

Formal Objection to planning application 20/00934/FUL for 8 houses on land to the rear of The George Inn, Sandford Road, Littlemore

Having viewed the application documents and plans for the above development, the following are my objections to the scheme.

Principle of development – Whilst the development of previously developed land is a key aspect of sustainable development, account must be taken of existing factors that go against the development of some sites. This is a backland plot with various existing residential properties that overlook the parking and pub garden. It is not an infill plot. The tenuous link to brownfield land to justify the development falls short of the impact the development would have. The site lies within the heart of the Littlemore Conservation Area and whilst developments have occurred over time within the Conservation Area, they appear to respect the more spacious characteristics that this scheme fails to do. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports sustainable development and states that such developments should be allowed: -

unless *“any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”*



Overdevelopment and privacy issues

The proposed development represents overdevelopment, resulting in a development proposal that is squashed into the space, simply because it is there, and the size of the site allows for 8 dwellings.

Although the architects have taken steps to try and reduce the scope for occupants to look out from windows into the neighbouring houses and gardens, this does not change the fact that there are 4 houses adjacent to the site which will look into the new gardens. Several of which have short or no back gardens only serving to exacerbate the situation. This will have a severe impact on the privacy of the new occupants and conversely the privacy of the occupants of the existing properties will be significantly affected. In particular, those properties affected are The Old Coach House (which has no rear garden and directly abuts the site boundary), No 1 Sandford Road, No 7 David Nicholls Way and No's 3 and 5 Lanham Way who's rear windows face plot 5. Although there are existing trees restricting views from No 3 Lanham Way, No 5 appears to have a direct view into the proposed garden of plot 5. And when in that garden the occupants of plot 5 would have views straight into the windows of No 5 Lanham Way. This is not acceptable.

Poor Design and Layout issues

The proposed layout and design generally, is in my view, incongruous with the character of the surrounding area and therefore would not enhance the character of the Conservation Area, in fact it is believed it would harm the character of the Conservation Area. The choice of materials and design also fails to respect the character. The proposal represents an attempt to simply get as many houses on the site as possible. The Design and Access Statement (D&A) reviews the positive pre application process they had, although it is worth noting that only extracts of the Council's response is included in the D&A statement. The scheme submitted at pre application stage was for 6 houses, and according to the D&A statement, the houses had a cottagey feel and appearance. The Council's response indicated concerns about privacy and overlooking. It was also indicated that the size of site could accommodate more units. The architects and applicants' response was to increase the number of units and change the design to squeeze in the 8 units. Going to some lengths to show how considerate they have been to discount 9 or 10 units on the site to justify the increase.

In terms of design, the terrace of plots 5 to 8 (albeit Plot 5 is a detached unit) has the appearance of an old factory building with its multiple gabled pitched roofs and then a large chimney on plot 5. The addition of Zinc clad sections between the roofs add to the confusing design concept. The other properties have been treated in a similar manner to try and create a harmonious design throughout the development. However, the result is a design that is alien to its surroundings and whether it is scarcely visible from Sandford Road or not, it is argued this proposal would have a harmful and negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area. NPPF makes it very clear that poor design should be rejected and only high quality designed schemes should be viewed positively. It is argued that the design of this application fails to respect its location and the over cramped nature of the layout would be harmful and be contrary to the guidance in NPPF and Policy HE7.

Parking and Access issues

The proposal will deprive the public house of a large car park and garden area and limit its ability to host events in the future, both for its own business but also for local community events, denying local clubs and organisations of a suitable space to hold their events.

Furthermore, the application documents (Forms, D&A and Transport Statement) indicate that 7 spaces would be created for use by the retained public house, including the demolition of a wooden structure behind the pub to make way for the parking spaces. However, there is a significant issue with the way the plans have been drawn. The application boundary shows 5 ½ spaces to fall outside of the application boundary and therefore cannot be delivered by this application. There are no parking spaces in this location apart from some parallel spaces running in line with the access road. Which means the proposed parking spaces would have to be physically constructed and therefore should fall inside the application boundary. It is understood that the applicant does not own or control the land outside the redline which calls into question the ability of the applicant to construct these parking spaces, regardless of whether they are within the red line or not and furthermore, whether they have permission to demolish the wooden structure as this is part of the public house.



extract from Proposed site layout plan

As shown above the red line has clearly been drawn through parking space number 6 and it excludes 5 parking spaces. Ultimately this means the application can only provide 1 ½ parking spaces for the public house, as the remaining 5 ½ spaces are not included within the application boundary. This is not acceptable and 1 ½ spaces does not meet that Councils required parking standard. It would severely affect the ability of the public house to trade effectively.

Irrespective of this, the location and arrangement of “7” parking spaces, is contrived and feels like an after thought. And simply reinforces the sense this is a development that is being squeezed on to a site and is not appropriate. In addition, placing the spaces in this location further reduces the size of the pubs beer garden further affecting the pubs appeal to customers and will have an adverse impact on the business. Which is not acceptable.

The spaces are proposed to be accessed directly off the narrow, shared access road. The narrowness of this road, results in very awkward and difficult spaces to access. It will lead to conflict between pub customer traffic and residents. The Council should ask the applicant to provide evidence to show that vehicles can safely and easily access these parking spaces. It seems that vehicles would have to mount the proposed footpath to be able to turn in and out of these spaces.

The entrance to the site is narrow, at only 4.95m, this effectively restricts traffic to one way, this could lead to problems on Sandford Road if a car or delivery lorry has to wait on the highway until a vehicle leaves the site. Furthermore, whilst the access road widens there is a gateway with stone pillars intruding into the access road which creates a pinch point. The proposed site layout does not include these gateway pillars on the plan, but there is no mention of the need to demolish this gateway into order to create a wide enough access. Once past the proposed pub parking area, the proposed access road, becomes even narrower. The road along this section appears to be less than 4m. Although the Transport Statement submitted with the application refers to Manual for Streets and the fact that access roads can be reduced in width for short sections. It is not overly clear whether a section of road some 20m long is considered short, especially when the overall access road is generally narrow along its length. Furthermore, the turning area and distance between parking spaces in the main part of the site, appear to be tight. There appears to be no vehicle tracking drawings to demonstrate that cars can access and leave the spaces easily and safely.

I would also be concerned about the ability of emergency vehicles being able to safely access the rear of the site for the above reasons. Especially, if more than one emergency vehicle (Fire Engine, ambulance and police) needed to attend a property on the site. With the limited space to turn and a narrow route in and out of the site, as well as conflict with pub customer vehicles, this could be a major problem. This again simply demonstrates how the proposal is trying to fit too many houses on the site.

Taken together, the negative impacts that this proposal will have, in terms of the poor design, cramped and incongruous layout, the loss of privacy and loss of a community facility, poor access, limited parking for the public house, it is argued that these negatives outweigh the positive of developing 8 houses on a brownfield site and in line with NPPF, the application should be **refused**.

Overlooking – As mentioned above, the proposed development will result in a significant infringement of privacy of both the occupiers of the new properties but more importantly the occupiers of the existing properties that will look straight into the gardens of the proposed houses. And the new occupiers will have direct line of sight into the windows of the existing properties. This issue may be minor if only one property was affected. However, it is believed that 4 existing properties will be adversely affected by the loss of privacy.

The Old Coach House – This property has no rear garden and its rear elevation sits directly along the boundary of the application site. The proposed plots 1 and 2 have their windows facing the Old Coach House and vice versa. They also only have small rear gardens and given the Old Coach House is on the site boundary, the impact these houses and scheme generally will be significant.

No 1 Sandford Road - Although this property is aligned side on to the proposed development the upper floor windows on the front elevation have a clear line of site into the proposed development.

No 7 David Nicholls Close – This property is set at an angle to the rear boundary of the site but again, its front windows look down into the proposed gardens of plots 7, 6 and 5.

No 5 Lanham Way – This property has a relatively short garden with its boundary with proposed plot 5. Although there are trees and vegetation on this boundary it is argued that views into the new gardens and equally and perhaps more importantly there are views back from the new proposed gardens into the rear windows.

The fact that the proposed development will have an impact on the privacy of 4 existing properties and conversely the privacy of the occupants of the proposed dwellings, is sufficient enough to demonstrate this proposal is not acceptable and should be refused.

The following photographs are taken from the Ecology report, which show the site, but helpfully also show the windows of some of the houses adjacent to the site which clearly evident in the photographs.



Figure 6: Improved grassland



Figure 3: B1, near the east boundary of the Site

Bin Storage area – The area set aside for the bin collection is between the end of the new pub garden and Plot 1, behind two of the new pub parking spaces and close to the rear of the Old Coach House, the location has clearly been chosen for the least impact on the new development and being close to Sandford Road. But it is not exactly a pleasant place for The Old Coach House which potentially will be affected by smells and noise when people are moving their bins on collection day or the night before. Furthermore, although there is a path around the pub parking spaces, there is potential for conflict and damage being caused to any vehicles parked in these spaces, whilst bins are being moved to and from the bin collection area. In addition, albeit a minor point, the layout plan shows the individual bin store and bicycle store for plot 4, as being located directly in the middle of its garden, hardly a desirable location for it?

Impact on trees – Whilst the proposed development has been located to avoid the existing trees and root protection areas. It is noted that Plot 5 falls within the root protection zone of the tree identified as T5. Plots 5 and 6 are also right on the edge of the TPZ for the tree identified as T8. Given the potential impact on trees and the presence of root protection zones on the layout plan, there should be a Tree Survey and plan that should have been submitted. However, it does not appear on the Council's website of documents submitted with the application.

According to the Council's website the trees running along the rear of the site (possibly outside of the site) are subject of a group TPO. This reinforces the need for a tree survey and mitigation plan to be submitted to ensure that the existing trees are protected and not harmed by this development.

Although not covered by a TPO there is a single Yew tree in the centre of the car park. This tree is protected by the fact it is located within the Conservation Area yet, no real mention is made of its loss or any justification for its removal given. Again, this is something the Council should take seriously and at the very least request additional information from the applicant.

Proposed Landscaping – The design and access statement makes bold claims that the proposed landscaping is an integral part of its design and intended to create a verdant village feel. However, it is my opinion that this couldn't be further from the truth. It has the appearance of an afterthought, added into the spaces left over to fill the gaps and ultimately, it will have the appearance of a modern car park of an office block not a village as the architects have tried to portray.

Conclusions

This proposal is ill thought out, it represents overdevelopment of the site, at 40 dwellings per hectare it appears cramped and been proposed simply because the numbers say it is possible to get 8 units on the site. It does not take into account the impact the development will have on the neighbouring properties or the character of the surrounding area particularly the character of the Littlemore Conservation Area. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the red line as currently drawn means the scheme cannot be implemented. The applicant has not included all of the proposed pub parking in the red line area. If the scheme was developed as per the red line, the pub would be left with only 1 ½ parking space which would not be acceptable and would not meet the Council guidance.

Overall, it is my opinion that it is not an appropriate development on this site. Irrespective of its brownfield nature, the negative impacts the development would have outweigh any benefit in terms of housing numbers. And in accordance with NPPF and the Council's Local Plan it should be **refused**.