

Planning Statement

To accompany the submission of a full planning application for the change of use of former doctors surgery to a residential dwellinghouse at The Surgery, Greenway Road, Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, GL56 9BJ

1. Introduction
 - 1.1 This Planning Statement accompanies a planning application for the development described above and submitted via the Planning Portal under reference PP-12725501.
 - 1.2 The following documents have been submitted to accompany the application:
 - Site Location and Block Plan (drg no. 3171-001);
 - Existing Floor Plans (drg no.3171-100);
 - Existing Elevations (drg no.3171-101);
 - Proposed Floor Plans (drg no.3171-200);
 - Proposed Elevations (drg no.3171-201);
 - CIL Forms no.1 and no.2;
 - Biodiversity Self-Assessment Form; and
 - Planning Statement (this document).
 - 1.3 This application is made to Cotswold District Council (CDC), the Local Planning Authority (LPA), to establish the acceptability in planning terms of the change of use of a former doctors surgery to a single residential dwellinghouse.
 - 1.4 The application site relates to a two-storey detached property located within the Blockley Development Boundary (as defined by the Cotswold Local Plan) and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The front (south) elevation of

the property faces onto Greenway Road. Residential properties surround the site to the east, south, and west, and the rear (north) of the site backs onto agricultural land.

- 1.5 Historically, the application site comprised a residential dwellinghouse but soon became a single-handed family run doctors practice. From 1985 onwards, the property operated as a branch surgery to 'The White House Surgery' based in Moreton town centre. In 2014, following successful growth of the town centre surgery, the practice amalgamated with Mann Cottage Surgery and moved into a purpose-built building known as the 'Four Shires Medical Centre'. The Blockley Surgery continued to operate as a branch surgery, but due to the amalgamation of practices, the constrained layout of the building, and the implications of the 2019 coronavirus pandemic, the Blockley Surgery closed its doors in 2020 and has remained vacant since.
- 1.6 Accordingly, the proposals seek to return the property back into a 4-bedroom dwellinghouse. Limited alterations are required to facilitate the change of use and relate solely to fenestration details and internal layouts.
- 1.7 The Development Plan
- 2.1 The application site is located within the administrative area of Cotswold District Council, wherein the relevant development plan is the Cotswold District Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Adopted 3 August 2018). The key development plan policies relevant to the determination of this application are as follows:
- 2.2 Policy DS2 (Development Within Development Boundaries) states that within the Development Boundaries indicated on the Policies Maps, applications for development will be permissible in principle.
- 2.3 Policy EN2 (Design of the Built and Natural Environment) states that development will be permitted which accords with the Cotswold Design Code. Proposals should be of design quality that respects the character and distinctive appearance of the locality.

- 2.4 Policy EN5 (Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) outlines that in determining development proposals within the AONB or its setting, the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape, its character and special qualities will be given great weight.
- 2.5 Policy INF2 (Social and Community Infrastructure) states that planning permission for development which results in the loss of a local community facility or service will be permitted provided: a) it is demonstrated that there is no local demand for the facility or service, or demand for an appropriate, alternative local community use for the facility; or b) replacement facilities or services are provided in an appropriate alternative location.
- 2.6 Policy INF3 (Sustainable Transport) outlines that development will be permitted that assists in the delivery of the objectives of the Local Transport Plan and in particular, actively supports travel choice through provision, enhancement and promotion of safe & recognisable connections to existing walking, cycling and public transport networks, gives priority to pedestrians and cyclists and provides access to public transport facilities and does not have a detrimental effect on the environment by reason of unacceptable levels of noise, vibration or atmospheric pollution.
- 2.7 Policy INF4 (Highway Safety) specifies criteria that development should meet, including the development is well integrated, creates safe and secure layouts minimising conflict and incorporating design for low speed, avoid locations where the cumulative impact of congestion or other undesirable impact on the transport is likely to remain severe, has regard to the Manual for Gloucestershire Streets.
- 2.8 Policy INF5 (Parking Provision) requires parking provision to be in accordance with standards and guidance set out in Appendix F of the Local Plan. Appendix F sets out standards for the provision of car parking spaces according to floor area of specific uses.

The National Planning Policy Framework

2.9 The NPPF is a material consideration when making decisions on planning applications or appeals. The key text in relation to the development proposals is outlined below.

2.10 Paragraph 8 sets out the overarching objectives of sustainable development which are mutually interdependent and supportive. These objectives are identified as economic, social and environmental.

2.11 Paragraphs 9-10 provide guidance on the interpretation of the three objectives. They are not to be read in isolation but instead are mutually dependent on each other. Seeking positive improvements to the quality of the built, natural and historic environment as well as quality of life is a key function of sustainable development.

2.12 Paragraph 11 clearly sets out that at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; and
- where there are no relevant development plan policies or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - o the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - o any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

2.13 Paragraph 12 provides important clarification on the interpretation of the presumption by confirming that the presumption does not change the statutory

status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making. It goes on to confirm that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan, permission should not usually be granted but makes it clear that applications can be granted where they depart from an up-to-date development plan if material considerations indicate that the plan should not be followed.

- 2.14 Paragraph 38 directs local planning authorities to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. It adds that decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Subsequent paragraphs cite that pre-application engagement is a useful tool.
- 2.15 Paragraph 60 states to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirement are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.
- 2.16 Paragraph 97 states that planning decisions should guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs and ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community.
- 2.17 Paragraph 115 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 2.18 Paragraph 124 states that planning should 'give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes'.
- 2.19 Paragraph 131 stipulates that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. It adds

that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

2.20 Paragraph 135 advises, among other things, that development should be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

2.21 Paragraphs 180 sets out the ways in which the planning system should contribute to and enhance the local and natural environment. The reuse of previously developed land, protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land, conserving landscape and scenic beauty particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and minimising impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity are all seen as important ways of achieving this.

2.22 Paragraph 182 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

2. Planning Assessment

3.1 The key matters in the determination of this application are considered to be: loss of a community facility; the principle of residential development; design and residential amenity; and highway safety. Each of these matters are addressed in turn below.

Loss of Community Facility

3.2 Policy INF2 relates to social and community infrastructure, including doctors' surgeries. Clause 2 sets out that development that would result in the loss of a local community facility or service will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is no local demand for it or demand for an appropriate alternative local community use for the facility, or that replacement facilities or services are provided in an appropriate alternative location.

3.3 As briefly touched upon earlier in this Statement, Blockley Surgery closed in March 2020 and has remained vacant ever since. The reasons for closure include the following:

- The main town centre branch (The White House Surgery) moved into a new purpose-built doctors surgery in 2014. This surgery has approximately 970sqm of floor area, covers the patient catchment area of Blockley, and provides significantly improved services, facilities and infrastructure. Thus, there has been no net loss of premises within the locality, nor is there a demonstrable need for the doctors surgery to remain in Blockley.
- Due to the constrained size and layout of the building, the surgery was forced to shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, as infection control measures could not be implemented. If re-opened, the building is at risk of being closed again under similar circumstances. The rehiring of staff and restocking of drugs/equipment on a labile basis is just not feasible. Moreover, other infections can easily spread in the building which is problematic given the nature of the business.
- Lastly, the property is outdated and no longer fit for purpose for health or community use, as Care Quality Commission (CQC) standards cannot be met. For example, there is no disabled access nor any scope for this to be implemented. Furthermore, there are also not enough consulting rooms for other clinicians (such as nurses, physios etc.) and there is limited parking available for patients.

3.4 As the doctors surgery has been vacant since 2020, the applicant has undertaken the necessary procedures required in order to formally close the practice. A copy of the application for closure, and confirmation from the NHS ICB Premises Committee, is included within Appendix A of this document.

3.5 In light of the above considerations, the proposed change of use of the former doctors surgery to a residential dwellinghouse is considered not to result in the loss of a community facility. As such, the provision of the healthcare facilities in the locality would not be affected and the proposal is considered to accord with Local Plan Policy INF2.

3.6 The Principal of Residential Development

3.7 The site is located within the Development Boundary of Blockley, which is identified as a Principal Settlement in the Cotswold District Local Plan (Policies DS1 and DS2). Policy DS2 states that 'Within the Development Boundaries indicated on the Policies Maps, applications for development will be permissible in principle.'

3.8 The application site also constitutes previously developed (brownfield) land. Paragraph 124 of the NPPF states that planning should 'give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes'. In addition, it is acknowledged that the original use of the site would have been as a dwellinghouse and as such, the proposal will facilitate the return to its originally intended use.

3.9 Overall, the proposal would provide a new dwelling in an existing building located within a sustainable settlement. The Local Plan and NPPF is therefore supportive in principle of forming a new residential dwelling on the application site.

Design and Residential Amenity

3.10 The proposals seek to return the property back to its original use as a residential dwellinghouse. Therefore, only minor alterations to the fenestration are necessary, such as the addition of a front porch, and a change of the rear garden doors to bifolds. As such, the proposed change of use is considered not to harm the character and appearance of the area, or the residential amenity of neighbouring properties. The proposals comply with Local Plan Policy EN2 and Section 12 of the NPPF.

Highway Safety

3.11 The change of use of the property from a doctors surgery to a dwellinghouse is less intensive and will afford a significant decrease in vehicle movements on and off the site. Furthermore, there is ample space for off-street parking to the front of the

building. As such, the proposal is not considered to have a detrimental impact on the local road network or highway safety and would accord with Local Plan Policies INF3 and INF4 and paragraph 115 of the NPPF.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 This Planning Statement has explained that change of use of the former doctors surgery to a residential dwellinghouse is an entirely appropriate form of development in the context of national and local planning policy.
- 4.2 Sufficient evidence and justification to demonstrate there is no longer a demand for such a community facility has been provided, and the development would make efficient and effective use of brownfield land in a sustainable location. It has also been demonstrated that the proposals would not cause any harm to residential amenity or impact negatively upon the local highway network.
- 4.3 It is therefore determined that this proposal represents an appropriate form of sustainable development that is supported on both a national and local policy level. As such, the proposals are a sustainable form of development and should be approved without delay (Paragraph 11, NPPF).