

Meeting of SBDC & Residents  
Development Brief & Supplementary Planning Document –  
Interpretation of site planning

Taplow Village Hall

November 21<sup>st</sup> 2013

Attendees:

George Sandy (GS): Chairman of Taplow Parish Council

Peter Beckford (PB): Head of Sustainable Development

Jane Griffin (JG): Principal Planner of Policy

Jacqueline Andrews recorded the minutes of the meeting

(GS) Information on the development brief and supplementary planning document as accepted by SBDC. We have the opportunity to influence what goes on in terms of planning in due course. Therefore our views are important and should be taken into account. Aspirationally the residents of Taplow would hope that whatever is built is well aligned with its surroundings and we want something rather super.

(JG) Mill Lane identified in the core strategy in 2011. Policy 15 within this strategy applies directly to Mill Lane and because it is identified as one of three opportunity sites the designation reflects the urgent need for regeneration and investment. The sustainable appraisal was twice revisited plus informal consultations with Parish Council and the land owners.

Core Policy 15:

- Comprehensive conservation led approach
- No greater impact on openness of green belt
- Mix of development, watercourses and parkland
- Suitable uses include residential commercial hotel and open space
- Sympathetic to the historic nature of the surroundings including both Conservation Areas

## Major constraints

- Green Belt
- Flooding
- Conservation Area
- Not all in same ownership (Mill site/Skindles, Taplow Investments, National Grid)
- Contamination
- Gas Holder (Gas holder site/Mill site)
- Poor state of repair of important buildings
- Location next to Grade 1 Maidenhead Bridge (Skindles)
- Access is restricted & need new access
- Viability – All these constraints affect viability

## Flood Risk

Plans 6a and 6b illustrate flood risk in blue. Purple is flood zone 2 and together with climate change, we would need to add 10% onto the flood risk levels.

## Opportunities

- Demolish eyesores: gasholder, warehouse and mill buildings
- Restore listed building and important conservation area buildings (Mill Island House, Dunlowe House and Skindles)
- Create new open space, tree planting and new rights of way
- Improve biodiversity (Kingfishers/badgers and deer)
- Improve long distance views
- Create new circular route with new foot-bridge across the Thames
- Create new employment opportunities
- Create new market housing & affordable housing (40% ish)
- Conserve Skindles hotel for future generations
- Improve and enhance conservation area
- Close Mill Lane to through traffic, remove rat run and create footpath

## Development Principles

- Development areas restricted to areas not at risk by flooding
- The location of existing development and extent of planning permissions
- 14000 sq m of replacement footprint
- No greater impact on the openness of green belt
- Scale of new development to be sympathetic to the historic nature of the site
- Height not to exceed height of tree canopy

## Design & Sustainability

- Design of the buildings must be exemplary
- Must enhance or preserve key views
- Reflect general scale and massing principles
- Include decentralized energy and renewable or low carbon energies
- Use sustainable construction techniques
- Use sustainable drainage systems (SuDs)
- Create new footbridge across Thames

## What Next?

- Site is currently marketed
- When sold (before Christmas), the developer will draw up plans
- Carry out pre-application consultation
- Submit planning application
- Get Planning Permission
- Build/Restore!

## Questions

Question from Karl Lawrence (Chairman of the Hitcham & Taplow Society, Taplow Village resident): There have been no recorded traffic incidents either at the Bath Road or the Berry Hill ends of the present access/exit road during the more than the 100 years it has been used by the commercial and hotel enterprises it was supporting, the limited residential use, and the 'rat run' commuters to/from the Maidenhead direction and no evidence has been revealed that significant congestion either east or west on the Bath Road has been attributable to the volume of traffic from Mill Lane entering on the Bath Road or entering Mill Lane from the Bath Road.

The only need for a new access road will be if a planning application is submitted and approved for residential development.

Who will pay what must surely be the high cost of constructing the new road? The developer(s) or the Buckinghamshire taxpayers?

When will it be constructed? Before any work on the development begins or simultaneously with building works?

PB: Bucks CC is the highways authority. Their advice to SBDC, as the planning authority, is that a new access is needed if this site is to be developed. There are issues with access from Mill Lane on to the A4 – it is dangerous turning out of and in to Mill Lane. The access will be provided by the developer, who would need to talk to the county council, which in turn would have to be convinced by the new proposals. Developer pays ultimately.

Question from Nigel Smales (Taplow Village Resident): How can you justify the increase in Skindles footprint by 86%?

PB: There is an extant permission in place for an extension to Skindles.

Further Question from Nigel Smales: Everything flows from the numbers yet the SPD contains only one number of significance – a permitted new footprint of 13,917m<sup>2</sup> which, once the hotel and offices are deducted, includes 10,154m<sup>2</sup> for residential. Application of UK averages indicates that this could equate to 134 dwellings or 308 residents. This compares with the SPD (Para 3.3.2) which suggests Mill Lane could deliver 100 new homes, or 240 residents, with the analysis that indicated 110 homes would be economic, and with the stated expectations of a potential developer to build in excess of 300 homes with potentially 740 residents. Just how many people does SBDC believe the site can accommodate?

PB: The core strategy does not specify the number of houses either as a minimum or a maximum. The most fundamental constraint is green belt and balancing the footprint already in existence. The number of houses will depend on the balance of residential and commercial. The assumption in the core strategy assumed quite large town houses, so if the houses are smaller, then we may have more.

Question from Tony Hickman (Ex Architect & Taplow Village Resident): On the assertion by PB that the Skindles planning consent could be implemented now. I do not believe that to be the case. For example, the garage is in the way. How much flexibility is there in the current core plan to change use of Skindles to offices and the hotel to the back of the site?

PB: In terms of planning permission there is live extant permission in existence.

JG: In terms of change of use, this is subject to planning consent. A developer is at liberty to put the case and the planning committee will make that decision.

Question from Ellington Road Resident: Where would the extension to Skindles go? – the extant permission was for a separate block over the road at the Orkney Arms and not joined to the hotel.

PB: This would be on the parking area of the car dealership. Planning permission does include going across the road.

Question from Martin Maund (Chair of Ellington & District Residents Association [EDRA]): On the subject of the hotel: And this is exactly one of our concerns that the reason for blocking off Mill Lane is to build a hotel over the Mill Lane road - the big concern for residents is that the hotel would be one big monolithic block over-dominant for this area and next to Maidenhead Bridge.

The extant permission was on the other side of the road from the hotel and so two separate buildings – not joined up, and the developer must not be allowed to use the road to build on to create a continual building going along the A4.

JG: English heritage would have to be consulted about any building built alongside the bridge, therefore it can't be monolithic. It would have to step down away from the bridge but it is subject to a planning application and can't predict what a planner could come up with. For clarity the extant permission was NOT to go over the road –

Question from Martin Maund (Chair of Ellington & District Residents Association [EDRA]): On the same subject, the views and vistas of the document have all been changed (bar one). They have been rerouted so that views within the conservation area have been lost and this has raised fears as to why all views and vistas have been revised AFTER the consultation – and they should be reinstated, as it's very important to ensure protection of the area and control the effect of the development.

JG – Some have been changed to reflect the conservation document.

Martin Maund (Chair of Ellington & District Residents Association [EDRA]): They have all been changed – except for one. EDRA were on the Working Group, and spent a lot of time agreeing where they should be and they should, therefore, not be changed

Martin Maund in response to PB: Plan 7 and 13 have been changed. (PB recommended that we take this conversation offline – Martin Maund to show share detailed information with PB after the presentation).

Question from Geoffrey Mingay, Pages Wharf, Mill Lane (adjoining Skindles): I have a question on the affordable housing question. This is a riverside location and it should command higher priced houses. I can't understand why affordable housing would be placed there.

PB: In summary, shared ownership housing (Part rented and part bought). Or subsidised rented accommodation is expected to be part of every plan. Society reflects that every location needs some affordable housing. SBDC does not need to rely on Mill Lane to meet its housing targets. The planning committee will either approve or refuse based on design and variety of housing.

A supplementary question from Geoffrey Mingay, Pages Wharf, Mill Lane (Adjoining Skindles): Can they offset this 40% against other sites? That is to say build less than 40% on this site and then invest in affordable housing on other sites.

GS: As this site is of premium value, houses could likely be priced between £750k and £1m and over. Therefore a developer could focus on premium housing at this riverside site and make an investment in affordable housing elsewhere.

As an aside, most developers are less interested in affordable housing as it cuts their margins.

A question from Clair Merison of Pages Wharf, Mill Lane (adjoining Skindles): I understand that the access to the hotel will be from the North? Will there be vehicular access, which avoids the row of houses at Pages Wharf on Mill Lane?

JG – If she was asked, she would advise that it avoids passing the small row of existing houses, but it is down to the planning application that is submitted.

Question from Joy Marshall: If we have affordable housing providing for houses, it appears that the infrastructure is not in place for this area e.g. schools (which have two year waiting lists). How will the children be properly educated?

PB: Both forms of housing will involve children. The county council will be consulted and would be required to provide any necessary financial contribution to create future educational space.

JG: One of the last pages of the SPD outlines what will be in the agreement. This includes affordable housing, a footbridge, educational contributions and policing contributions. Section 106 of the agreement is what the developer has to deliver and this must include all of these things.

Question from Tony Meats (Ex Architect & Taplow Village Resident): I want to ask a more fundamental question: How do we get to an aspirational outcome for the site? To my mind we should have a competition for architects with a proven track record in 'residential mixed development'. This is a viable way of creating a visual statement of an aspirational plan for this very special Taplow site.

PB: The DC has limited powers. Our only real control is through planning controls but in between this application, the developer will have more detailed discussions about their draft designs. We cannot require the landowner to hold a competitive beauty parade. The outcome we want is a solid scheme.

Tony Meats: Surely you can be more proactive as a planning authority?

PB : We think we are being proactive.

Jon Bidgood (local resident & EDRA resident);- I have a criticism of the new proposed access; both the position and scale are horrifying. Why would you close off Mill Lane when the densest part of housing would benefit from access into Taplow Village? Jon further explained that he has submitted an idea for a "two-way" traffic system, as part of the public consultation exercise. With the North part of the site continuing to use Mill Lane to access the Village but Mill Lane being "cut-off" in the middle of the site, thus preventing rat-runs and the South part of Mill Lane being used only for the Hotel and existing residents thereby reducing the need for any major new junction on the A4. Nigel Smales pointed this out to the audience on the projected site plan. Jon then asked SBDC if they considered this submission and what they thought of it?

JG: We are not the highway authority that is Bucks CC. The design was discussed with Bucks CC Highways Engineers, who said that if you measure the number of trips coming out of the site you will need a signalized junction. Bucks CC is the ultimate authority.

PB: The Rat run was a strong view of 59% of those consulted and so it was considered to be important to respond to this.

Question from Paul Thorn (Taplow Village resident): Why have Barratt's pulled out?

JG: Their reasons were not shared with the council.

Question from Roger Worthington: How can you expect a new developer to be signed by Christmas. Why do you think you will achieve this?

JG: 250 companies have expressed an interest and 20 companies have already been on site and judging by the amount of calls, there is a lot of interest.

Question from Sally Sandy (Taplow Village Resident): I would very much like you to take note of what Tony Meats has said because he has been an international town planner for most of his career. We need a design to lead the project and not a mediocre plan or style.

Tony Meats (Taplow Village Resident): I have offered my services to draw up a vision plan for this site, but my offer has not been taken up.

Question from Martin Maund (EDRA): Our residents, as well as the small terraced row in Mill Lane, are the most affected by the development as we are over the Bath Road from it, and they are really worried about the blight inflicted on their area, caused by the new road and the traffic signals. We asked for the 2006 Jacobs Babbie traffic survey to be included but want to know why it was excluded? It gave the historic traffic generated by the site which the existing site access can safely accommodate with the hotel, the Mill, the recycling plant plus all of the rat running - with this stopped there should now be a decrease in traffic with the new development. You have no form of 'before' and 'after' comparison. This does not make sense.

PB: The 2006 Traffic Survey was included. The purpose of the brief is not to make a comparison. It is to set out clear guidance. We are not the Highways Authority. You may arrange to see them to discuss any points you have.

Martin Maund (EDRA): Commented that the requirement for the changes must be based on fact and the survey with the historic traffic quantities should be included to decide if a new access is required or if it is flawed. He reaffirmed that the 2006 Traffic Survey has been omitted.

Further question from Martin Maund (EDRA): It is understood that the changes to the roads and road networks will be determined by the quantity of homes built on the site?

PB: Well, that and the other aspects of the development – such as a commercial hotel.

MM (EDRA): Martin responded and quoted from the relevant documents;-

1. 'PAG' Policy Advisory Group, who approved this SPD on the following Report at their meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013

4.3 – *“Depending upon the eventual mix and scale of development on the Mill Lane site, Bucks cc has indicated that a larger junction arrangement to the*

*east of the VW garage may be needed, resulting in the loss of a greater number of TPO trees”*

2. The ‘Highways Issues and Options Report’ states in 5.9 that *“TfB’s desired PRC of +10% would be achieved with a scheme of 150 dwellings & 70 room hotel with a smaller junction and that road widening is required for development beyond this scale”*
3. The Development Economic Analysis states that the existing access would be retained for 100 homes – which it also recommended was the viable amount for the site.

The Spatial Strategy also says there should be 100 homes on the site.

Martin’s specific point was why does the SPD have the new road access and traffic signals fixed in it?

Furthermore, every single resident is opposed to road widening:

- They do not want traffic control signals at the site junction &
- They do not want the road access changed

EDRA feels this should not be fixed or specified in the SPD, as these road and highways changes should be governed by the size of the development,

And accordingly developers will be bidding on the site in the belief that they can build over 100/150 homes and will therefore overpay for the site.

Tony Hickman: Tony Meats and I (Both retired architects living in Taplow) had a meeting to agree some detailed graphics on creating a desirable vision for the site rather than have a verbal description only.

Barrie Peroni (Berry Hill Resident): I am concerned that SBDC can do all the planning but must not talk to the CC as far as roads are concerned. Blocking off the rat run makes no mention of the ‘rats’ once they have been cut off. Why can’t the highways agency and SBDC talk to each other? It surely is common sense and utter nonsense that the two parties are not talking to each other. The priority seems to be invested in the site and the rest for us are left to cope with the consequences.

Question from Nigel Smales (Taplow Village Resident): Pointed to triangular plot east of Jubilee River, which is part of the package now up for sale but not referred to in the SPD. What are the expectations for this chunk of land?

JG: This is green belt and nothing will be built on it. The only areas that may be built on are the areas shaded pink on the plan.

Comment made by GS: Going back to the competition mentioned by the Taplow architects, the Parish has received a windfall of £100k from Land Securities. If it could be assured that a chosen competition winning design would be mandated as a requirement that any future developer must follow, then Parish Council could consider putting up the prize money for the competition. This has not yet



been put before the Parish Council but we have potential funding for an award prize relating to a visual plan for this site.

PB: It would be for the landowners and developer to decide whether to go down the route of a competition including PC support. The important thing is that a good high quality scheme comes out of it. For example, if a competition is held there will be one winner and if residents then did not like that scheme, what would you do then? Who would judge it?

GS asked Martin Knight (Taplow Village resident who sits on RIBA National Council, and Chairs the Group that judge architectural competitions) to give his opinion: Providing the landowners are informed, anyone can make a planning application for any piece of land. The Parish Council could, therefore, commission a scheme. My reservation however is whether you could encourage everyone to support a single scheme. It is one way of moving the discussion towards design versus waiting for developers to respond. It is also a way of testing the density for the development. It is clear that all the elements of; live, work, commercial, employment and opportunities will not be at the forefront of most developer minds.

Some kind of competition would be a way of exploring this but would still be reliant on a developer agreeing with the concept.

Question from Martin Maund (EDRA): What do you think about road widening on the A4?

PB: I'm not the highways agency but it depends on the exact nature of the development and the amount of traffic.

MM (EDRA): EDRA is deeply opposed to it, for many reasons that we now haven't the time to go into, but SBDC can control this by not allowing more than 150 homes and a 70 bedroom hotel on the site.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm