

The Committee of the Friends of Old Headington

Comments on the Outline Plan for Barton

13/01383/OUT | Outline application (seeking means of access) for the erection of: A maximum of 885 residential units (Class C3); a maximum of 2,500 sqm gross Class A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5 uses (with a maximum of 2,000 sqm gross foodstore Class A1); a maximum of 50 extra care housing units; a maximum of 7,350 sqm GEA hotel (Class C1); a maximum of 3,000 sqm GEA Class D1, D2 floorspace (community hub and primary school); in development blocks ranging from 2 to 5 storeys with associated cycle and car parking, landscaping, public realm works, interim works and associated highway works. (Additional information - Landscape and Cultural Heritage Statement) | Land West Of Barton North Of A40 And South Of Boundary Brook Northern By-Pass Road Wolvercote Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9SD

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above application. The Committee of the Friends would like to comment as follows:

Social Housing Provision

The Friends support the stated intention to set the level of affordable housing provision at a minimum of 40% (100% social rented). Barton West is currently the only major opportunity for the provision of a substantial number of new dwellings in an area with excellent connections to the City, and we welcome the opportunity to create a new semi-rural neighbourhood while going some way to meet Oxford's housing needs.

'Green' features

The Bayswater Brook linear park is an imaginative idea, and we congratulate the developers on the concept.

The Outline Plan as described will meet the statutory requirements that 20% of the site's energy will be provided by on-site renewables or low carbon energy sources. We note that this target will primarily be met by means of photovoltaic panels, and suggest that all available measures to minimize any 'flash' effect from sunlight reflected from the panels should be adopted.

Green spaces

The plans as currently presented do not seem to meet the City Council's Commitments in the document *Oxford Core Strategy 2026*, adopted by the Council on 14th March 2011, and specifically the commitment set out in CS 21 of ensuring that there will be 5.75 ha of publicly accessible green space per 1000 population. Honouring this commitment should be mandatory **within this development**.

The *Oxford City Green Space Study* of August 2005, which forms part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy, clearly identified Headington and Barton as areas with a provision of open space well below the City Standard, and the new Barton must not be similarly underprovided. The provision of private green space should not be allowed to justify the failure of the proposals to meet the City Council's formal commitment to the minimum amount of publicly accessible green space.

The Committee feels that the 'pocket parks' will be too small to be of meaningful value in terms of green space provision. On the basis of the documentation submitted, we fear that the concept is nothing more than a PR gimmick to make a virtue out of irregular patches of ground which would not otherwise generate any revenue for the developers. If the concept is to be retained, we recommend specifications for minimum size, with landscape treatment and maintenance. Which specific needs of residents will be met by 'pocket parks' should similarly be clarified.

Local amenities

1. We welcome the new primary school planned for the development, but are concerned by the assumption that existing doctors' surgeries and secondary schools will be able to absorb the increased numbers living in Barton West. We would like to see the calculations underlying these assumptions. We also feel that this is a missed opportunity to provide a public house, lacking in Barton since the closure of the Fox, and an important part of any community.
2. The number of parking spaces available for the retail centre has not been made sufficiently clear. The provision of adequate parking will be crucial to the viability of the commercial enterprises envisaged; however multi-storey parking would be both inappropriate and unacceptable in the context of this development.
3. The application does not make clear what is meant by the term "mixed use" in connection with the main commercial square. It can mean a mixture of single use buildings, or it can mean that each building contains a mixture of uses. The latter is much to be preferred, and it should be signalled at this stage as a requirement : a shop with apartments over it is much less bleak out of shop opening hours than a single use retail block.
4. The present proposals for the spine road do not take account of the variety of purposes which it will serve.
 - It is very likely to become a rat-run for residents of the existing Barton Estate to get to and from the A40 Ring Road, because the incentive to gain easier access to

the Green Road roundabout by joining the primary traffic flow will be considerable, unless access from Bayswater Road is improved, e.g. by the introduction of traffic lights.

In any case, high level specifications for the traffic calming measures must be part of the legally binding conditions to be met in the outline permission.

- It will run through the two proposed “principal squares” and will be crossed by all four “green corridors”, which will go north-south from the brook to the ring road, and which are specifically described by the developers as providing children’s play opportunities. Both the squares and the green corridors mean that there will be a potentially lethal mix of through traffic and pedestrians, including children. The City Council must set out stringent and legally binding safety measures to reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

Northern bypass

1. We note the intention to retain the multi-layered green buffer between the new development and the A40; between Old Headington/Northway and the A40, and on the central reservation (other than where it is proposed that a new crossing will clear a channel between the existing trees and shrubs). If the crossing is built as proposed, we would like to see an explicit commitment that the green buffer will be replaced and maintained to the perimeter of the crossing to the north, to the south, and in the centre - as far as that is compatible with the road layout.
2. We agree that the retail centre is appropriately sited adjacent to the A40. However, we are concerned that the residential units alongside the dual carriageway are too close to the road. Even allowing for the retention of greenery between houses and road, it is clear that residents along this stretch will suffer from noise and pollution to an unacceptable degree. The distance between houses and road should be increased to match that on the Northway side of the A40.
3. Regarding the slowing of traffic to 50 mph to allow access into and out of the proposed development, it is not clear how or where this would happen, and therefore where traffic

noise and pollution may rise or fall as a result; more information is needed for detailed consultation.

A40 Crossing

This is a key feature of the new development and a matter for serious consideration. Essentially, in order to avoid a significant increase in traffic on the Green Road (Headington) Roundabout, it is proposed that Northway should take bus and emergency traffic from Barton West. We would argue that the existing bus-service from Barton to Headington and the centre of town is excellent, and there is a proposal in place to extend it for the residents of Barton West. We are concerned that the benefits of a vehicular link from the new development to Foxwell Drive, even if appropriately restricted to buses and emergency vehicles, will not outweigh the harm to Northway's residents.

In the light of the Northway residents' Town Green status application being assessed as duly made, we feel that the success of the Barton West project should not be predicated upon the existence of a vehicular route crossing the A40.

It is not clear in any case what the precise intentions of the applicant are: the diagram on p. 56 of the Design and Access Statement shows the proposed bus route using Meaden Hill as access to Northway, conflicting with the map on p. 83 which seems to imply the use of Foxwell Drive turning right into Northway, while the Design Code (p. 17) also implies the use of Foxwell Drive but as a left-hand turning into Northway.

Should such a crossing eventually be permitted, we would be concerned that an effective barrier to traffic other than buses or emergency vehicles would not (given the information currently available) be established. The statement on p. 85 of the Design and Access document that "The link will be controlled to ensure that non bus and emergency vehicle drivers are not encouraged to make the illegal manoeuvre between the A40 and Foxwell Drive" is unacceptable: reliable and workable preventative measures would need to be set out in detail for consultation, together with clear proposals for the exact route for vehicles, and for measures to mitigate traffic, noise, and pollution in Northway's quiet residential streets.

Waste water drainage

We have serious concerns about any addition to the existing drainage and sewerage networks; the infrastructure is well known (and documented by Thames Water) as being inadequate and in need of improvement. Marston, Northway, and Old Headington have all suffered extreme sewage flood incidents in recent years. We therefore strongly recommend the imposition of a "Grampian" condition stating that no development can begin until a workable drainage strategy is in place, and that it should be the responsibility of the developer to work with Thames Water to implement such a strategy and have it thoroughly assessed and approved in writing prior to the commencement of any other work on site.

Flooding

We are not convinced that the developers have done quantitative analysis of the effect of floods from 2008 onwards. Before outline consent is given, the developers should be required to show computer modelling of the effects of various levels of inundation.

Height of buildings

We are seriously concerned that the “gateway” residential block and the foodstore and/or hotel will be visible from a specified point in Stoke Place (one of the key Old Headington views identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal). The documentation states that these specific buildings will consist of 4-5 storeys and rise to 17 and 18 metres: 18 metres is over 58 feet high, which is higher than four double-decker buses one on top of another. This is unacceptably brutal to be a direct interface with the Old Headington Conservation area and the historic Ruskin Fields, which were recently preserved for posterity by a decisive ruling by a Planning Inspector rejecting an appeal to build on them. These blocks should be no higher than three storeys.

At present the sole non-natural visual marker on the development site as viewed from Old Headington is the electricity substation, the height of which relative to any proposed buildings is not indicated in the drawings supplied.

English Heritage states that there will be a negative impact on the conservation area, but that this might be justified by the provision of housing to meet the needs of the city. However, if the buildings which create that negative impact are designated for retail and commercial use, that is another matter, and we would strongly object to the height as suggested in the Outline Plan.

The *Conservation Area Appraisal* for Old Headington makes clear the importance (emphasized by the Planning Inspector in her report on the Barton Area Action Plan) of views into and out of the area. It is crucial that the value of these views is respected. We strongly recommend that the developer be required to produce detailed computer modelling of the appearance of the development in context and from a number of viewpoints before the application can be considered.

All interested parties (Headington, Barton, Northway, councillors) need to be able to compare the actual (substation and the nearest existing buildings) with the proposed (development) building heights, and assess the impact properly. This is especially important following on from the recent evaluation of the height and impact of the development in Port Meadow, which proved to be a complete travesty, and which must not be repeated for Barton.

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<http://www.foh.org.uk>

(Chairman: Veronica Hurst 9 Stoke Place, Oxford OX3 9BX tel. 01865 750484)