
APPLICATION NO.	P10/E0716
APPLICATION TYPE	Full planning application
REGISTERED	11 June 2010
PARISH	Ipsden
WARD MEMBER(S)	John Griffin
APPLICANT	R Atkinson
SITE	Handsmooth House, Ipsden.
PROPOSAL	Demolition of the existing accommodation at Handsmooth House and erection of a replacement detached dwelling and guest pavillion for use in conjunction with the main house, garage, tennis court, agricultural buildings, landscape works and associated ancillary works.
AMENDMENTS	As amplified by summary response accompanying agent's e-mail dated 30/7/10 and architect's letter dated 30 July 2010
GRID REFERENCE	465626/185509
OFFICER	Mrs H Moore

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application is referred to Planning Committee at the discretion of the Development Manager.
- 1.2 The existing site is located some 2.5km east of the small village of Ipsden within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is located on high ground at the top of a valley. Ipsden Restricted Byway runs concurrent with Urquhart Lane to the South of the site and Ipsden Footpath 8 runs to the east of the site.
- 1.3 The site is occupied by Handsmooth House and Cedar Bungalow, together with ancillary structures. The site is accessed by a private drive that curves up from the end of Urquhart Lane and is bordered on all sides by agricultural land and woodland, with Fludgers Wood providing a back drop to the house to the north. A collection of largely redundant farm buildings are located in the valley bottom either side of Urquhart Lane.
- 1.4 Handsmooth Farm House is thought to date from the 1930's, with rendered walls and a slate roof. The covered swimming pool to the east side of the dwelling which was added in the 1970's is mainly glazed with a copper roof. The bungalow to the west is constructed in timber with a low pitched roof.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal is to demolish all of the residential buildings and ancillary buildings on the site and all of the redundant agricultural buildings in the valley bottom.
- 2.2 The house and bungalow are proposed to be replaced with two new contemporary style dwellings. The main dwelling would be on three floors comprising basement, ground and first floors, and the guest dwelling would be on two floors. The dwellings would be finished in white exterior plaster and are flat roofed. The main dwelling is shown as a five bed dwelling, and the guest house as a two bed dwelling. Detailed calculations of volumes are provided. These advise that the volumes of the existing

dwellings are 2800 cubic metres and the volumes of the proposed dwellings are 3321 cubic metres, resulting in an increase of some 18%. There is a significant increase in the proposed below ground development, and a significant decrease in the volume of proposed replacement agricultural buildings.

- 2.3 Ancillary structures and land re-grading around the dwellings are also proposed. These include the construction of a bridge from the rear of the house to a raised garden area with quadruple garage and ancillary storage areas beneath. A raised tennis court with a synthetic finish is proposed to the west of the main dwelling, formed with an ivy clad retaining wall along the frontage. Significant re-grading is proposed around the proposed dwelling which would be sited further forward on the site than the existing property. The land in front of the existing dwelling slopes downwards towards the access gate onto Urquart Lane, and in order to provide a level garden area in front of the property, a plateau is proposed culminating in a ha ha. The land level in front of the proposed dwelling would be raised by up to 4.5m above existing land levels. Re-grading of the land in front of the dwelling would take place over a significant area, some 170 m in-front of the dwelling. The re-graded land would be re-planted with indigenous species. The access track would be re-surfaced with local Thames Valley gravel bonded onto a tarmac surface and the main gate would be replaced with a wooden gate. External lighting is proposed around the dwellings. In terms of planting, reinforcement of existing hedges and woodland edges are proposed together with further tree planting.
- 2.4 The existing barns in the valley bottom are dilapidated and constructed in a variety of utilitarian materials. It is proposed to demolish the whole range and to replace them with two new barns to be constructed with a brick plinth, timber boarded walls with corrugated steel roofing. Barn one would be used for domestic storage purposes ancillary to the use of the dwelling houses, and barn two would be used for agricultural purposes.
- 2.5 Plans **attached** at Appendix 1 show the location of the site and details of the proposals.
- 2.6 A large range of documents have been submitted with the application, full details of which can be viewed on the Council's web site www.southoxon.gov.uk The documents include a Design and Access statement, a Sustainability Statement, an Arboricultural Impact Appraisal and Method statement, a Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage statement, Lighting and Lighting Impact Assessments, a Landscape and Visual Appraisal and a Habitat Survey.
- 2.7 In overall terms the agent's information submitted with the application concludes – 'This planning application provides a unique opportunity to replace an existing undistinguished building complex with an outstanding contemporary country house, designed by a world leading architect, in a landscape setting that does it justice. It will provide a new benchmark within the district to which other future developments will aspire and to which the planning authority can draw attention when seeking to demonstrate examples of good design and landscape assimilation. Richard Meier is a renowned architect of excellence. His design for Handsmooth House is inspirational yet it was carefully progressed in response to a thorough analysis of the site and its context. Meier's buildings are pristine, light, elegant and graceful, renowned for their clean lines, fine detailing and subtle interplay between solids and voids. The result is a design that is in balance with its landscape, which stimulates visual interest and is committed to delivering a sustainable solution, with respect to design, construction and management.

Policy H12 and C2 seek to ensure the inherent character of the countryside and Chilterns AONB is not damaged by inappropriate development. The approach taken by the design team seeks to provide an outstanding building, of innovative design and aspiring to the highest standards of sustainability with strict attention to detail, that can be judged on its own merit and does not attempt to be a pastiche. All landscape treatment is part of a holistic approach to design that allows the pure linear beauty of the building to be reflected in the rectilinear pattern of a working landscape. The proposals also provide an opportunity to enrich the ecological diversity and scenic richness of the landscape.

The landscape appraisal concludes that the proposed development will provide a significantly enhanced view from public viewpoints. The proposals will have no greater visibility than the existing development, neither widening views of the property, nor significantly closing them. Instead, the development will be seen from the same locations as the existing development and the view will remain that of a large property and guest accommodation. It will however be of a different design, scale and form, and this will be a positive change.

This exciting proposal brings together a uniquely appropriate site and a remarkable modern building. The proposal sets a building of sublime purity in a landscape to match and replaces a house entirely without merit. The proposed scheme will significantly enhance the site and its wider countryside setting.

The proposal complies with the relevant development plan policies. It is considered that the proposed development would not materially harm the living conditions of local residents, the character and appearance of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or any other interests of acknowledged importance.'

2.8 A limited further précis of the submitted information is also **attached** at Appendix 11.

2.9 A letter from the architect and a summary response to the consultation replies are **attached** at Appendix 111.

3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 The following consultation replies and comments have been received –

3.2 Ipsden Parish Council – Objection raised. Comment - 'Parish Councillors have very mixed views on this application, however a majority were of the view that it would be conspicuous and look out of character and place in this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.'

3.3 OCC – Highways – No objection raised. Comment – although the site is in a relatively remote area, the proposal in highways terms is like for like demolition and rebuilding. It is recommended that passing places are constructed on the internal driveway, and the guest house remains as ancillary accommodation. Conditions requiring retention of parking and manoeuvring areas, provision of cycle parking facilities, guest accommodation to be ancillary accommodation and provision of a traffic management plan should be imposed on any planning permission.

- 3.4 Forestry Officer – Objection raised. The woodland (Fludgers Wood) to the north east of the house is recorded as ancient semi natural woodland. Collectively, and in some cases individually, the trees on the site are important landscape features, contributing significantly to the AONB. In order to implement the development, it will require removal or damage to 4 category B trees, and possible damage to 1 category A tree. Category A and B trees are a constraint to development and their removal/damage is not acceptable. Whilst proposed planting is a positive factor, there is sufficient space on the site for considerable redevelopment without having to affect the trees. Therefore, objection is raised.
- 3.5 Countryside Officer – No objection is raised subject to imposition of appropriate conditions. A reptile survey will need to be conducted particularly on the lawns between the existing house and the woodland. Proposals for landscaping the site include restoration of the meadows which form a potentially important link between two areas of SSSI grassland at Berins Hill Bank and Warren Bank. Appropriate species mix should be used to ensure maximum conservation benefit.
- 3.6 SODC Landscape Consultant – Objection raised.
- The existing bungalow is recessive in the landscape due to its limited height and its dark colour. The proposed replacement guest accommodation building, by virtue of its increased height (virtually double), colour and angular box-like silhouette would be much more prominent, contrasting with the dark woodland backdrop.
 - The existing house is evident because of its white colour. Although the proposed replacement house would be similar in height to the existing, its appearance would be significantly different. The hipped roof of the existing house is dark and recessive, and the adjacent single storey swimming pool is similarly dark and recessive in the landscape.
 - The proposal is to re-grade the whole of the foreground meadow in an extensive cut and fill operation. Substantial works are also proposed to the rear of the building.
 - The ‘South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment’ identifies the site as lying within the Chilterns Escarpment. The enhancement strategy is one of ‘conserve’. Under ‘general principles for development, the advice is that new development should respond to the characteristics of the landscape and reinforce local distinctiveness and minimise adverse impacts.
 - Information accompanying the application advises that the choice of white as the colour of the new building diminishes the buildings in views. I do not concur with the diminished effect of white. This is evident when viewing the recessive existing swimming pool and cedar bungalow on the site. In the wider context, white buildings in the landscape are more evident and eye catching than adjacent and more muted buildings.
 - Architectural merit can be considered by others. However, in terms of the visible mass of the built forms, combined with their prominent colour set within the muted and subtle countryside palette, I consider they would be noticeably more strident than the components they seek to replace. The buildings would be a distinctive focal point at the head of the valley and rather than rest comfortably within the landscape setting the development would assert its presence, creating a dominant feature. The proposed grading is considerably more extensive than is necessary to mitigate the existing confined embankment.

- No objection is raised to replacement of the dilapidated farm buildings.
 - With regard to lighting, the submitted report on lighting acknowledges that the locality is an intrinsically dark area. Notwithstanding any compliance with the Institute of Lighting Engineers Guidance, given that the proposed buildings have large areas of glass, light from the structures will be visible for considerable distances. There are also external wall mounted floodlights. The large areas of glazing might be an intent to maximise available natural light. However, when the building is illuminated, the buildings will be obvious features on a hillside in this inherently dark area.
 - The 600m hedge lined approach along Urquhart Lane is effectively single track width, narrowing to 2.6m along the final approach over which the hedgerows meet creating a tunnel of vegetation. There is no mention of how construction plant and HGV's would impact on or negotiate this sensitive confined route.
- 3.7 Environmental Health (Environmental Protection) – Any planning permission should be subject to conditions requiring contamination investigation, and if necessary, remediation works.
- 3.8 The Environment Agency – The proposal has a low environmental risk.
- 3.9 Chilterns Conservation Board. – Objection raised. No objection is raised to the principle of a replacement dwelling, but objection is raised to the details of this building. The building is of a completely inappropriate design for this prominent site in the AONB. The design appears to be very similar to development by the same architect on a completely different site in China. Therefore, it's difficult to see how this house has been designed to suit this particular setting in the Chilterns. Other examples put forward are not comparable with this proposal. The illustrations provided are misleading, and do not show the house as it would appear in its principal views from the bottom of the hill. The house would appear much more prominent against the tree line and sky line. There are no drawings showing the existing house or recently approved replacement dwelling with the proposed house shown overlain. The application talks about the re-grading of the field associated with the proposed dwelling. This is a major engineering operation which would consequently lead to detrimental impacts on the character of the slope and the landscape. Access to the site is via a small unmade lane. Large lorries travelling to and from the site could have significant impacts locally.
- 3.10 Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) – Strong support. Comment –
'The beautiful setting in an area of outstanding natural beauty and the exceptional views across the countryside demand an appropriate design for any new building in this location. This proposal for Handsmooth House convinces us in all respects. We applaud the client's commitment to commission a well-designed home from a highly esteemed architect as we commend the intensive cooperation between the client and the architect. We welcome a contemporary piece of architecture in this location. In its relationship with the landscape, the proposal follows the grand tradition of English country houses, and in our view the visual impact of the proposed Handsmooth House, as of the house it replaces, is entirely appropriate.'
- 3.11 CPRE – Henley and Mapledurham – There are different views, however, overall, no objection is raised. Some considered the extreme angularity of the building would not sit well in the landscape, others thought it represented an exciting project by a world renowned architect. The landscape improvements and planting are welcomed.

- 3.12 CPRE – Rights of Way Convenor – Restricted Byway 16 provides the sole vehicular access to the site. During construction work, HGV's and other construction vehicles may cause a serious hazard to walkers, riders and cyclists using it as there is little room to take refuge. Problems may arise if two large vehicles meet in the lane.
- 3.13 OCC Countryside Services – Ipsden Footpath 8 runs to the east and Ipsden Restricted Byway runs concurrent with access to the property. Nothing should be deposited on the byway which would obstruct or dissuade the public from using route. Any damage to the surface of the path will be the responsibility of the applicants and adequate provision should be made for all path users for them to pass delivery vehicles to the site.
- 3.14 Neighbour responses – issues raised include the following matters -
5 local letters in support –
- The existing house and farm buildings are extremely dilapidated. Redevelopment of the site is welcomed.
 - This is a rare example of a well designed building with exceptional sympathy and concern for the location, both in its elevations and proportions and its landscaping details.
 - Ipsden has a number of examples of architecture from various periods.
 - The proposed house and environs will be something for which generations will applaud both Ipsden and the SODC.
 - There is considerable local support for the proposals.
 - The installation of ground source heat pumps, rain harvesting, PV's and low level lighting is welcomed.
 - The only concern is access.
- 3.15 4 local letters of objection –
- This ultra modern house would sit on a hill and dominate the landscape. The proposal is to bring it forward on the site and it will be visible not only from the local area but also from a considerable distance around.
 - The landscape appraisal shows how visible a white building is in this location, to exacerbate the effect is illogical. Any building should be subservient to the landscape.
 - Re-landscaping this ancient hill is not appropriate in the AONB. The answer should be to address the siting and design of the dwelling rather than to artificially manipulate a protected ancient landscape.
 - This architecture would be more appropriate in London.
 - The access road is very narrow and unmetalled. It would be difficult to accommodate large delivery lorries and earth moving equipment.
 - The proposed house has large areas of glazing and would have a significant night time impact in terms of artificial light.
- 3.16 7 letters in support from architects (mainly non local). The issues raised include the following points -
- The proposed house is beautiful. It is carefully ordered in terms of scale, play of light and shadow, proportion and interlocking spaces. It creates a harmonious whole. As with all classical buildings it stands proudly in contrast to the nature that surrounds it.
 - Richard Meier could be considered as the greatest designer of houses today and it would be wonderful to have one of his buildings in this country.

- The scheme has all the hallmarks of an architectural masterpiece which responds to its rural context in a highly elegant and sophisticated manner. It would be in the greatest tradition of country houses, built in different historical eras across the English Countryside, which confidently emphasise the relationship between the man made and the picturesque. The inclusion of a ha ha is appropriate within this context.
- Building ‘in keeping’ simply means parodying existing styles – we do not live in a museum and should be encouraging new designs, not simply building variants of our neighbours’ homes. It’s a shame we seem happy to live in house models designed for lifestyles and technologies from centuries past.
- Much of our uplifting architecture is not ‘in keeping’, eg. Stonehenge, Castle Howard, The Eden project. The house should be built and should immediately be listed Grade 1.
- White is the colour which intensifies the perception of all other hues that exist in natural light. It is against a white surface that one best appreciates the play of light and shadow, solids and voids.
- This is not a ‘space age petrol station’, nor is it ‘completely inappropriate’ and ‘out of place’, it is a timeless masterpiece.
- This is a work of high architectural endeavour which offers to add significantly to the District’s built heritage. Understandably, it does not follow the Chilterns Design guidance, since it does not aspire to be un-noticeable. It seeks to be something our successors can be proud of.

3.17 1 letter in support – non local.

- The new house is a fine piece of modern architecture with clean and simple design.
- We have too little modern architecture in Oxfordshire. We commissioned a modern house in 1967 which was Grade 11 listed last year.

3.18 1 letter of objection (non local)

- Richard Meier designed a building just opposite the famous Cathedral in Ulm (Germany), and with this, ruined the area around the Cathedral. He will ruin the area with this building.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 P64/H0434 – Erection of agricultural workers dwelling. Approved.
P70/H0085 – Erection of covering over swimming pool. Approved.
P02/S0722 – Demolition of all buildings on the site, erection of replacement dwelling, staff accommodation, garaging, stables and access gates. Approved.
P03/S0081/LD – Application for lawful development certificate for occupation of the Cedar bungalow without compliance with an agricultural occupancy. Granted.
P04/E0661 – Demolition of existing house, bungalow and farm buildings and construction of new family dwelling, garden and associated staff dwelling and stable block. Application withdrawn.
P05/E0140 – Demolition of existing dwellings and erection of dwelling, garaging and stables with second dwelling to be ancillary to main house. Application withdrawn.
P05/E0602 – Demolition of existing dwellings and erection of dwelling, garaging and stables with second dwelling to be ancillary to main house. Approved.
P10/E0715/EX – Demolition of existing dwellings and erection of dwelling, garaging and stables with second dwelling to be ancillary to main house.

Approved.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 The following Policies and Guidance are considered relevant to this application.

Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP) Policies

G2 – Protection and Enhancement of the Environment.

G6 – Promoting Good Design

C1 – Landscape Character

C2 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

C6 – Biodiversity conservation

C8 – Species protection

C9 – Landscape features

EP3 – Light Pollution

EP5 – Flood Risk

EP8 – Contaminated Land

D1 – Vehicle and bicycle Parking

D8 – Energy, water and materials, efficient design

D10 - Waste management

H12 – Replacement dwellings

R8 – Public Rights of Way

5.2 Guidance contained in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2008, the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide (2010) and the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment.

5.3 Government Guidance set out in –

PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development.

PPS5 – Planning for the Historic Environment

PPS7 – Sustainable Development in rural Areas.

PPS9 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

PPS22 – Code for Sustainable Homes.

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The main considerations are:-

1. Whether the development complies with the Council's replacement dwellings policy.
2. Whether the impact on the character and appearance of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty would be acceptable.
3. Whether the development meets the provisions of PPS7.
4. Whether the replacement of the agricultural buildings would be acceptable.
5. Whether the proposals represent sustainable development.
6. Whether the impact on woodland and ecology would be acceptable.
7. Whether the impact on the surrounding highway and public rights of way network would be acceptable.
8. Consideration of other material factors, including flood risk and contamination.

Replacement dwellings.

6.2 The site lies in open countryside and Policy H6 of the SOLP does not normally allow for the erection of new dwellings in such locations. However, Policy H12 of the SOLP allows for an exception to be made to this where the proposal involves the replacement of an existing dwelling. In this case there are two dwellings on site and there is therefore no objection in principle to their replacement. Indeed, as set out in the planning history for the site, planning permission has been granted on a number of occasions for replacement dwellings on this site. The most recent being in July of this

year, details of which are **attached** at appendix 1V. There are, however, a number of criteria which have to be met.

(i) The use of the dwelling must not have been abandoned.

- 6.3 Although it is understood that both properties on the site have not been occupied for some time, they both remain as bone fide dwellings and their use has not been abandoned in planning terms.

(ii) The existing building must not be listed or of historic, visual or architectural merit.

- 6.4 None of the existing buildings on the site, comprising the house, its swimming pool and the cedar bungalow have any historic, visual or architectural merit. Accordingly, no objection is raised to the principle of their replacement.

(iii) The proposed dwelling should not be any greater in volume (taking account of permitted development rights) than the existing dwelling.

- 6.5 The application provides very detailed calculations of the respective volumes and how they have been calculated. Basically, the proposed above ground houses would be some 18.6% larger than the existing and very significant areas of 'underground' development in the form of a basement, garaging and work rooms are also proposed. The reason for the volume criteria in Policy H12 is set out in the text of the policy as follows –

'in all cases, the Council will seek to ensure that the new dwelling does not have a greater impact on the character of the site and its surroundings than the existing dwelling due to its scale, size, form or materials used. In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Council will ensure that any proposals for replacement dwellings conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.'

Accordingly, the impact of proposed replacement dwellings in the landscape must be assessed.

Impact on the character and appearance of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding natural beauty.

- 6.6 The site lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Government advice is set out in PPS7 and states that nationally designated areas such as AONB's have been confirmed by Government as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should therefore be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions in these areas.
- 6.7 Policy C2 of the SOLP advises –
'In the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty the primary aim is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special landscape quality and distinctiveness of the area. Development which would harm the beauty or distinctiveness of the area will not be permitted. To be acceptable, development must be of a scale and type appropriate to the area, and be sympathetic in terms of its siting, design and materials used'.
- 6.8 The Supplementary Planning Guidance 'South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment' identifies the site as lying within Character 8, Chilterns Escarpment. The enhancement strategy is one of 'Conserve'. Under 'General principles for development' the advice is that new development should respond to the characteristics of the landscape and reinforce local distinctiveness and minimise adverse impacts.

- 6.9 The South Oxfordshire Design Guide advocates that new development should share key characteristics within the immediate or wider surrounding area in order to reinforce local identity. 'One of the fundamental principles of this design guide is that new development should share common characteristics with its locality, setting and immediate neighbours. New development should appear and function as an integral part of the area taking account of and working with the landscape and built-form as well as local construction techniques and use of materials'.
'Through sensitive design, and taking into account the development context, new development can both reflect and contribute to the positive character and distinctiveness of the local area'.
- 6.10 Revisions to The Chilterns Building Design Guide sets out the following policy on 'One Off' designs –
"This guide is intended to help conserve and enhance the Chilterns landscape by promoting locally distinctive building traditions. However, this does not mean that there is no place for contemporary and innovative architecture or more interesting designs which demonstrate adherence to the basic principle of being in harmony with their site and the surrounding buildings and countryside. By their very nature such designs are likely to come forward rarely, though they should still be of the highest standard. They should therefore only be built in exceptional circumstances, where it can be shown that, whether in the open countryside or a settlement, they enhance the landscape and immediate setting rather than detract from local character. They should also demonstrate the highest principles of sustainability in terms of design, use of materials and renewable energy provision for example and should have the ability of to be repaired and renewed when necessary.
The Board supports Government policy which stresses that isolated new dwellings in the countryside will require special justification for planning permission to be granted. The exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design may provide the special justification. The design should be truly outstanding and ground-breaking, for example in its use of materials, methods of construction or contribution to protecting and enhancing the environment (PPS7).
Therefore, for such buildings to fit into the Chilterns AONB they should be sympathetic to their surroundings and the defining characteristics of the local area and will need to demonstrate the appropriate use of local building materials wherever possible.'
- 6.11 There is, therefore, a very significant array of advice regarding development within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In this case there are two main fundamental elements to be considered. Firstly, the impact of the proposed dwellings in the AONB landscape, and secondly, the impact of the proposed re-shaping of the landscape.
- 6.12 Richard Meier is an architect with an international reputation, and the design of the replacement dwelling is contemporary and in theme with similar buildings he has designed. There is no disputing the quality of the design and that the construction would not be of the highest standards. Notwithstanding this, consideration must be given as to whether this proposal would appear appropriate within this particular landscape.
- 6.13 Handsmooth House is evident in the landscape primarily because of its white walls. It has a traditional roof:wall ratio of approximately one third, and the slate roof of the house is recessive in the landscape, as are the dark coloured swimming pool building and the cedar bungalow. In addition, part of the existing house is visually obscured because it is set back. The ratio of openings to walling of the existing house also conform to typical proportions. Although the proposed house would be similar in height to the existing property, it is proposed to be set further forward on the site by some 6.5 to 9.0m and its appearance would be very different. The proposed building

is designed to stand out rather than blend with the character and appearance of the AONB. While the height of the proposed building does not exceed the ridge height of the existing dwelling, it is considerably larger. This is clearly shown on the photograph **attached** at appendix V which shows the extent of the existing dwelling and its appearance in the landscape, compared with the extent of the proposed dwelling. The white walls of the proposed dwelling and extent of the glazing would both act as an eye catcher in the landscape. While, again, this is something the architect is well-known for, the majority of the buildings that he has been involved with have been built in very different climates to the Chilterns and concern is expressed about how well the proposed materials will weather in this exposed location.

- 6.14 The proposed replacement dwelling takes the volume of the all the elements of the house, including its dark roof and swimming pool building, and consolidates them into a completely white walled building. The proposed replacement building, rather than being recessive in the landscape, and using the subdued palette associated with buildings within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with its angular form and white colour, would contrast sharply against the dark woodland backdrop.
- 6.15 Although the proposed guest pavilion would be in the same position as the cedar bungalow, it would be over double its height. The proposed replacement pavilion, by virtue of its increased height, white colour and angular box-like silhouette would, from an easily discernable structure contrasting against the dark woodland back drop.
- 6.16 With regard to lighting, the submitted report on lighting acknowledges that the locality is an intrinsically dark area. Notwithstanding any compliance with the Institute of Lighting Engineers Guidance, given that the proposed buildings have large areas of glass, light from the structures will be visible at considerable distances. The large areas of glazing might be an intent to maximise available natural light. However, when the building is illuminated, the buildings will be obvious features on a hillside in this inherently dark area.
- 6.17 As indicated in the consultations and representations section of the report, Members will note there is considerable architectural support for the buildings. However, within this rolling rural landscape, officers consider that the proposed dwellings would not appear as sympathetic structures in the landscape, and would not enhance the natural beauty of the area.
- 6.18 As indicated to the Planning Agents prior to the submission of the application, no objection is raised to the principle of a modern replacement dwelling. However, it is the uncompromisingly stark appearance of this proposal with no sympathy in terms of materials and form which, in officers opinion, would result in the erection of a building which would appear alien in this landscape.
- 6.19 In terms of ground modelling, the proposal is to re-grade the whole of the foreground meadow in an extensive cut and fill operation. Similarly, land to the rear of the dwelling is to be excavated to form 'underground' garaging and workshop areas. The design philosophy of this is to eradicate what is described by the Agent as the 'crude engineering work' on the site and to create a 'seamless link with the field' in front of the proposed dwelling. The Agent has also advised that this reforming of the land would significantly reduce the visibility of the proposed house from locations in the valley bottom. However, officers consider this is unlikely and question the accuracy of some of the cross sections accompanying the application. The applicant's Landscape Architect is of the opinion that the considerable alteration of existing levels is a 'sympathetic response to the constraints of the topography'. In contrast, your officers consider that manipulation of the ground works are proposed to make the land fit the

design philosophy of the building. This is contrary to the usual approach where the qualities of the site are assessed and the design worked up to integrate new development into its context. As is common with the houses designed by this Architect, the house is intended to be a statement building with a landscape created around it. It is intended to sit on a plateau and involves substantial excavation: the material would be spread to the front of the house re-defining the contours of the hill.

- 6.20 The Council's Landscape Consultant advises that the submitted analysis of the site is not in accordance with accepted methodology and does not fully take into account the sensitivity of the receptors, including the AONB landscape.
- 6.21 It has been mooted by the Agent that the proposed building would not be widely viewed in the locality. It is correct that the approach to the building is along a narrow lane with enclosed vegetation. However, the existing dwelling is clearly visible from the lane (public byway IPSCRF16) at the entrance gate and some views are also available from the public footpath (IPSFP08) running to the rear of the site. Very clear views of the site and buildings are also available from the public footpath network to the south west of the site, in particular from footpaths IPSFP01 and IPSFP20. Extensive views are available from these public footpaths. The proposed buildings would, therefore appear as prominent buildings set within the AONB landscape, and would be viewed extensively from public viewpoints.
- 6.22 **The provisions of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7**
The Agent draws attention to the provisions of Government Guidance set out in PPS7, Paragraph 11 of which states –
'Very occasionally the exceptional quality and innovative nature of the design of a proposed, isolated new house may provide this special justification for granting planning permission. Such a design should be truly outstanding and ground-breaking, for example, in its use of materials, methods of construction or its contribution to protecting and enhancing the environment, so helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas. The value of such a building will be found in its reflection of the highest standards in contemporary architecture, the significant enhancement of its immediate setting and its sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area.'
- 6.23 Whilst the architecture of the proposed dwelling itself may be of high quality, the site lies within the AONB which has the highest status in terms of landscape and scenic beauty. Officers are concerned that the type of dwelling would not be appropriate within the AONB and objection is raised to the significant works required to the landscape. Accordingly, officers consider that the test of enhancement to the landscape and sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area, as set out in PPS7, would not be met by this proposal.

Whether the replacement of the agricultural buildings would be acceptable.

- 6.24 The agricultural buildings at the bottom of the hill are redundant, are in very poor condition and have no historic or visual quality. Their demolition is, therefore, welcomed. The proposal is to demolish all of the agricultural buildings on both sides of the track and to erect two replacement buildings on land to the south of the track. The proposal to replace the buildings with two new buildings, to be constructed with a brick plinth, timber walls and a corrugated steel roof is generally acceptable. One building would be used for ancillary domestic storage, and one would be used for agricultural purposes. As such, this part of the proposal is considered acceptable.

Whether the proposals represent sustainable development.

- 6.25 The design of Handsmooth House and associated guest pavilion has regard to principles of sustainable development. The Sustainability Statement confirms that the construction of the dwellings should achieve Code Level 4 and a 57% reduction in CO₂ emissions. In accordance with SOLP Policy D8 the building is orientated to benefit from passive solar gains, bringing natural light, heat and ventilation into the property helping to create an attractive living environment. The design has sought to maximise energy efficiency and promote water conservation through design, and the use of established technical solutions. Proposed improvements to the ecological value of the site are proposed and sustainable urban drainage solutions have been integrated to increase filtration and reduce surface water run off. The drainage strategy details the methods by which surface water is dealt with in a sustainable way by means of soakaways. Infiltration systems located within the main garden and paved areas are designed to dispose of all surface water runoff from hard standing areas on site. In addition the scheme incorporates proposals for water conservation, reducing the overall water demand of the development. As such, officers consider that the proposals comply with the council's sustainability Policies.

Impact on woodland and ecology

- 6.26 With regard to impact on trees, the woodland (Fludgers Wood) to the north east of the house is recorded as ancient semi natural woodland. Collectively and, in some cases individually, the trees on the site are important landscape features, contributing significantly to the AONB. In order to implement the development, the work will require removal or damage to 4 category B trees, and possible damage to 1 category A tree. Category A and B trees are a constraint to development and their removal or damage to them is not considered to be acceptable. Whilst proposed planting is a positive factor, the loss and harm caused to adjacent trees would not be acceptable. Accordingly, objection is raised to this aspect of the development.
- 6.27 In overall terms, officers are of the opinion that there is sufficient space on the site for considerable redevelopment that will not have a damaging effect on trees, as has been demonstrated by previous approvals for replacement dwellings on the site.
- 6.28 With regard to ecology, the overall site area contains a great deal of potentially suitable reptile habitat. In these circumstances, any planning permission should be subject to the imposition of a condition requiring a reptile survey and if appropriate a mitigation strategy to be undertaken. The site also forms a potentially important link between two areas of SSSI grassland, and care should be taken in the proposed replanting of the grassland in front of the dwelling to ensure that planted species are appropriate to ensure that the proposals have maximum nature conservation benefit. Subject to the above, no objection is raised in terms of ecological issues.

Impact on the surrounding highway and public rights of way network.

- 6.29 In terms of impact on the surrounding highway network, the only access to the site is via a narrow lane designated as Restricted Byway. Local concern has been expressed that the use of the lane by heavy construction and delivery lorries would represent a hazard to users of the lane and create problems if two vehicles meet.
- 6.30 In highway terms, it must however be noted that planning permission has been granted on several occasions for the erection of replacement dwellings on the site which would involve use of the lane by demolition and construction traffic. The demolition of the dwellings and their replacement, in terms of highway impact, is a

‘like for like’ situation.

- 6.31 With regard to use of the Restricted Byway by vehicles associated with the development, Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Services have raised no objection to the proposals, provided that there is no obstruction to the lane, that any damage is repaired, and that the safety of all path users is maintained whilst works are in progress including provision for them to safely pass any delivery vehicles on the site.
- 6.32 In view of the above, no overall objection is raised to the impact on the surrounding road and public footpath network.

Other material factors.

Contamination.

- 6.33 The proposed residential development is regarded in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 23 as a sensitive use to any land contamination. For this reason PPS23 requires a precautionary approach to be adopted and for the developer to conduct adequate contaminated land investigations to ensure that the land is safe and suitable for the intended use. In addition, the land where the agricultural buildings stand may have been subject to contamination by agricultural chemicals. Accordingly, contamination investigation and remediation conditions should be imposed on any planning permission.

Flood Risk

- 6.34 The site is located on high ground at the top of the valley, in flood zone 1. As the site is over 1 hectare in size, a flood risk assessment has been submitted. The Environment Agency consider that the site is in a low risk category, and do not wish to make further comment.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 It is recognised that the proposed dwellings have been designed by an architect with an international reputation, and there is no disputing that the quality of the design and construction would not be of the highest standards. However, the proposed buildings are designed to stand out from rather than blend with the character and appearance of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The angular form, white finish and the extent of the glazing would result in buildings which appear as stark features in contrast to the rolling rural landscape of the AONB. Substantial remodelling of the land is involved to create a landscape to fit the proposed dwellings and ancillary buildings rather than working with the landscape and designing the houses to integrate within their context. This also results in the loss of two trees. As such, officers consider that the proposed development and associated earthworks would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special landscape quality and distinctiveness of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **That planning permission be refused for the following reason:-**

1. **The proposals are contrary to Policies G2, G6, C2, C9 and H12 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, advice set out in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide and the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide, and advice set out in PPS5 and PPS7. The proposed buildings are designed to stand out from rather than blend with the character and appearance of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The angular form, white finish and the extent of the glazing would result in buildings which appear as stark features in contrast to the rolling rural landscape of the AONB. Substantial remodelling of the land is involved to create a landscape to fit the proposed dwellings and ancillary buildings rather than working with the landscape and designing the houses to integrate within their context. As such, the proposed development and associated earthworks would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special landscape quality and distinctiveness of this part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.**

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