

Mr O. Rider

Sent via email



date: 1 December 2014

Dear Mr Rider,

Re: 14/00838/FUL

Thank-you for the opportunity to comment upon the details of the planning application (14/00838/FUL) for 376 dwellings at Farm Lane, Leckhampton. The comments provided are officer comments endorsed by the Leader of Cheltenham Borough Council. The application is of particular interest to the Council given it directly abuts our administrative boundary and, should the application be successful, the residents of the new scheme will predominantly look to Cheltenham for work, leisure, services and facilities.

In considering the proposal particular regard has been had to the principle of the development, its timing, and the impact it could have on the ability to deliver a comprehensive wider development strategy for the area.

Comments on the principle of development

The submission JCS proposes an urban extension to the South of Cheltenham at Leckhampton (Policy SA1). This allocation, which encompasses land within both Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough' administrative areas, aims to ensure that proposals are brought forward as part of a comprehensive scheme of development. However, the current application does not include all of the land within the submission JCS allocation for this location (A6).

Policy SA1 (3) requires "proposals must be accompanied by a comprehensive masterplan for the strategic allocation. This should demonstrate how new development will integrate with and complement its surroundings in an appropriate manner." Although a plan has been submitted showing the proposal in relation to existing development, and detail shown as to development on the proposal site itself; no masterplan has been submitted showing how this development will link into a wider sustainable development of the strategic allocation at Leckhampton as a whole.

The planning history relating to the site, which is not repeated here has consistently highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to development, reinforcing comments repeatedly made by Cheltenham Borough Council. Although allocated for development in the Tewkesbury local Plan 2006, policy SD2 requires a comprehensive scheme to be brought forward. This has been an ongoing theme in considering development of this area; the Tewkesbury local plan inspector's report (December 2003) argued that the development of the proposal site alone would be "a relatively isolated protrusion into the countryside" and would suffer from a lack of viable public transport connection and isolation from other supporting facilities. The determining authority will need to be satisfied that the residential travel plan and developer contributions from the scheme can meet these concerns

The current proposal lacks engagement in regard to sharing the burden of infrastructure costs in regard to the rest of the strategic allocation, and demonstrating realistically that the policy requirements of submission JCS policies SA1 (strategic allocations) and SD5 (design) will be met. Because of this, Cheltenham Borough is of the view that the development proposed is a piecemeal scheme and fails to demonstrate its contribution to comprehensive master planning of the strategic allocation proposed by the submission JCS. This requirement for comprehensive planning and development of the strategic allocation was a key reason for Cheltenham Borough Council's refusal of outline permission for 650 dwellings (13/01605/OUT) on the 31st of July this year:

"...It is unclear at this time whether the proposed application as part of this strategic allocation would be in line with, and provided for the necessary comprehensive development needs and provision required for the strategic allocation as a whole and not just the application site. This would include the appropriate provision for retention and enhancement of areas of local green space; provision of new Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show people sites; and infrastructure requirements as set out in policies SA1, INF4, INF7 and INF8 of the pre submission document of the JCS. The application is contrary to guidance set out in paragraphs 77, 150 and 156 of the NPPF."

It would clearly be preferable for development at this location to be presented to Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils as a comprehensive scheme for the strategic allocation rather than in a piecemeal way, which has the potential to prejudice the proper and comprehensive planning of the area. However, in the event that Tewkesbury Borough Council is supportive of the principle of this development they should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the comprehensive development of this area is not prejudiced.

Other relevant considerations

As a detailed application particular importance should be attached to the visual impact of the proposed development on the landscape, especially given its siting abutting the Cotswolds AONB. In this regard it is our view that the application has only considered in a limited way the requirements of submission JCS policies SD7 and SD8 and has not had full regard to the value and importance of conserving and enhancing the adjacent Cotswolds AONB, particularly views from Leckhampton Hill and the Devils' Chimney.

Policy SD7 requires that "All applications for development will consider the landscape and visual sensitivity of the area in which they are to be located or which they may affect." Policy SD8 requires that "All development proposals in or adjacent to the Cotswolds AONB will be required to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance its landscape, scenic beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and other special qualities."

The JCS evidence base - through the Landscape & Visual Sensitivity and Urban Design Report (2012) - considered this area as part of a wider parcel (C6a - option 2). It identifies this part of the site as high both in landscape and visual sensitivity - the most sensitive notation it can have.

The submission JCS's indicative site layout for the site (Layout 6 which is provided as guidance rather than policy) suggests that the area can be developed and the current proposal broadly places development within the developable area suggested on the plan. Nevertheless, any development needs to recognise the extreme sensitivity of the site, and particularly its proximity to the AONB. The recently refused application to the north around Kidnappers Lane suggested a masterplan approach which showed density reductions as development moved away from Shurdington Road and towards the AONB. The previous

appeal decision on the Farm Lane site has seen logic in such a master planned approach for both parts of the site; therefore a logical extension of the approach used to the north would suggest a low density, heavily landscaped development form in the area of the current proposal.

The relationship between the proposed development of the strategic allocation, the existing landscape character of the site and the Cotswolds AONB was another important factor in the refusal of (13/01605/OUT) by Cheltenham Borough Council earlier this year:

"The proposed development would have a significant adverse impact on the character of the landscape and the adjoining AONB. ...Furthermore the development of the site in the manner suggested would erode the relatively open and spacious character of the site, which includes public rights of way, would compromise views out of and into the site, with the consequence that the high amenity value attached to the land and landscape would be unacceptably harmed."

It is our view that the current application is over dense, and shows little consideration in either its layout or landscape strategy to the sensitivity of its location adjacent to the AONB and its relationship to the more considered development and landscape approach which was being promulgated through the previous (refused) application around Kidnappers Lane. The high density approach leads to a layout which is not appropriate to an urban edge.

In light of the comments set out above, regard should be given to the following submission JCS policies and our criticism of the proposal:

- SD5 (i) in its failure to deliver a development which is sensitive to context, character and sense of place;
- SA1(3) in its failure to provide a masterplan for the strategic allocation or demonstrate how development will integrate with and complement surroundings; and
- SA1(6) though its piecemeal approach which constrains its ability to enable a comprehensive scheme to be delivered across the developable area of the strategic allocation

In determining the application, Tewkesbury Borough Council will need to be convinced that the proposals are underpinned by a strong and ambitious vision for the architecture, urban design and landscape design of the development. In addition, the decision makers should ensure that appropriate connectivity and integration is made with existing and future neighbouring parts of the development, both in infrastructure and through a 'joined up' approach to mitigating landscape and visual impact. Any consented scheme should provide a suitable and attractive southern edge to the town in this location which works well with the AONB and Greenbelt designations bounding it. Cheltenham Borough Council is of the view that this has not been achieved by the current scheme.

Other concerns of Cheltenham Borough in this area, expressed through the refusal reasons set out for (13/01605/OUT), are provided below:

- The grant of planning permission for the proposed development in advance of the finalisation of the Joint Core Strategy could prejudice decisions about the size, scale, sustainability and phasing of new housing development. Therefore it is unclear at this time whether the proposed development would be in line with planning for housing objectives, reflecting the need and demand for housing in, and the spatial vision for the area or whether the proposals would undermine wider policy objectives. The application is therefore contrary to guidance set out in paragraphs 150 and 156 of the NPPF.