

**ABG/20033/3 – J S Bloor (Newbury) Ltd & Cube Land Securities
Demolition of 83 Northcourt Road and erection of 21 dwellings in rear gardens of 79 to 87 with new access.
Land at 83 Northcourt Road and rear gardens of 79 to 81 and 85 to 87, Northcourt Road,
Abingdon, OX14 1NN**

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the demolition of no 83 Northcourt Road and the redevelopment of this property along with part of the rear gardens of nos. 79 – 81 and 85 – 87 to create 21 dwellings.
- 1.2 The proposal is to build 13 dwellings in 4 terraces and 8 semi-detached dwellings on a site area of 0.42 hectare. It is a resubmission of a scheme that was refused in July 2007 for 14 dwellings.
- 1.3 The site is located on the north side of Northcourt Road, a mature residential suburban road with a mixture of houses and flats. The properties on the north side are individually designed detached dwellings set in large plots. To the west of the site lies the access road to the Fitzharrys School, whose campus (along with Dunmore Infant School to the east) adjoins the northern boundary of the site. To the east lies a recently approved development for 21 dwellings, which comprises a mixture of flats, terraced dwellings and a detached house, and is currently under construction.
- 1.4 A copy of the plans showing the location of the proposal, its design and layout together with extracts from the design statement are attached at **Appendix 1**. The plans have been amended to take account of changes requested by Officers and the Council's Principal Housing Enabling Officer.
- 1.5 The application comes to Committee because Abingdon Town Council objects to the proposal.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 In April 2007, two identical applications were submitted for the demolition of no83 Northcourt Road and the erection of 14 dwellings on the same site as the current application site. The first application was withdrawn on 5 July 2007. The second application was refused on 12 July 2007 under delegated authority and is currently subject to appeal. It was refused for the following reasons:
1. Having regard to the proposed layout and density below 40 dwellings per hectare, the proposal represents an inefficient use of land within the built up area of Abingdon, for which no material justification has been given. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policies GS5 and H15 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011, to Policy H3 of the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and to advice contained within PPS3 "Housing".
 2. In the opinion of the District Planning Authority, the site is capable of accommodating 15 units or more. The applicant has failed to adequately demonstrate why a higher density scheme with a reasonable amount of affordable housing would not be viable on this site, and has not fully explored options for a different mix of dwelling types and tenure. Based on the lack of information of alternative scenarios which may enable some affordable housing to be provided, the proposal is contrary to Policy H17 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 and to Policy H4 of the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, and to advice contained within PPS3 "Housing" and to advice contained within the Government Policy Statement "Delivering Affordable Housing" (November 2006).
 3. The proposed development, by reason of its layout and the juxtaposition of proposed units with existing neighbouring dwellings, represents an unneighbourly form of development that is detrimental to neighbouring properties in terms of amenity and overlooking. As such the

proposal is contrary to Policies DC1, DC9 and H10 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011.

4. The proposal, as submitted, fails to provide financial contributions towards improving local services, facilities and social infrastructure to meet the need generated by this proposal to improve local services. As such, it is contrary to Policy DC8 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 and Policy G3 of the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016.

2.2 In August 2007, a further identical scheme for 14 dwellings was submitted. This was withdrawn on 12 September 2007.

3.0 **Planning Policies**

3.1 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011*

Policy GS5 (making efficient use of land and buildings) seeks to promote the efficient re-use of previously developed / unused land and buildings within settlements (provided there is no conflict with other policies in the Local Plan).

3.2 Policy H10 (development in the five main settlements) enables new housing development within the built-up area of Abingdon, provided it makes efficient use of land, the layout, mass and design of the dwellings would not harm the character of the area and it does not involve the loss of facilities important to the local community (i.e. informal public open space).

3.3 Policy H15 (housing densities) seeks net residential densities of at least 40 dwellings per hectare in the five main settlements, provided there would be no harm to the character of the surrounding area or the amenities of adjoining properties.

3.4 Policy H17 (affordable housing) seeks a 40% affordable housing requirement on sites in Abingdon that are capable of accommodating 15 units or more.

3.5 Policies DC1, DC5, DC6, DC8, DC9 and DC14 (quality of new development) are relevant and seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design / landscaping; does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours; suitable social and physical infrastructure exists for the development or can be provided; the development is acceptable in terms of highway safety, and will not result in adverse surface water run-off.

3.6 PPS3, "Housing", is also relevant and reiterates the key objective of developing previously developed sites within urban areas, where suitable, ahead of greenfield sites and making the most effective and efficient use of land. It also comments on the importance of design, in that proposed development should complement the neighbouring buildings and the local area in general in terms of scale, density, layout and access. Paragraph 12 of PPS3 confirms that good design is fundamental to the development of high quality new housing, whilst Paragraph 13 goes on to state that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.

4.0 **Consultations**

4.1 Abingdon Town Council objects to the proposal stating:

"The Town Council felt the proposals were detrimental to highway safety and substandard in vision onto the Northcourt Road. Contrary to T8 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and DC5 of VWHDC Local Plan. Also concern of introducing extra traffic between two schools".

4.2 County Engineer – no objections, subject to conditions and a financial contribution towards the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy.

- 4.3 County Funding Officer – seeks contributions to education / library / fire and rescue provision and waste management operations.
- 4.4 Drainage Engineer – no objections (subject to conditions).
- 4.5 Environmental Health – no objections.
- 4.6 Waste Management Team – no objections, subject to a financial contribution towards the provision of recycling bins for each dwelling.
- 4.7 Crime Prevention Design Advisor – no objections. “The layout of the site is acceptable, all public areas are surveyed and vehicles overlooked.”
- 4.8 2 letters of objection have been received, which are summarised as follows:
- The original reasons for refusal still apply. The only material change is that there are even more dwellings.
 - The proposal does not take into account the busyness of Northcourt Road.
 - This will increase traffic on Northcourt Road and will compromise further the safety of school children and others who walk and ride along this road.
 - The parking spaces proposed are inadequate and will lead to further on-street parking.
 - The developers have not addressed the contribution they are going to make to the local community and services.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The main issues in this case are considered to be 1) the principle of the development in this location, 2) the provision of affordable housing, 3) the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including its design, 4) the impact of the proposal on neighbouring properties, and 5) the safety of the access and parking arrangements.
- 5.2 On the first issue, PPS 3 ‘Housing’ makes it a priority to use previously developed land for new housing and encourages the use of innovative approaches to achieve higher densities within existing settlements. In this respect, paragraphs 9 and 10 of PPS3 specifically refer to the Government’s strategic housing policy goal to create sustainable, inclusive, and mixed communities in all areas, with the planning system delivering a mix of housing to support a wide variety of households at a sufficient quantity to take account of need and demand and to seek to improve choice. In addition, Policy H10 of the adopted Local Plan enables such development. The principle of a development of 21 houses in the manner proposed, therefore, is considered an acceptable and appropriate form of development in this location.
- 5.3 Regarding the second issue, Policy H17 is explicit that on sites within the built up area of Abingdon which are capable of accommodating 15 units or more, there is a requirement for the provision of 40% affordable housing. To this end, on a scheme of 21 units, 9 affordable units are required. The application as originally submitted only proposed 4 units to be affordable which has been amended to 6 units. This amended number of units represents a 28.5% provision, which is contrary to Policy H17.
- 5.4 It is therefore necessary to consider whether there are any special circumstances that could justify the proposed development at this reduced level of affordable housing provision.
- 5.5 The site is a previously developed site where the dwellings have a high existing value. This is a material consideration which impacts directly on the viability of the proposed development.
- 5.6 The applicants, in their supporting statement, state that the provision of 40% affordable housing is not viable on this site. Confidential residual valuation statements have been submitted to show the current financial breakdown and costing of the proposal, and these

have been independently verified by the District Valuation Office (DVO) on behalf of the Council.

- 5.7 The DVO has confirmed that, due to the site's high existing use value, a development of 21 units on the site is not viable with 40% affordable housing provision. However, the DVO has advised that some affordable units can be provided and through negotiation the applicant has agreed that 6 affordable units could be provided on the following basis:
1. No social housing grant: 2 x 3 bed shared ownership units and 4 x 2 bed shared ownership units.
 2. With social housing grant: 4 x 3 bed social rented and 2 x 3 bed shared ownership units.
- 5.8 The Council's Principal Housing Enabling Officer has confirmed that there is an urgent need for 3 bed social rented homes in Abingdon, and as such an application for grant funding could be successful and enable the second option. If funding is not achieved, the first option will still contribute to providing much needed affordable accommodation within Abingdon.
- 5.9 The DVO has also negotiated an agreed value of the existing dwellings, whereby if the applicants sell the houses for more than what has been agreed, a further contribution to the Council would be payable towards providing affordable housing.
- 5.10 Your Officers consider, therefore, that the reduced provision of affordable housing of 6 units is justified in this case, on the grounds of viability.
- 5.11 Turning to the third issue, the development in the form proposed is not considered to be harmful to the character of the locality. The mix of terraced dwellings and semi-detached units is in keeping with the recently approved development on the adjoining site to the east and the dwellings are similar in style and form to other dwellings in the locality.
- 5.12 The scheme has a density in excess of 40 dwellings per hectare, which accords with Policy H15, which overcomes the previous reason for refusal. There is on site outdoor garden space for each unit and sufficient parking space / garages. Officers, therefore, consider that the proposal is not an overdevelopment of the site.
- 5.13 In respect of the impact on neighbouring properties, it is considered that no undue harm would be caused to those properties directly opposite the site or to the east. The revised plans are also considered to overcome the previous reasons for refusal in that the 12m and 21m distances between the proposed and existing dwellings have been achieved.
- 5.14 On the issue of parking and access, the proposed arrangements are considered acceptable. Adequate visibility can be achieved at the proposed access point onto Northcourt Road to ensure pedestrian and vehicle safety, and the increase in traffic movements is not considered to be sufficiently harmful to users of the local footpath / cycle network to warrant refusal. The County Engineer raises no objection to the proposal, subject to conditions.
- 5.15 Regarding the issue of surface water flooding, the redevelopment of the site is not considered to lead to increased risk of flooding providing a suitable surface water drainage scheme is implemented. It is recommended therefore, that in the interest of avoiding excessive surface water run-off, conditions requiring a sustainable urban drainage scheme (SUDS) be implemented and the surfaces of the parking areas are permeable are imposed on any permission granted.

6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *That authority to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee*

Chair in order to enable the completion of a S106 Agreement to secure the required financial contributions for highways and social infrastructure and the provision of affordable housing.

- 1. TL1 – Time Limit*
- 2. MC2 – Sample Materials*
- 3. LS2 – Landscaping*
- 4. RE7 – Boundary details*
- 5. Access in accordance with scheme to be submitted and agreed*
- 6. Car parking layout with permeable surfacing in accordance with specified plan*
- 7. Bin storage and cycle parking to be constructed prior to first occupation.*
- 8. Details of SUDS drainage scheme to be submitted*

6.2 That authority to refuse planning permission is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning & Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair should the Section 106 Agreement not be completed to enable a decision to be made within the 13week period (i.e. By 20 December 2007).

The reason for refusal would be based on the lack of necessary financial contributions towards improving local services and facilities and lack of affordable housing.