

## The Committee of the Friends of Old Headington

### Supplementary Comment on the Height of Buildings in 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

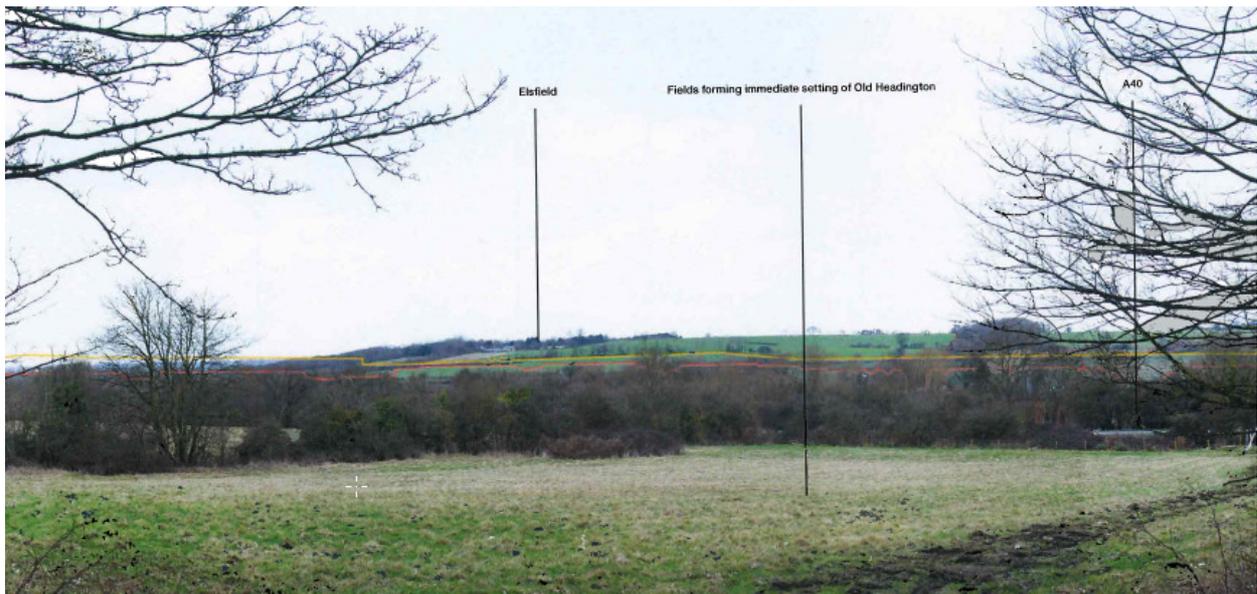
The Friends of Old Headington wish to make a further submission on the Barton Planning application, 13/01383/OUT, and we should be glad if you would draw it to the attention of the Officers, and of members of the Planning Committee.

Since we made our previous submission we have had the opportunity to study the developers' document *Effects of the Proposed Development on Landscape and Cultural Heritage* (June 2013) and specifically Figure 6, page 12 of that document, the view to the north from Stoke Place, Old Headington.

The document concedes that this view is "principally a rural outlook", which is the case; it adds "but heavy traffic on the A40 detracts from this", which is not true: the A40 is largely invisible from Old Headington and Northway, partly due to intelligent planning, and partly due to the three layers of mature trees and shrubs on both sides and on the central reservation. The fact that the A40 is briefly glimpsed in the photograph in Figure 6 (View 3) 'Views to the north from the public right of way, Stoke Place' was due to a small section of hedgerow being temporarily removed to allow access for emergency vehicles in 2012.

The importance of the rural setting of the Conservation Area and in particular the views north across the historic meadows of Ruskin Fields towards Elsfield has already been emphasized in the *Old Headington Conservation Area Appraisal* (July 2011), which states (p.27) that "the land beyond the ringroad in the mid-ground is hidden from view by the falling landform ... whilst the rolling hills of the South Oxfordshire countryside that rise to the north of the Bayswater Brook form an extremely attractive background".

The "wireframe" illustration depicting the proposed heights of the residential and retail units as viewed from the south (page 12, fig. 6: view 3 (scan no. 3 attached)) therefore merits particular attention. When considering this wireframe illustration it is essential for Councillors and Officers to restrict their attention to the yellow 'Parameter Outline', as distinct from the 'Illustrative Outline', since the developers would be fully entitled to build to the full height of the Parameter Outline for much or all of the development:



These heights represent a completely unacceptable failure to take seriously the recommendations of the *Old Headington Conservation Area Appraisal*, since the views will clearly be irreparably damaged by intrusive buildings.

**We do not think that a development in such a sensitive context should rise higher than a level equivalent to a two storey building on the highest point of the site.**

**In particular, we object to the proposal to line the spine road with houses of “up to 4.5 storeys”** (See *Design and Access Statement*, Figure 6.3, page 66.) To put a long street of what are normally described as “Town Houses” at the very edge of a city seems to indicate a failure to understand urban and architectural idiom, and would make the development much less sensitive than it should be.

We are especially concerned by the possibility that the proposed excessive height of the retail and hotel blocks in this development could mask a desire to have multi-storey car parks on one or two of the upper floors: we should object in the strongest possible terms to such a proposal, and **we ask for a condition to be imposed at this outline application stage declaring that this would not be given permission.**

It is important that the potential impact on local views is fully understood at this stage; pages 8 and 9 of the *Effects of the Proposed Development* imply much less impact than the “wireframe” views attached here as scans ‘Barton 1’, ‘Barton 2’, and ‘Barton 3’, which clearly demonstrate that various communities will suffer the loss of valued views.

In addition to the above points on the roofline parameters, we wish to draw Members’ and Officers’ attention to the figures provided by the developers for proposed AOD heights – i.e. the heights of buildings above a fixed base, or Ordinance Datum.

The AOD figures in the developers’ proposals indicate that in many cases the height of apparently lower buildings can be even higher above ordinance datum than the ostensibly larger blocks, and that means more prominent on the skyline. For instance the “gateway” residential block and the

mixed use food-store/hotel in the proposals are quoted as 4-5 storeys with heights of 17m and 18m; their heights AOD are respectively 82.0m and 85m; however residential property south of the spine road near its eastern end has a nominal maximum height of 9m or 2.5 storeys, but yet its maximum height AOD is 85m – the same as the hotel and food-store. The small area of residential development of at the south eastern corner of the new development is of up to 2.5 storeys, but yet its height AOD is 99m at the maximum, which is 17m above the height AOD of the gateway residential block and 14m AOD higher than the hotel/food-store. This raises very serious concerns about the impact of the development on the Conservation Area, and these concerns must be taken into account in their entirety in formulating the conditions for which we argue above.

**We consider it essential that the developers produce detailed computer modelling of the ‘real-life’ appearance of the development from a number of viewpoints outside the site for consultation, and before Outline permission can be granted.**

The Barton West site has a distinct natural advantage in that the extent to which it is visible at all is restricted to a relatively small area as described in the document *Effects of the Proposed Development on Landscape and Heritage* (p.6). This is due mainly to local topography with the land dropping away from high ground to the north, south, and east and masking by trees and hedgerows to south and west.

To squander these natural advantages by building to inappropriate heights is to invite comparison with the travesty that is the recent development for students at Port Meadow. There is no need for the new development west of Barton to destroy timeless views as has happened there; we are convinced that Grosvenor and the City Council can fully achieve their aims by working with the natural features of the landscape and preserving key views for all West Barton’s neighbours.

### **The Committee of the Friends of Old Headington**



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

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