

APPLICATION NO.	P15/S4257/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	9.2.2016
PARISH	SONNING COMMON
WARD MEMBER(S)	Will Hall Paul Harrison
APPLICANT	Bewley Homes PLC
SITE	Lea Meadow Sonning Common, RG4 9NJ
PROPOSAL	Residential Development of 65 dwellings with associated public open space, landscape planting and new access onto Peppard Road (as amended by drawings received from agent on 28 April 2016).
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	471204/179609
OFFICER	Carolyn Organ

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Sonning Common is a large village situated around 2.5 km from the northern outskirts of Reading. It has a range of facilities including schools, public houses, shops and a doctors' surgery. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) wraps around the settlement on three sides.
- 1.2 The site itself is a single field of just under 4 hectares in size, including a "leg" leading from the south eastern corner through to Kennylands Road. A location plan is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 Adjacent to the north western boundary of the site is The Herb Farm, which is a garden centre and café with associated parking areas and open land to the front. To the northeast of the application site is open farmland dipping down into a valley with Peppard Road, immediately adjacent to the site, forming the boundary to the AONB. To the south is the low density development of Birdwood Court and Essex Way, built on the site of a former school owned by Essex County Council. To the west of the site is a single property known as Hagpits which is itself bounded by Hagpits Wood, an area of around 2.5 hectares of woodland.
- 1.4 To the north of The Herb Farm is Westleigh Road, which is an estate of houses and bungalows constructed in the 1960s. This housing estate also wraps around to the front onto Peppard Road with larger detached houses.
- 1.5 To the south of the site is Birdwood Court an estate of 12 properties, mostly single storey, constructed in the mid-1980s to a very low density. To the west of Birdwood Court, contiguous with a part of the southern boundary of the site, is an area of open space, to the west of which is Essex Way, an estate of mostly bungalows, the occupation of which is for elderly residents. Within Essex Way is a recently built nursing home.
- 1.6 The principal part of the site has a slight slope from west to east but otherwise is generally level, although it sits a little above Peppard Road (B481), which is the principal road between Sonning Common and Reading. The site is in use as paddocks and has some stable buildings in the south west corner. This principal part

of the site is a rectangle and extends to around 3.4 hectares. The west, east and southern boundaries comprise mature trees and to Peppard Road these form a hedged boundary with several mature trees. The trees on the southern and eastern boundaries are protected by a group Tree Preservation Order whilst 6 individual trees on the Peppard Road frontage are separately protected through Tree Preservation Orders.

2.0 PROPOSAL

2.1 The applicants propose the erection of 65 dwellings on the site. Following discussions with council officers, local residents and the development group behind the emerging Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan, amended plans were submitted in April 2016 adjusting minor elements of layout, affordable housing and parking. The proposed layout plans are included as **Appendix 2**.

2.2 The proposed housing mix is as follows:

	Affordable	Market	TOTAL
1 bed	4	0	4
2 bed	13	14	27
3 bed	9	9	18
4 bed	0	10	10
5 bed	0	6	6
TOTAL	26	39	65

2.3 The site will have a single vehicular access onto Peppard Road, requiring partial removal of an existing hedgerow. The layout is based around 6 perimeter blocks with a central area of public open space, including a Local Area of Play. The layout retains the important trees and hedging around the site, supplementing the boundary with Peppard Road, closest to the AONB.

2.4 The majority of the housing is two-storey, with some “feature” buildings on important plots and bungalows closest to Peppard Road, again to limit the impact on the AONB.

2.5 The application sits comfortably below the current screening thresholds for an Environmental Impact Assessment. Officers are satisfied that a scheme of this size, outside any designated areas relative to landscape, flooding, conservation/heritage and Green Belt, would not have required an Environmental Statement at time of submission.

2.6 As well as ensuring affordable housing is achieved on site, the applicants will need to provide and maintain on site open space and play area and contribute to the provision of bus stops. These contributions will be secured via a Section 106 agreement. The site will also be liable to pay the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) at a rate of £150 per square metre.

3.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

3.1 Sonning Common Parish Council – Object.

Main reasons for objections to the amended scheme for 65 houses were:

- Contrary to Core Strategy – outside built up area of the village.
- Application is premature as the neighbourhood Plan has not gone through referendum
- Proposed number of homes is too high – the neighbourhood Plan seeks to allocate the site for 60 homes.
- Housing mix does not accord with the emerging neighbourhood plan policy
- Inadequate visual screening behind Brid Court.

- Risk to the security unnecessarily introduced for residents of Bird Court.
- Further landscaping and details of the footpath behind Essex Way is needed to address security concerns.
- Peppard Road speed limit should be changed to 30mph by Oxfordshire County Council if the development goes ahead.

3.2 Neighbour Representations – Letters from 45 objectors received. The main objections are summarised below.

- Many objectors accept the principle of development proposed at Lea Meadow but think that the application is premature of the neighbourhood plan and the number is too high as it is only allocated for 60 homes.
- Security concerns for residents of Bird Court caused unnecessarily by the new footpath connecting to all the way along to Peppard Road.
- Security concerns for residents of Essex Way.
- Unacceptable impact on traffic in the village from new housing.
- Strain on village facilities from new housing.
- Too many large homes.
- Not enough 3 bedroom family properties.
- Application has an unacceptable density of development.
- Pedestrian crossing needed in the centre of the village.
- Impact on Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Wider landscape buffers needed on southern boundary with Essex way and Bird Court.
- Lea meadow is a haven of wildlife which would be lost by development of the site.
- Impact on Hagpits Wood and health and safety issues if people trespass on the land.

Oxfordshire County Council Highways – No objections. This is subject appropriate contributions and conditions. Contributions identified for public transport and providing bus stop infrastructure on Kennylands Road. Conditions to cover access, driveways and turning areas, drainage, parking and manoeuvring, cycle parking, travel plan and construction method statement.

Oxfordshire County Council Archaeologist – No objections following conducting of field evaluation that revealed the site had no particular archaeological interest.

Thames Water Development Control – No objections subject to Grampian condition covering sewer infrastructure works for foul drainage to be agreed prior to works commencing on site and implemented prior to first occupation.

Monson Drainage Engineer – No objections subject to conditions requiring details of surface and foul water drainage to be agreed prior to work commencing on site.

Environment Agency – No objections subject to appropriate surface water drainage that meets the criteria set out in the Environment Agency Groundwater Protection: Principles and Practice (GP3) Document One.

Crime Prevention Design Adviser – No comments received this application. Comments on the application in 2014 related to rear access footpaths, permeability, parking, communal space, landscaping, the link to Kennylands Road and lighting.

Housing Officer – No objection. Affordable Housing housing numbers, tenure and mix agreed.

Environmental Protection Team – No objections subject to condition requiring scheme for mitigation of noise and dust to be agreed and implemented during construction.

Environmental Health - Air quality – No objections. Request a condition for EV charging points.

Contaminated Land – No objections.

Forestry Officer – No objections subject to arboricultural plan and tree protection plan being brought up to date that can be done through condition. Concerns over parking spaces within root protection areas have been addressed following receipt of amended plans and subject to tree protection conditions.

Countryside Officer – No objections subject to conditions.

Landscape Architect – Identifies reduced harm to AONB following amendment. Remains concerned about urbanising impact on Peppard Road particularly in terms of highway works. Sensitive lighting scheme required through condition.

Chilterns AONB Board – No objection. Support the findings of the council's landscape architect.

Urban Design Officer – Concerns about enclosure of main street, the amount of hardstanding and requests conditions for materials.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P14/S2391/FUL](#) - Refused (02/12/2015)

Residential Development of 65 dwellings with associated public open space, landscape planting and new access onto the Peppard Road (as amended by Drawings and Information accompanying letter from agent received June 2015 and further amended by Drawings and Information accompanying letter from agent dated 4 September 2015)

[P12/S2507/O](#) - Withdrawn prior to determination (08/02/2013)

Residential development with new combined access onto the Peppard Road. Approximately 55 Dwellings.(as amplified by planning statement which accompanied the email from the agent dated 6 December 2012)

[P11/E1123/O](#) - Withdrawn prior to determination (21/10/2011)

Residential development with new access on the Peppard Road (Including indicative layout for 80 units).

[P10/E1034/O](#) - Withdrawn prior to determination (29/09/2010)

Outline permission for the erection of 105 dwellings.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 South Oxfordshire Core Strategy policies

CS1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

CSS1 - The Overall Strategy

CSB1 - Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

CSEN1 - Landscape protection

CSEN2 - Green Belt protection

CSG1 - Green infrastructure

CSH2 - Housing density

CSH3 - Affordable housing
CSH4 - Meeting housing needs
CSM1 - Transport
CSM2 - Transport Assessments and Travel Plans
CSQ2 - Sustainable design and construction
CSQ3 - Design
CSQ4 - Design briefs for greenfield neighbourhoods and major development sites
CSR1 - Housing in villages

5.2 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 policies;

G2 - Protect district from adverse development
G4 - Protection of Countryside
C4 - Landscape setting of settlements
C6 - Maintain & enhance biodiversity
C9 - Loss of landscape features
D1 - Principles of good design
D4 - Reasonable level of privacy for occupiers
D6 - Community safety
D12 - Public art
EP1 - Adverse affect on people and environment
EP4 - Impact on water resources
EP6 - Sustainable drainage
H4 - Housing sites in towns and larger villages outside Green Belt
R1 - Outdoor sport or play areas
R2 - Provision of play areas on new housing development
R6 - Public open space in new residential development
T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users
T2 - Unloading, turning and parking for all highway users

5.3 South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2008

5.4 Emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031

5.5 Emerging Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan (SCNDP) policies:

SCH1 – Housing Distribution
SCH2 – Housing Mix
SCH4 – Housing for local people
SCD1 – Design
SCCH2 – Land for recreation
SCMRP3 – Parking
SCENV1 – Protecting the AONB
SCENV2 – Rural look and feel of the village
SCENV3 – Wildlife corridors

5.6 National Planning Policy Framework

5.7 National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance

5.8 Environmental Impact Regulations, as amended 2015

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 Principle of development

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless materials considerations indicate otherwise. Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country

Planning Act 1990 provides that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. In the case of South Oxfordshire, the most relevant parts of the Development Plan are the Core Strategy which was adopted in December 2012, the saved policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 and any relevant neighbourhood plans. Development which is not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan should be refused unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 6.2 Sonning Common is designated as a 'larger village' in the Core Strategy. Policy CSS1 sets out an overall strategy for the District, which seeks, among other things, to support and enhance the larger villages as local service centres, while focusing 'major new development' at Didcot and supporting the roles of Henley, Thame and Wallingford.
- 6.3 Policy CSH1 identified the distribution of housing within South Oxfordshire including housing in the 12 larger villages. Policy CSR1 indicates that housing provision in the villages will be achieved through allocations, infill development and rural exception sites for affordable housing. In Chapter 18 of the Core Strategy identifies the delivery mechanisms for allocating sites. These included further development plan documents produced by the district together with neighbourhood development plans.
- 6.4 Although the application site is not yet allocated for development it is proposed for allocation in emerging policies within the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan (SCNDP).
- 6.5 The NPPF at paragraph 216 outlines the weight that can be given to emerging policies. There are three elements that contribute to the weight that can be given. These are copied below from the NPPF for reference.
 - *the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);*
 - *the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and*
 - *the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).*
- 6.6 Sonning Common is at an advanced stage in the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The plan is currently at examination stage with an Examiner's report expected shortly.
- 6.7 There is not significant unresolved objections to the proposal to allocate this site. For example, there are no statutory objections to the allocation of the site. This is also evidenced in the representations to the application. Neighbour responses generally accept the principle of development in this location but are concerned with the timing of the application and details of it as summarised in the consultation section of this report.
- 6.8 The site is not within any national designations and there is not conflict between the development of this site and the general content of the NPPF. An assessment of the sustainability of this proposal against the NPPF definition is provided below.
- 6.9 The advanced nature of the plan, together with the limited unresolved objections and consistency with the NPPF means that the proposed allocation can be attributed significant weight in decision making.
- 6.10 The manner in which this scheme has come forward ahead of the making of the SCNDP has been a source of great objection in the village, and the Parish Council have objected

strongly to the scheme on the grounds of prematurity. However, arguments of prematurity need to be seen in the context of sustainable development and the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF and CS1 of the Core Strategy.

- 6.11 The council has recently received two planning appeal decisions on major housing proposals; land at Winterbrook, Wallingford (P15/S0191/FUL) and land north of Lower Icknield Way, Chinnor (P15/S0154/O). These appeals were allowed and planning permission granted for the proposed housing development.
- 6.12 Both Inspectors assessing these appeals concluded that we should be applying a higher housing target as set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which means delivering more housing than is currently planned for in our adopted Core Strategy. However, they recognised the strength of our housing distribution strategy, which focuses development to the more sustainable towns and larger villages.
- 6.13 Para.49 of the NPPF specifies that relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Para.14 adds that where relevant policies are out of date, *planning permission should be granted unless:*
- *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole; or*
 - *specific policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.*
- 6.14 The outcome of these two appeal decisions means that the Core Strategy housing supply policies are given less weight in our decision making. Sustainable development should now be permitted unless there is planning harm that outweighs the benefit of providing new housing. Applications for housing should now be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development and should be permitted unless there is planning harm that outweighs the benefit of providing new housing. The impacts of the development are considered below and the planning balance weighed up in the conclusion of the report.

Infrastructure

- 6.15 Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy requires that new development must be supported by appropriate on and off-site infrastructure and services. Through consultations on the application and the neighbourhood plan the infrastructure needs required to mitigate the impact of development have been identified.
- 6.16 On 1 April 2016, the council implemented their Community Infrastructure Levy. This development will pay £150 per square metre towards infrastructure improvements. In addition to the levy specific public transport and on site infrastructure will be secured through a Section 106 legal agreement. The specific requirements of the site that will be included within the legal agreement include:
- Provision of 40% of the scheme as affordable housing
 - A Local Area for Play within the site
 - Open space provision on site with ongoing maintenance requirements
 - £10,000 contribution to public transport and bus stops
 - Contributions towards street naming and bin provision
- 6.17 There is also a condition for the site to provide appropriate access from the B481 to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before commencement of the development and implemented before occupation of the dwellings or in accordance with a programme of works that would also need to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

Layout and Design

- 6.18 Policy D1 of the Local Plan confirms that all new development should be in keeping with the locality, listing twelve elements of good design that proposals should adhere to. This application has been the subject to amendments in April 2016 to address concerns from residents and the tree officer in relation to minor layout issues. These amendments removed the section of footpath behind Bird Court connecting through to Peppard Road. The footpath now runs from Kennylands Road and joints in with the development roads at the earliest opportunity. Other amendments were to move car parking spaces away from tree root protection areas.
- 6.19 The council's urban design officer expressed some concerns about a lack of enclosure along the main access road and around the central area of public open space. This is caused by a reliance on the larger detached units in this part of the site, which include garages and driveways. This weakens the definition of streets. I recognise this concern but consider that the overall level of natural surveillance within the scheme is acceptable.
- 6.20 Generally, house types are used on corner plots that are dual-fronted, ensuring active frontages in both directions. However, this arrangement does lead to private gardens alongside roads. Treatment of boundaries on these plots would be important as the benefits of active frontages would be outweighed by poor quality boundary treatments such as close-boarded fencing. The use of planting and brick walls would be necessary to maintain the overall quality of the urban realm. The urban design officer has highlighted that the proposed materials are not particularly characteristic of the village, which is largely of red brick construction. Specifications of the materials to be used both for the properties and public realm should be required by condition to ensure that they are high quality.
- 6.21 The Crime Prevention Design Adviser raised concerns as part of the previous application about rear access footpaths serving a number of plots. This has not been raised as part of this current application. I acknowledge the point but do not consider these alleys so widespread as to warrant further objection.
- 6.22 The use of rear parking courts has been generally avoided and this is supported as such areas often suffer from lack of natural surveillance and become harsh unattractive environments. The trade-off for this is some parking courts next to the street that increase the hardstanding. One such area is opposite the public open space, where parking spaces serving plots 52-54 are grouped together. The urban design officers identifies that this results in a weakened design in this area of the scheme.
- 6.23 The other weakness identified by the urban design officer relates to the one bedroom maisonettes at plots 37/38 and 52/53. The garden for plots 38 and 52 are physically separated from the dwelling and are instead accessed via a private access adjacent to their allocated parking space. This reduces the usability of the space for residents of those plots and may have benefited from some re-design however the proposal is not unacceptable in its current form.
- 6.24 The council's landscape architect has identified that there is a lack of "green links" within the site, particularly in terms of linking the central public open space to the green link through to Kennylands Road. I acknowledge this point but consider locating the open space centrally is very important to the overall scheme and so this separation is acceptable. This central area of open space is complemented by other smaller areas through the development. A landscaping scheme for both hard and soft landscaping proposal has been included as a condition and it may prove possible to use differing surfacing and planting as cues to link the areas of open space together and the central area to the southwestern corner of the site where the footpath to Kennylands Road enters.

- 6.25 As outlined above, overall the site benefits from good natural surveillance and permeability. I consider the proposed layout, supported by conditions to secure some details around landscaping and materials, to be acceptable.

Neighbour amenity and security

- 6.26 A number of residents of Essex Way have raised concern about the footpath link between the site and Kennylands Road as it will potentially cause security concerns for Essex Way, where private gardens back onto the site along the length of the footpath. The Thames Valley Police Crime Prevention Design Adviser previously identified this weakness in consultation on the previous application. I acknowledge the concern but consider the benefits of the link in terms of linking this site to Kennylands Road and its bus services to comfortably outweigh these concerns. I consider a bespoke planting scheme of thick low-level hedging, with appropriate species, will prevent potential intruders reaching the fences of Essex Way easily. The Crime Prevention Design Adviser also suggested previously the path is kept as wide and straight as possible, with good lighting and that consideration is given to CCTV. These matters are covered by condition that will seek to agree the design details and planting of the footpath link prior to commencement of the development.
- 6.27 I consider this proposal will not cause harm to the amenity of existing residents. This is due to the distances involved between the proposed properties and neighbouring developments within Essex Way or Bird Wood Court. The footpath mentioned above no longer stretches along the southern boundary of the development to Peppard Road behind the properties on Bird Court. This is now a landscaped area, which is covered by the landscaping condition for the site.
- 6.28 In terms of the amenity of future residents, the majority of units benefit from garden sizes that meet or exceed the guidelines outlined in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide (SODG). Any harm experienced by residents who do not enjoy garden sizes in line with the SODG is mitigated by the quality and size of the public open space within the site. There are also a number of occasions where the layout does not achieve the 25 metres back-to-back distance proposed by the SODG as necessary to ensure adequate privacy for residents. However, due to the way the layout is arranged, there are very few houses positioned exactly “square” with one another in the perimeter blocks arrangement, with most being off-set from one another. This mitigates the harm caused by the lesser distances. Furthermore, the SODG remains as a guide, not a tool to be applied strictly.
- 6.29 To prevent existing residents experiencing undue disturbance during construction, a condition requiring a Construction Management Plan has been applied.

Landscape impact

- 6.30 Policy CSEN1 of the adopted Core Strategy states, *“The district’s distinct landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced.”* The policy goes on to state *“Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character of the area.”* It also states, *“High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and planning decisions will have regard to their setting.”* Policy CSQ3 of the Core Strategy says, *“Planning permission will be granted for new development that is of a high quality and inclusive design that...responds positively to and respects the character of the site and its surroundings”*
- 6.31 Turning to the Local Plan, Policy G2 states, *“The district’s countryside, settlements and environmental resources will be protected from adverse developments”*, Policy G4 confirms, *“The need to protect the countryside for its own sake is an important consideration when*

assessing proposals for development.” Finally, Policy C4 states, “Development which would damage the attractive landscape setting of the settlements of the district will not be permitted. The effect of any proposal on important local landscape features which contribute to the visual and historic character and appearance of a settlement will be considered”.

- 6.32 The proposed site is in a sensitive location, although it does not fall within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding natural beauty (AONB), with the boundary with the AONB being the opposite side of Peppard Road. The application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
- 6.33 The LVIA demonstrates that views from other public vantage points are limited, due to existing land forms and vegetation. The LVIA considers views from Kennylands Road, Essex Way, Westleigh Drive and the Millennium Green. In all circumstances, views of the site are either impossible or extremely limited.
- 6.34 The proposal results in the removal of approximately 21 metres of existing vegetation to create the access for the development. The layout allows for a deep area of replacement planting behind the existing hedge to provide further screening on the boundary with Peppard Road. The council's landscape architect recommends that a scheme of around 3-8m of planting is conditioned to include large-scale trees that will contribute towards breaking up views into the site from the AONB. There is more than sufficient space to accommodate this and the details will be secured through the proposed landscaping condition.
- 6.35 The council's landscape architect also identified that the proposed highway works to Peppard Road will result on a loss grass verge and sporadic highway hedging along, which in her opinion will have a negative impact on landscape character at that point. In particular, the proposal includes the widening of the road to accommodate a right-hand turn lane, removal of some of the grass verge to provide a new pedestrian and cycle route, new road markings and street lighting. The landscape architect has requested new planting on the eastern side of Peppard Road to mitigate the impact of the highway works on the character. Given this land lies outside the ownership of the applicant, there are no powers available to the council to insist on this planting. Some of the verge on the eastern side of Peppard Road may fall within highway land and new planting may be able to form part of the works that are covered by condition and will be implemented through an agreement between the applicant and the county council. However, this still lies outside the reasonable control of this council and so I have assessed this scheme on the basis no hedge can be provided on the eastern side of Peppard Road.
- 6.36 The LVIA accompanying the amended plans contends that the retention and enhancement of the Peppard Road western boundary will mitigate the impact of the proposals on the AONB to such an extent *“the character and scenic beauty of the AONB would be conserved and not be adversely affected by the proposals.”* I accept that the erection of 65 houses, and associated highways work, on this site will have an impact on the landscape. On balance, the proposal takes all available opportunities to mitigate this impact to an acceptable degree so that, when weighed in the planning balance, the impact of the proposal on landscape does not warrant a refusal of planning permission. Conditions covering the landscaping and lighting strategies for the site are proposed to ensure the opportunities for minimising the impact of the development on landscape is appropriately considered and implemented.

Impact on trees

- 6.37 The tree data on which the arboricultural reports is based was completed about four years ago. Some of the trees referred to are no longer present. The arboricultural method statement will need to be amended to reflect any changes identified. This will be covered

by a tree protection condition.

- 6.38 The council's tree officer highlighted some issues relating to impact of parking spaces on root protection areas in front of unit 10 33, 34, 35 and 36. Where possible spaces have been relocated. For example, 4 of the 10 spaces associated with 33, 34, 35 and 36 have been moved to the north western boundary, next to the herb farm maze. There was not space to move all of the spaces without moving them too far from the dwellings to which they relate. The remaining spaces have been changed from perpendicular parking to parallel parking so that they are further away from root protection area of the trees. The tree protection condition requires the details of the materials and method of construction of any roadway, parking, pathway or other surfacing within a root protection area, to be of a 'no dig' construction method in accordance with the principles of Arboricultural Practice Note 12 "Through the Trees to Development", and in accordance with current industry best practice; and as appropriate for the type of roadway required in relation to its usage. I consider that this is an acceptable solution.

Ecology

- 6.39 The council's ecologist has identified that the proposals are acceptable subject to conditions to protect important species on the site and promote the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity in accordance with policy CSB1 of the Core Strategy and policy C8 of the local plan.

Archaeology

- 6.40 A field evaluation has revealed no artefacts of interest so the county archaeologist has confirmed there are no objections on this point.

Contamination

- 6.41 The application is supported by a Contaminated Land Ground Investigation Report that confirms there is no evidence of contamination within the site.

Foul drainage, flooding and water supply

- 6.42 From an initial review of their assets, Thames Water has identified that there is a lack of sewer capacity in the area. Further investigations are required by condition to establish exactly what capacity issues exist and how the developer would need to address these to meet the requirements of their development.

- 6.43 I am satisfied, having reviewed the consultation responses, that surface water from the site can be appropriately drained. A detailed drainage scheme for this site would need to ensure that all surface water run-off is accommodated within the confines of the site and discharged in existing drainage channels in a controlled manner. The Environment Agency has identified that site is above both a secondary and principal aquifer. If infiltration drainage is proposed it must therefore be demonstrated that it will not pose a risk to groundwater quality. A condition that requires approval of surface water drainage systems that meet the Environment Agency criteria set out in their Groundwater Protection: Principles and Practice (GP3) document is required.

Highway safety

- 6.44 Policy T1 of the Local Plan requires all new developments to provide for a safe and convenient access to the public highway network for all users. Policy T2 requires appropriate parking, manoeuvring and turning space within all new development, including larger vehicles such as refuse lorries or emergency vehicles.

- 6.45 The application is supported by a Highways, Transportation and Accessibility Statement. This has considered the current traffic flows on local roads and junctions and assessed the likely impact from the additional movements associated with this scheme. Peppard Road

and its associated junctions was found to be operating well within its capacity at peak times and can easily accommodate the additional traffic from this development. A ghosted right turn lane into the development is proposed to prevent traffic trying to turn into the development disrupting traffic flows. The proposed access point will provide adequate visibility splays in both directions.

- 6.46 The Highways Authority has confirmed no objections to the scheme. They have confirmed that the proposed access is designed in accordance with the relevant guidance and it can be achieved in this location. This would be subject to a condition that requires further detailed design work required, including details of improvements to the footpath on Peppard Road so that is suitable for pedestrians and cyclists alike. The works would be implemented through an agreement between the county council and the applicant, which is separate but linked to the planning process.

- 6.47 The Highways Authority has requested a Section 106 financial contribution £10,000 to bus stop infrastructure to serve the site. I am satisfied these contributions are necessary, related and proportionate to the impact of this development. A Residential Travel Plan is also required by condition. This is necessary to encourage new residents to use sustainable forms of transport.

- 6.48 The application proposed 170 parking spaces. There have been objections that the scheme does not fully accord with the requirements of the emerging neighbourhood plan policy SCMRP3 relating to parking.

- 6.49 An analysis of the requirements of the emerging policy, the existing county and district parking standards based on the proposed housing mix is provided in the table below. This shows that the proposal delivers in excess of the county and district standards for parking and is only very marginally short (1.9 spaces) when assessed against the emerging policy.

		Parking requirements based on proposed mix				Proposed parking in application	
		Based on SCNDP parking standards		Based on OCC/SODC parking standards			
Bedrooms	Proposed housing mix	Allocated spaces	Unallocated spaces	Allocated spaces	Unallocated spaces	Allocated spaces	Unallocated spaces
1	4	4	0	4	1.6	4	11
2	27	54	8.1	54	8.1	59	
3	18	36	7.2	36	5.4	42	
4	10	30	5	20	4	30	
5	6	24	3.6	12	3.6	24	
Total	65	148	23.9	126	22.7	159	11
Overall total		171.9		148.7		170	

- 6.50 The shortfall against the emerging policy is related to the number of unallocated spaces. The development is comprised of houses and four maisonettes all of which meet or indeed exceed requirements for allocated spaces.

- 6.51 I consider that the parking provision for the development is acceptable for the type and mix of homes provided. There are no objections from the county council in relation to impact on highway safety. Larger vehicles will be able to move around the site freely and this has

been confirmed through an updated tracking drawing. The proposal accords with the requirements of Policies T1 and T2 and will have an acceptable impact on highway safety.

Affordable Housing and Housing Mix

- 6.52 Policy CSH4 of the Core Strategy requires a mix of housing to be provided to meet current demand. The district currently has two published documents for considering housing mix - the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2014 and the South Oxfordshire Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) 2012.
- 6.53 The emerging SCNDP policy SCH2 seeks to require new development to take account of, and address the housing needs of residents within Sonning Common, unless viability or other material considerations show a compelling justification for a different mix.
- 6.54 The **HNA** was a more thorough assessment than the SHMA and is based on original survey data and 2001 census data using the ODPM model and Guide to Good Practice.
- 6.55 The **SHMA** uses secondary data from the 2011 census and GL Hearn demographic projections. It suggests that councils should have regard to other up to date evidence of need and the existing mix and turnover of properties at a local level.

Market housing

- 6.56 The districts Housing Needs Assessment provides detail on the recommended mix of housing type and size. The assessment found a shortfall of smaller units, especially two bedroom properties, in both the market and affordable sectors. The HNA indicated 50% 1 and 2 bedrooms and 50% 3 bedrooms plus.
- 6.57 The SHMA also found a shortfall in smaller units but recommended for most units to be 2 and 3 bedrooms. The findings from both are summarised below.

Market homes (%)	1 bed	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4+ bedrooms
HNA	50		50	
SHMA	6	27	43	24

- 6.58 The mix should be informed by this evidence but should also respond to the character of the setting and the layout of the scheme to help develop distinct character areas and variety within the development.
- 6.59 The proposed market housing mix confirms 14 of the 39 market units would be 2 bedrooms, equating to 36% of the total market units. This is broadly in line with the SHMA mix and I consider this is acceptable taken against evidence as a whole.

Affordable housing

- 6.60 Government Welfare reform, introduced since the production of the SHMA, has seen a significant increase in the demand for two bedroom accommodation for rent with a reduction in demand for larger rented family homes due to the changes in eligibility for Housing Benefit.
- 6.61 The highest demand for shared ownership properties is also for two bedroom houses, therefore the affordable housing mix is more suitably delivered with a higher proportion of two bedroom properties and a lower number of three bedroom properties than indicated in the SHMA guidance. In addition, the SHMA recognises that, whilst the demand for one bedroom accommodation is also high, this size of accommodation provides less flexibility in meeting changing household need and that there is potential for greater turnover as a result of household moves. The requirement for councils to meet the needs of homeless families may also indicate a need for a bias away from one-bedroom to two bedroom provision.

6.62 The council's housing officer identified that the mix of affordable housing should reflect the significant demand for two bedroom units for both rented and shared ownership tenures with a subsequent reduction in the number of four bedroom units. It is important that the smaller units provide flexibility and therefore the housing officer expects the 2 bedroom units to be able to accommodate 4 persons and some of the 3 bedroom units to accommodate 6 persons.

6.63 Taking account of the importance of two bedroom units and the need for large three bedroom properties within the affordable housing mix the Head of Housing has agreed that the council's preferred size mix is delivered. This has an impact on the amount that registered providers will pay for the units. Therefore, in order to achieve the preferred mix it was necessary to change one two bedroom property from rent to shared ownership. This change results in a tenure mix comprising 70% rented and 30% shared ownership overall. I consider that although this is not fully policy compliant in terms of tenure split, by one home, this would give a better mix of properties to meet need. Therefore, we consider this to be a reasonable and justified compromise position that does not undermine the principles of policy CH3.

6.64 The agreed affordable housing will be secured through a Section 106 agreement. This is detailed in the table below.

	Rented units	Shared ownership units
1 bedroom maisonettes	4	0
2 bedroom houses	9	4
3 bedroom (5 person) houses	4	2
3 bedroom (6 person) houses	1	2
Total	18 (70%)	8 (30%)

6.65 The emerging SCNDP seeks an even greater number of smaller market properties than required by the district's evidence. The SCNDP mix by bedroom is compared to the proposal in the table below.

	SCNDP expected mix for whole site	Proposed mix for whole site
1 bed	13%	6%
2 bed	38%	42%
3 bed	41%	28%
4+ bed	8%	24%

6.66 Overall, the SCNDP mix would require the whole site to have 51% of homes as 1 and 2 bedrooms and 49% as 3+ family homes. The proposal includes 48% of total homes as 1 and 2 bedrooms and 52% as 3+ bedroom family homes. I consider that the proposal balances the evidence as a whole appropriately and provides an acceptable variety of types, sizes and tenures of homes that responds to the character of the area.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND PLANNING BALANCE

7.1 The report describes the proposals in full and assesses the proposal against the relevant material planning considerations. In assessing the application, I have had regard to paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF which requires Local Planning Authorities to approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development where possible. The three strands of sustainable development are set out at paragraph 7 of the NPPF as economic, social and

environmental. All these have been considered throughout the report and my conclusions against each of the strands is summarised below.

Economic role

- 7.2 The Government has made clear its view that house building plays an important role in promoting economic growth. In economic terms, the scheme would provide construction jobs and some local investment during its build out, as well as longer term expenditure in the local economy supporting the ongoing vibrancy of the village. I consider that moderate weight should be afforded to this benefit.

Social role

- 7.3 The proposal helps to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of 65 houses towards those required to meet the needs of present and future generations. It also does this by creating a high quality built environment, in a sustainable location with accessible local services close by for new residents to use.

Environmental role

- 7.4 In environmental terms, the scheme offers opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement, which is a matter to which I afford moderate weight. Against this, I have found that the scheme would cause some harm to the 'rural' character of Peppard Road through the highway improvements. However, given my wider assessment of highway safety matters I afford this harm limited weight. The development would result in the loss of farmland. However, some loss will be inevitable in order to secure the delivery of the levels of housing required in South Oxfordshire over the plan period. In addition, given the very substantial area of the district that is covered by protected landscapes or Green Belt, the opportunity to provide new dwellings on a suitable site that is unaffected by these designations weighs significantly in favour of the proposal.
- 7.5 The site is also an emerging allocation in the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan (SCNDP). The advanced nature of the plan, together with the limited unresolved objections and consistency with the NPPF means that the proposed allocation can be attributed significant weight in decision making.
- 7.6 Taking into account the benefits of the development and weighing these against the limited harm, I consider that the proposal represents a sustainable development, consistent with Para.14 of the NPPF and Policy CS1 of the SOCS. The proposal would contribute towards the objective to significantly boost the supply of housing, consistent with Para.47 of the NPPF.
- 7.7 Therefore, placing all of the relevant material considerations in the balance, including the weight of the SCNDP, I conclude that the limited adverse impacts would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal and recommend the application for approval.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 **To delegate authority to grant planning permission to the Head of Planning subject to the completion of the Section 106 agreement and the following conditions:**

1. **Commencement three years - full planning permission.**
2. **Approved plans.**
3. **Sample materials required (all).**
4. **Fire hydrants and water supply.**
5. **Secured by design part 2.**

6. Off site highways works including new vehicular access.
7. Estate accesses, driveways and turning areas.
8. Parking and manoeuvring areas retained.
9. Construction traffic management.
10. Construction hours restriction.
11. Appropriate provision for the control of noise and dust.
12. Residential travel plan.
13. No surface water drainage to highway.
14. Surface water drainage works (details required).
15. Foul drainage works (details required).
16. Drainage strategy waste water infrastructure.
17. Landscape management plan.
18. Landscaping scheme (trees and shrubs only).
19. Boundary walls and fences.
20. Footpath details.
21. Lighting.
22. Tree protection (detailed).
23. Reptile mitigation strategy.
24. Biodiversity method statement.
25. Childrens' play space.

Author: Carolyn Organ
Telephone: 01235 540546
Email: planning@southandvale.gov.uk