

ABG/16935/1-D – Banner Homes

Construction of 86 dwellings. Former Kingfisher School, Blacknall Road, Abingdon

1.0 The Proposal

1.1 In July 2003, outline planning permission was granted for residential development on the site of the former Kingfisher School in Blacknall Road (ref ABG/16935-X). The decision letter and location plan are in **Appendix 1**. Key conditions of the outline permission are:-

- The position and specification of the access to the site from Blacknall Road has been approved
- There is no vehicular access to the housing from any other road
- A footpath link is provided between Blacknall Road and Caldecott School
- Public open space area to be 7% of the site area

1.2 In addition to these conditions, the developers have the following contractual obligations with the vendors, Oxfordshire County Council:-

- To provide an adopted highway from Blacknall Road to the remaining playing fields, and to the Family Centre which lies to the west of the site
- To provide 3 parking spaces for the use of the Family Centre

1.3 This new application deals with the reserved matters. Extracts from the application drawings are in **Appendix 2**, and a model of the proposal will be available for Members to consider at the Meeting. It is proposed to build 86 dwellings comprising:-

16 x 1-bedroom flats
26 x 2-bedroom flats
7 x 2-bedroom houses
37 x 3-bedroom houses

1.4 The outline planning permission requires 25% provision of affordable housing in accordance with the terms of the adopted Local Plan, and 21 of the dwellings would be affordable, spread across the site in two areas. Off-street parking space would be provided at the ratios of 2 spaces per house, 1.5 spaces per 2-bedroom flat, and 1 space per 1-bedroom flat. An area of public open space equivalent to 7% of the site is shown, in accordance with the outline permission.

1.5 Amended drawings relating to aspects of the design and layout of the proposal have been submitted and have been the subject of re-consultation. Supporting the application is a contextual analysis and design statement.

2.0 Planning History

2.1 In addition to the outline planning permission for residential development the Family Centre was permitted in February 2003 to replace the facility that existed at the former South Abingdon Community Centre.

3.0 Planning Policies

3.1 The principle of housing development, and the amount of affordable housing, is established by the extant outline permission. Relevant policies from the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan include D1, D2, D3 and D4, which require all new development to be acceptable in terms of design, impact on neighbours, highway safety and landscaping.

3.2 Similar policies from the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan are DC1, DC5, DC6 and DC9. Other relevant policies include Policy H14, which requires the density of new housing development in Abingdon to be at least 40 dwellings per hectare provided there is no harm to the character

of the area or to neighbours' amenities, and Policy H15, which requires at least 50% of new housing on sites of four or more dwellings to be 2-bedrooms or less.

4.0 **Consultations**

4.1 Abingdon Town Council does not object but requests the following issues be given consideration:-

“Recommend that County Council’s Highways Section consider whether the access for traffic coming out of Blacknall Road is safe. There is no indication on the plans that a footpath would be provided to Caldecott School. This was agreed at the outset.”

4.2 Local Residents – 5 letters have been received raising the following concerns:-

1. Overdevelopment of the site
2. Inadequate parking which is likely to result in additional on-street parking in the locality
3. Additional traffic on Blacknall Road/Caldecott Road which suffers from congestion at school peak hours, and at St Helen’s Wharf bridge to the detriment of the safety of cyclists
4. Lack of a transport statement or highways safety audit
5. Overlooking
6. Increased air pollution in the town centre from additional vehicles travelling into the town centre from the site
7. Likely damage to listed buildings on St Helens Wharf arising from additional vehicles travelling into town

4.3 County Engineer – no objections subject to conditions.

4.4 Consultant Architect – commends the proposal subject to minor modifications (see **Appendix 3**).

4.5 Architects’ Advisory Panel – supports the proposal (see **Appendix 4**).

4.6 Police Architectural Liaison Officer – no objections but would prefer a play space on the public open space (see **Appendix 5**).

4.7 Environment Agency – has issued a holding objection subject to details of surface water drainage.

4.8 Assistant Director Environmental Health – no objections in terms of impact on town centre air quality (see **Appendix 6**).

4.9 Arboricultural Officer – no objections.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 The main issues are, first, the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the neighbourhood; secondly, the effect on neighbours and the wider area, including air quality in Abingdon town centre; and thirdly, highway safety. With regard to the first issue, the application is supported by a contextual analysis and design statement which has fed into the design and layout of the proposed buildings, and by a model which will be on display at the Meeting. A landscape strategy has also been prepared.

5.2 The surrounding neighbourhood is suburban and contains buildings that are mainly two storeys in height, with some taller buildings on the north side of Caldecott Road. The scale of buildings in the proposed scheme is primarily two-storeys, with some two-and-a-half storeys to add variety. Occasional three-storey elements are included to provide focal points through the site. Design ideas have been drawn from vernacular buildings in the locality, but also from other parts of suburban Abingdon, for example Northcourt Road and Spring Road.

- 5.3 The Consultant Architect recommends permission subject to minor modifications which are being discussed with the applicants. Officers are confident that slight amendments to the design of the proposal can be made to satisfy the Consultant Architect and progress on this matter will be reported orally at the Meeting.
- 5.4 With regard to the comments of the Police Architectural Liaison Officer concerning a play space, it was decided not to require an on-site play space at the outline stage in view of the proximity of the site to the recreational ground that lies east of Blacknall Road.
- 5.5 Regarding the second issue, the layout of the scheme has been carefully prepared to minimise harm to neighbours from overlooking or loss of light. The dwellings located nearest to neighbours' houses would meet the 40-degree rule, and would result in no harmful overlooking of the most sensitive areas of neighbours' gardens. Where the rear of proposed dwellings would face the rear of neighbours' houses, a distance of at least 21 metres is shown, which meets the Council's minimum standard for privacy.
- 5.6 The holding objection issued by the Environment Agency relates to the method of surface water drainage for the development. The applicants have submitted further drainage information to the Environment Agency and progress on this matter will be reported orally at the Meeting.
- 5.7 An objection has been made regarding the effect of the proposal on air quality in Abingdon town centre. Air quality in the town centre is the subject of study and the comments of the Assistant Director Environmental Health on this issue are in **Appendix 6**. He considers that the likely traffic flows from the site into the town centre are too insignificant when compared to existing traffic flows to warrant refusal of the application on this ground. In addition, Officers consider significant weight needs to be attached to the following considerations:-
- the principle of housing development on the site, and therefore traffic from it, has been accepted with the outline planning permission
 - national policy of making efficient use of previously developed land within urban areas like Abingdon at significantly higher densities than has been the case historically.
- 5.8 An objection has also been made on the grounds of potential damage to listed buildings in the St Helens Wharf area by additional traffic from the site. In view of the likely small increase in traffic flows on St Helens Wharf arising from the development, Officers consider any increase in potential damage to be insignificant, and that this objection should consequently attract limited weight.
- 5.9 The final issue is highway safety. The location and specification of the access was agreed in the outline permission. The ability of the local road network to safely absorb expected traffic flows from a residential scheme of this approximate size was also considered and accepted at the outline stage. Given the suburban location of the site, parking ratios have been adjusted towards the upper end of the Council's standards. A footpath link from Blacknall Road to the school is provided as required by the outline permission. Overall, the County Engineer has no objections to the proposal.
- 6.0 **Recommendation**
- 6.1 *Subject to the amendment of the proposal to satisfy the Consultant Architect, and to the removal of the Environment Agency's holding objection, it is recommended that authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, subject to conditions including materials, boundary treatments, highway surface treatments, street furniture, landscaping, details of drainage, the design of any electricity sub-station, the design of cycle sheds and bin stores, and parking.*