

<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P21/S0343/FUL</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL APPLICATION
<b>REGISTERED</b>	21.1.2021
<b>PARISH</b>	GREAT MILTON
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Caroline Newton
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Blanc Restaurants Ltd
<b>SITE</b>	Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons, Church Road, Great Milton, OX44 7PD
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Full planning permission for the erection of a new Wellness Spa, Bistro, Garden Villas, Garden Rooms, Pavilions and Storage Barns, minor extensions and alterations to the existing Grade II* Manor House, former Stables building and Staff Facilities building, new highway access, internal road and car parking areas, limited demolition and associated works. (Amended plans and information September 2021, Archaeological Evaluation Report October 2021 and Amended plans and additional information April and June 2022).
<b>OFFICER</b>	Cathie Scotting

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The application is referred to the Planning Committee as the proposals represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and are a departure from the Development Plan. Great Milton Parish Council have not expressed a clear position on the proposals and their views are reported below.

1.2 The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) (Direction) 2021 requires the local planning authority to consult the Secretary of State before granting planning permission for certain types of development, and this includes buildings over 1000 square metres in the Green Belt or any other development which, by reason of its scale or nature or location, would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

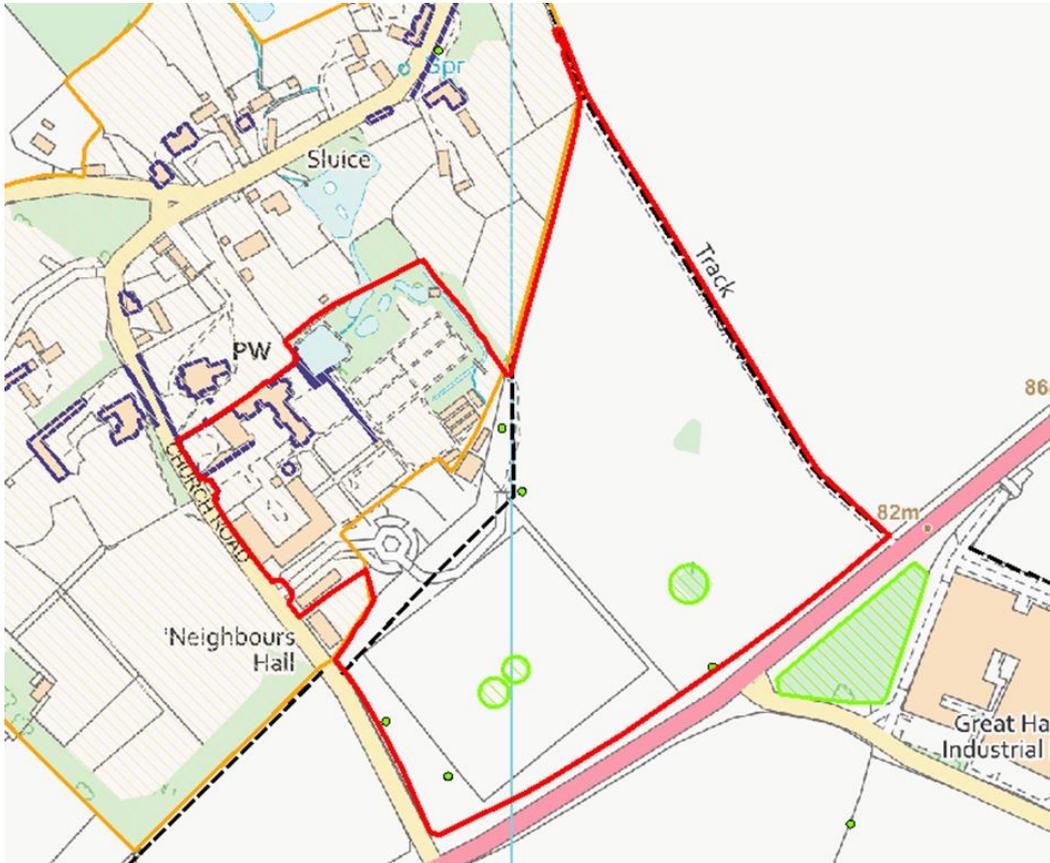
**2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS**

2.1 Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons has been operating since 1984 when Raymond Blanc purchased the manor house for a restaurant and hotel. The manor house dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is on the edge of the village of Great Milton adjacent to the church grounds. The overall application site area is 10.6 hectares incorporating existing buildings, gardens and open fields. Constraints and designations relevant to the consideration of this application are listed below and highlighted on the GIS extract below:

- Oxfordshire Green Belt (whole site)
- Listed Buildings:
  - II\* The Manor House and garden walls to rear
  - II\* Entrance gates and flanking walls approx. 70m. SW of Manor House.
  - II Dovehouse 20 m south of Manor House

- II Entrance screen approx. 60m. SW of the Manor house.
- Great Milton Conservation Area
- Tree Preservation Order
- Public rights of way (Great Milton Footpaths 11 and 12)

Application Site



- 2.2 Church Road leads north from the A329 into the village of Great Milton. The manor house has two access points from Church Road, the northern one comprising the listed gates, flanking walls and entrance screen. The southern one accesses the parking areas for visitors and staff, and also staff accommodation and service buildings.
- 2.3 The manor house along with other buildings and structures within the grounds are situated within the Great Milton Conservation Area. Walls enclose the inner manor house garden, some listed in their own right. Beyond the wall to the east there is a Japanese ponded garden created by Raymond Blanc in 1980's which incorporates a historic fish pond and the renowned kitchen garden. Further towards the south are associated buildings including poly tunnels and an open barn housing a waste digester. The outer gardens lie on lower ground than the inner manor house garden and within the Japanese garden particularly there are some level differences.
- 2.4 Beyond the envelope of the built structures and formal gardens are the existing car parking areas for staff and visitors enclosed by hedgerows and trees. An open field is to the south and east and it is bounded by the A329 and Church Lane. This field is relatively flat on the western side and contains an orchard but to the north and east the land rises slowly and then more steeply by about 6 metres. across the whole site towards the A329, Church Road, the manor house, and the church beyond.

- 2.5 Public footpath GMFP12 crosses the field from Church Road, edging the more enclosed area of the site through the open field and rising with the terrain to the elevated footpath GMFP11 at the top of the field. From this juncture the path goes south towards Great Haseley and north towards the village. There are views from the public footpaths.
- 2.6 Trees within the Conservation Area are protected and this affects all the trees within the gardens of the manor house. Within the open fields there are other protected trees plus more along the boundary of A329 and Church Road, important for the landscape setting of the site
- 2.7 Neighbouring properties include the Neighbours Hall, situated off Church Road and surrounded on other sides by the site, St. Marys Church to the north, a Grade 1 listed building, and the residential properties of Priors Gate and The Priory. Other residential properties in the vicinity are The Great House (also listed), Brookbank and Priory Cottage.
- 2.8 The restaurant caters for 80 covers and currently the hotel accommodation comprises 32 hotel suites, 21 within the stables and 10 within the manor house and one within the Dovecote. The establishment has gained an international reputation, the restaurant has retained two Michelin stars since 1984 and the hotel is 5 star. Almost 60% of its staff are residents in South Oxfordshire with the majority based in Great Milton and the surrounding villages. In 2014 the property was acquired by Belmond, a luxury travel company, and was rebranded to Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat Saisons and in 2019 Belmond joined (LVMH) Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton.
- 3.0 **THE PROPOSALS**
- 3.1 The overall objective of the development is to provide an upgraded and larger hotel that will be more competitive with comparable standards of luxury/ top quality hotel establishments. Key to this is the provision of a spa, an additional dining offer, increased accommodation and the renovations. The proposals take the form of extensions to the manor house and stables, also requiring listed building consent, and a large number of new buildings situated within the wider gardens. A new access from the A329 would be formed accessing two new large parking areas.
- 3.2 A replacement restaurant conservatory to the manor house is proposed as well as small extensions to the stables and staff accommodation. There would be two large buildings, the spa and bistro, but in all there would be 31 new buildings/structures comprising:
- 12 buildings associated with and including the spa in the gardens,
  - 7 buildings including the bistro and new hotel suites in the gardens
  - 12 service buildings / structures, comprising security hut, arrivals pavilions, recycling pergola, relocated poly tunnels and new agricultural buildings.
- 3.3 The net increase in floorspace will be 4292 sq. m (GEA). This represents an increase of around 75% over existing floorspace. Employment positions would increase from 176 employees to 259 (full time equivalent).
- 3.4 A masterplan of the site is attached at [Appendix 1](#). Due to the volume of drawings only a limited selection of other drawings is appended to the report. All the drawings can be viewed on the council's website. The proposals could be classified into various elements which are described below.

### **Access and parking**

- 3.5 The arrival to the establishment is to be reconfigured and accessed from the A329. Visitors to the site would pass a new security hut and drive through the existing orchard to a new arrivals pavilion (two buildings) where a valet service would operate. The new visitor car parking area (150 spaces) is located to the north adjacent to the public footpath.
- 3.6 A new area for staff parking (100 spaces) and deliveries would be situated to the left of the main access and extend parallel to Church Road almost to the public footpath. The entrance to the staff parking area would contain a new circular waste and recycling pergola structure. It is intended that deliveries would be taken from this area to the hotel buildings by electric buggy.
- 3.7 The overall amount of car parking spaces would increase from 90 to 250 an increase of 160 spaces. Combined the new car parks and service roads are in the region of 1 hectare in size. The application (Planning Statement March 2021) proposes 10% of car parking spaces to include electric vehicle charging in both staff and visitor parking areas. Cycle parking for staff at a ratio of 1:12 and electric cycle charging facilities are to be provided, plus electric bicycles will be made available to guests.
- 3.8 The development will also support a public bus subsidy from first use (or alternatively a shuttle bus for staff), and monies for public footpath improvements and travel plan monitoring.

### **Changes to the manor house and stables**

- 3.9 The purpose of the changes to the manor house is to permit better functioning of the kitchen, restaurant improvements to the bedrooms, provide downstairs toilets for restaurant guests and improved servicing arrangements. The detailed internal works to the listed building are described and considered in the accompanying application on the agenda for listed building consent: P21/S428/FUL. The main external changes are a replacement conservatory extension ([Appendix 2](#)) for the main restaurant, moving the existing Edwardian bay window with a small linked extension and an enlarged first floor gable window extension on the northern east elevation, facing the church.
- 3.10 The stables are to have a two storey extension in the south west corner near to Church Road and a small single storey extension in the south east corner. This is to provide office and staff facilities.

### **Spa building, gym and treatment rooms**

- 3.11 The spa building ([Appendix 3](#)) is designed in a classical vernacular with a domed roof structure and parapet. The garden facing elevations are largely glazed broken by columns and the rear elevation incorporates reconstituted Cotswold stone. It is located within the current kitchen garden area close to the boundary with the garden of the Priory along which lies mature hedge and tree planting.
- 3.12 The spa building has an approximate 700 sq. m footprint, with an overall floor area of 1114 sq. m. Revisions have sunk the building (by removing the first floor and creating a basement) so that the overall height is reduced to 5.7m (parapet) and 7.8m (top of the glazed dome). On the ground floor the spa building contains a swimming pool, steam, plunge pools and sauna areas, a welcome lounge and casual dining, changing facilities, storage and staff offices. Within the basement will be treatment

rooms, relaxation lounge and a plant room. Dispersed amongst the Japanese gardens, ponds and mature planting are eleven further small buildings including a gym, treatment rooms and hamman. Example drawings of these buildings are in [Appendix 4](#).

#### **Bistro and garden hotel rooms**

- 3.13 These buildings are situated in the existing gardens and upon areas currently occupied by polytunnels, service buildings and the car parking areas. The bistro ([Appendix 5](#)) is the second largest building, with a ground floor of 560 sq. m and mezzanine floor of 168m and a ridge height of 7.5m. It takes the form of a barn with panel glazing along the front and rear elevations and two terraces facing towards the garden and towards the fields, plus large glazed gable ends. There is no glazing in the roof mass.
- 3.14 There are seven hotel buildings accommodating 10/12 additional bedroom suites. The Presidential Villa (1) and Deluxe Garden Guest rooms (4) will have clay tile pitched roofs and elevations of Cotswold rubble stone. The Garden suites and guestrooms, (2/4) Wildflower suite (1) and Garden Villas (2) will have flat sedum roofs and elevations of Cotswold rubble stone. Recent amendments incorporate linked and enclosing walls between some buildings. Garden accommodation is shown in [Appendix 6](#).

#### **Staff facilities and service buildings**

- 3.15 A two storey extension to the staff accommodation will provide a large meeting room and storage. The existing staff accommodation provides lockers and changing facilities, laundry, a kitchen and dining room and a small meeting room.
- 3.16 A number of small buildings are proposed throughout the site, the security hut, arrivals pavilion and the refuse and recycling pergolas. There will also be an electricity sub-station building of Cotswold rubble stone and a clay tiled roof located close to the existing southern entrance on Church Road adjacent to the staff block.

#### **Agricultural buildings**

- 3.17 Within the field there will be 5 relocated polytunnels and 3 new agricultural buildings for machinery and storage, two of them incorporating an office and toilet. The three agricultural buildings range from 4.5m to 7.5 m ridge heights and are situated on terrain which rises about 4 metres over the extent of the buildings alongside the public footpath. The highest building will be situated at the lower end. A section of these buildings and visitor car park is in [Appendix 7](#).

#### **Landscaping proposals**

- 3.18 The landscape masterplan reflects landscape, ecological and tree proposals. The existing orchard would remain along with the majority of existing trees and vegetation. The development would lead to the loss of around 30 trees including 6 Category B trees (moderate quality) but no category A trees (high quality).
- 3.19 A new vineyard is proposed on the field on the south facing slope. Between the orchard and vineyard a new kitchen garden and polytunnels are proposed. Native shrubland and new trees are interspersed in these locations. A hedgerow around the perimeter of the visitor car parking will be provided. The existing right of way is informal grassland and a flowering lawn route is proposed. New tree planting is also

proposed close to the boundary with the A329 and around the deliveries pergola. Further biodiversity is provided by a pond and reed beds are located close to the access and measures to support habitats and roosts are proposed for birds, hedgehogs, amphibians and bats. A biodiversity net gain of over 10% would be achieved.

### Phasing

3.20 The phased implementation of the works is proposed as follows:

- Phase 1 – Access from the A329 and works in the fields including the security hut service roads, staff parking, visitor parking, agricultural barns, relocation of polytunnels
- Phase 2 – Works within the existing built envelope the extension to staff facilities, the arrival pavilions, bistro and hotel garden villas, and commencement of spa buildings
- Phase 3 - Refurbishment of Manor House, replacement conservatory, 21-29-completion of the spa buildings.

3.21 The phases are structured so that Phase 1 (approx. 6 months) would be implemented without any impact on the existing facilities and Phases 1 & 2 (approximately 2 –2.5 years) enable Le Manoir to keep operating at a similar capacity of the existing business whilst Phase 3 works are undertaken.

### Summary of amendments

3. 22 Key amendments submitted throughout the process include:

- Removal of cookery school building, now accommodated in bistro building
- Reduction in volume of Bistro (21%) and Spa (19%)
- Spa building sunk to reduce height and incorporate basement
- Overall minor reductions to footprint and volume of hotel villas
- Relocation of buildings to respect tree root protection areas
- Removal of solar panels from visitor parking area (September 2021) and reintroduction (April 2022)
- Visitor car park has been revised to a more informal layout.
- The angle of the pitch to the conservatory roofs reduced and the framework lightened to be in a bronzed metal rather than painted timber.
- The Edwardian bay window to the Manor House is retained and extended to the garden terrace under a flat lead roof behind a parapet
- Alterations to villas including linked stone walls

3.23 Further information was submitted in June to clarify elements of the proposals, including the access, building detail and the polytunnel dimensions. This information does not alter the proposals and is on the website.

### 4.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Comments from consultees are summarised below. The full comments can be viewed under the reference number on the website. The comments reported are the latest position from consultees, previous comments are reported where relevant.

4.2	Great Milton Parish Council	Latest comments May 2022 (Vote: 2 for, 1 against, 2 abstentions). The parish comments include views expressed at the parish meeting covering the following matters and concerns:
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	<p>Scale: The need for extent of development, spa offerings are usually on larger expanses of land. The development would futureproof Le Manoir and its sustainability.</p> <p>Footprint: Little evidence that the scheme had reduced in footprint</p> <p>Access and traffic: Junction with the A329 is unsafe given its proximity to Church Road and Haseley junctions, yet it was acknowledged that OCC have no objection. Additional traffic through the village and road safety implications on village roads in darkness.</p> <p>Heritage and tradition: Development does not relate to intimate country hotel, removal of vegetable garden.</p> <p>Biodiversity: Loss of wildflower meadow, plans for car parking in fields.</p> <p>Drainage: Concern about the impact on drainage, especially large increases in water.</p> <p>Process: A lack of engagement on the latest plans, lack of a model, a huge amount of material to consider and navigate.</p> <p>Previous comments</p> <p>October 2021: Support the application but notes concerns over scale, car parking, use of neighbours hall, access, inclusivity and use by local residents, drainage, odour.</p> <p>March 2021: Although the Parish Council supports the scheme, it also shares the concerns of residents on the overwhelming size and effects on flora and fauna.</p>
<p>Great Haseley Parish Council -</p>	<p>March 2021: Concern about the potential adverse impact on the junction of Rectory Road from Great Haseley, and Great Milton on the A329, with the proposal for a new entrance to Le Manoir being added very close to the existing junctions, especially given the volume of traffic and speed of vehicles on the A329.</p>
<p>Historic England (South East) -</p>	<p>June 2022 (Various emails): That with the amendments sought by condition the scheme represents a low level of harm and are content for this harm to be weighed against public benefits as directed by paragraph 202 of the NPPF.</p> <p>May 2022: Further information and design development has addressed many, but not all, of previously raised concerns. Taking all these revisions together we consider that the proposals would now entail a moderate level of harm to the significance of both the manor and conservation area.</p> <p>We believe that there is scope for further improvements to the design of some elements, which could reduce the impact of the new facilities without compromising the aspirations of the applicant. If our remaining concerns are satisfactorily addressed, we would be content for your Council to balance the remaining harm against any public benefits associated with the proposals.</p> <p>Previous comments:</p> <p>Objection due to the scale of development and its design, which would result in unjustified harm to the significance of a Grade II* listed building and the conservation area. The application does not clearly set out the impact of the proposals on the significance of</p>

	the grade II* listed building and are not clearly and convincingly justified.
Conservation Officer	<p>Overall, I support the proposals. The amended plans have taken on board concerns and further assessment work has been done to inform internal alterations and ensure no historic fabric is impacted.</p> <p>Previous comments: December 2021: Unable to support the applications. The massing of structures remains large compared with the principles discussed at pre-app is still an issue. No revisions regarding proposed alterations to the Manor House itself have been submitted. Issues that require resolution for the listed building are all still outstanding.</p>
OCC (Archaeology)	No objection subject to conditions.
OCC (Highways)	No objection, subject to conditions, the completion of S278 agreement for highway works and the following S106 obligations: Public bus subsidy (or shuttle bus) Travel Plan Monitoring £1,426.00 Dec 2019 RPIX Public Rights of Way £10,000.00 Feb 2021 Baxter
OCC Public Rights of Way Officer	No objection subject to details of footpath improvements. Require a contribution for improvements to the public footpath network
OCC (Lead Flood Authority)	No objection subject to a condition on a sustainable drainage scheme.
Drainage officer	No objections subject to conditions for a sustainable drainage scheme, SUDS compliance and details of foul drainage
Landscape Architect	<p>Concerns: The guest parking has been changed to a less formal arrangement which is an improvement, this would be improved further if the hedge was continued through the centre of the car park to provide separation between the rows. I remain concerned about the re-introduced solar panels above areas of parking, which I don't consider to be appropriate in the rural green belt setting.</p> <p>Previous comments: Disagree with findings of LVA The parking canopies are inappropriate in the rural landscape. No additional planting is proposed to screen low level and winter views of the new staff parking and delivery area from Church Lane Reinforced grass as a surface in the parking bays, is only appropriate for occasional overflow parking or temporary use. Surfaced paths within the field area should be kept to a minimum. Light spillage from buildings Insufficient buffer planting and inappropriate boundary treatments. Loss of screening and containment due to removal of mature existing vegetation Lack of information / clarification</p>

Forestry Officer	No objection subject to condition. The amended site layout and updated Arboricultural Impact Assessment has addressed my previous concerns. Previous comments – Objections to garden villa accommodation and relationship to trees.
Countryside Officer	No objection subject to conditions: The submitted metric assessment has concluded that development can comply with the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the SOLP and will deliver a net gain for biodiversity on site.
South and Vale District of CPRE	Objection. Refers to previous comments.  Previous comments: The development is contrary to Green Belt policy, the proposed development will be visible from the public footpaths in particular the covered parking area will impact on the open views. Contrary to policies on lighting, Great Milton is a village without streetlights and experiences low levels of light pollution. Harm to the dark skies and wildlife from light pollution from the road access and extensive glazing Safety concerns about the proposed site access from the A329 and the information in the Transport Assessment.
CPRE (Rights of Way) -	Objection: The development would obscure open views from footpaths.
Energy consultant	No objection: The amount of Solar PV to achieve the result (40% reduction) is significant, 900m <sup>2</sup> , to be sited both on the car park canopy and the buildings.
Economic Development	Support: The proposed development would contribute positively to the economic development of the district.
Air Quality	No observations to make subject to the mitigation measures outlined in section 6: Mitigation Measures of the Air Quality Assessment report.
Environmental Protection (Noise)	May 2022: No objection subject to a condition regarding plant noise assessment to ensure target noise emission limits at neighbouring properties.
Contaminated Land	No objection subject to a condition requiring monitoring and if necessary remedial works.
Waste Management	No observations
Urban Design Officer	I can support this application based on the information submitted and the character and masterplanning principles having been maintained.
Crime Prevention advisor	No response following submission of application security and safety statement. Previous comments: Objection

	Concerns particularly relating to surveillance, security, excessive permeability and car parking. Concerns that there are several points of access into the hotel grounds adjoining the public right of way, which are not directly overlooked by any surveillance and are not resistant to unauthorised entry. Storage barns, kitchen gardens and polytunnels could be vulnerable to theft
Environment Agency	No comments
Thames Water Development Control	No objection to water network and water treatment infrastructure capacity subject to conditions.

4.3 Comments from 63 neighbouring properties have been received. These comprise:  
 36 letters of representations to original scheme  
 35 letters of representations to first amendments  
 24 letters of representations to final amendments

4.4 There are some comments supporting the principle or elements of the proposals:

- Recognise business has to adapt to meet current commercial expectations and ensure ongoing viability and sustainability.
- Support principle but have concerns
- Addition of Bistro will mean more inclusivity
- Support new bus service to the village
- Support the principle of a spa at Le Manoir
- Fully support application and boost to local economy

4.5 The majority of representations raise concerns and object to the proposals for the summarised under the following topic areas:

General:

- Proposals do not fit in with the current ethos of excellence and sensitivity to landscape, replacing the kitchen garden with garden villas removes the very basis on which Le Manoir is founded
- Huge increase in development, increase in floor area by 75%, majority of buildings remain as original sized, revised proposals do not significantly alter scale of project
- Negative impact on village character, over-dominating in relation to village,
- lack of infrastructure in village to support this development
- Le Manoir have been part of community but cannot support current proposals
- A spa proposal in the 1990's was refused

Green Belt and Countryside:

- Development and intrusion of buildings in the Green Belt
- Solar panels over car parks intrusive to landscape
- Revised location for kitchen garden unsuitable due to exposure and security, is likely to fail
- Size and visual impact of car parks, underground parking should be explored
- There are no relevant special circumstances, only profit for international company
- Destruction of wildflower and natural fields

Public footpath:

- Negative change to character, outlook and setting of footpaths, loss of valuable amenity.

- Can the footpath be diverted so that views across the fields be maintained.
- Concern where dog walkers can walk

Heritage and built development:

- Development is too large and out of proportion with garden and Manor
- Damage to the Conservation Area, out of keeping with Great Milton character
- Flat roofs are odds with historic nature of original property
- Scale of development and harm to listed buildings
- Architecture should match excellence of place and have own architectural identity,
- Design is pastiche, stereotypical and generic historicism
- Scale, size, design buildings, particularly spa bistro, presidential villa
- Alternative traditional materials more appropriate

Sustainability and Energy:

- Huge increase in energy requirements and water use
- No evidence of green energy and traffic generation will be immense. New development should meet highest conservation standards.
- Development at this scale is not sustainable, proposals do not make sense at a time of climate crisis,
- Significant environmental and visual impact,
- Development at odds with climate emergency, and the Manoir's own marketing / branding on sustainability

Access and Traffic:

- Road safety, new access onto A329 is dangerous
- Traffic Volume, increase in trip rates and flows through Great Milton, affecting pedestrian safety including school children
- Increase in deliveries, underestimation of day visitors, car parking needs
- Mini bus for staff will not make a difference to traffic
- Reduced speed limit required
- The plans are not clear about helicopter landings
- The temporary bus service may not coincide with the completion of this expansion (if not continued), and there is no guarantee of uptake from staff

Pollution:

- Noise and air pollution from traffic
- Light pollution from buildings, car park, roads and cars, Great Milton roads are unlit, threat to dark skies.
- Concern re Police advice for more lighting

Drainage:

- Concern re runoff from fields and local flooding
- Church Road prone to flooding
- Natural water drainage will be affected by new buildings
- Increased rainfall and flooding generally, new development exacerbates situation
- Culvert under Swerford lane not low enough for the ditch to take any more flows

Water Infrastructure:

- Increased volume of waste water and inadequate infrastructure, as cited by Thames Water, existing pumping station at bottom of Church Road already overwhelmed
- Huge increase in water use
- River pollution due to inadequate infrastructure

Trees and Biodiversity:

- Objection to removal of mature trees, loss of 43 trees
- Risk to water levels in nearby ponds, new ponds in inappropriate location near the A329
- Threat to rare butterfly, kidney vetch exists in the fields and should be retained/translocated.
- Destruction to biodiversity

Community use and amenity:

- Quality of life affected by increase in development, traffic and pollution
- Potential conflict with events at Neighbours Hall and hotel residents
- Le Manoir dustbins and recycling located close to Neighbours Hall
- Community is not part of the proposal

Economic matters:

- The other hotel establishments referred to in the Planning Statement addendum (May 2022) are not comparable as they have far larger grounds than Le Manoir, and charge far less per night than Le Manoir.
- The comparison with other hotels fails to point out is that each of these was originally a large stately home, set within its own parkland, nowhere near a village, with their own existing private driveways.
- The assertion that without further investment and the departure of Raymond Blanc (planning statement addendum) profits would radically fall is incorrect, Michelin stars are awarded to restaurants not individuals.
- Welcome more jobs, but other advantages unlikely
- Development is using the brand, but there is uncertainty over the legacy (kitchen garden, cookery school, access across field)
- Temporary benefits to village businesses during construction
- Large number of additional staff, yet very little provision for their accommodation, pressure on Great Milton housing and creation of HMO's

4.6 There have also been many comments on the consultation. The proposals have been advertised and consulted upon in accordance with the statutory requirements and the applicant has undertaken discretionary consultation, for which there is no prescribed format. A Statement of Community Involvement and addendum was submitted with the application highlighting comments made from local residents.

5.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

5.1 The site has an extensive history and relevant applications are listed in [Appendix 8](#) below. Key proposals over the years include the change of use from the manor house to a hotel in 1986 and extensions and alterations in 1996. A proposal to extend the existing kitchen and conservatory, 8 new bedrooms and conversion of stable block to 6 bedrooms, the conversion of house into staff facilities, a new entrance and car park was permitted in 1996. This followed an earlier refusal which also included a spa facility, swimming pool and engineering block, refused on the grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt and harm to the listed building and conservation area.

6.0 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)**

6.1 Formal screening for EIA was undertaken in January 2021 (Ref: P20/S4593/SCR). An EIA is not required.

7.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

7.1 **Development Plan Policies**

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (SOLP) Policies:

STRAT1 – Overall Strategy

STRAT6 – Green Belt

DES1 - Delivering High Quality Development

DES2 - Enhancing Local Character

DES3 - Design and Access Statements

DES6 - Residential Amenity

DES7 - Efficient Use of Resources

DES8 - Promoting Sustainable Design

DES9 – Renewable and Carbon Energy

DES10 - Carbon Reduction

EMP10 - Development in Rural Areas

EMP11 - Tourism

ENV1 - Landscape and Countryside

ENV2 - Biodiversity - Designated sites, Priority Habitats and Species

ENV3 - Biodiversity

ENV6 - Historic Environment

ENV7 - Listed Buildings

ENV9 - Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

ENV12 - Pollution - Impact of Development on Human Health, the Natural Environment and/or Local Amenity (Potential Sources of Pollution)

EP1 - Air Quality

EP3 - Waste collection and Recycling

EP4 - Flood Risk

INF4 - Water Resources

TRANS2 - Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

TRANS4 - Transport Assessments, Transport Statements and Travel Plans

TRANS5 - Consideration of Development Proposals

TRANS7 - Development Generating New Lorry Movements

7.2 **Neighbourhood Plan**

There is no Neighbourhood Plan for the parish of Great Milton.

7.3 **Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents**

South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SODG 2016)

Developer Contributions SPD

7.4 **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**

7.5 **Other Relevant Legislation**

Human Rights Act 1998

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been taken into account in the processing of the application and the preparation of this report.

Equality Act 2010

In determining this planning application the Council has regard to its equalities obligations including its obligations under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

8.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 The key issues to consider are:

- **Spatial Strategy**
- **Employment, Leisure and Tourism**
- **Green Belt**
- **Landscape and Public Right of Way**
- **Trees**
- **Heritage**
- **Archaeology**
- **Design and Character**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Sustainable Design and Energy**
- **Transport and Access**
- **Air Quality**
- **Agricultural Land**
- **Lighting**
- **Drainage and Water Infrastructure**
- **Noise**
- **Residential Amenity**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Conclusion: Planning Balance**

**Spatial Strategy**

8.2 STRAT 1 specifies where major new development is to be located and the roles of towns and villages in the District. Great Milton is a smaller village and there is policy support for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services. The policy also plays a role in protecting and enhancing the countryside, particularly the Oxford Green Belt (and AONBs) by ensuring that outside of the towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment. The proposed development conflicts with the Council's spatial strategy.

**Employment, Leisure and Tourism**

8.3 The NPPF (para 84) provides policy on supporting a prosperous rural economy and enabling sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside. SOLP Policy EMP10 supports sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses, communities, and visitors in rural areas, and which respect the character of the countryside. This includes 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. The development is not within an appropriate location (Green Belt) and the scale and location of the development, particularly the car park proposals in the open countryside, could not be said to respect the character of the countryside.

8.4 Similarly, Policy EMP11 encourages new development to advance the visitor economy for leisure and business purposes. It permits within the built-up areas of the larger and smaller villages smaller and proportionately scaled developments that are in keeping with the character of the settlement. By reason of scale the development does not meet this criterion. However, Policy EMP11 also advises that larger developments will only be supported in exceptional circumstances, for example to sensitively re-use a historic building, or to proportionally support or enhance enjoyment

of a significant and established visitor attraction where this cannot reasonably be achieved from a town or village location. The unique experience incorporating the heritage assets and gardens offered by Le Manoir in this location, cannot be provided elsewhere. In this respect the principle of the proposals at Le Manoir comply with Policy EMP11.

- 8.5 The Council's Economic Development officer has highlighted several documents providing evidence needs for business and tourism in the district. The 2014 Hotel Needs Assessment for South Oxfordshire highlights the need for diverse accommodation types and a need for expansion and development of existing rural destination hotels. The report specifically highlighted the potential of adding spas to meet growing interest in spa holidays in the UK. The Experience Oxfordshire "Economic Impact of Tourism 2017" report shows that over 90% of trips to Oxfordshire are day trips. Offering additional accommodation will enable visitors to extend their stay, therefore increasing their overall expenditure in the district. The South Oxfordshire Business and Innovation Strategy 2017 – 2020 (BIS) revealed that businesses in the area struggled to attract and retain skilled staff. This is partly attributed to the cost of living in Oxfordshire, and difficulty of travelling to rurally based workplaces.
- 8.6 The Planning Statement advises that Belmond Le Manoir must diversify its offering to ensure that it continues to appeal to the changing preferences and expectations of its global client base. The Statement advises that competition amongst high class establishments has become increasingly competitive and other hotels offer facilities such as a spa and gym. Additionally, the number of restaurants with two Michelin stars is increasing. A benchmarking exercise (April 2022) against other establishments within a radius of London has been undertaken, however limited weight is afforded to this as it is a narrow selection of facilities that are not necessarily comparable or representative of the characteristics in respect of this site. Nonetheless it is accepted that Belmond Le Manoir wish to safeguard their position among the very best world hotels, and that responding to changes in the industry and technology is necessary. The internal proposals to redesign the guest facilities, kitchen and restaurant will support a more efficient and effective operation, as well as enhance the experience. The provision of additional facilities particularly the spa and bistro will also facilitate a more diverse offer and encourage the longer stays by visitors, sought by the establishment.
- 8.7 From a wider economic perspective and public benefit, there would be significant investment to the tune of £36 million. The application advises that number of employees would increase from 176 to 259 (full time equivalent - FTE), and there will be indirect opportunities arising from supply chains and related services potentially providing a further 46 jobs. It is recognised that attracting and retaining staff, especially in the hospitality industry, is a current challenge and this could have consequences for other businesses, however the employment situation can flux. Presently 60% of the staff live in South Oxfordshire. It may not be possible for the new workers to live locally especially as the surrounding area is Green Belt and countryside and new housing will be limited. The staff accommodation does not provide overnight accommodation. Accommodation is expensive in Oxfordshire and the proposed subsidy for the bus service via Wheatley to Oxford will assist in securing and retaining staff and is considered essential to the development. Considering the proposed phasing the main increase in employment is likely to be towards in Phase 3, nearing completion of the development.
- 8.8 Jobs during the construction phase will be created, including specialist contractors, and the application projects there will 170 direct FTE construction jobs and a further 190 indirect/induced jobs per annum during the anticipated build period of 3 years. Whilst this has a positive benefit it also produces an issue in respect of temporary increased

traffic and accommodation for workers. A condition for a phasing and construction management plan would be necessary to manage the impacts of construction.

- 8.9 The proposals include the provision of electric bicycles for use by visitors, this will assist in reducing car travel during a stay and could also encourage a wider use of services and facilities in the vicinity for the benefit of the village and District. This and the provision of push bikes is considered necessary and can be secured by condition as part of a Travel Plan.
- 8.10 Overall, the development will produce a significant benefit to the economy in terms of employment and expenditure associated with the establishment but also wider economic chains. There could be a slight disbenefit arising from the increased demand for housing in the vicinity for workers and potentially the recruitment of staff could be challenging, albeit this could be temporary.

### **Green Belt**

- 8.11 The NPPF (paras 148 and 149) advises that the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this, and relevant to the consideration of this application, include the extension or alteration of a building if it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building and buildings for agriculture and forestry. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances (VSC). When considering an application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. These policy requirements are reinforced by SOLP Policy STRAT 6.
- 8.12 There are elements of the scheme, which if taken in isolation could be recognised as being forms of development that would not be considered inappropriate in the Green Belt, for instance the extensions to existing buildings and the agricultural buildings. However, the scheme needs to be viewed as a whole and all the development needs to be assessed in relation to the openness of the green belt. 'Very special circumstances' (VSC) need to be demonstrated to justify the scale of the scheme, given great weight is afforded to retaining the openness and rural character of this site.
- 8.13 The impact on the openness of the Green Belt varies in significance across the site. The extensions to existing buildings, including the replacement conservatory, do not present any further harm. The buildings within the Japanese gardens and the kitchen gardens are very enclosed by mature trees and planting, and this verdant enclosure will remain. The spa building whilst large has reduced in height. Overall, the harm to openness in these gardens is minimal.
- 8.14 The new development in the existing parking areas is relatively enclosed but the scheme will introduce significant buildings, including the bistro and guestrooms into this part of the site. These buildings displace the parking areas, and the development overall generates an increased demand for parking which is to be provided in completely open fields. This development will cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 8.15 The parking areas will cause some harm to the openness of the Green Belt amplified by the proposed solar panels in the valet parking area plus the various service buildings and structures situated in the open field. The poly tunnels and agricultural buildings will

also have a negative impact, and whilst in principle agricultural buildings are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, these buildings are required in connection with the hotel / restaurant operation, two of the buildings will contain an office and toilet and are therefore considered to be of a quasi-agricultural / business use. These buildings will have a negative impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The case for Very Special Circumstances is set out in the Conclusion.

### **Landscape and Public Right of Way**

- 8.16 The impact on the landscape is of most concern. Some of the landscape information is lacking and inconsistent with the identified proposals, however despite this, an assessment can be made on the landscape and visual impact and for the purposes of this I am referring to the landscape masterplan and the detailed drawings for buildings / structures.
- 8.17 Notably, officers have a contrary view on the findings of the Landscape Visual Assessment. We do not accept that the effect on the character of the site will be beneficial after 15 years and that the user experience of the right of way will be improved, or that the characteristics of views across the site would be largely unchanged.
- 8.18 There have been several amendments from the original proposals which provide further mitigation and reduce the impact on the landscape. The proposals contained within the existing building and garden envelope do not raise any significant landscape concerns although there is a considered a need to control lighting to minimise light pollution. The parking areas, solar canopies and new buildings within the open field remain a concern. The new parking is substantial in area, the visitor parking around 43,000 sq. m and the staff parking around 36,000 sq. m; together with service roads the amount of new road and parking area is in the region of 1 hectare.
- 8.19 The staff car parking area has been altered to respect a protected tree and it could be further enhanced with hedge planting to soften wider views including from the elevated public footpath however the orchard trees will provide partial screening. The tree planting along Church Road provides good screening but the parking area will still be visible from the Church Road and the A329.
- 8.20 The design of the visitor parking has altered to a less formal arrangement that will align with the contouring of the land, however further hedgerow and landscaping is considered necessary to mitigate and assimilate the parking area. The height of the solar canopies rises from 2.1 to 2.5 metres high and situated in the central part of the car park. These will be screened although the hedgerows will need to be maintained so that solar gain is not compromised. The canopies will be visible from wider views especially the elevated footpath.
- 8.21 The applicant has been asked to investigate other alternatives yet advises that solar panels on the agricultural buildings would be affected by shade from mature trees on the boundary of the site. Ground mounted panels were also considered but these would conflict with other land use proposals for the kitchen gardens or also be affected by tree shade. Officers believe that some solar panels could be introduced to the agricultural buildings especially on the southeast roof plane, however more area would still be required to meet the policy requirements of DES10. Given the proposed development for the car park would already produce some landscape harm the benefits of meeting the requirements of DES10 are considered to be outweighed by the extra harm arising from the canopies.

- 8.22 The visitor parking area and the agricultural buildings are to be situated adjacent to the section of public right of way which rises from the more level ground to the top of the field. The car park and buildings will be situated between 7 and 11 metres from the footpath itself. In my view this will bring fragmented enclosure to the path and will obscure views from this section of the footpath. The vulnerability to crime in this area has been highlighted by the police and it is very likely that CCTV cameras would be installed. The nature of the path will completely alter from a rural tranquil experience to a more urban and enclosed one, and this could detract users of the path. Currently the establishment allows the public to access informal paths on the higher field however there is no guarantee that this permissive arrangement will remain, and it is probable that it will not, in view of the proposals for the vineyard in this location.
- 8.23 The proposals for the vineyard, the relocated kitchen gardens and orchard may likely generate a need for security in the form of fencing, currently not proposed, and raised as an issue by the Crime Prevention advisor. Since the experience of the footpath user would be compromised by the current proposals, it is considered to necessary to ensure the experience from other parts of the footpaths are maintained. A condition to remove permitted development rights for fencing, which could be erected to 2m high is suggested, so that the design of any fencing is acceptable in relation to the rural footpath user experience.
- 8.24 The need for security and safety also generates a need for lighting. This is also discussed under Biodiversity and Lighting. The extent and scale of new development including the buildings, the parking areas, service roads and new access will need lighting and the movement of cars will produce light. Whilst fixed lighting can be controlled through a condition it cannot be dispensed with, and the development will introduce a significant degree of light into areas of the site which are currently unaffected by light. This will have a negative impact on the tranquil and rural character of the landscape at night.
- 8.25 Concluding on landscape, the new buildings are largely contained within the envelope of the existing gardens and whilst visible are not considered to have a significantly increased visual impact and detracting effect over the existing poly tunnels, except for the lighting impact which can be controlled. The introduction of the new access, extensive parking areas, solar canopies and agricultural buildings into currently undeveloped fields will have a negative impact on the views and experience of the public footpath and highway users and introduce intrusive light pollution. This part of the site will become urbanised, and the proposals will detract from the rural landscape.

### **Trees**

- 8.26 New tree planting is proposed throughout the site. The scheme has been amended to take account of tree root protection areas (RPA) and where works are to take place in proximity or over root protection areas, particularly in the spa and hotel garden area and at the point of access from the A329. The arboricultural assessment proposes a thorough strategy for protecting trees during construction, the details to be secured by condition.
- 8.27 The scheme has also been assessed in relation to the services, included in of the Arboricultural Survey & Impact Assessment April 2022. The treatment rooms and relaxation pavilion provided as part of the Spa Complex are provided with WC units and basins for use during occupation. It is proposed that these facilities will be mains fed with water and electricity, but foul drainage will be self-contained (and require collection) to avoid the need for deep excavations in this area, and hence disturbance to the tree protections zones. This affects five buildings in the far north-western garden.

Overall, the arboricultural and landscape information demonstrates that although some trees will be lost, there are robust proposals for tree protection and replacement planting and there is no objection in relation to trees.

### Heritage

- 8.28 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the tests of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies ENV6, ENV7 and ENV8 apply. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
  - b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
  - c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset from its alteration or from development within its setting should require clear and convincing justification.
- 8.29 There will be a significant change to the context of the listed building, incorporating the introduction of a variety of building types and uses into the grounds of the manor and encroachment into the previously open setting of the listed building and into the Great Milton Conservation Area. The proposals will erode some of the site's historic significance and sense of openness within its grounds. Great weight should be given the conservation of these heritage assets, particularly in view of the specific listings and inclusion within the Conservation Area.
- 8.30 Historic England (HE) and the Council's Conservation officer raised holding objections on the earlier schemes, particularly on works to the manor house and the scale of development within the grounds, as well as detailed design. The latest amendments provide more information on the internal works to the manor house, have reduced the scale of the spa building, include design changes to the garden villas and provide further justification for the works. Historic England have advised they would like to see further refinement to the design of the conservatory and the porches of the villas but and have agreed (email 6 June 2022) that these details can be provided through conditions. With these refinements the proposals are considered to cause the lowest level of harm.
- 8.31 In this case, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. The NPPF does not define public benefits, but further guidance is given in the PPG which states they could be anything that delivers economic, social, or environmental objectives and they should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. Benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits, for example works to a listed building which secure its future as a designated heritage asset could be a public benefit.
- 8.32 The applicant states that the proposal secures the viable use of a Grade II\* heritage asset, and this supports its long-term conservation. In my view I do not have the evidence to suggest that this development secures its *optimum* viable use (my emphasis) but from my assessment the works to the listed building are necessary to enhance the internal arrangements and layout to improve operations. The application provides a justification on the need for the wider development elsewhere on the site and it is accepted that principle of such development is beneficial to the economic

vitality of the business. The question relates to whether the scale and detail of that development is appropriate and following amendments and a detailed assessment the Conservation officer and HE are satisfied on those accounts.

- 8.33 Overall, the development will sustain the significance of the heritage asset with a low level of harm but ensure the continuity of a viable use. The continued use of the heritage assets provide a substantial contribution to the community in terms of the economic benefits, highlighted in the application. The character of the overall site will alter but the distinctiveness of the manor house will be preserved. The scope for public benefits is mentioned throughout the report and an assessment of the benefits versus harm is undertaken in the conclusion to this report.

### **Archaeology**

- 8.34 The results of the trenched evaluation identify the presence of below ground archaeological remains within the application site of Late Roman to Saxon date that reflect its occupation and use from this period. The proposed development will impact on recorded archaeological remains and as such further investigation is required in advance of any development, to be secured by pre commencement condition.

### **Design and Character**

- 8.35 The detailed design has been considered carefully in relation to the heritage concerns and the proposed materials and detailed finishes are acceptable. Inevitably the character of the gardens will change and become more developed, yet the new buildings are sited on lower ground than the manor house and curtilage. The spa building design is grandiose, and the lowering of the building has overcome the previously identified harm to the character and setting of the listed building and conservation area from its over dominating mass and scale. The contemporary and simple approach for the majority of hotel villas provides a contrast which allows the traditional character of the manor house to prevail.
- 8.36 The extent and nature of the proposals will mean the character of the establishment would alter from an understated but prestigious boutique country hotel to one that is more extensive and imposing. The key issues for assessing the scheme are discussed throughout this report. As the proposed buildings are relatively secluded the change in character itself is would not present an issue of wider concern unless it produces harm, in terms of green belt, landscape and heritage in particular, and these issues are discussed elsewhere.

### **Biodiversity**

- 8.37 The scheme will lose grassland loss to cropland (vineyards and kitchen garden) and built development. The orchard area will be preserved and additional development near to the ponds will not materially change the value of these areas being ornamental in nature. The majority of habitats on site are of lower ecological value or have been heavily influenced by human intervention. In terms of species there is evidence of bats roosting and a derogation licence from Natural England for works on the existing building will be necessary as well as controls on lighting.
- 8.38 Proposals for biodiversity include the introduction of ponds, living sedum roofs, reed bed drainage, new hedgerows, tree planting and indigenous planting groups. The biodiversity metric assessment concludes that the development will comply with the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the SOLP and can deliver a net gain for biodiversity on site, the results indicating a net increase of 10.02% habitat and 13.88% in hedgerow.

Overall the scheme produces a substantial benefit in terms of a net gain for biodiversity.

### **Sustainable Design and Energy**

- 8.39 Policy DES10 requires non-residential development proposals to i) to meet the BREEAM Excellent standard and ii) development proposals of 1,000sqm or more are required to achieve at least a 40% reduction in the carbon emissions compared with a 2013 Building Regulations base. The updated Energy and Sustainability Statement (April 2022) sets out its Appendix A that initial scoring on the anticipated BREEAM credits for the development. These indicate BREEAM Outstanding for the new development and BREEAM Excellent for the proposed refurbishment of the Manor House and other existing buildings.
- 8.40 The detailed calculations for carbon emissions are contained in the Building Regulations Assessment (April 2022) and the Council's Energy consultant advises that 40% reduction in CO2 emissions has been achieved across the whole site by modelling all the different buildings in one assessment, instead of individually. Normally each building would be required to meet the requirement individually, however, some of the buildings are very small in floor area, and this approach is reasonable in this instance. The Sustainability Statement advises the development will meet the 40% reduction in carbon emissions in the following way:
- Photovoltaics (Building Integrated) - 250m<sup>2</sup> These are sited on the spa building (150 m<sup>2</sup>), garden hotel villas (80 m<sup>2</sup>) and presidential villa (20m<sup>2</sup>)
  - Photovoltaics (Visitor Parking Canopy) -700m<sup>2</sup> (minimum)
  - Central Ground Source Heat Pump System – provides a heat source and heat sink for the heat pumps. This is to be sited in the former kitchen garden.
- 8.41 Policy DES8 advises that all new development should seek to minimise the carbon and energy impacts of their design and construction and notes that a sensitive approach will need to be taken to conserve the special character of designated heritage assets. The existing buildings will be designed to achieve BREEAM Excellent and this is commended given the sensitive nature of heritage assets. To meet objectives for water conservation the Energy Statement advises that water reuse systems such as rainwater/greywater systems will be investigated for their appropriateness to the scheme. Details of these have not been provided yet they will be considered as part of the credits for the BREEAM standards. The development therefore complies with policies DES8 and DES10.
- 8.42 To meet the policy requirements of DES10, the scheme is largely relying on solar canopies above the visitor parking area. Policy DES9 encourages schemes for renewable energy at all scales provided that they do not cause a significantly adverse effect to the landscape, amongst other criteria. The principle of the energy proposals is acceptable, yet its contribution will mitigate the development to meet Policy DES10 and it does not offer net additional energy. The landscaping impacts of the proposed parking areas and the solar canopies have been discussed above.
- 8.43 Beyond the buildings the proposal incorporates extensive new parking areas. Whilst it is envisaged that the public bus service will cater for some staff, there is still a large car park dedicated for staff plus the customer valet parking area. There will be an increase in private car travel which undermines the objectives of Policy DES8 and TRANS5. The eminence of the hotel has been established in this countryside village location and is intrinsic to its success. It is recognised that the expansion of the hotel will generate more private car travel which cannot be provided by other transport modes but can be mitigated to a small degree.

- 8.44 The existing hotel already includes electric car charging points and the scheme will provide more at a ratio of 10% both in the staff and visitor parking area. It is also proposed to provide electric bicycles for use of the residents as referred to above. Cycle charging will also be necessary and this should be provided for staff too. This is considered necessary to assist in reducing car travel and also facilitate a wider use of services and facilities the village and District. Promoting sufficient electric cycle and car infrastructure will be helpful in addressing greenhouse emissions and partially overcome the conflict with these policies DES8 and TRANS5.
- 8.45 In terms of overall sustainability there are benefits and some disbenefits. The increased generation of traffic and the use of resources associated with development is counter balanced by the wide-ranging proposals for sustainable design, including water conservation and re-use, energy generation and carbon reduction. Especially notable is the design for BRREAM Outstanding on the new build, which is beyond policy requirements and BREEAM Excellent for the existing buildings, which is often a challenge for older and historic buildings.

### **Transport and Access**

- 8.46 A new access is to be formed from the A329. This is designed to prevent traffic coming east / west using Church Road. The details of this will need to be secured by a S278 highways agreement.
- 8.47 A significant amount of replacement and new parking is to be provided. Currently there is overspill parking on the field and the Transport Statement advises there is sometimes overspill parking on Church Road. A proportionate assessment has been made of the parking needs for the number of guests and staff and is considered acceptable. Electric vehicle charging points would be provided and other modes encouraged by the provision of cycling infrastructure and a bus service. A travel plan for staff and visitors is necessary to assist with identifying options for alternative modes to the car.
- 8.48 In May earlier this year Oxford Bus Company and Le Manoir announced their partnership to re-introduce a bus service travelling from Oxford, via Wheatley to Great Milton and beginning 20<sup>th</sup> June. From the perspective of Le Manoir it is understood that this is to primarily to assist staff travel but will of course be of benefit to the village. From the County's perspective this also assists with the replacement of a bus service for one that was axed in Oxford. I am advised that this subsidy is to last for 3 years. This subsidy is not directly related to this development scheme however a continuing or new bus subsidy is sought, or if the bus service is not on-going, monies for a staff shuttle bus. The subsidy of a public bus service is of great wider benefit as well as forming an essential part of a Travel Plan to encourage staff to use public transport. It is not expected that many guests would arrive by bus. Timing of the subsidy is relevant because the increase in staff will not start to materialise until the works are close to completion (see Phasing in paragraph 3.20). A subsidy for a public bus service is of significant public benefit and will assist in mitigating the impact of staff traffic to the development whereas a shuttle bus for staff will only address the latter.
- 8.49 Additionally financial contributions to be secured through a S106 agreement are:
- Travel Plan Monitoring £1,426.00 Dec 2019 RPIX
  - Public Rights of Way £10,000.00 Feb 2021 Baxter Local improvements.
- 8.50 The duration of construction is expected to be around 3 years. A construction traffic management plan including a plan for contractors travel is necessary.

### **Air Quality**

- 8.51 Subject to a condition to control dust during construction through a construction management plan, and measures to promote sustainable transport, discussed above, there is no objection on the grounds of air quality.

### **Agricultural Land**

- 8.52 The site is within land classified as best and most versatile agricultural land and represents Grade 1 on the Agricultural Land Classification. Currently the vegetable garden and poly tunnels and the orchard are using for growing produce associated with the hotel. The remainder of the southern fields are grassland and not currently cultivated or grazed. The proposed parking development and the service roads within the fields would utilise approximately 1 hectare of land that would be lost permanently to potential agriculture. The NPPF (Para 174) that planning decisions should consider the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The loss of 1 hectare of agricultural land, and the proposed development, as set out in this application is unlikely to lead to the loss of any further agricultural land. In your officer's opinion this disbenefit is not material.

### **Lighting**

- 8.53 The NPPF advises that planning decisions should limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes, and nature conservation. The harm from light pollution has been identified above in relation to the landscape and nature conservation, yet from a crime prevention perspective the need for lighting has been identified. The applicants propose a lighting strategy which can be secured by condition incorporating:
- Controls on the hours of lighting
  - Lower levels of lighting as outlined in the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance notes
  - Illumination of and spill from the pathways kept to a minimum
  - Glazing and lighting specifications to minimise light spillage.
  - Electrically operated blinds within some buildings
- 8.54 In addition to the development within the site, the new access is likely to need lighting. A condition will also be required to ensure details of this are submitted to ensure that as low illumination as possible is provided, whilst ensuring safety.

### **Drainage and Water Infrastructure**

- 8.55 The development proposes to deal with all surface water on site through infiltration and surface water bodies, the details of which to be provided by conditions. There will be no discharge to the public sewer. Concern has been raised about the impact on offsite drainage channels which lead to the river Thames. As all surface water is to be managed on site there should be no impact arising from the development in terms of increased or decreased flows.
- 8.56 The foul water system currently is discharged to a Thames Water sewer in Church Road and a septic tank. The proposals incorporate an expansion and improvement to the underground foul water system on site. The septic tank will be removed and whilst most flows will be gravity led two new pumping stations and pipes will be necessary to link to the gravity pipelines. The pumping stations will solely below ground.

- 8.57 Thames Water has identified a lack of capacity in the wider sewerage network and the developer has advised that discussions have been held over an upgrade, which would be carried out approximately 20 months after permission. A condition preventing the use of new buildings until the upgrade has been completed is advised. Thames Water have advised there is sufficient water supply for the development.

#### **Noise**

- 8.58 The development may generate noise emissions from plant and to ensure that noise levels are acceptable in relation to neighbouring properties, a plant noise assessment is necessary and, if required, the implementation of mitigation measures.

#### **Residential Amenity**

- 8.59 Many residents have objected to the development on a wide range of matters and these issues are covered in the report. Immediate neighbouring properties sit within spacious gardens and there will be no direct effect on the amenity of neighbouring residents in terms of noise, privacy, overlooking etc. It is agreed that there will be a negative effect on wider amenity in terms of public views into and within the site, especially from the public footpaths.

#### **Infrastructure**

- 8.60 The Council's CIL charging schedule does not levy CIL in relation to hotels. The staff accommodation will not provide living accommodation and is not CIL liable. In terms of financial obligations the waste collection will be managed commercially so the only requirements relate to highways and transport, as identified above.

#### **9.0 CONCLUSION: PLANNING BALANCE, VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PUBLIC BENEFITS**

- 9.1 The Le Manoir hotel and restaurant has been established since the 1980's and has obtained a distinctive reputation, internationally as well as within this country. Whilst there have been a number of improvements and extensions over the years, these are not recent and the applicants have identified a need to refurbish and expand the offer to remain competitive in their market. Significant investment is planned to create a substantial increase in size and extent of the hotel establishment to meet these objectives.
- 9.2 The development is within the Green Belt and the site contains listed buildings and structures including the 15<sup>th</sup> century manor house. The development represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt and needs to demonstrate very special circumstances to outweigh the harm to the green belt. It is also acknowledged that there is a low level of harm to the manor house and its setting and the Council need to assess this against the public benefits of the scheme.
- 9.3 Above it has been demonstrated that there would be significant harm to the openness of the green belt and to the landscape, including the experience of public footpath users. This derives especially from the elements within the currently undeveloped open field rather than the buildings within the envelope of the existing development which is well screened. Without a case for very special circumstances that overrides the harm to the openness of the green belt and the landscape harm the development would be unacceptable.

- 9.4 There is a low level of harm to the listed building and its setting by virtue of the alterations to the buildings and the new development within the grounds. The significance of the heritage assets is high, the manor house is Grade II\* listed, there are curtilage listings of Grade II and Grade II\*, and the site is within the Great Milton Conservation Area and the setting of the St Mary's Church, which is Grade I listed. The public benefits therefore need to be substantial.
- 9.5 The justification put forward for the very special circumstances and the public benefits principally concentrate on the economic rewards underpinned by significant investment, and the increased employment and provision for tourism, important for the wider economy. This is agreed although is slightly tempered by the current challenges in recruitment where the hospitality industry is particularly affected, and the increased pressure upon housing, in a location where new housing beyond infill or brownfield redevelopment is not appropriate.
- 9.6 The proposals demonstrate a very high standard of sustainable design, which have particular merit as they go beyond policy requirements. The goal to obtain BREEAM Excellent for the existing buildings is considered a significant public benefit since this also assists with the longevity of a viable use for the historic assets. A BREEAM Outstanding accreditation for the new buildings is commended but in my view the design is for the most part mitigation and presents a small net public benefit.
- 9.7 The landscaping and ecology proposals will provide an excess of 10% net gain in biodiversity and this is of a considerable public benefit, noting that the future requirements of the Environment Act are not yet in force.
- 9.8 The provision of a public bus subsidy also has significant wider benefits, more-so than a staff shuttle bus, which would serve only as mitigation.
- 9.9 Providing substantial public benefits, in the form of delivering economic, social or environmental objectives also represents a case for very special circumstances. There is identified significant harm to the landscape, openness of the green belt and the public right of way and there is low level harm to the heritage assets. In balancing these harms there are varying degrees of public benefit in terms of contributions to the economy, sustainability, the continued viable use of the heritage assets, enhanced biodiversity and infrastructure. Overall, your officers consider that these represent a considerable public benefit. In conclusion, the case for very special circumstances is supported and the development will provide substantial public benefits which justify the granting of planning permission for this development.

10.0 **RECOMMENDATION**  
**Grant Planning Permission**

**Subject to:**

- i) the completion of a S106 agreement for the infrastructure identified in the report and the following Conditions, the final drafting of which to be agreed for consistency under the delegated powers of the Chairman of Planning Committee and the Head of Planning, and**
- ii) confirmation from the Secretary of State that they do not intend to issue a direction under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) (Direction) 2021**

**Conditions:**

- 1 Commencement three years - Full Planning Permission
- 2 Approved plans
- 3 Phasing
- 4 Archaeology WSI
- 5 Archaeology Mitigation and Recording
- 6 Tree Protection (Detailed)
- 7 Construction and Traffic Management Plan
- 8 Levels (details required)
- 9 Unsuspected Contaminated Land Condition
- 10 New Vehicular Access
- 11 Sample materials required (all)
- 12 Details Conservatory
- 13 Details Presidential suite
- 14 BREEAM Outstanding and Excellent Ratings
- 15 Energy Statement - Details Required
- 16 Energy Statement Verification
- 17 Ecology and Wildlife Protection
- 18 Landscape Environment Management Plan
- 19 Landscaping Scheme
- 20 Landscape Management Plan
- 21 Removal of PD rights for fencing and enclosures
- 22 Lighting Strategy and Details
- 23 Green Travel Plan
- 24 Turning Area & Car Parking
- 25 Cycle Parking Facilities
- 26 Electric Vehicle Charging Points (details required)
- 27 Noise Assessment (external noise & plant equipment)
- 28 SUDs Scheme Surface Water
- 29 Surface Water Drainage
- 30 Foul Water Network Upgrade
- 31 Foul Drainage details
- 32 Hours of operation

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