



**THE COWSHED SITE,
ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD**

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

ON BEHALF OF:

BLOOMBRIDGE LLP

PREPARED BY:

R A Cutler BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS MRTPI MBA

**Partner
Bloombridge LLP
4th Floor, Venture House
27-29 Glasshouse Street
London
W1B 5DF**

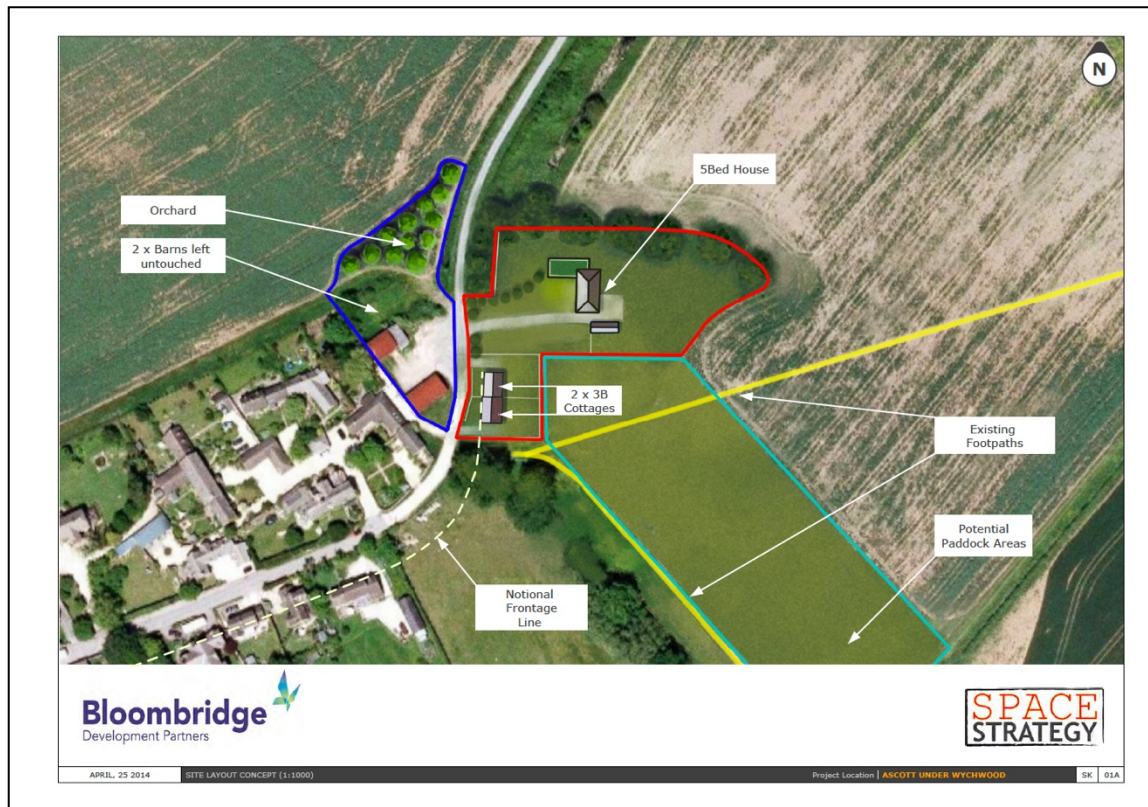
February 2021

Final Version

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The proposed development comprises a mix of up to 7 residential units on the former Cowshed site at the eastern end of the High Street, Ascott-under-Wychwood.

Bloombridge LLP first started promoting a scheme for a residential redevelopment of the site in 2014, at which time based on an initial idea to develop a large house with ancillary accommodation and two three bed cottages on the Cowshed site and possibly some employment development to replace the Dutch Barns on the opposite side of Mill Lane. The initial idea is shown below.



It is important to stress that the Cornbury Estate selected Bloombridge LLP as the Estate’s preferred developer owing to the company’s track record in using community engagement to deliver high quality development in sensitive locations. A recent example is a 120 unit scheme consented in the Parish of Swinderby (Lincolnshire), master planned by Space Strategy. This achieved the full support of the Parish Council and progressed with just a handful of residual objections from the local community. The Bicester Gateway Innovation Community is another example, which was supported by both the Parish and Town Councils and received unanimous Planning Committee resolutions in July and October 2020; and our 32 storey tower next to a Grade 1 listed church in Leeds city centre also received a unanimous approval (in August 2020). These applications are of a different scale to the Cowshed site at Ascott-under-Wychwood, but they have involved the same, careful and inclusive approach to achieving planning permission.

The pre-master plan and pre-application community engagement exercise for the proposed development on the Cowshed site (which at the time included the Dutch Barns site opposite, since granted planning permission to be redeveloped for two dwellings) was undertaken directly by Richard Cutler, a Chartered Surveyor and Chartered Town Planner, one of two Founding Partners of Bloombridge LLP. Engagement started through discussions with immediate neighbours early in 2014.

Equipped with some basic views and feedback, together with an initial concept drawing, Bloombridge and Bidwells (the land agent for the Cornbury Estate) requested a 'Day Zero' exploratory meeting with the Parish Council, which was held on 9 June 2014. Precedent was the main concern expressed by Parish Councillors, along with the design quality and drainage, and the Parish Council was firm that it would maintain an impartial view until formally asked to comment through the planning application process. It was agreed with the Parish Council that Bloombridge should go back to the neighbours. This resulted in an informal meeting with about a dozen residents on 19 September 2014 at Yew Tree Farmhouse, where a range of views was expressed, concluding with an overall 'in principle' objection to the proposed scheme (although this was not a unanimous view). Again, a key concern raised by neighbours was the possible precedent and, in particular, the possibility that the proposed scheme might lead to future development by the Estate on adjoining land known as Connor's Field. Ecology and tree protection matters were also raised as concerns.

At this point in time, in 2015, the policy position in the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan was unclear in terms of the potential for development in Ascott-under-Wychwood, which was not then a defined 'Village' in the draft Local Plan (Table 4.1). Because the issues of precedent and 'in principle' objections were at the forefront of the initial community engagement exercise we decided to wait for progress on the emerging Local Plan, notably with regard to the status of Ascott-under-Wychwood and the scope for residential development within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our focus was on making representations to the draft Local Plan, where we attended the Hearings in October/November 2015 and May 2017. We also focused on progressing the key technical studies, including heritage, ecology, drainage and landscape and visual impact, and we held informal meetings with residents as and when the opportunity arose.

Following approximately three years of policy-based engagement, Richard Cutler arranged to see the Parish Council again, informally, on 11 June 2018 (the local District Councillor, Jake Acock, was also in attendance). This was in anticipation of the Inspector's Report on the emerging Local Plan, eventually published on 24 August 2018. The key issues discussed with Parish Councillors included:

- a. Local Plan policy – in particular, claims that this supported an 'in principle' objection to any development in Ascott-under-Wychwood.
- b. Encroachment into the open countryside.
- c. Increase in traffic.
- d. Land drainage and drain maintenance.

- e. Setting of the listed Yew Tree Farmhouse.
- f. Mature trees.
- g. 'Previously developed' land – noted as a positive.
- h. Affordability – smaller units preferred.
- i. 'Thin end of the wedge'.
- j. It was concluded that the next step is a community engagement workshop.

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan was adopted in September 2018. As explained in the Planning Statement accompanying the application, it is clear that adopted, up to date policy is supportive of new small-scale residential development in defined 'Villages' like Ascott-under-Wychwood, especially where 'previously developed' land is involved. It is because of this policy position, as well as the overall need for housing in West Oxfordshire (including needs expressed directly to us by local residents), that we made the decision to re-work our designs to include more units, with a focus on smaller units.

The revised proposals for the Cowshed site (and which at the time included the Dutch Barns site on the opposite side of Mil Lane) were formally consulted upon from 3pm to 8pm on 15 November 2018 at the Tiddy Hall in Ascott-under-Wychwood, having previously been advertised in the village magazine, *The Grapevine*, and on village notice boards (see below).

**THE COWSHED AND DUTCH BARN, YEW TREE FARM,
HIGH STREET, ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD**

Committee Room, Tiddy Hall, 3pm to 7:30pm

15TH NOVEMBER 2018

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ('DROP IN') EVENT

Bloombridge LLP is proposing to submit a planning application for a small-scale residential development to replace the barns at Yew Tree Farm. Best practice encourages early community involvement in the design process to ensure easily addressed concerns, ideas or opportunities are incorporated in the plans.

We would welcome suggestions in this regard.

Our preferred option at this stage is eight predominantly 2 and 3 bed houses, designed to a high standard on the 'previously developed' element of the site.

All trees will be retained.

Please 'drop in' any time during the consultation.

We look forward to seeing you.



The event was attended by Bloombridge and Space Strategy and approximately 50 people (about 10% of the village population), including the District Councillor, Jake Acock, who spoke to every attendee (which he recorded as 44). Eight A1 boards were displayed and used as the basis for one to one and group discussions as people came and went throughout the afternoon (see the Appendix).

A representative summary of the feedback received verbally and in writing during and after the public consultation includes:

- a. Strong support for the proposed small units (2 or 3 bed) in preference to the original 'large house' concept. The proposed small units aid affordability and serve two key needs in the village, comprising the young and the 'down-sizing' elderly.
- b. Enough car parking spaces (to prevent increased parking on the High Street).
- c. A desire to minimise large agricultural vehicles passing up and down High Street. Concern expressed about damage to cars, trees, mud on the road, damage to the surface, and large vehicles at unsociable hours.
- d. Concern to ensure the trees and woodland areas surrounding the barns were protected. A preference for these areas to be 'designed-in' as part of the overall landscape and management strategy.

- e. Support for the proposed Martyrs' Garden initiative. Suggestion that the garden could be planted with 16 trees, one for each Martyr.
- f. Questions around foul and surface water drainage; resolved by identification of a blocked culvert.
- g. Approximate 50/50 support/objection in relation to the proposed parking for walkers, alongside concerns expressed about parking on verges, especially relating to the use of the Sports Field, and whether extra spaces would help or hinder this local issue.
- h. Need for a turning circle (with signage) at this end of the High Street (eg delivery vans and refuse vehicles).
- i. Commercial space not favoured.
- j. A dislike of the proposed 'two bungalow' solution to the Dutch Barn site on design grounds. Key comment: "this part of the site needs a solution that addresses any overlooking concerns back on to the Yew Tree Farm cul-de-sac, perhaps through the application of innovative design."
- k. "It's an AONB village where no development should be allowed" contrasting with "if we have to have development anywhere in the AONB then why not here, close to the village and on previously developed land". Preference for Cotswold stone.
- l. "Thin end of the wedge", contrasting with "need to keep the village alive".

The display boards were left with the Parish Council and made available to be viewed by anyone who was unable to attend the event on 15 November 2018. We also subsequently emailed a list of people who requested specific technical reports, such as heritage and ecology. A write up in the January 2019 edition of *The Grapevine* followed.

Since the public consultation, Bloombridge has received 5 expressions of interest from village residents wanting to reserve a new house on the development. All of these people are looking to downsize from a larger house. This is reflective of a local need and what we would describe as 'on balance' local support for the scheme.

CONCLUSION

The community involvement efforts since 2014 have proved an invaluable contribution to the design-evolution exercise. Very careful attention has been paid to the comments received. We would also say that the November 2018 consultation was helpful in demystifying the development proposals for the Cowshed site, and that of the Dutch Barns which has subsequently been granted planning permission for 2 dwellings, providing reassurance on design quality and mix, and in helping the scheme to evolve into something that feels grounded in what Ascott-under-Wychwood both wants and needs.

It is rare for any new development to please everyone. It is likely that there will still be both 'objections in principle' and objections to certain details. As ever, these objections will likely be more vocal than any expressions of support since supporters tend to be more passive and less inclined to comment (because they do not feel adversely affected in any way). We were, nonetheless, delighted that 27 of the 44 recorded people who attended in November 2018 stated support for the proposed development, with the remaining 17 counted as being split approximately equally between an 'objection' or 'undecided/neutral' response.

Further Information

For further information on this Statement of Community Involvement, please contact the joint applicant:


Richard Cutler
Bloombridge LLP
4th Floor, Venture House
27-29 Glasshouse Street
London
W1B 5DF

T: +44(0) 203 086 7950

M: +44(0) 7771 968 227

E: richard@bloombridge.com

APPENDIX – BOARDS DISPLAYED AT THE CONSULTATION ON 15 NOVEMBER 2018



Current Thinking

Further small-scale development in Ascott-under-Wychwood accords with the recently adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan where Policy OS2 states that this category of settlement is,

“...suitable for limited development which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of these communities”.

Such development can be delivered in a way that makes good sense to the village as a whole, offering fewer impacts and more benefits than the barns in their current condition.

The three barns and hardstanding areas that make up this proposed development site are, like the rest of Yew Tree Farm, now largely obsolete in terms of their agricultural function, and they are becoming somewhat unsightly. They form part of the village, located at the end of the High Street, and, like the redevelopment of the rest of Yew Tree Farm in the 1980s, this last part can be seen as a logical rounding off and conclusion.

When it comes to change, we believe that the Parish has more to gain and less to lose from development on this site. The Local Plan is clear that, subject to the ‘General Principles’ in Policy OS2, small scale development in the ‘Villages’ is sustainable and modest growth is positive in terms of the vitality of the village and the contribution new units can make to the pressing housing needs in Oxfordshire.

Today we are seeking your views on this proposition.

Welcome Land at Yew Tree Farm



Village Land at Yew Tree Farm

Planning Policy

Our summary of the planning decision basis, comprising policy and 'other material considerations', is as follows:

1. In the first instance the application is considered to be in accordance with the development plan (the recently adopted LP2031) and attracts its full weight. Whilst no strategic housing allocations are included in the LP2031 for Ascott-under-Wychwood there is not an embargo on new homes in the AONB.

2. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In the second instance, therefore, in the event that West Oxon judges there to be a policy conflict, even if only through an interpretation of policy, it is considered that there are other material considerations in this case, including community benefits, and lack of harm, that indicate planning permission should be granted in the 'planning balancing exercise'.

3. The five key core objectives in the LP2031 (para. 3.3) include 'Strong Market Towns and Villages', recognising that West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural district (para. 3.4). Ascott-under-Wychwood is identified as a 'Village' in the LP2031 (Table 4.1 to para. 4.14).

4. In their Local Transport Plan (LTP4) Oxfordshire County Council identify the Cotswold line as a strategic priority including further capacity and service enhancements. The site lies approximately 800m from the train station (a 10 minute walk).

5. In terms of employment in the Burford - Charlbury Sub-Area, as the LP2031 advises in paras 9.6.10 and in 9.6.28:

"The resident workforce is highly skilled with a large proportion in professional occupations or holding managerial positions. The area is characterised by high-levels of home working with around 35% of workers working at or mainly from home. This helps to keep a reasonable job/workforce balance. Compared to the eastern parts of the District, there is less commuting to Oxford and adjoining areas." (para. 9.6.10).

6. In terms of housing in the Sub-Area, Table 9.5 to para. 9.6.31 anticipates 774 homes will be delivered in the period 2011 - 2031. The 774 figure includes the 62 homes at Milton under Wychwood, the subject of the allowed appeal (ref: APP/D3125/W/16/3143885), and 120 'Existing small planning commitments at 1st April 2017 (less than 10 units)'. As LP2031 Policies H1 and BCl both note, the anticipated future supply of 774 homes in the Sub-Area should not be taken as an absolute target for each sub-area or maximum ceiling to limit development. The required level of housing delivery of at least 15,950 homes district-wide includes reliance on windfall development (paras 5.33 and 5.34, and Policy H2). It is clear that further windfall housing in the AONB above the 774 homes identified in the LP2031 for the Sub-Area is acceptable.

7. The site is not undeveloped, rather it is somewhat of an eyesore, there is no identified village boundary, but a site at the end of the High Street, a short walk from the village amenities, can reasonably be considered to be part of the village and well related to it. The site does not significantly contribute to the wider landscape setting, rather the characteristics of the site provide a visual distinction from the surrounding countryside. The scale and high standard of design of the new homes will consolidate the High Street's overall linear form and thereby reflect the existing settlement pattern in a way that complements the distinctive character of the area.

8. Lastly, regard should be had to the economic, vitality and social benefits available to the village from new residents increasing expenditure in the local economy, village shop, pub and non-retail uses which satisfy the community's everyday needs, as well as supporting the Cotswold railway line, which is a strategic priority including further capacity and service enhancements (para. 9.6.12 of the LP2031). The development will generate New Homes Bonus (grant paid by central government to the Council reflecting housing growth in the area which can be spent to benefit the local community), boosting the supply of homes. Above all, the location of the site is accessible and sustainable, being within easy walking or cycling distance of the village services and facilities.

Planning Land at Yew Tree Farm



Layout Land at Yew Tree Farm



Surface Water

AONB

Foul Water

Technical Matters

- Trees – keep all, plant more.
- Highways – traffic speed is not an issue, nor is safety.
- Surface Water – move storm water outlet / renovate ditches.
- Foul Drainage –Septic tanks
- Lighting – sensitive to ecology.
- SUDS – better than existing concrete hardstand (18.7% less hardscape).
- AONB – detailed LVIA analysis shows a reduction in impact.

Benefits

- More attractive / conclude this end of High Street.
- Turning circle and signage for delivery vans.
- Parking for walkers.
- Parish to specify tree planting & species?
- 2 and 3 bed houses, possibly some business space.
- £100 per sq m towards affordable housing.

Technical Land at Yew Tree Farm

Natural Stone

NOT Reconstituted Stone

Our No 1 objective is to deliver a high quality scheme in a high quality landscaped environment. We are not a volume housebuilder, and we do not have standard house types, so we can respond flexibly to ideas and local preferences.

Initial soundings suggest that a traditional approach, centred on Cotswold Stone elevations, is the preferred way forwards.

Sympathetic Tiles/Slates

NOT Contrasting Tiles

Materials Land at Yew Tree Farm

Next Steps

We would welcome your comments and we are happy to talk through and review our thinking. Please fill in a questionnaire. In particular, we would be interested to hear your thoughts on local needs and things that we might do to make our proposals acceptable to you.

1. We will collate all feedback.
2. We will apply this feedback to the formulation of our planning application.
3. We will address any outstanding technical issues.
4. We would be happy to provide a report back to the Parish Council.
5. The plan is to submit a detailed planning application in Q1 2019.
6. This will include a Statement of Community Involvement.
7. We would expect a decision to be made during the summer 2019.
8. If our application is approved, we would aim to be on site in Q3 2020.

We have sought to follow Government best practice in community engagement.

Bloombridge
Development Partners

Next Land at Yew Tree Farm