

SUBJECT **COMMITTEE SITE VISIT REPORTS** **ITEM 8**
 25 August 2010
 Attendance – Verbally updated at Committee

REPORT OF Head of Planning & Building Control

APPLICATION NO.	P10/W0541
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	14.05.2010
PARISH	TIDDINGTON
WARD MEMBER(S)	John Nowell-Smith
APPLICANT	Q Hotels Limited
SITE	The Oxford Belfry Brimpton Grange Milton Common (In the parish of Tiddington)
PROPOSAL	Proposed new bedroom wing to provide 105 additional guest bedrooms, extension to bar and restaurant plus associated works including the construction of an overflow car park.
AMENDMENTS	As clarified by transport statement by NTP dated June 2010. As amended by drawing number 924 - 112A accompanying Agents email dated 12th July 2010 and amended transport statement.
GRID REFERENCE	465166203574
OFFICER	Mrs S Crawford

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application has been referred to the Committee because the recommendation conflicts with the views of the Tiddington and Great Milton Parish Councils; the site lies on the boundary between these two parishes.
- 1.2 The application was deferred from the Planning Committee meeting of 28 July 2010 to allow members to visit the site. Members visited the site on 23 August 2010 to assess the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the impact on neighbouring properties.
- 1.3 The Oxford Belfry Hotel and conference facility lies in the centre of Milton Common. The hotel complex is set in grounds of approximately 6.9 hectares (17 acres) fronting onto London Road (A40); approximately 300 metres from Junction 7 on the M40 and near to the A329. The hotel complex sits back some 80 metres from the road. The Oxford Belfry has been extended many times in several different styles. Land levels drop away to the rear of the site. There is a large modern courtyard complex to the rear. The main entrance is to the west side of the site; the exit and service area is served by a separate access to the east of the site. The site has no special designation. A public footpath runs across the site from London Road to the north; the footpath

passes to the west of the existing complex.

1.4 The site is identified on the Ordnance Survey Extract **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 The application seeks full planning permission for an extension onto the existing courtyard wing on the rear to provide a further new wing accommodating 105 bedrooms including an extension to bar and restaurant and an overflow car park.

The new wing would be constructed to the north of the existing, three storey, bedroom block in an area that is currently landscaped and laid to lawn; One of the two existing tennis courts which lie at a lower level would be lost, one would be retained.

The new accommodation would be arranged in a courtyard complex on four levels, namely;

- a lower ground floor that takes advantage of existing changes in land levels accommodating 16 ensuite bedrooms,
- the ground floor and first floors each accommodating 34 rooms (33 ensuite bedrooms and one suite (room 8), and
- the second floor accommodating 21 bedrooms within the roof space.

Because of the drop in land levels to the rear of the site the ridge height of the new wing would be approx 800mm lower than the existing bedroom wing. Walls would be a mixture of brick on the lower ground floor and render to ground and first floor and the roof would be covered with a plain clay tile to match the existing building.

The extension would provide a total of 4,515 square metres of floor space across four floors. The footprint of the extension would measure some 1,385 square metres which represents an increase in approximately 21% of the overall footprint of the existing buildings.

Two small extensions are proposed to the existing buildings; a single storey extension to provide additional male and disabled toilet facilities to the hotel bar area and the infilling of a paved terrace outside the existing hotel restaurant.

Amended plans have been received which detail changes to the proposed car parking arrangements to take into account the comments raised regarding landscaping and security issues.

These amendments include the following:

- The re-planning and adjustment of the existing main parking areas to provide 18 additional spaces, so that only 87 spaces are now needed in the new overflow area.
- The re-design of the overflow car park with 87 spaces to reduce the area of land involved, and moving the rear boundary further from the pond.
- Confirmation that the surface treatment of the overflow car park will comprise gravel reinforced with a cellular layer under, and that the roadway areas will be in harder wearing tarmac, but with a resin bonded gravel surface to retain a more rural appearance.
- Alteration in the planting arrangements, to generally provide lower shrubs and hedges between the parking bays, to provide separation whilst still keeping the area open visually to assist security.
- The re-design and reduction in width of the car park entrances onto the main hotel service road.

- The provision of new automatic control barriers into the new overflow car park to improve security, and the relocation/modification of the existing barriers to the main car park.
- Confirmation that a CCTV security system will be provide to both car park areas.
- The provision of low level timber clad lighting bollards of the type indicated throughout the parking area to provide lighting sympathetic to the location, without the need for high level lamp standards.
- The provision of a bicycle storage area adjacent to the main hotel reception for use by guests. (Parking for staff bicycles is adjacent to the service area at the rear of the hotel).

2.2 The application is accompanied by a design and access statement, a business statement and a transport statement and these documents can be viewed on the Council's website at www.southoxon.gov.uk. Reduced copies of the amended plans accompanying the application are **attached** at Appendix 2.

2.3 The application has been advertised as major development. It has not been advertised as a departure because Policy TSM4 allows for extensions to existing tourist related premises subject to a number of criteria.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

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| 3.1 | Tiddington Parish Council | Refuse. Overdevelopment – too large in a country location adjacent to the Green Belt. This represents a 40% increase over the existing accommodation. A three storey building would be prominent in approaches from the north. Highway considerations are a concern. Car park layout is dangerous for pedestrians and outside the confines of the main complex; it is adjacent to a pond and will have adverse effects on biodiversity. Use of the car park would cause problems for the neighbour who shares this access. Many concerns from residents |
| | Great Milton Parish Council | Refuse. We support measures that will benefit the local economy, we have the following concerns; overdevelopment, the site of the overflow car park is currently undeveloped grass land and the provision of a car park would erode the countryside. An additional 105 bedrooms would increase traffic and have a considerable impact on London Road. The use of the overflow car park would impinge on the neighbour's use of the access to their property at the rear to the detriment of the owners and visitors and their visitors. |
| | Countryside Officer | More information is needed on to assess the importance of the overflow car park area as a habitat for Great Crested Newts. |
| | Forestry Officer | No objection provided that the trees on the frontage are retained and the parking area is outside the root protection areas of trees . Recommend conditions in respect of landscaping and tree protection. |
| | Crime Prevention Officer | This is an area where there has been significant car crime in the past. No objection to extension but comments in relation to the safety of the overflow car park |

OCC (Highways)	The proposal is in an unsustainable location where there is no reliable transport alternative other than the car. It is contrary to national and local policies in PPS4 and PPG13 to reduce the dependency on the car. If the LPA are minded to grant planning permission, conditions to provide for a Travel plan on the site will be required.
Landscape Consultant	Comments in relation to design and lighting of overflow car park.
Thames Water	No objection.
CPRE	Objection. Whilst the site is not in the Green Belt it is close to the boundary and the impact of large scale development should be considered. Overdevelopment. This is not sustainable development as it will encourage car journeys. Now that an extension for bedrooms has been allowed at the Oxfordshire Golf Club the need for extra facilities is questioned and the evidence submitted with the application indicates that the occupancy rates of rooms from 2008 to 2009 fell by 10%.
Neighbour Object (7 - original) (4 – amended details)	Milton Common is a settlement with few facilities and services and is classified as a village that can not accommodate additional residential development – how then can this be appropriate?. Overdevelopment, increase in traffic as access to public transport is poor and this will lead to more accidents on the A40; concern about capacity of sewage plant and loss of water pressure for potable water. There is no need for additional hotel accommodation in the area and there is no guarantee that jobs will go to local people as many of the workers currently on site are not local. The extension will be visible from the fields at the rear of the site. The use of the overflow car park will create problems of noise and disturbance for the neighbour and increase the probability of the road being blocked. Greater use of the ponds will disturb wildlife.

4.0 RELEVANT RECENT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 P07/W1416 – Two storey block for staff accommodation - APPROVED
- P05/W0576 – Amended layout for leisure club and bar extensions – APPROVED
- P05/W0575 – Modifications to roof to provide additional bedrooms - APPROVED
- P99/N0009 – Amendments to wing approved in 1998 - APPROVED
- P98/N0003 – Extension to provide new wing for 68 bedrooms - APPROVED

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 Adopted SOLP Policies

G2 – Protection of District's resources, G6 – Quality of design and local distinctiveness, GB4 visual amenity of the Green Belt, EP4 – Protection of water resources, EP6 - Surface water drainage requirements, EP7 – Ground water resources, EP8 – Contaminated land, C4 – landscape setting of settlements, C6 – biodiversity conservation, C8 – Species protection, D1 – Principles of good design, D2 – Parking for vehicles and cycles, D8 – Conservation and efficient design, D9 – Renewable energy, D10 – Management of waste, D11 – improvements to infrastructure, E6 – Retention of employment sites, TSM1 and TSM2, TSM4 –tourism policies, T1, T2, T3 - transport policies
South Oxfordshire Design Guide
South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment.

SODC Interim Guidance on Developer Contributions (2008)

PPS1 – Delivering sustainable development
PPS7 - Sustainable development in rural locations
PPS4 - Planning for Sustainable Growth
PPS7 – Sustainable development in rural areas
PPS9 – Biodiversity and geological conservation
PPG13 Transport

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues in this case are;

- Whether the principle of development is acceptable
- Need
- Employment and sustainable economic growth
- Design, scale and impact on character of the area
- Sustainable design
- Transport issues
- Ecological issues
- Green Belt impact
- Neighbour impact, and
- contributions

6.2 **Principle.** Policy TSM4 of SOLP allows for the construction of hotels (and extensions to existing premises outside the Green Belt) within the built up limits of settlements provided that;

- The site is not in the Green Belt,
- The scale and location of the development is appropriate and the design and materials are in keeping with the locality,
- There is no significant loss of amenity by local residents,
- Where appropriate the site is accessible by public transport and provision is made for pedestrian and cycle links with adjacent areas; and
- There are no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections.

Whilst Milton Common is not a settlement where new residential development would be allowed because of the limited range of services and facilities it offers, this does not apply to the extension of an existing tourist related facility outside the Green Belt. The principle of an extension to the hotel is acceptable subject to the criteria specified above. The criteria are discussed in detail below.

6.3 **Need.** The Oxford Belfry is a four star hotel containing 154 guest bedrooms with ensuite facilities, associated bars and restaurants, a series of large conference and meeting rooms, leisure club, swimming pool and staff accommodation. The site has been in use as a hotel for 60 years. Q hotels, the current owners purchased the site approximately 5 years ago and have been upgrading the existing facilities since that time, spending some £4.6 million on the upgrade.

The existing conference facilities provide accommodation for approximately 750 delegates in two suites (accommodating approx 450 and 300 delegates each). The applicant considers that the full use of conference facilities for residential conferences and weddings is restricted by the fact that there are only 154 bedrooms at the hotel. Guests and conferences have to be turned away at present; the additional 105 bedrooms will help to rectify the current imbalance in facilities.

A detailed business statement has been submitted with the application which sets out a sound case for the need for the additional accommodation. In summary these are;

- Location within easy reach of the Midlands and London combined with access to good transport/road links
- Conference facilities catering to the larger conference market but lacking in adequate overnight accommodation. Conferences are turned away due to the lack of accommodation; the local economy does not benefit.
- Allowing the proposed extension will generate in the region of £1.3 to £1.4 million within the local economy and an estimated 27 additional full time employees as a minimum.
- Additional economic benefits are estimated as being in the order of an additional spending of £145K to £155K on consumable food and beverages, a significant element of which will be secured locally (time period for such spending not specified)

6.4 **Employment and Sustainable Economic Growth.** PPS4 - Planning for Sustainable Growth, sets out the governments overarching objective to achieve sustainable economic growth. To this end the PPS requires that social, economic and employment impacts of the development on the local area be considered when assessing proposals for economic development in rural areas.

The PPS makes it clear that the achievement of the above objective needs to be balanced against the achievement of other relevant planning objectives including the protection of the countryside for the benefit of all.

Policy EC6.2 of PPS4 states that economic development in the countryside should be strictly controlled “and locate most new development in or on the edge of existing settlements where employment, housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together”.

Policy EC7.1 of PPS 4 aims to help deliver the Government’s tourism strategy . Local planning authorities are encouraged to support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich, rather than harm, the character of the countryside, its towns, villages, buildings and other features. Local planning authorities should, through their local development frameworks support the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres, carefully weighing the objective of providing adequate facilities or enhancing visitors’ enjoyment or improving the financial viability of the facility with the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites.

These objectives are reflected in the relevant policies of the SOLP 2011. In this regard policy TSM 4 of SOLP allows for the extension of existing premises outside the Green Belt. In this case, the site is in use as a hotel and conference facility and is in a good location in respect of road connections; the site is not in a sensitive location and the growth would help to deliver more balanced facilities at the site in respect of the proportion of bedrooms to conference facilities.

6.5 **Design, scale and impact on the character of the area.** It is acknowledged that the scale of the proposed extension is large representing a 21% increase in overall footprint of buildings on the site. However, in the context of the 6.9 ha site area and given the discrete siting of the extension behind the existing complex, the extension can easily be accommodated without a significant impact on the character of the area or the amenity of neighbours The design of the extension is in keeping with the existing bedroom extension at the rear and is acceptable.

With regard to the overflow car park, neighbours have commented that this is outside the existing complex of development and is an unwelcome extension of development into the countryside. Whilst this area has not been developed it can not be considered as countryside because it clearly lies within the confines of Milton Common, it is however acknowledged that it is in a loosely consolidated part of the settlement. The overflow car park is not anticipated to be in constant use and will be surfaced in resin bonded gravel. It would sit behind the existing dense belt of trees and hedging along the frontage of the site and would be further landscaped to assimilate the development. As such your officer's consider that the impact of the overflow car park on the visual amenity of the area would be relatively limited.

6.6 **Sustainable design.** Policy D8 of SOLP requires all new development to display high standards in the conservation and efficient use of energy, water and materials. To achieve this end all 105 rooms will be air conditioned using a Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) heat recovery for heating and cooling of rooms in conjunction with a heat recovery ventilation system to reduce heat and energy loss. The extension will be constructed and finished to meet a BREEAM excellent rating. As such this aspect of the proposal is acceptable.

6.7 **Transport issues.** A traffic impact assessment has been submitted as part of the application to analyse the impact of the extra traffic and the sustainability of this proposal. The Highways authority have some concerns in relation to the scheme because the proposal is in an unsustainable location where there is no reliable transport alternative other than the car. OCC consider that the proposal is contrary to national and local policies in PPS4 and PPG13 to reduce the dependency on the car.

The transport statement suggests that there are approx 100 full time staff and 60 casual staff at the premises (60 staff reside on site) in addition to visitors to the site for conferences, accommodation or in connection with the leisure centre. The statement details a number of travel options available to access the hotel;

- by rail to the stations at Oxford or Thame/ Haddenham with the last leg of journey by taxi,
- There are three bus services available,
 1. The 275 service on London Road operates between High Wycombe and Oxford (via Stokenchurch) three times a day Monday to Friday (23 minutes travel time to Oxford),
 2. The 124 bus also operates a service on the A329 from Thame to Watlington four times a day Wednesday to Saturday with two services on Tuesday (8 minutes to Thame and 20 minutes to Watlington)
 3. The 111 bus provides a service from the junction of London Road with Rycote Lane one service in each direction on Tuesdays.
- Most visits to the hotel will be by private car
- Cycle parking is provided for staff and is proposed for visitors as part of the application.

A total of 213 parking spaces are proposed in the existing car park to the front of the hotel and a further 87 parking spaces are proposed in a new over flow car park; cycle parking for visitors and staff is also provided.

Local concerns about increased traffic generation are acknowledged but the road network consists of A class roads or motorway and the roads can accommodate any increase of traffic easily. The applicant contends that the lack of bedroom space at present generates additional traffic movements because visitors attending conferences who can not be accommodated overnight have to travel elsewhere for accommodation and have to return to site the next day. The site is in an existing commercial use and is in an advantageous location for visiting and can accommodate adequate levels of

parking. This is a use that already exists and is in an good location to take advantage of the road linkages.

- 6.8 **Ecological issues.** The proposed overflow car park is adjacent to a large pond which is surrounded by willow scrub and semi-improved grassland. The creation of a new parking area would involve the loss of approx 0.25 ha of rough grassland.

The rough grassland is a potential habitat for species such as reptiles which are likely to use the area for foraging. Also given the proximity of the pond, the area is suitable for amphibians such as the legally protected great-crested newt which may use the rough grassland for foraging and the surrounding hedgerows and trees as hibernation sites. The surrounding landscape has numerous ponds and there is a known population of newts at Tetsworth and there is a probability that the site has ecological significance.

If newts or other protected species such as the grass snake and slow worm are found to be present then mitigation measures will have to be put in place. Reptiles such as the grass snake and slow-worm receive protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The great-crested newt is protected under the EC Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

Guidance provided in PPS9 and the accompanying Circular (ODPM 06/2005) states: The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal. It goes on to state It is essential that the presence or otherwise of a protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted.

No surveys have been carried out at this stage, although it is hoped that an initial survey will have been completed by the committee date. However, in this case there is a 1.8 hectare piece of land immediately to the north of the ponds of similar grassland and hedgerow within the applicant's control. If protected species are found to be present on the overflow car park site, your officers are satisfied that mitigation measures to provide alternative habitats and foraging etc could be provided to the north of the ponds. Given the advice set out above it is not appropriate to add a condition to carry out appropriate surveys and the recommendation is made subject to these surveys being carried out. If any protected species are found to be present a condition would be added to provide for mitigation measures to be submitted, approved and then provided prior to any works to create the car park. If the surveys reveal that there are no protected species present then no mitigation measures would be needed.

- 6.9 **Green Belt impact.** The site is not within the Oxford Green Belt. The boundary of the Green Belt runs along Sandy Lane which is some 240 metres to the west of the site. Even though the scale of the extension is large, it is a significant distance from the Green Belt and separated by other residential development. In my view the proposal has no impact on the openness of the Green Belt at this distance.

- 6.10 **Neighbour impact.** The hotel site surrounds the nearest neighbour at Brimpton Cottage on two sides. The neighbours at Brimpton Cottage have three concerns to the proposal in relation to the overflow car park, the increase in visits by service vehicles and to the size and location of the extension.

The access to Brimpton Cottage is also used as the service access to the hotel kitchens and staff accommodation. The exit from the main car park also feeds onto the access at the junction to London Road. The neighbours currently experience noise and disturbance as a result of the use of the service yard and the access to their property is

sometimes blocked by service vehicles. The neighbours consider that there will be more deliveries to the service area with an increase in the size of the hotel and with the use of the overflow car park there will be more traffic movements around the junction onto London Road.

The concerns in relation to the use of service area are acknowledged but given the scale of the commercial use on the site at present the increase in deliveries etc would not be sufficient to justify a refusal of planning permission.

The new overflow car park is some 130 metres from Brimpton Cottage; it is also not anticipated to be in constant use, only at times when the hotel is particularly busy. At this distance from Brimpton Cottage there will be limited impact in terms of noise and disturbance and the increase in activity at the junction where traffic speeds are low would not create a material nuisance in terms of blocking access to Brimpton Cottage.

With regard to the extension, there is a 40- 50 metres belt of trees along the shared boundary of the hotel with Brimpton Cottage which will not be affected as a result of the proposal. The extension would be over 70 metres from Brimpton Cottage. Even though the scale of the extension is large, at the distance involved and given the boundary screening, the bulk of the extension will have very little impact on Brimpton Cottage.

- 6.11 **Contributions to infrastructure improvements.** Policy D11 of the Local Plan aims to secure contributions towards supporting infrastructure for new developments. The Council's interim guidance on developer funding requires hotel developments to contribute £28.99 per new bed for contributions towards community safety (105 new bedrooms = £3,043.95). The Oxford Belfry Hotel has experienced problems with car crime in the past. The contribution sought will allow Thames Valley Police to install an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera link into the hotel's camera system to enable the police to monitor and identify criminals who target the car park. The estimated cost of the cabling and installation of a LAN computer is equivalent to the developer obligation sought. The applicant has agreed to provide a unilateral undertaking to secure this contribution and the recommendation is subject to this being received.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 It is acknowledged that this extension is a large extension to the existing premises but, given the discrete siting, it can be easily accommodated on the existing site without detracting from the character of the area or the amenity of adjoining neighbours. Concerns in relation to traffic generation are acknowledged but the road network can accommodate the traffic and the site is in an attractive location to take advantage of road links. The extension and overflow car park would not in themselves create an unneighbourly form of development due to the distances involved to the nearest neighbour. If protected species are found to be present following appropriate surveys there is sufficient land under the applicant's control to mitigate any potential loss of habitat. The proposal accords with the Development Plan policies and it is recommended that planning permission be granted.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

Subject to;

- 1) **The receipt of surveys to investigate for the presence of great crested newts and other protected species. If found to be present mitigation measures will be required.**
- 2) **The receipt of a unilateral undertaking to secure contributions to policing of £3,043.95**

And to the following conditions;

1. **Commencement 3 years**
2. **Compliance – approved drawings**
3. **Materials as on plans**
4. **Provide parking in accordance with approved plans**
5. **Detail of barriers to overflow car park, bollards for low level lighting, position and mounting details of CCTV cameras and cycle parking to be submitted and approved. Schemes to be provided in accordance with approved details prior to first use of new wing.**
6. **Landscaping**
7. **No commencement on overflow car park until satisfactory mitigation measures carried out**
8. **The building shall be constructed and fitted out to achieve a BREEAM excellent rating as stated in the design and access statement.**
9. **SWD details**
10. **Waste water details/ works required**
11. **Tree protection detailed**
12. **Travel plan**

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