

APPLICATION NO.	P18/V0359/FUL
SITE	Parklands School Besselsleigh Appleton Oxford
PARISH	BESSELSLEIGH
PROPOSAL	Refurbishment and Conversion of the existing Manor House into 8 apartments. Demolition of all other existing outbuildings and extension to Manor House. Erection of 36 new dwellings comprising 9 apartments within extension to Manor House and 27 houses within the grounds of the site. Retention of the existing site access, plus new associated parking and landscaping.
WARD MEMBER(S)	Anthony Hayward
APPLICANT	Millgate
OFFICER	Martin Deans

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the Head of Planning subject to the completion of section 106 obligations for financial contributions, and subject to the following conditions:

Standard

- 1. Commencement three years - full planning permission.**
- 2. Approved plans.**

Prior to commencement

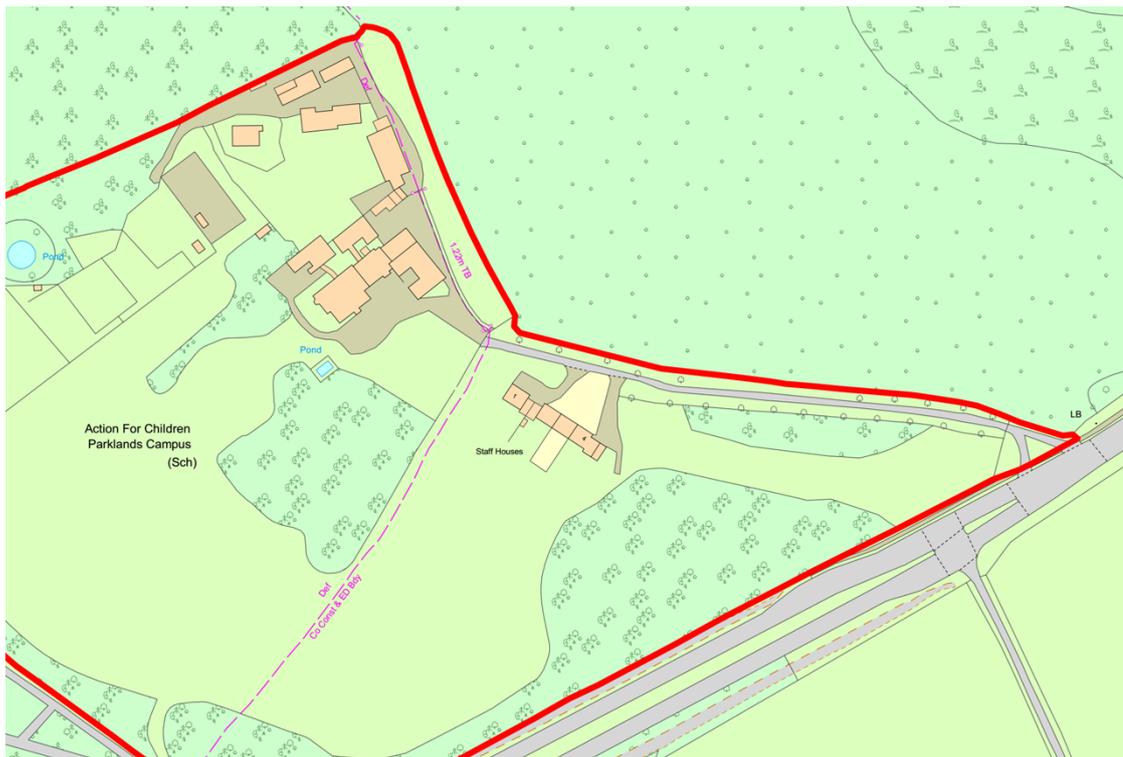
- 3. Contaminated land.**
- 4. Piling methodology.**
- 5. Ecology licenses.**
- 6. Tree protection.**

Prior to occupation

- 7. Materials as specified.**
- 8. Biodiversity enhancement in accordance with details.**
- 9. Surface water drainage in accordance with details.**
- 10. Foul drainage in accordance with details.**
- 11. Landscaping and tree species details.**
- 12. Tree methodology statement.**
- 13. Details of external lighting.**
- 14. Landscaping implementation and management plan.**
- 15. Boundary treatments.**
- 16. Access and off-site works in accordance with details.**
- 17. Parking in accordance with plans.**
- 18. Residents' travel information packs.**
- 19. Noise mitigation in accordance with details.**

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

1.1 This application comes to committee because it is a major application to which Besselsleigh Parish Meeting object. The site is the former Parklands School which lies between Besselsleigh and Appleton on the A420. The site has lawful use as a school. It comprises a number of buildings in two groups, a group in the north-east part of the site focussed on the Manor House, originally a Victorian manor-style house from the mid-C19th, and a line of staff cottages in the south east of the site. The site area is approximately 9.5 hectares. There is an existing vehicular access from the A420. A site location plan is below.



- 1.2 Two public footpaths lie in close proximity, Besselsleigh Footpath 10 to the north east of the site, and Fyfield Footpath 2 to the south west of the site. Ancient Woodland also borders the side and the Grade II* Church of St Lawrence and Grade II gate pier of the Manor House lie to the east of the site. The whole of the site is within the Oxford Green Belt.
- 1.3 The application seeks full planning permission to demolish the modern extensions to the Manor House, all the other modern school buildings, and the staff cottages. A new extension would be added to the Manor House and a total of 17 new apartments would be created through this extension and conversion of the retained part of the house. A total of 27 new houses would be built within the grounds; 15 to the north-east to replace the existing school buildings behind the Manor House, and 12 to the south-east as replacements for the staff cottages. Improvements would be made to the access with the A420.

1.4 Amended plans have been submitted to address the design, tree and landscape concerns, following discussions with the relevant officers. Amendments have also been made to the proposed access arrangements from the A420. Extracts from the plans are **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

Besselsleigh Parish Meeting	Objection. Impact on Greenbelt, effect on A420, effect on local surroundings of the character and nature of the development
Appleton With Eaton Parish Council	No objection. Comments on road safety and footpath connections
Neighbours	Objections have been received from one neighbour which can be summarised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrary to green belt policy • Unsustainable location • Harm to the wider landscape • Potential for highway danger
Oxfordshire County Council Highways	No objection to the principle of the access modifications, subject to conditions Request for a financial contribution towards improved public transport on the A420
Conservation Officer	No objections to amended plans
Housing Officer	No objection subject to securing financial contribution for off-site affordable housing
Drainage Engineer	No objections subject to conditions
Urban Design Officer	No objections to amended plans
Landscape Architect	No objection subject to details regarding internal and external boundary treatments, tree planting species, lighting and a landscape implementation and management plan
Forestry Team	No overall objections but concern over future pressure on a retained mature oak tree
Countryside Officer	No objection subject to conditions
Environmental Protection Team	Request noise survey due to proximity to A420

Thames Water Development Control	No objection subject to piling method statement due to close proximity of underground water and utility infrastructure.
Contaminated Land	No objection subject to conditions
County Archaeologist	No objections
The Woodland Trust	Objection. Deterioration and disturbance to Collier's Copse (ancient woodland) to the north of the site
Oxford Green Belt Network	Objection. Inappropriate development in the green belt, inappropriate design, potential light pollution, traffic issues, and harm to landscape setting

3.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 [P89/V0321](#) - Approved (02/08/1989)

Retention of a portakabin.

[P87/V0267](#) - Approved (03/08/1987)

Retention of a portakabin.

[P86/V0256](#) - Approved (06/02/1986)

Conversion of existing loggia on ground floor of accommodation block to provide one bedroom for existing staff flat.

[P85/V0218](#) - Approved (16/08/1985)

Retention of a portakabin to provide offices for social worker and school burser.

[P84/V0268](#) - Approved (16/11/1984)

Retention of a portakabin to provide offices for social worker and social bursar.

[P83/V0223](#) - Approved (05/03/1984)

Single storey building to form sports hall.

[P82/V0182](#) - Approved (03/11/1982)

Removal of greenhouse and replacement with general purpose building of similar size.

3.2 **Pre-application History**

[P17/V1511/PEJ](#) - (14/08/2017)

Proposal to provide circa 40 dwellings comprising a combination of semi detached and detached three, four and five bed units. The main house will be converted into apartments. Access to the site will be as existing and trees will be retained where possible.

[P16/V2869/PEM](#) - (19/12/2016)

Scope for potential redevelopment

4.0 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 The proposed development is neither of a scale sufficient to warrant and EIA,

5.0 **MAIN ISSUES**

5.1 The relevant planning considerations are considered to be the following:

- Green Belt policy
- Heritage issues
- Design and layout
- Landscape and trees
- Highway safety
- Affordable housing
- Housing mix
- Other matters, particularly biodiversity, drainage, noise, contamination, Community Infrastructure Levy and other financial contributions

5.2 **Green Belt Policy**

Policy CP13 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out that the construction of new buildings within the green belt is considered inappropriate development unless it falls within one of the exceptions listed in the policy. One exception is for –“*limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development*”.

5.3 It is normal convention to assess the impact of a replacement building on the openness of the green belt by comparing the volume of the existing and proposed building. In this case the comparison shows that the replacement buildings will increase the built volume on the site by approximately 30%. In light of this, officers have concluded that the proposed redevelopment will have a greater impact on openness, and that the proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the green belt.

5.4 Following on from this position, the next question is whether there are any “very special circumstances” that apply to the application and which can be said to outweigh the harm to the green belt. The applicants have argued there are several such very special circumstances, as follows:

- Heritage benefits
- Restoration and management of the original parkland setting of the site
- Vehicle trip generation and highway safety improvements to improve the safety and sustainability of the site

These will be examined below in relevant parts of the report.

5.5 Heritage Issues

The Manor House is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset. The original C19th buildings on the site comprise the main house and attached service wing, with a further attached stable block. Inappropriate modern extensions for school use have been attached to the service wing and the stable block. The latter has also been subject to considerable alteration. To the north of the Manor House are a number of C20th buildings of various sizes which are not sympathetic to its heritage status. The proposals will remove the much-altered stable block and all C20th buildings, add a new extension to the service wing, and build new houses in a “courtyard” to the north of the Manor House, and to replicate the line of staff housing in the south-east part of the site.

5.6 The scheme has been amended to address concerns from the conservation officer. The removal of the C20th additions to the Manor House, and the scale and design of the proposed extension, are considered to represent a material improvement to the historic integrity and setting of the Manor House. The rationale for the proposed courtyard of buildings to the north is to suggest estate dwellings, set broadly within the built area of the existing school buildings to be removed. Again, it is considered that the removal of the existing functional buildings and their replacement with housing is a considerable improvement to the setting of the Manor House. The new dwellings in the south-east part of the site are further from the Manor House and are seen as replacements for the existing staff housing.

5.7 Overall, the proposals are considered to make a significant improvement to the historic significance and to the setting of the non-designated heritage asset. They also provide an appropriate use for the asset, which is the best way of ensuring its upkeep for the future. Officers accept that these heritage benefits do form part of the “very special circumstances” argument in green belt terms.

5.8 Design and Layout

The design and layout of the scheme has been based on providing new buildings that are significantly more sensitive to the status of the non-designated heritage asset, and to the rural location of the site. Officers consider that the detail of the design and the quality of the materials is of high quality. Both the conservation officer and the urban design officer have no objections to the amended layout, and overall officers consider the design and layout to be innovative and worthy of credit. The use of the layout to replicate a credible heritage relationship between the new houses and the Manor House is welcome, providing further support to the overall heritage benefits of the scheme, and further support to this element of the “very special circumstances” case.

5.9 Landscape and Trees

The application is accompanied by a landscape and visual impact assessment, and by an arboricultural report. The site was originally landscaped as an open parkland to provide a setting for the Manor House, with trees planted as individuals, small groups, or small wooded areas. The site does contain a considerable number of trees, which make a positive contribution to its overall

character. However, the trees have not been subject to effective management for some decades which has meant a marked degradation of the original parkland concept. The applicants intend to restore the original parkland character of the site and to then to permanently manage the trees and landscape through a management company.

- 5.10 As part of the development, approximately 5% of the trees categorised as highest quality, and approximately 30% of the trees categorised as lower quality, will be removed. The forestry officer has assessed the proposals and has no overall objections. He does not support the objection of the Woodland Trust with regard to the ancient woodland to the north of the site. He does remain concerned over the likely future pressure to remove a mature oak tree which lies to the west of the proposed dwellings in the south-east corner of the site. It is not possible to amend the layout of this housing without causing an objection on conservation grounds. Consequently, officers have concluded that the proposal is acceptable overall.
- 5.11 The landscape officer has considered the submitted assessment. The main opportunities for public views of the site are from the nearby public footpaths. Given that the two main areas of development do broadly equate to the existing framework of built development on the site, the net visual impact on the landscape is considered to be acceptable, subject to conditions.
- 5.12 The application does provide a clear opportunity to restore the original parkland setting of the Manor House. As this setting can then be secured through the agreement of a suitable management plan, officers agree that this improvement does contribute to the case for “very special circumstances” in green belt terms.
- 5.13 **Highway Safety**
The applicants have submitted a transport assessment and plans showing improvements to the access from the site to the A420. The transport assessment compares the traffic generated by the historic school use to that which will be generated by the residential scheme. This assessment indicates a broadly similar level of traffic between the two types of use, and a net reduction in the peak hours trip generation for the proposal. The county highways officer states that, overall, he does not object to the assessment.
- 5.14 Currently the existing access onto the A420 has a forked layout, with an “in” arm and an “out” arm. There is a ghost right turn lane on the A420 for traffic turning right into the “in” arm, and road lining to discourage drivers turning into the “out” arm and to discourage drivers exiting the site to turn right onto the A420 across two lanes of traffic. The lining does not present a physical barrier to drivers wishing to turn right and so its effectiveness can be questioned.
- 5.15 The existing access lies just to the east of a short section of dual-carriageway that runs westwards as far as Tubney Wood. Just to the east of the site, in recognition of the dual carriageway, the speed limit changes from 50mph to 70mph. The county highways officer does recognise the potential for danger with vehicles emerging from the site and turning right as vehicles on the A420

are entering the dual-carriageway. As part of the proposal the applicants wish to improve the safety of the access through additional signage and the construction of a “splitter island” on the A420 to physically prevent drivers emerging from the site and turning right. The applicants also propose to create new footpath links to the two nearest bus stops on each side of the A420. The proposed splitter island is also designed to serve as a pedestrian refuge to allow pedestrians to cross the A420 to reach the bus stop on the south side. The county highways officer has examined the access and footway proposals and finds them acceptable in principle subject to further detailed work and a financial contribution towards improvements to A420 bus services. In view of the scale of the development he has requested a construction traffic management plan to controls such issues as parking of vehicles and wheel washing to prevent debris on the A420. In this case, as there is adequate space on site to accommodate construction vehicles, officers support the use of a CTMP, whilst recognising that it cannot prevent parking in the highway.

5.16 The evidence suggests that, in terms of trip generation, the proposals should be no worse than the trip generation of the historic school use. The proposed access works do offer a significant improvement in highway safety, and the prospect of some future residents being able to more easily use A420 bus services. In terms of green belt policy, officers agree that highway safety and sustainability improvements do contribute to the case for “very special circumstances”.

5.17 **Affordable Housing**

Given the relatively remote location of the site, the housing officer agrees that on-site affordable housing would not be appropriate. A financial contribution is therefore required to enable provision of affordable housing in more suitable locations. A viability assessment has been undertaken and the council has engaged an independent consultant to assist with this. Broad agreement has been reached on the nature of a suitable contribution, which can be secured through a Section 106 obligation.

5.18 **Housing Mix**

The proposed mix of housing compared to the SHMA market housing mix is:

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+bed
Application	12%	25%	25%	38%
SHMA	5%	25%	45%	25%

This clearly shows a larger proportion of 1-bed units (provided through conversion of the Manor House) and a larger proportion of 4+ bed units as opposed to 3-bed units. It should be noted, however, that the SHMA sets parameters for greenfield sites, whereas the application site is a brownfield site with an existing use value, and has the further complication of finding a solution to re-use a heritage asset which imposes further constraints on the size of dwelling that can be realised. In view of these factors, officers consider the proposed mix to be reasonable.

5.19 **Other Matters**

Biodiversity

The submitted ecology surveys have been assessed by the countryside officer. He has no objections subject to conditions.

5.20 Drainage

The application includes a flood risk and drainage assessment. The site is served by a sewer. Thames Water notes that the development is in the vicinity of existing underground water utility infrastructure and has requested a condition to secure a methodology for piling if necessary. The council's drainage engineer has no objections subject to conditions.

5.21 Noise

The environmental protection officer has assessed the application. Due to the proximity of the A420 he has requested a noise survey and appropriate noise mitigation measures if appropriate. The nearest house to the A420 will be approximately 80m from the road. This is approximately twice the distance of other recently approved housing schemes along the A420 which, through approved noise mitigation measures, have demonstrated a satisfactory noise environment for residents. In view of the distances involved for this development, officers consider it is highly likely that a satisfactory noise environment can be provided and, therefore, that this issue can be controlled through a suitable worded condition.

5.22 Contamination

A geophysical survey has been submitted with the application. Although this has identified no significant contamination on site that would preclude housing development, it has also shown a moderate risk of contamination from use of the site. The scientific officer therefore requests a staged condition to allow for investigation of this risk and for mitigation if necessary.

5.23 Community Infrastructure Levy

The development is liable for CIL. A charge of £148,664 was calculated at the time of submission of the application.

5.24 Other Financial Contributions

The following developer contributions are considered fair and proportionate and should be secured through section 106 agreements:

District Council	Amount (£)
Off-site affordable housing	To be finalised

Oxfordshire County Council	Amount (£)
Improvements to bus services	£49,743.76

6.0 **CONCLUSION**

6.1 The proposal raises key issues in terms of sustainability, green belt policy, and of finding an appropriate use for a non-designated heritage asset. Officers have carefully assessed these issues and consider that there are very special circumstances that outweigh the harm to green belt arising from the

inappropriate nature of the development. Key amongst these are the heritage benefits that can be realised through a high quality and considered design and layout. The balance of trip generation figures suggests the proposed use is no worse in terms of sustainable transport and does include measures to assist with easier use of buses. Technical issues have been resolved or can be through the use of conditions. Overall therefore officers support the scheme.

The following planning policies have been taken into account:

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part1 policies;

- CP01 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CP03 - Settlement Hierarchy
- CP04 - Meeting Our Housing Needs
- CP07 - Providing Supporting Infrastructure and Services
- CP13 - The Oxford Green Belt
- CP22 - Housing Mix
- CP24 - Affordable Housing
- CP33 - Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
- CP35 - Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking
- CP37 - Design and Local Distinctiveness
- CP39 - The Historic Environment
- CP42 - Flood Risk
- CP44 - Landscape
- CP46 - Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 policies;

- DC20 - External Lighting
- DC5 - Access
- DC6 - Landscaping
- DC7 - Waste Collection and Recycling
- DC9 - The Impact of Development on Neighbouring Uses
- GS6 - Redevelopment of buildings outside settlements
- GS7 - Re-use of vernacular buildings outside settlements
- HE9 - Archaeology
- L10 - Safeguarding and Improving Public Rights of Way

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 has been through examination but the Inspectors Report has not been received. Its policies therefore have limited weight.

Vale of White Horse Design Guide (March 2015)

National Planning Policy Framework, 2018

Planning Practise Guidance, 2014

Equality Act 2010

The application has been assessed against section 149 of the Equality Act. It is considered that no recognised group will suffer discrimination as a result of the proposal.

Human Rights Act, 1998

The application has been assessed against Articles 1 and 8. The impact on individuals has been balanced against the public interest and the officer recommendation is considered to be proportionate.

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