

Constraints and Opportunities Plan – 4 Bladon Close, Oxford OX2 8AD

Responding to Site Character and Context

The existing site features a dilapidated building set on an irregular plot, sited at the end of a cul-de-sac in North Oxford, and set adjacent a railway line. Houses in Bladon Close vary in their style, design and appearance, and are typically between 1 to 2 storeys in height, with trees in each of their relatively large gardens. The proposed development seeks to maintain this aesthetic by providing a 2.5 storey building in a corner plot at the far end of the cul-de-sac, designed with render to the upper levels and fair faced brickwork to some lower level parts of the building.

Existing opportunities include a number of trees, shrubs and hedges on the site, a secluded location at the end of a cul-de-sac in a very low flood risk area, proximity to local public transport routes and cycle lanes, and the availability of a fibre optic / cable network in Bladon Close.

Existing constraints include an immediate proximity to a railway line, heavily overgrown and non-maintained gardens, no gas services supplying the site (although there is a gas network available in Bladon Close), no fibre / cable serving the site (although it is available in Bladon Close), and dilapidated structures on the site.

To identify the provision of utilities both on the site and within the local area, a full topographical and utilities survey was undertaken, and a desktop STATS plans report prepared whereby several utility providers were contacted to confirm their presence or otherwise in the local area.

With the gardens being heavily overgrown, it was noted that several trees appeared to be stifling the growth of others, and that the presence of all existing trees would prevent future occupants from being able to enjoy beneficial use of their garden area. An arboricultural assessment was completed which assessed the suitability and importance of all trees on the site, and which provided advice as to which could, or should, be removed as part of the development whilst maintaining the character of the area. All recommendations of this report have been taken into consideration as part of the design for this site. To further explore the effect on ecology on this site, a preliminary roost assessment was completed which identified the need for additional surveys in the summer of 2021. These surveys have been booked in, the results and subsequent advice received from these surveys will be incorporated into any detailed design and construction proposals.

The design rationale is to construct a building that accommodates 5No two-bedroom flats, with private and shared amenity spaces, that sits well within the surrounding area. No parking has been provided on site but cycle storage for 12No bicycles is provided to encourage use of the nearby public transport routes and cycle lanes.

Natural Features and Resources

The orientation of the site leads to north facing rear gardens, with a railway line to the west and a residential property to the north and east. The proposed development has been designed to ensure that the building sits within the site and has all living areas sited to the rear of each flat, overlooking the garden areas. Trees on the boundary of the site are to be retained to afford privacy to occupants and adjacent land owners, with overgrown bushes and insignificant trees in the middle of the site being removed to enable the remaining trees to flourish, providing an enhanced natural habitat for wildlife. A preliminary roost

assessment has been carried out as part of the design, with follow on surveys planned to take place from May 2021. The results and recommendations of these follow on surveys will be incorporated in to any detailed design and construction activities on the site to ensure that there is no detrimental effect in terms of biodiversity on the site.

Hard landscaping to the site is to be minimised, with a sustainable SUDS compliant gravel surface being provided to the front of the property to minimise surface water run off.

Movement

The existing site has a single access point which is in the northern corner of Bladon Close, with all other site boundaries leading on to private residential land, or the railway line. The proposals seek to retain this arrangement, with only a single point of access being available from Bladon Close.

The site is situated in close proximity to a good public transport network and cycle lanes. To encourage their use, the proposals do not provide any on site vehicular parking but instead provide sufficient covered storage for 12No bicycles.

Designing Development of Blocks, Density and Uses

The site has been designed to replicate that of other properties on this street, with north facing gardens and an internal layout that provides residents with a view over their gardens and amenity space from their living areas. Each flat benefits from windows and a set of glazed doors to the rear elevation facing the garden to maximise levels of natural daylight in the living areas.

The rationale behind the development is to replace a dilapidated 5-bed house which has remained empty for some time, with new accommodation in a sought after area for young couples and small families in North Oxford, on a site that is well served by public transport and cycle routes to provide them with easy access to shops and facilities in Oxford.

The building has been designed in such a way that it sits well within the surrounding area and does not obstruct sight lines from the adjacent properties. The important trees to the site boundary are to be retained to further ensure that the aesthetic of this development suits the area in which it is to be built.

Design of External Areas

The plot of the proposed development is clearly defined as a residential plot as is the existing site. The development is constrained by the shape of the existing plot which is an irregular shape, however the private gardens are a regular shape, each sized appropriately for the flat that they serve, whilst the shared amenity space utilises the remaining rear garden area. The site itself is bounded on two sides by other private residences, both of which are already afforded privacy from the trees that sit along or near to the boundary line, all of which are to be retained.

External lighting will be minimised so as not to cause disturbance to others, and so that it is in-keeping with other external building mounted lighting in the local area. The proposal seeks to have discrete lighting at the main entrance, adjacent the bike shelter, within the bin store, and at the back door of each flat only, whilst security considerations ensure that the main entrance to the property complies with current Secured by Design guidance.

Plots and Buildings

The proposed new building has been designed to respect the surrounding character of the site and the area, and has been subject to a request for pre-application advice to ensure the design principles are sound and would be considered as suitable. The existing site features a dilapidated building set on an irregular plot, sited at the end of a cul-de-sac in North Oxford, and set adjacent a railway line. Houses in Bladon Close vary in their style, design and appearance, and are typically between 1 to 2 storeys in height, with trees in each of their relatively large gardens. The proposed development seeks to maintain this aesthetic by providing a 2.5 storey building in a corner plot at the far end of the cul-de-sac, designed with render to the upper levels and fair faced brickwork to some lower level parts of the building.

With the proposal seeking to provide accommodation for young couples or small families (2 adults and a child), the designs meet their needs by providing modern, open-plan living with separate bedroom areas in a readily accessible area of North Oxford. The new building enhances the current site by providing modern living accommodation that utilises services available within Bladon Close such as cable / fibre networks, and by providing sufficient cycle storage to serve all flats. This, along with the locality of the site and its proximity to local public transport links and cycle lanes.

The main constraint relating to the site is the proximity of the railway line and the resultant noise levels generated from traffic along it. To determine the suitability of the proposed development, and to ensure that mitigation measures were included if required, a detailed noise impact assessment was carried out (ref. APT/07206-B). The assessment concluded that a minimum sound reduction of 27dB would be required. As such, the proposal is to include double glazing units with suitable trickle vents throughout which will provide at least 30dB sound reduction.

Ensuring Quality

The material choices proposed for this development are a 'soft' render to the upper levels, with some fair faced brickwork to the ground floor. The mixture of materials has been selected to provide a more interesting aesthetic which sits well within the variety of design styles of the properties found along Bladon Close. The use of a rendered finish to the majority of the building improves the u-value, and with the render being a through coloured render, there is no requirement for redecoration, unlike when a standard sand:cement render is used. The construction of primary built elements seeks to exceed on the u-value requirement for a new build property, thereby further improving energy efficiency, reduce the need for heating and lower overall energy consumption.

Rainwater goods have been carefully positioned at the corners of the building to provide symmetry, with a central downpipe on each side elevation being positioned over a render expansion joint. Services within the property have been carefully aligned to ensure that soil pipes are internal, avoiding unsightly external stacks running up the face of the property.

All materials have been selected for longevity, and so that the need for ongoing maintenance is minimised. Materials are readily available and from reputable manufacturers, with products benefitting from BBA certificates that prove their suitability and quality.

The use of hard landscaping materials have been minimised on the site. The proposals include for a pea shingle or other SUDS compliant 'driveway' that provides access to the cycle store, bin store and main entrance, with soft landscaping proposed to the rest of the site. Existing hedges to the front of the site are

generally to be retained, maintaining the appearance from the street and along publicly visible boundaries, and ensuring a suitable habitat for wildlife remains.

Below ground services are to run in a shared trench where possible, with both phone and cable / fibre networks running together to a single point of entry. The existing site is served by overhead unsightly BT cables which will be buried, improving the overall appearance of the development site.

Design and Alteration of Buildings

Houses in Bladon Close vary in their style, design and appearance, and are typically between 1 to 2 storeys in height, with trees in each of their relatively large gardens. The proposed development seeks to maintain this aesthetic by providing a 2.5 storey building in a corner plot at the far end of the cul-de-sac, designed with render to the upper levels and fair faced brickwork to some lower level parts of the building. The proposed building has been positioned so as to ensure that it sits comfortably along existing building lines within Bladon Close, and not crossing any 45 degree lines from neighbouring property's windows.

The existing roofs of other properties in the area are of varying styles, but generally comprise of pitched tiled roofs. Some are hipped, while some have a traditional gable end appearance. The proposed development has a slate tiled mansard roof to give the appearance of a sloping roof structure from the ground level, while the choice of materials will enhance long views from St Peters Road across the Wolvercote Primary School grounds.

All flats have been designed to mirror the characteristics of other properties in the area, with views from the living area of each flat looking out over their respective gardens, all of which lead directly onto a terrace (or directly in to the garden in the case of the ground floor flats). Bedroom and en-suite windows are functional in that they provide natural light and ventilation. The upper floor flat benefits from rooflights over the living room to maximise the availability of natural light in this space. The size and positioning of openings on the proposed development have been designed to provide symmetry from the outside, while enhancing the internal living environment by maximising natural light and providing privacy to occupants and to neighbouring properties.