

WATLINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINATION
HEARING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF ARCHSTONE PROJECTS AND BLOOR HOMES (67)

- 1 This statement is written on behalf of Archstone Projects and Bloor Homes, who are actively promoting Site A – land at Britwell Road, Watlington. A hybrid application for Site A has been submitted and is currently with the Council for determination (LPA Ref. P17/S3231/O).
- 2 We support the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan and have sought to respond to the Examiners' questions in turn below. We have considered the Examiner's questions based on the Basic Conditions in the context of the Neighbourhood Plan, rather than the details of the current planning application on Site A.

Session 1 – The proposed bypass of Watlington

What evidence underpins the proposal in the Plan for a Watlington bypass?

- 3 The provision of a bypass is consistent with the draft Local Plan policy TRANS 3, which safeguards its route around the town. Part of the evidence base supporting this is within the Transport Topic Paper (October 2017), which highlights at paragraphs 3.4 that the bypass for Watlington has 'wider strategic benefits'.
- 4 The Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan Part A identifies on page 18, that mitigation (such as the Watlington bypass) would reduce the highway delays expected by development growth (e.g. Chalgrove Airfield). The planning application for Chalgrove Airfield is therefore expected to fund part of the bypass (see below).

Would the combination of the three proposed housing allocations and the bypass represent sustainable development?

- 5 Yes. The adopted Core Strategy (and the Settlement Assessment Background Paper supporting it) identifies Watlington as a larger village, due to its services and facilities. The draft Local Plan continues to identify Watlington as a larger village and identifies a level of growth accordingly. The WNP is consistent with this and the site selection process underpinning it has identified sites which relate well to the town's services and facilities; and would meet the

identified housing requirement in the least sensitive locations, when compared to the alternatives, i.e. by avoiding the AONB and majority of designated heritage assets in the area. This is further supported by the WNP's Sustainability Appraisal. The sites and their relationship with the town reflect a logical and sustainable approach to development, even before any consideration of the bypass and its environmental, social and economic benefits.

There are various references in the Plan (para 2.6/WNDP10) to earlier proposals to use Willow Close and the access road to the Watlington Industrial Estate as the western part of a bypass for the town. Does this route have any status and/or is it safeguarded?

6 We have no comments to make.

How will the proposed route be delivered in general terms? Is its delivery dependent on financial contributions from the emerging residential development at Chalgrove (as set out in the submitted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033) and/or from other sources of funding? In broad terms is the development of a bypass commercially viable?

7 The draft allocations in the WNP, to be in accordance with paragraph 6.3 and Housing Sites A – C, will be expected to deliver and/or safeguard sections of the road as part of their respective schemes, which altogether should enable a significant proportion of the bypass to come forward. In addition, developments both within Watlington and beyond will contribute to the CIL fund, which could be utilised to deliver the remainder (given its draft identification as a strategic transport project at TRANS 3). The bypass is also identified within the latest Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan (WAT9).

8 The Oxfordshire Growth Board published the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy in September 2017. This includes a list of infrastructure projects and their 'Multi Criteria Assessment' score, which is used to support funding bids and for generating priority action plans to support enabling and unblocking infrastructure projects. Within the M40 Corridor Eastern, the Watlington bypass scored an MCA of 19 – higher than any other project in the area. This clearly demonstrates the value and importance of the bypass. At County level, significant levels of funding have been awarded for housing and infrastructure (including £150 million for infrastructure within the Housing and Growth Agreement); with further announcements on other funding expected (such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund), which could free up funds that may have otherwise helped to fund schemes such as Didcot.

- 9 Carter Jonas, in their letter on behalf of Homes England, have also provided written commitment (26th January 2018) to SODC regarding the delivery of the development at Chalgrove Airfield, stating that it will provide 'gap funding' for the bypass.
- 10 As such, we consider there is sufficient confidence that the safeguarding and alternative route for the B4009 is viable and deliverable.

What discussions have taken place between public bodies and potential site developers of the sites proposed in the submitted Plan to ensure a co-ordinated approach towards its design and delivery? Has an appropriate technical standard been determined?

- 11 Yes. Discussions are ongoing, with a key meeting held on 19th January 2018 (Watlington Edge Road Technical Meeting), which agreed the technical standards for the bypass. The policy at paragraph 6.4 of the WNP could be amended to ensure that such technical standards are met.
- 12 Other meetings have taken place, for instance on the 28th November 2017 between Homes England and the site promoters within the WNP. These discussions are ongoing and will inform the revised planning application at Site A.

When is it anticipated that the bypass (within the NP area) will be delivered?

- 13 At the meeting on 28th November 2017 it was generally accepted that the delivery of the road by 2022/23 was reasonable. The physical part of the road within Site A will be built within 6 months from implementation, with the safeguarded land made available for the completion of the connection when it is required.

Are any measures being pursued by public bodies to secure the connection of the proposed Watlington bypass to the B4009 to the east of the neighbourhood area (in Pyrton parish)?

- 14 Discussions are ongoing between Homes England, OCC, SODC, WNPG and the respective site developers/promoters.

What would be the likely impact of the proposed new developments (Sites A/B/C) on the free and safe flow of traffic in the town before an effective bypass of Watlington is developed?

- 15 OCC have indicated that there is existing capacity for some development and planning permission will be approved if there are no outstanding technical objections. Once the bypass is in place, improvements to the local highway network can be expected.
- 16 The detailed planning application at Site A has been designed and submitted to enable the proposed dwellings to be delivered independently of the bypass, and therefore contribute to the housing needs of Watlington.
- 17 Notwithstanding this, the application proposal would deliver part of the new road, with a further section being safeguarded.

What would be the likely impacts of the proposed scale of development on traffic levels along Pyrton Lane (with or without a bypass)? What impact will any changes in traffic levels have on the character of Pyrton Lane?

- 18 The transport implications of each development will be subject to detailed discussion and consultation with the County.
- 19 In respect of the Transport Assessment for Site A, it confirms that the site will not give rise to adverse impacts on Pyrton Lane. This should only improve with the bypass in place (including cumulative impact).
- 20 Amendments to the current planning application at Site A are being made to reflect recent discussions with OCC.

Session 2 – The proposed housing allocations

Can the proposed housing allocations be sensitively incorporated within the neighbourhood area in general, and its surrounding agricultural landscape in particular? Do they take account of the Chiltern Hills AONB to the south and east of the town?

- 21 Yes. The southern and eastern ends of the town are most sensitive in landscape terms (with the eastern side being particularly sensitive in heritage terms also). Therefore, identifying development sites in the least sensitive south west, west and north ends of the town is logical and would be most likely to deliver sustainable development, as noted above. The sites also have the benefit of jointly being able to deliver the bypass. The draft Local Plan policy TRANS 3 and the evidence base supporting the Local Plan reflects this.

- 22 In terms of the quantum of development proposed for Site A within the WNP, Archstone made representations to the WNP in a letter dated 26th February 2016. Within this, Archstone enclosed evidence from landscape consultants EDP, who reviewed the SODC Landscape Capacity Study and concluded that a larger area of the site was suitable for development. The WNPG would have had this evidence as part of their consideration of the capacity of Site A.

Can the three sites be satisfactorily incorporated into the design, layout and townscape of Watlington? Do they take account of heritage assets?

- 23 Yes. Development to the east and south of Watlington would have a greater landscape impact and a greater impact upon the character of the town, including on the Conservation Area and other designated heritage assets – the majority of the listed buildings are concentrated along Couching Street and Shirburn Road, with relatively little development north of Hill Road.
- 24 Site A can provide a high quality residential development which will be in-keeping with the prevailing character of the town (with reference to both the Watlington Design Guide and SODC Design Guide). The design approach has been informed by a full suite of technical work, including a Landscape and Visual Appraisal, an Archaeology and Heritage Assessment and Design and Access Statement. The LVA in particular, assesses the landscape capacity of the site in detail, assessing key views in and out of the site and its visual relationship with the existing built form. It suggests mitigation, including the provision of substantial structural planting along the southern boundary, which will ensure a softer transition between the town and surrounding countryside when compared to the current industrial estate and intensive agricultural use. This mitigation is included in the planning application.
- 25 As set out above, the layout is currently in the process of being amended, but Site A will continue to be supported by the above technical work, with further clarification provided where required. The site will remain well connected to the town and its services and facilities via cycle and pedestrian linkages.
- 26 In terms of non-designated heritage assets, the SODC Sustainability Appraisal acknowledges that the land for the bypass is 'without archaeological constraint' (page 54). For Site A, pre-submission archaeological evaluations have been carried out; the initial findings of which are consistent with this.

Would the development of Site A be compatible with the ongoing operation of existing businesses on the Watlington Industrial Estate?

- 27 Yes. Watlington Industrial Estate neighbours residential areas such as Cuxham Road, Hurdlers Green and Windmill Piece. It does not currently operate in isolation. This is not an unusual relationship in towns. There is no evidence of any noise complaints from these residential properties.
- 28 Initial discussions with an occupier on the Estate to mitigate noise at source had progressed and terms agreed to carry out suitable mitigation works, which were satisfactory to the business itself and a straight forward solution. However, the landlords' consent to these minor works (comprising an application to enclose/improve their external plant) has not been forthcoming, and alternative mitigation measures have been explored with the Council's Environmental Health Officer.
- 29 The application has assessed the current noise from the occupied Industrial Estate and provided mitigation against it based on a worst-case scenario, i.e. assuming an unrestricted 24-hour operation. As such the proposals will not place unreasonable restrictions on the existing businesses at the Industrial Estate and is consistent with paragraph 123 of the NPPF and related Planning Practice Guidance. This approach is also consistent with the existing saved Local Plan policy EP2 and the forthcoming Local Plan draft policy ENV11.
- 30 The current planning application proposes on-site mitigation measures comprising a combination of acoustic barriers, the orientation of properties and fabric specification. These measures will be retained as part of the amendments to the application and there will be further technical work by the Applicants' noise consultant to support these measures. There will be betterment for existing neighbouring residential properties in terms of noise.

What is the current progress of planning application P17/S3231/0 on Site A?

- 31 The application was subject to pre-application discussions. The application was validated by SODC on 25th September 2017 and the consultation period ended on the 21st November 2017. A number of key consultee responses have been received which have led to amendments to the layout. Meetings and discussions are ongoing with OCC, SODC and WNPG, and the above amendments are currently being made. The description of development and number of homes remain unchanged and a meeting with the WNPG in January to discuss the revised layout attracted broad support. A further meeting with OCC Highways took place on the 26th February 2018 to agree the revised highway approach in order to overcome their concerns of 1st December 2017.

What is the anticipated timetable for the submission of planning applications on sites B and C?

32 We have no comments to make.