movement, particularly in peak hours when people are travelling to and from work and will combine a trip to obtain fuel. This traffic movement will involve a substantial amount of right turn movements across traffic. Consequently, if the filling station were still in operation it is likely that, during periods of peak hour congestion, traffic entering and leaving it would be causing significant further delay and congestion on Drayton Road.
- 5.12 According to national statistics, a proposal for 62 dwellings can be expected to generate approximately 45-50 vehicle movements in the peak period. The County Engineer has made a careful assessment of the comparative traffic profiles and considers that the proposed housing would cause no more congestion and delay to peak hour flows than could be reasonably expected from a fully operational filling station. This opinion is re-enforced when he takes into account the expected staff and customer flows to and from the former car showroom and garage site in the peak period. On this basis the County Engineer does not object to the traffic implications of the proposal. The proposed parking ratios are considered to be appropriate in light of Government guidance to significantly reduce parking standards in urban areas, and they comply with the Council's parking standards.
- 5.13 The fourth issue is affordable housing. The applicants have been in discussion with the Council's Housing Officer and can provide 40% affordable housing with an acceptable mix of tenures and sizes of unit. The details will be the subject of a Section 106 Obligation.
- 5.14 The next issue is the quality of the environment for future residents. All of the proposed houses will have rear gardens. The proposed flats will have limited amenity space, but the applicants argue that the Ock Valley public open space adjoins the north boundary of the site and is a convenient alternative amenity space for flat dwellers. No on-site public open space is proposed, again for reasons of commercial viability, but the applicants have offered a financial contribution towards off-site provision. This contribution would be part of the Section 106 Obligation. Policy H23 normally requires 15% of the site to be laid out as public open space, but does allow for off-site contributions where on-site provision is not appropriate.
- 5.15 The site suffers from noise from vehicles on Drayton Road. Surveys indicate that the noise levels close to the road would be within Noise Exposure Category C as contained in the relevant national guidance, PPG24, "Planning and Noise". Further back into the site, noise levels fall to NEC B. Under NEC C, planning permission should not be granted unless there are overriding planning reasons to do so, whereas under NEC B, planning permission should be granted with conditions.
- 5.16 Were the housing to be within NEC B, it would all have to be set back from the road by some 30 - 35 metres. Officers are concerned that this would produce a very poor townscape and not reflect the local traditional pattern of street frontages, where buildings sit close to the road. This is contrary to a considerable amount of recent national guidance from CABE and others

on good urban design. Consequently, Officers consider that the interest of promoting a high quality townscape here amounts to sufficient grounds to override the presumption of refusal due to noise. This view is supported by the Deputy Director (Environmental Health), provided conditions are imposed to control noise levels inside the dwellings close to the road. The applicants have submitted information concerning the insulation of the proposed dwellings and the careful design of trickle vents to significantly reduce noise levels in principal rooms facing Drayton Road. These insulation measures can be required by condition.

- 5.17 Overall, and having regard to the proposed development in total, and to the convenient proximity of the Ock Valley, Officers consider the quality of the proposed environment for future occupants would be acceptable.
- 5.18 The next issue is flooding. Most of the site lies within the floodplain of the Ock. A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted to the Environment Agency and it is proposed as part of this assessment to lower existing site levels near to the east boundary with the houses in Hermitage Road and Riley Close. This lowering of levels will increase flood storage capacity on the site to counteract the proposed increase in built footprint. The Environment Agency has considered the FRA and proposed flood compensation works and has no objection subject to conditions.
- 5.19 The final issue is the impact on local services and infrastructure. Oxfordshire County Council has requested a total financial contribution of over £103K to mitigate the effect of the proposal, primarily for increases in school space, library stock, waste management and social and healthcare provision. A contribution of over £55K to ABITS is also to be made. These contributions will be secured via a Section 106 Obligation.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *It is recommended that:-*

Either

authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Chair, subject to:-

- i) the completion of Section 106 Obligations to secure financial contributions for local services, off-site public open space and public art, and to control affordable housing*
- ii) conditions, including materials, architectural details, acoustic insulation, landscaping, removal of permitted development rights, boundary treatments, access and parking*

Or

Authority to refuse permission is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Chair should matters not be resolved by the deadline for determination of the application (19 March 2007).