

GFA/19649/2-D – Cotswold Gate

Reserved matters application for residential development (23 houses and 13 flats) with new access

Land Adjoining Coxwell House and Winslow House, Coxwell Road, Faringdon

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application is on the allocated housing site on Coxwell Road. Outline planning permission for residential development was granted on 14 August 2007. A copy of the decision letter and site plan is in **Appendix 1**. The outline planning permission included approval of a new access road into the site from Coxwell Road.
- 1.2 The site lies to the east of two detached houses known as Winslow and Coxwell House (formerly Red House). To the north are houses in Carter Crescent and to the east are Nos 4 and 5 Tollington Court. An open field lies to the south. A group of overgrown Christmas trees has been a distinctive feature on the site for several decades. These were not considered worthy of protection by a TPO and they have been recently cut down.
- 1.3 The current application is for the reserved matters, namely the details of the proposed housing, road layout, parking, and public open space. The housing development would be a mix of 23 houses and 13 flats. Extracts from the application plans are in **Appendix 2**. The proposed housing would be mainly terraces of houses and flats, with four detached houses, one pair of semi-detached houses and two “flats over garages”, all arranged around an area of public open space located on the south boundary. Parking would be provided at a ratio of 1 space per 1-bedroom dwelling and 2 spaces each for the other dwellings.
- 1.4 The application has been amended by significantly reducing the original amount of three-storey development in the scheme. The amended plans have been the subject of fresh consultation and the consultation period expires just after the date of the Meeting, on 2 April 2008.
- 1.5 The application comes to Committee because the Town Council and more than 3 local residents object

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 This site was allocated for housing development on the recommendation of the Local Plan Inspector. His rationale for doing so is in **Appendix 3**. He noted that the site “...relates more closely to the existing built up area of the town. It is largely seen in the context of the surrounding housing, rather than as part of the open countryside outside it, including from Coxwell Road.”
- 2.2 With respect to the stand of Christmas trees, he noted that “.. apart from a few individual specimens of other species that could be retained, they are in a generally poor condition and would not justify the designation of a group TPO in arboricultural terms. As a largely “accidental” and somewhat alien feature in the local landscape.., I do not accept that the presence of these trees precludes consideration of the site for new residential development.”
- 2.3 He went on to state that “...I conclude that development of this partly brownfield site would not be unduly intrusive in landscape terms.”

2.4 The August 2007 outline planning permission included an informative which stated that any development on the site should respect its edge of town location and the privacy of surrounding neighbours. Attached to the permission was a Section 106 Obligation which required commuted sums for public open space, off-site play equipment, art, local primary and secondary schools, and local transport. These sums will be paid once the development commences.

3.0 **Planning Policies**

3.1 Policy H4 iii) of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan allocates the site for housing development. Policies DC1, DC5 and DC9 require all new development to be acceptable in terms of design, highway safety and impact on neighbours.

4.0 **Consultations**

4.1 Faringdon Town Council objected to the original plans for the following reasons –

- “height of the proposed buildings (too high)
- orientation of the buildings to the east end (would be better if they were turned around to avoid overlooking of neighbouring properties in Tollington Court)
- density
- sewerage and water services (how are these going to be provided for in a part of Faringdon where difficulties are already experienced with water pressure)
- lack of sufficient car parking in an enclosed estate where there is no opportunity for parking elsewhere
- access and egress (located on a brow which will make it difficult to turn into the development as well as being on a bend)
- highway will be higher than the footpath – maintenance of the footpath is therefore an issue.”

4.2 Great Coxwell Parish Council does not object but requests the following issues be given consideration –

“The Parish Council expresses concern that the new design of the development consists of a high percentage of 3 storey dwellings which will have an adverse visual impact on the sky line on this edge of town development as viewed from Great Coxwell.”

4.3 Any comments received in respect of the amended plans will be reported at the Meeting.

4.4 Local Residents – 7 letters of objection and 1 letter of observation have been received in respect of the original plans. The grounds for objection are as follows:-

- i) The height and density of the proposal is out of keeping with the locality
- ii) Overlooking from numerous first floor windows close to the boundary
- iii) Loss of light
- iv) Overdominance due to the height of the proposed housing
- v) Inadequate parking provision
- vi) The internal road is narrow and dangerous

- vii) Loss of trees and wildlife
- viii) Lack of security from back passageways to the houses

- 4.5 Any comments received in respect of the amended plans will be reported at the Meeting.
- 4.6 County Engineer – no objection subject to some changes to the design of the access road and conditions
- 4.7 Consultant Architect supports the amended proposal subject to minor amendments to some of the details. His comments are in **Appendix 4**.
- 4.8 Architects Advisory Panel (amended proposal) “Like this scheme – good standard of high density urban design”
- 4.9 Crime Prevention Design Advisor – comments to be reported at the Meeting

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The principle of housing development on the site is established by Policy H4 iii) of the adopted Local Plan. The extant outline planning permission has approved the access onto Coxwell Road, set the amount of affordable housing at 40% and set the amount of public open space at 15% of the site area. Thus objections made concerning the safety of the proposed access, the loss of existing wildlife and the capacity of local sewers are not material to this reserved matters application. These matters aside, there are three main issues to consider. Firstly, the impact on the character and appearance of the area; secondly, the impact on neighbours; and, thirdly, the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers within the site.
- 5.2 With regard to the first issue it needs to be recognised that, in order to meet current Government policy on housing densities, any development on the site will be at a significantly higher density than the existing low density housing in Carter Crescent or Tollington Court. The applicants also argue that simply to replicate the neighbouring post-war form of development at a higher density (similar to the Nursery View development off Stanford Road) would clearly fail to meet current Government guidance on producing high quality new housing that incorporates locally distinctive design. Consequently, the applicants have deliberately set out to produce a development that is distinct from the surrounding houses, using designs that are based on more traditional, higher density vernacular built forms with relatively narrow spans and steeply pitched roofs. Proposed materials are principally artificial stone and render with some red brick, and plain tiles.
- 5.3 The proposed housing is principally two and two-and-a-half storeys in height, but a total of four three-storey elements are spread throughout the scheme. The applicants consider that these elements are relatively small components of the total built form and are justified in design terms when seen as part of the overall composition of the scheme. The proposed terrace designs, including the three storey elements, are shown in **Appendix 2**. The height and massing of the proposal has been significantly reduced from the original submission. Both the Consultant Architect and the Architects’ Advisory Panel now support the design approach.

- 5.4 The Consultant Architect has made suggestions about some relatively minor details which are being discussed with the applicants. His concern about the bedroom window on the side of Plot 30 has to be seen in light of the fact that the window has been deliberately placed there for two reasons – firstly, to provide some overlooking of the parking court and, secondly, to avoid a bedroom window facing the neighbour at No 5 Tollington Court. This issue is illustrated in **Appendix 5**. Improvements to the composition of this end wall are being discussed with the applicants and progress on this will be reported at the Meeting.
- 5.5 The main public view of the site is from Coxwell Road which is the main entrance into Faringdon from the west. The public open space has been deliberately sited on the south boundary in order that the tree and hedgerow planting on the space will provide the maximum screening effect when seen from Coxwell Road. These trees and hedgerows will be under Council control and therefore can be protected for the long term. The treatment along the south boundary will be a mixture of walling behind the housing and post and rail fencing alongside the public open space, as indicated in **Appendix 6**. The proposed walling is designed to screen the parking court to the rear of Plots 2 – 10. Officers consider the positioning of the public open space provides the best means of softening the edge of the development from the countryside beyond, and the overall treatment of the boundary will provide a good quality visual appearance.
- 5.6 The informative on the outline planning permission draws attention to the fact that the site is on the edge of the town. The design approach taken by the applicants is considered inappropriate by the Town Council and by many neighbours, but it has followed Government guidance in terms of producing a locally distinctive solution to higher density housing and uses the public open space to soften the built edge of the development. In simple density terms the proposal equates to 45 dwellings per hectare, but, as Members will be aware, density on its own is only one element in determining the quality of a proposed housing scheme. Overall, Officers consider that the design approach is of high quality and the proposed development will have an acceptable impact on the locality.
- 5.7 The second issue is the impact on neighbours. The informative on the outline planning permission draws attention to maintaining the privacy of surrounding neighbours in Carter Crescent and Tollington Court. Essentially this relates to overlooking from proposed rear facing bedroom windows. Members will be aware that the Council's minimum distance for ensuring privacy between rear windows is 21 metres. In response to this issue, the main rear walls of the proposed houses are set at least 10 metres away from the north and east boundaries of the site. Two single projecting gable windows on Plots 28 and 29 would be 2 metres closer than this, but all the proposed bedroom windows will be at least 35 metres away from the closest houses in Carter Crescent and 23 metres away from the closest dwelling in Tollington Court. The relevant distances are shown in **Appendix 7**. There would be no first floor windows on the north wall of Plot 19 (a flat over the garages) or on the east gable wall of Plot 30 (the closest house to No 5 Tollington Court), and a condition can be imposed to prevent windows being inserted into these walls at a later date.
- 5.8 Given the distances between the proposed housing and the neighbouring houses, which generally exceed the Council's minimum distance by a significant margin, Officers consider that the reasonable expectations of neighbours for privacy in this context will be met, and will certainly be significantly better than on many of the recent housing developments in the town where window-to-window distances of 21 metres

are common. These distances also mean that no harm would arise through loss of light or over-dominance. The concerns about security are being discussed with the Crime Prevention Design Advisor and his comments will be reported at the Meeting.

5.9 The final issue is the one of the safety of occupants and visitors from vehicles moving within the site. The proposed access road has been amended at the request of the County Engineer to introduce narrower sections to help reduce vehicle speeds. The internal road layout has been designed for adoption and the County Engineer has no objections subject to appropriate conditions.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1.1 *Subject to the outcome of further discussions concerning the design detail and safety of the proposal, it is recommended that authority to grant approval of reserved matters is delegated to the Chair, Vice-Chair and Local Members in consultation with the Deputy Director (Planning & Community Strategy) subject to:-*

- i) the expiry of the consultation period on the amended plans and the consideration of issues raised in any further representations that are received, and*
- ii) conditions, including external materials, architectural details, hard surface materials, parking, the retention of garages/car ports, external and internal boundary treatments, landscaping, and the removal of permitted development rights to prevent windows being inserted on some elevations.*