

Woodstock – 16/01364/OUT

Committee presentation

Introduction

Updates from additional pages and any late reps

Description and slides (location, aerial, heritage, illustrative plan).

Speakers

Rest of slides

Commentary

Context –

The site is not allocated in the adopted Plan and would not comply with policy H7 dealing with development in service centres. However, the plan is time expired and out of date in relation to housing land supply matters.

The emerging Local Plan modifications identify the site as a proposed housing allocation, EW1c and therefore the Council has accepted in principle that the site is suitable for housing development. Nevertheless, even in the absence of an allocation, Woodstock is accepted as a suitable location for some new development.

Given the stage of the emerging local plan, the intentions as regards housing land supply matters currently attract limited weight. On this basis, the Council cannot currently demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing using the Sedgefield methodology and proposals need to be considered in the context of paragraph 14 of the NPPF, having regard to footnote 9 which addresses restrictive policies. Such restrictive policies include those dealing with heritage assets.

In the context the current local plan position, the delivery of a large number of houses is a benefit and must be accorded substantial weight. Likewise the delivery of affordable housing is a substantial benefit.

Heritage

As noted in paragraph 5.43 of the report, there are a number of designated heritage assets, the settings of which would be affected by the proposal. See slide 4

Historic England has referred to harm arising to the setting of the park by replacing countryside with housing. Similarly, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) expresses concern that the development would erode the surviving open setting of the WHS.

Historic England considers that the proposal would undoubtedly have some impact on the setting of the SAM through loss of a sense of rurality. However, the key vista the villa once enjoyed to the ESE would be preserved. The effect on setting would be characterised as “moderate adverse” in its view.

With regard to the Conservation Areas at Woodstock and Bladon, there would be no direct impact as the site is some distance from each. However, the wider setting is a consideration and some harm arises through loss of landscape and openness. Historic England judge this impact as “low”.

As regards the Cowyards, the harm would be limited.

In the case of each asset identified there would be harm to significance arising from the location, proximity, nature and scale of the proposed development. With reference to paragraph 134 of the NPPF the harm is judged less than substantial. This harm needs to be weighed against public benefits.

It is noted that the applicant intends to use funds arising from the development to contribute to meeting the costs of a programme of works at the WHS. Whilst visitor income covers on-going maintenance, repair and restoration require additional funding and the costs identified in the WHS management plan amount to around £40m. The mechanism by which an endowment will deliver the funding will be subject of a legal agreement. The use of funds from the development in the manner envisaged represents a significant public benefit to be factored into the balance in terms of the less than substantial harm to heritage assets that has been identified.

Highways

The primary access would be onto the A44 with a secondary access onto Shipton Road to the north east of the site. In addition there would be a number of pedestrian/cycle paths linking the site with the existing development to the west, the A44 and Heh Straet to the east. The existing public right of way on the western edge of the site would be retained and improved.

The site is accessible to the wider area by public transport and cycling.

A pair of new bus stops and a pedestrian/cycle crossing close to the new access on the A44 will be provided. Other off-site works will be required, as set out in paragraph 5.171 of the report. A number of highways related financial contributions are also required.

OCC raises no objection as regard sustainability, traffic generation and highway safety.

Landscape

Existing trees and hedgerows would be retained and protected during construction, and substantial areas within and around the site would be landscaped with trees, shrubs and grass. A large pond would be located at the front of the site as part of the drainage scheme, along with other swales elsewhere within the green spaces.

However, notwithstanding this landscaping, the visual effects of a development of this scale and extent cannot be completely mitigated.

The magnitude of change to landscape character in this location would be high. There is visual harm arising, but this is not so detrimental as to warrant refusal on landscape grounds alone. The harm does however need to be factored into the planning balance.

Siting, Design and Form

The application is principally in outline and therefore for most of the site area there is currently no detail provided in relation to siting, scale and appearance.

Phase I has been submitted as a full application, as it was considered necessary and appropriate to have certainty as regards layout and design for this part of the site that would be very visible on the main approach to the town, and because of its proximity to heritage assets.

Phase I has been subject to amendments requested by Officers and is now considered acceptable.

A Design Code produced by the applicant has informed the approach to Phase I and would likewise guide the remainder of the development.

Residential amenity

The buildings in Phase I would achieve acceptable separation to existing properties and there would therefore be no unacceptable loss of privacy or light. Appropriate layout in subsequent phases would be dealt with at reserved matters.

The potential for disturbance during the construction phase would be addressed by a construction management plan.

It is envisaged that the proposed buildings would not require enhanced acoustic performance as a result of external noise sources. Nevertheless a condition is recommended to ensure that acceptable living conditions are achieved.

The site is not located in an Air Quality Management Area or close to one. The submitted information demonstrates that pollutant concentrations in this location would be well below Government objectives.

A suitable lighting scheme can be agreed by condition.

The ground investigation carried out revealed no elevated concentrations of contaminants.

Ecology

The bulk of the land is under arable cultivation with low ecological value. The margins provide habitat of greater value and would be retained and enhanced.

Green spaces would be subject to an agreed management plan.

No objection is raised by the Council's Biodiversity Officer or Natural England.

The land is not classified as best or most versatile agricultural land and its loss would not have a significant effect on agricultural production.

Retail and Employment.

Woodstock is a thriving town with a range of services and facilities and a mix of commercial uses providing employment.

The scheme would incorporate up to 1,100sqm of commercial floorspace, although the specific uses are not yet known. There is no reason to believe that the modest commercial offer on the application site would be detrimental to the vitality and viability of the town centre. Indeed it is likely to complement it rather than compete.

An increased population would be likely to increase patronage of town centre businesses.

The car parking demand in the town is acknowledged to be consistently high but unlikely to be materially worsened by residents of the proposed development.

Social infrastructure

It is acknowledged that the development would require expansion of the existing primary school and the Marlborough School, this can be delivered by way of a financial contributions secured by legal agreement with OCC.

The consequence of the primary school expansion would be the necessity to relocate WUFA to the application site.

In its current location adjacent to the school it is convenient, allows interaction of different age groups, provides “wrap around” care before and after school and contributes to community cohesion. The alternative is much less convenient and potentially disruptive when families have children in both the pre-school and primary school. The disbenefits of this have a bearing on the planning balance, but on its own this would not in your Officers’ view constitute a reason for refusal.

It is noted that WUFA has requested Members carry out a site visit to the school/WUFA and this is a matter for Committee.

No objection is raised by OCC Education Officers.

There would be large amounts of space for informal recreation on the application site and more formal provision can be addressed by enhancements of existing facilities off-site. The details of precisely what will be delivered are not known but financial contributions will ensure play and recreation provision is commensurate with the scale of development. A legal agreement will deal with this, as well as any intentions regarding the applicant retaining long term management of on-site open space.

Drainage.

The site is in Flood Zone 1 and therefore at low risk of flooding.

A suitable surface drainage system can be secured by condition.

Foul drainage will also be the subject of condition.

Affordable housing

The applicant submitted a viability appraisal with the application which has been assessed by an independent consultant engaged by the Council.

There is a difference of opinion between the applicant who is offering 37% affordable and Officers who consider that at 50% affordable the scheme would still be viable. On this basis, it has been agreed that 50% will be delivered, unless a lower percentage is found to be justified following a review of viability after Phase I. This would allow on-site development costs and sales values to be established and fed into the viability model.

This would be the subject of a legal agreement.

The delivery of affordable housing is a substantial planning benefit.

Benefits

The applicant has requested that a number of potential benefits of the scheme are drawn to Members' attention. These are categorised as economic, social and environmental.

Economic – Jobs during construction and jobs associated with the commercial floorspace within the development and school expansions. Increased population to support the town, including retail and community provision. - These are acknowledged.

Social - The provision of new housing to meet identified needs and financial support for the WHS – Officers agree that these attract significant weight as referred to in the report. The applicant also refers to the provision of new modern premises for early years provision. In this case, Officers acknowledge that a new building would be potentially advantageous for example in terms of design and function, but as set out in the report at paragraphs 5.131 and 5.132 it is considered that the disbenefit of removing the locational and social association of the WUFA and the school would be significant.

Environmental – High quality development, provision of landscape and green spaces, as well as sustainable urban drainage features. Whilst Officers acknowledge that these would be delivered, subject to compliance with conditions, they are not considered benefits compared to the site remaining as an extensive area of open countryside. Landscape harm cannot be completely mitigated, as identified in the report. Re-instatement of the historic Heh Street for non-vehicular traffic is a positive but not of great consequence. Provision for greater public appreciation (through interpretation) of the Roman Villa, could involve information boards or public art and is a positive if well conceived and well executed, but not of particularly great weight in the planning balance.

Conclusions

The consideration of material factors in this case results in a finely balanced recommendation.

The delivery of 300 dwellings, including affordable housing, to contribute to identified housing needs is a substantial benefit. A consequence of such development would be economic gains such as jobs in construction.

The use of proceeds from the development to fund repair and restoration of the WHS is a significant public benefit.

On the other hand there remains significant, although less than substantial harm to the settings of a number of designated heritage assets, visual and landscape impact that cannot be entirely mitigated, and the social disbenefits of the proposed relocation of the WUFA.

Assessing the scheme in the round, Officers consider that the benefits would outweigh the harm and therefore with reference to paragraphs 134 and 14 of the NPPF the proposal is considered on balance to represent sustainable development. It is accordingly recommended for approval subject to the completion of necessary legal agreements.

