



Applications:

- **20/02450/FUL** | Partial demolition and reconstruction of existing single-storey former stable residential conversion. Demolition of cowshed remains and reconstruction to form single-storey residential accommodation. Erection of two storey extension to former stable. New south boundary wall. Alterations to widen vehicular opening in listed west boundary wall. Associated landscaping and provision of bin stores. | Meadow Larkins Larkins Lane Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9DW
- **20/02455/LBC** | Partial demolition and reconstruction of existing single-storey former stable residential conversion. Demolition of cowshed remains and reconstruction to form single-storey residential accommodation. Erection of two storey extension to former stable. New south boundary wall. Alterations to widen vehicular opening in listed west boundary wall. Associated landscaping and provision of bin stores. | Meadow Larkins Larkins Lane Oxford OX3 9DW

Stance: **Object**

Reasons for comment:

- Amount of development on site
- Effect on adjoining properties
- Effect on character of area
- Effect on privacy
- Height of proposal
- Information missing from plans
- Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies (Oxford Local Plan and Headington Neighbourhood Plan)
- Other – the site is not a residential garden; conflict with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in terms of heritage assets (significant buildings within the Headington Conservation Area)

The following are the comments of the Friends of Old Headington with respect to planning applications **20/02450/FUL** and **20/02455/LBC** for Meadow Larkins, Larkins Lane, in Old Headington.

While some aspects of the present proposal are an improvement on the application in November 2018 (18/02588/FUL) our chief concern is with the proposal to build a two-storey extension to the present residential accommodation.

The size, location, and orientation of the proposed extension is inappropriate for the Conservation Area setting.

One of the objections we had to the previous application was that building was proposed over the orchard on the east side of the site. The current proposal still builds on the orchard part of the site and up to one-half of the orchard (from the southern boundary to the northern end of the patio) is lost in this way. The point we made earlier stands, i.e. that ‘the site is an orchard (essentially part of adjacent green fields) rather than a residential garden ... and therefore does not benefit from Policy HP 10. This fact alone should invalidate the proposal. And there is no local plan policy to support building on this site.’

The extension is approximately 27m long and 10m high¹; we feel this is too massive for the setting. It is intrusive into the surrounding green setting of the Conservation Area and to properties to the north. The overall appearance detracts from the neighbourhood character and identity.

The proposed development does not address green space policies enumerated in the Headington Neighbourhood Plan – indeed it does not refer to the HNP at all. Furthermore, the planning inspector’s report on proposals to add nearby Ruskin Fields to the development of Barton Park in 2012 emphasised the need to protect against ‘an adverse impact on the distinctive character of the Conservation Area’, an argument that we believe also applies to the present site.

The site

The Meadow Larkins site lies within the domain of the historic Mathers Farm which dates from the C17. In the Old Headington Character Appraisal the site is part of the St Andrew’s Lane and Larkins Lane Character Area and is described as ‘comprising former farm buildings’, and the site’s orchard provides an open aspect to the Green Fields Character Area, an area that ‘includes the remnants of the agricultural land on the edges of the historic village’.

The wider effects on the Conservation Area

Remarks made by the planning inspector considering the proposal to add Ruskin Fields (to the west, but also a green part of the Conservation Area) are pertinent in considering this application. She said in paragraph 32 of her 14/11/2012 report to the city council,

‘[that the Fields] create an important open setting to the tightly knit historic core of the Conservation Area that is fundamental to its intrinsic character. Whilst development could feasibly be designed and laid out to preserve the appearance of the Conservation Area and to safeguard the ecological importance of the hedgerows and trees that form the Fields’ boundaries, development, no matter how sensitively designed, would inevitably result in the reduction of and would be intrusive in views of this green wedge and would have an adverse impact on the distinctive character of the Conservation Area. I conclude that such harm to the Conservation Area would not be outweighed by the individual or cumulative benefits of affordable housing and open space provision and improvements to pedestrian and cycle links.’

By the same argument it can be fairly said that Meadow Larkins is an important site to the east side of the village, at the boundary of the Larkins Lane and Green Fields Character Areas. The new development is intrusive in scale and design, changing as it does the agricultural feel to this part of Old Headington.

The planning proposal makes no reference to Headington Neighbourhood Plan Policies and we review relevant sections below.

Effects on Character & Identity in Old Headington

The Old Headington Conservation Area is one of the Character Areas listed in the Headington Neighbourhood Plan (HNP, adopted by Oxford City Council in July 2017), and the Character Appraisal completed in 2011 is referenced as the key document for the Old Headington Character Area in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The submitted Design and Access and Heritage Impact statements do not reference nor address HNP Character and Identity policies, designed to protect areas within the Neighbourhood Plan.

- *CIP1: Development to respect existing local character*

It is our view that the proposed extension is too large for the site and inappropriate in scale. The east-facing aspect of the proposed development has not been illustrated in the application beyond the presentation of a standard east elevation. It has not been shown in the context of the open fields to

¹ No dimensions are presented in the plans and the measurements here are calculated with respect to the stated size of the new property entrance.

the east and from view points along Barton Lane east of the site. The choice of materials needs to be considered carefully: Cotswold Stone is not a local building material and would not fit naturally in village viewpoints.

- *CIP2: Protecting locally important views*

The HNP requires that 'Development will seek to protect important views within Headington itself'. The loss of the orchard site will result in residential buildings being visible from the east and along Barton Lane. The HNP also identifies a key view cone (Appendix C, Viewpoint 1 from Old High Street: 'View through Larkin's Lane out to the wider countryside') which will be impacted by the current proposal. The view in question can be seen at Google Maps here, <https://goo.gl/maps/YqbeY5itsrYLuVz39>.

- *CIP3: Innovative design*

We do not think the proposed extension respects and takes account of local heritage; neither does it 'enhance the distinctive identity, character and setting in terms of scale, layout, density, orientation and massing'.

- *CIP4: Protecting important assets*

The policy here states, 'Where the significance of a heritage asset, either designated or non-designated, would be affected by a development proposal, that development proposal will only be permitted where it addresses the conservation and enhancement of the significance, character and any special architectural or historic features of significance the asset may possess.'

The Old Headington Character Assessment lists what it calls 'Positive Buildings', which have the status of non-designated heritage assets. The site, along with Mathers Barn, comprises agricultural buildings. In addition, this part of Larkins Lane includes old high walls, vernacular farmhouse and cottages, and the adjacent green fields. The proposed extension does not enhance 'the significance, character and any special architectural or historic features of significance' at the site, and we are concerned about the precedent set by development on a green, non-garden site in the Conservation Area.

Green Spaces policies

These exist in order to increase and enhance green space within the HNP Area: 'The aim is the greening of Headington through policies designed to protect and enhance green space and biodiversity. These policies provide for the protection and extension of green spaces including parks, trees and allotments, the protection and enhancement of the green setting including verges and non-designated public access green space and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and conservation sites.'

The present proposal removes green space and does little to remedy the situation after development. In particular we note:

- *GSP2: Provision of Green Space within Developments*

This policy requires the submission of a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan; no plan as such has been submitted.

- *GSP3: Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity*

According to the HNP, GSP3 seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity on both designated and non-designated sites in Headington in accordance with the Green Strategy Objective 21 which seeks the "protection of important and prosaic species in all sites." The proposal threatens the Meadow Larkins orchard and puts at risk a variety of trees and plants that will be destroyed as a consequence of development.

- *GSP4: Protection of the Setting of the Site*

The HNP says, 'Development will be permitted where its design responds appropriately to the site and character of the surrounding area'. The proposed intrusion of modern buildings is not

appropriate to the site and the surrounding Green Fields Character Area. As development increases around the Conservation Area, green spaces within will become ever more important.

As a final comment we note the detailed and historically informed views expressed by neighbours and former occupants of the area, who have their own concerns about the impact of the development. We cannot enumerate these here, but we do feel it is important that they are accommodated.

The Friends of Old Headington (FOH) was formed by a group of local residents in 1959 to protect the special character of Old Headington village, what is now the Old Headington Conservation Area. FOH is an active membership organisation with elected trustees which meet regularly to promote our aims, organise local community events, including an annual AGM.

The Aims of the Friends of Old Headington include

- retaining Old Headington as a village, with special emphasis on preserving its lanes, walls, grass verges, and trees;
- ensuring that new buildings and alterations are in keeping with the existing character of the village;
- co-operating with the Oxford Preservation Trust and the City Council in their declared policy of preserving the village; and
- involving as many as possible to achieve these aims successfully