
SUBJECT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REPORTS ITEM 6

REPORT OF Head of Planning & Building Control

APPLICATION NO.	P12/S1642/O
APPLICATION TYPE	OUTLINE WITH ALL MATTERS RESERVED
REGISTERED	30.7.2012
PARISH	THAME
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr David Dodds Mrs Ann Midwinter
APPLICANT	Fisher Brown Investments Ltd
SITE	46 Southern Road, Thame, OX9 2DZ
PROPOSAL	Demolition of the existing dwellings and commercial buildings and the erection of 5 two-storey residential units (comprising two detached 3/4 bedroom units and a terrace of 3 two-bedroom units) together with access and parking.
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	470530/205687
OFFICER	Mr Peter Brampton

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application is referred to the planning committee because officers' recommendation conflicts with the views of Thame Town Council.
- 1.2 Southern Road runs along the southern outskirts of Thame town centre. The application site is located on the southern side of the road, around 60 metres from the junction with Moreton Lane. The site totals around 1,200 square metres and is on a gentle north to south down slope.
- 1.3 Centrally located within the site is a two-storey dwelling dating from the 1960s. It is of brick construction under a pitched, tiled roof. Adjacent lies a mobile home that is now vacant. Along the northern front boundary of the site is a detached single storey commercial building. This is of brick and stone construction under a "barrelled" corrugated sheet roof. It is now in poor condition and is prominent from Southern Road.
- 1.4 The application site does not lie within any designated areas, but the Thame conservation area lies immediately adjacent to incorporate the burgage plots that define much of the northern side of Southern Road.
- 1.5 The site is shown on the 1:1250 scale location plan **attached** as Appendix A.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The applicant seeks outline planning permission for the demolition of the existing dwelling, mobile home and commercial building to create space for five new dwellings. These units will consist of two detached 3/4 bedroom units and a terrace of three two bedroom units.
- 2.2 Crucial to the assessment of this application is the fact that all matters are reserved for future consideration. The applicant has provided two indicative site plans, floor plans and elevations for the scheme to demonstrate how the five units *could* be arranged. In both cases, the terrace of three is located behind the two detached dwellings which front onto Southern Road. The plans also show a proposed access point and how many parking spaces could be provided. Officers stress strongly that only limited weight can be attached to these plans.
- 2.3 The applicant has confirmed the scale parameters of the proposed development. These show the minimum and maximum widths and depths of each house. These are shown in the table below (all measurements in metres):

Plot No.	Min Width	Max Width	Min Depth	Max Depth
1	6.0	6.5	11.0	11.5
2	6.0	6.5	11.0	11.5
3	6.1	6.6	6.9	7.8
4	6.1	6.6	6.9	7.8
5	6.1	6.6	6.9	7.8

- 2.4 Reduced copies of both indicative schemes accompanying the application (marked Option A and Option B) are **attached** as Appendix B. Supporting documentation, including the Design and Access Statement, can be found on the council’s website.
- 2.5 An earlier application for seven houses on this site was withdrawn following officer objections to the scheme, primarily relating to the overdevelopment of the site and the unneighbourly impact.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 **Thame Town Council** – Recommends refusal. Whilst the council does not object to the residential redevelopment of the site, the scheme is over-development, is unneighbourly and would lead to an unacceptable increase in vehicle movements onto Southern Road.

Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee – Raise concerns over access being opposite vehicular entrance to Sainsbury’s, but pleased to see this long-term eyesoe being addressed

Countryside Officer – Conditions requiring bat survey of existing house to be demolished and scheme for removal of Japanese knotweed are necessary

Forestry Officer – Condition requiring landscaping scheme is necessary to ensure an improvement in the quality of the tree cover in the area

OCC Highways Area Liaison Officer – Conditions relating to a SUDS scheme, a construction traffic management plan, vision splay details, estate accesses, driveway and turning areas and parking provision are all necessary

Waste Management Officer – Further details are required, relating to the collection point for bins

Monson Engineering Ltd – A condition relating to a SUDS scheme is necessary

Neighbour Representations – Five letters of objection received. Main objections can be summarised thus:

- Proposal represents an overdevelopment of the site
- This number of houses will cause an excessive increase in traffic movements onto Southern Road, endangering other motorists and pedestrians
- Proposal will cause congestion on the narrow Southern Road
- Loss of outlook and light to the rear of No. 24 Sharman Beer Court
- Loss of light to No.97 Sharman Beer Court
- Overlooking of Nos. 40-42 Holliers Close
- Noise from construction and from residents thereafter will be disruptive
- Additional strain on infrastructure
- Proposals should include pedestrian footpath for south side of Southern Road

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P12/S1390/O](#) - Withdrawn (23/08/2012)

Demolition of the existing dwellings and commercial buildings and the erection of 7 two-storey residential units (comprising a terrace of four two-bedroom units and a terrace of 3 two-bedroom units) together with access and parking.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 policies;

G2 - Protect district from adverse development

G6 - Appropriateness of development to its site & surroundings

C8 - Adverse affect on protected species

CON7 - Proposals in a conservation area

C9 - Loss of landscape features

D1 - Principles of good design

D2 - Safe and secure parking for vehicles and cycles

D3 - Outdoor amenity area

D4 - Reasonable level of privacy for occupiers

D8 - Conservation and efficient use of energy

D10 - Waste Management

E6 - Retention of employment sites

EP1 - Adverse affect on people and environment

EP2 - Adverse affect by noise or vibration

EP6 - Sustainable drainage

EP8 - Contaminated land

H4 - Housing sites in towns and larger villages outside Green Belt

H7 - Range of dwelling types and sizes

H8 - Dwelling densities

T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users

T2 - Unloading, turning and parking for all highway users

South Oxfordshire Design Guide (SODG) 2008

The National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework)

The South Oxfordshire submission Core Strategy

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

Principle of development

- 6.1 Policy E6 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan confirms there is no objection to the change of use of employment sites within the four towns of the district, provided that the site is less than 0.25 hectares, and the buildings on the site total less than 500 square metres. The application site falls below both of these thresholds, so there is no in principle objection to the loss of the employment site.
- 6.2 The Local Plan states that as Thame is one of the four towns of the district, the principle of new housing within the built up areas of the settlement is acceptable. Policy H4 outlines the considerations for applications for new housing in Thame and more specifically allows for the erection of new housing subject to the following:
- i) An important open space of public, environmental or ecological value should not be lost, nor an important public view spoilt
 - ii) The design, height, scale and materials of the proposed development must be in keeping with the surroundings
 - iii) The character of the area should not be adversely affected
 - iv) There should be no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections and;
 - v) If the proposal constitutes backland development, it would not create problems of privacy and access

Other considerations relevant to this proposal are:

- Whether the proposal incorporates an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes
- Whether the proposal would incorporate appropriate sustainability and waste management measures
- Whether the proposal would affect the habitats of protected species
- Whether the proposal would affect the health of nearby trees and provide adequate landscaping
- Whether there are any issues regarding land contamination

- 6.3 At the time of writing this report, the emerging South Oxfordshire Core Strategy is still at submission stage. Thus, whilst the policies contained within the core strategy can be attributed some weight, officers have not applied full weight to them in relation to this particular proposal.

Siting Issues

- 6.4 There can be little doubt that the existing site can be described as an eyesore. The existing commercial workshop at the front of the site is now in a poor state of repair and is very prominent in the street scene. Some oblique views of the house to the rear are possible from the public realm and this is also a building with little architectural merit. Officers have no objections to their removal in this regard.
- 6.5 The commercial building spans most of the width of the site, and officers are satisfied the site does not contribute to an important public view. By removing the workshop, the site will actually be opened up. The new houses will likely be set back from the road, providing a depth of frontage more akin to the residential development to the east. Officers are also satisfied the site does not have any particular environmental or ecological value.

Design, character and appearance

- 6.6 There is no overriding character to the residential development surrounding the application site. The houses to the east, facing onto Southern Road, are set back from the road in long narrow plots. To the immediate west and south lays Sharman Beer Court, a very high density development of flats and small-scale housing for the elderly. To the north, on the opposite side of the road, lays Dorchester Place and Fothergill Place, two more high density residential developments.
- 6.7 Officers consider the proposed development will represent a mid-point between the older, lower density, development to the east, and the more recent high density schemes to west and north. Both indicative plans indicate the two detached dwellings will be set back from the road, although not as far as the adjacent No.48 Southern Road. The terrace will then be located behind. Officers are satisfied that this tandem development represents the only logical way to achieve five properties on this site, and so reasonable weight can be attached to this arrangement when assessing this scheme.
- 6.8 As discussed, this proposal will likely give the site a more open frontage than the existing situation. This is to the benefit of the character of the area. The scale parameters submitted in support of the application confirm the new dwellings will all be two-stories of a reasonable width and scale, relating well to existing properties in the area.
- 6.9 However the final scheme arranges the five units, the units at the rear of the site will not be prominent from the public realm. The units at the front will provide good screening of those at the rear from Southern Road. Limited views of the rear units will be possible from Moreton Lane, through Sharman Beer Court. However, from this vantage point, these dwellings will be seen in context alongside the massing of the Sharman Beer Court, and will not be unduly prominent or harmful to the character of the area.
- 6.10 Policy H8 of the Local Plan confirms that in town centre locations, a density of 40 dwellings or more per hectare is required, whilst elsewhere 30 dwellings or more per hectare is necessary. However, these densities should not be achieved at the cost of the character of the area.
- 6.11 This site lies on the edge of the town centre and five dwellings on it represents a density of development of around 41.3 dwellings per hectare. Officers consider this density can be accepted, as it is largely consistent with Policy D8 and also given the higher densities of Sharman Beer Court, Dorchester Place and Fothergill Place. As such, officers do not consider this proposal represents an overdevelopment of the site.
- 6.12 To reiterate, the layout, scale and appearance of the development are all reserved matters. However, from the information available, officers are satisfied the erection of two detached units and a terrace of three units can be adequately designed so as to have an acceptable impact on the character of the site and the area.

Neighbouring Amenity

- 6.13 Tandem residential development, such as that shown on the indicative plans, can often lead to issues over a lack of privacy, both for existing residents and future residents of the new housing. Officers have carefully considered both indicative layout plans provided by the applicant and have reached the on-balance conclusion that this scheme can be designed so as not to cause undue harm to residential amenity.

- 6.14 Given the existing residential development along Southern Road, it appears likely the two detached houses will be located at the front of the site. The indicative plans indicate these houses will be located on a similar building line to the housing to the east. This will ensure a reasonable relationship with this existing housing, in particular No.48 Southern Road. This property is orientated to face northeast, away from the application site, and benefits from a single storey garage extension on its western side. Therefore, officers are satisfied the proposed detached dwellings, if built approximately as shown on the indicative plans, would not cause a loss of light or be overbearing on No.48.
- 6.15 The northeastern wing of Sharman Beer Court will project forwards and behind the dwellings built to the front of the site. From observations on site, there are very few first floor windows in this wing that would be potentially compromised by the new dwellings to the front of the site. Some ground floor windows will look towards the site, but it is likely the impact on these will be acceptable, particularly once boundary treatments are agreed. Overall, officers are satisfied the proposed development to the front of the site, given the scale parameters, will not materially affect neighbouring amenity.
- 6.16 The residential development to the rear of the site will have a more noticeable impact on neighbouring amenity. From observations on site, Nos. 22 and 24 Sharman Beer Court have small rear gardens that bound the application site and enjoy a relatively open aspect across this undeveloped portion of the site. Ensuring any residential development on the application site maintains a reasonable outlook to these properties is key.
- 6.17 Of the submitted indicative schemes, Option B provides the most appropriate way of addressing this issue. This demonstrates the terrace of three two-bed units would be staggered to reduce the impact on this outlook. The nearest dwelling, Unit 5, would be located almost completely forward of No.24 Sharman Beer Court, as a distance of just over 11 metres. Units 4 and 3 are then staggered in a southerly direction.
- 6.18 Whilst again stressing that Option B is only one way this site can be developed, it does reassure officers that this scheme can be accommodated without causing material harm to the amenity of the occupants of Nos. 22 and 24 Sharman Beer Court.
- 6.19 Option B also demonstrates one way to mitigate the impact on the rear of No.48 Southern Road. This property has an unusual “triangular” shaped rear garden that narrows dramatically and is orientated to face southwest, over the rear of the application site. From within this garden, the residential development to the rear will be quite prominent.
- 6.20 Option B reveals that the scale parameters allow the provision of a gap of around 16 metres between the rear of No.48 and the nearest unit. In officers’ opinion, such a distance would ensure there is no significant loss of light or outlook to the rear of No.48 from this scheme. As shown by the indicative plans, space for planting along the shared boundary with No.48 will also be proposed, to provide scope for softening the development from this private rear garden.
- 6.21 The indicative floor plans provided with Option B indicate that only a bathroom window will be located in the first floor of the front elevation of each of the terrace properties. Such an arrangement would prevent any concerns regarding the overlooking of No.48, and also mutual overlooking of the new dwellings at the front of the site.
- 6.22 Officers do have some concerns about the living conditions for Plot 3 under Option B. The rear of this property would sit only around 7.5 metres from the flank wall of No.20

Sharman Beer Court. This does restrict the outlook from the rear of this property. However, a reasonably clear aspect to the east and southeast is shown that would ensure adequate light is received to the rear of this property, whilst it also benefits from a generous rear garden of some 80 square metres, in excess of SODG requirements for a two-bed property. As such, officers are satisfied that this property should be able to benefit from acceptable living conditions.

- 6.23 Given the distance between the rear of the application site and Holliers Close (over 23 metres), officers do not consider this development would allow an undue amount of overlooking of the properties in this development.
- 6.24 Overall, officers are satisfied the proposed quantum of development can be achieved without causing material harm to the amenity of neighbouring residents or compromising the living conditions of future occupiers.
- 6.25 Officers also acknowledge the objections relating to the potential noise that the occupants of five houses will create, and appreciate this is particularly sensitive due to the proximity of Sharman Beer Court. However, officers consider this is an edge of town centre location, and a degree of residual noise is to be expected. Officers do not consider the potential noise impact of these properties represents a reason for objection. This is particularly the case given the existing commercial use of the site. Nonetheless, a condition restricting construction hours is considered appropriate, given the scale of the development and the proximity to neighbours.

Highway Safety

- 6.26 Officers acknowledge local objection to the highway safety implications of this proposal, but do not agree the impact would be materially harmful.
- 6.27 Both indicative site plans indicate an access point in the northwestern corner of the site, slightly away from the busy access to the Sainsbury's car park to the northeast. Officers are satisfied an access at this point, or elsewhere along the northern boundary of the site, could achieve adequate visibility in both directions.
- 6.28 Officers accept that Southern Road is a busy road, serving a number of housing developments and also allowing vehicular access to a number of town centre shops and businesses. The road can become congested, but this is a long-standing problem. Officers do not consider the vehicular movements associated with these five units would make a material difference to the overall amount of traffic on the road.
- 6.29 Both indicative plans show that two parking spaces will be provided for the two larger units, with the option of a third space for each unit in the rear garden. This meets the parking standards of the Local Plan.
- 6.30 Of more concern is the provision of only one space for each two-bedroom dwelling. The parking standards confirm that two spaces should be provided for a two-bed property. However, officers are mindful of the relatively sustainable location of the site, in close proximity to shops, services and facilities, including bus routes to Oxford and Aylesbury.
- 6.31 Furthermore, the applicant has drawn officers' attention to existing planning permissions in Thame where a single space for a new two-bed dwelling has been allowed. It is also important to note that the OCC Highways Liaison Officer has raised no objection to the under-provision of car parking. Finally, officers consider there is always an element of "buyer beware" in that any potential purchaser of the new properties will be aware of the associated parking provision. Overall, officers conclude

the indicative parking provision does not represent a reason to refuse planning permission.

- 6.32 Conditions relating to a construction traffic management plan, visibility splays, the layout of the estate roads and parking are all necessary and recommended by the Liaison Officer.

Housing Mix

- 6.33 This proposal will provide 60% two-bed units, in accordance with the requirements of Policy H7.

Sustainability and waste measures

- 6.34 The applicant has provided a brief sustainability statement with the application that outlines a few measures to be incorporated into the construction of each dwelling. However, this does not make reference to the Code for Sustainable Homes, and officers consider there is scope for more sustainable measures in the building's construction than is currently shown. A pre-commencement condition can secure further details, related to the Code for Sustainable Homes.

- 6.35 The submitted indicative plans do not provide any information on waste and recycling storage. A pre-commencement condition can secure these details.

Protected Species

- 6.36 In consultation, the council's countryside officer has identified the potential for bats to roost in the loft space of the existing 1960s dwelling on the site. No information on bat activity has been provided at this stage. Ordinarily, a bat survey is required prior to determination of any application relating to residential development.

- 6.37 However, in this particular instance, the countryside officer has confirmed the likelihood of significant bat roosts within the house is limited. Furthermore, there will be plenty of opportunity to incorporate mitigation measures in the final design of the new housing. Therefore, officers consider it appropriate to request the bat survey as part of the reserved matters application that will be necessary should this application be approved.

- 6.38 The countryside officer also noted on site the significant presence of Japanese knotweed. This plant is considered contaminated waste and its removal from the site is essential. A pre-commencement condition will require the prior agreement to a scheme that outlines how the plant will be entirely eradicated from the site.

Trees

- 6.39 In consultation, the council's forestry officer has confirmed none of the existing trees on the site have any particular value and so there is no objection to their removal. Any consent would be subject to a detailed landscaping condition to secure appropriate replacement planting and to try to improve the tree cover in the area.

Land Contamination

- 6.40 In accordance with the requirements of Policy EP8 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, and given the proposed change of use of the land from commercial to residential, a full land contamination investigation is required and a pre-commencement condition can control this.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The principle of a new residential development in this location is acceptable, given the permissive stance established by Policy H4 of the Local Plan. This stance is consistent with national guidance contained in the NPPF. Whilst limited weight can be applied to

the indicative plans submitted in support of the application, they do demonstrate that this site can accommodate five dwellings without causing material planning harm.

7.2 Therefore, subject to the relevant conditions, the proposed development complies with the policies of the Development Plan in so far as it would not materially harm the living conditions of neighbours or the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, subject to the relevant conditions, it would not endanger safety in the wider highway network or the habitats of protected species. The development would also incorporate appropriate sustainability measures and not risk further land contamination, again subject to relevant conditions.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **Grant Outline Planning Permission subject to:**

1. **Commencement - Outline Planning Permission**
2. **Submission of Reserved Matters - General**
3. **Reserved Matters to be submitted to include bat survey**
4. **Levels to be agreed**
5. **Sample materials to be agreed**
6. **Boundary treatments to be agreed**
7. **Sustainable Homes measures to Code Level 3 to be agreed**
8. **Refuse & Recycling Storage to be agreed**
9. **Vision splay details to be agreed**
10. **Estate accesses, driveways & turning areas to be agreed**
11. **Plan of Car Parking Provision to be agreed**
12. **Surface Water Drainage scheme to be agreed**
13. **Construction Traffic Management Plan to be agreed**
14. **Landscaping Scheme to be agreed**
15. **Scheme to remove Japanese Knotweed to be agreed**
16. **Hours of operation**
17. **Contamination investigation to be agreed**

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