

## URBAN DESIGN COMMENTS ON DM CONSULTATION

<b>To:</b>	Brian O'Donovan.
<b>From:</b>	John Dawson, Principal Urban Designer.
<b>Cc:</b>	Catherine Daly.
<b>Date:</b>	12 March 2024

<b>Proposal:</b>	Construction of storage and distribution units.
<b>Ref:</b>	23/03120/FUL.
<b>Location:</b>	Oakdown Farm, Winchester Road, Basingstoke.
<b>Doc Nos:</b>	Design and Access Statement (December 2023). Plans and documents submitted December 2023.
<b>Policy:</b>	NPPF (2023). Policy EM10 of the Local Plan 2011-29. Design and Sustainability SPD (2018).
<b>Recommend'n</b>	No objection subject to consideration being given to a number of issues.

### COMMENTS

#### 1. The relationship of the development to existing settlements

- 1.1 I raise no objection to the principle of the development of a number of large buildings on the application site in respect of their relationship to existing settlements. This site at Oakdown Farm lies very close to the existing settlement of Basingstoke. It is only separated from the adopted Local Plan housing allocation sites of Basingstoke Golf Course and Hounsome Fields to the east by the A30 and a short stretch of woodland at Peak Copse. The development of the Oakdown Farm site would be seen as an extension of Basingstoke. There would be some limited harm to the settlement pattern of the town insofar that the site projects to the south west of the town as opposed to, for example, comprising a rounding-off of the settlement area. This harm would be partly mitigated by any new boundary to the town being confined by the M3 to its south.
- 1.2 In raising no objection to the proposal's impact on the settlement pattern of Basingstoke, I have attached some very limited weight to the proposed allocation of Oakdown Farm and the land to its north known as Southern Manydown in the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan Update. Draft Policy SPS10 of the Regulation 18 draft Plan allocates Oakdown Farm for warehousing and/or industrial floorspace. Draft Policy SPS5.4 allocates Southern Manydown for 7,500 homes and other uses. Figure 6.5 of the Regulation 18 draft Plan is a Concept Plan for Southern Manydown. This shows how development on this draft allocation site at Southern Manydown would wrap around the northern and western edges of the Oakdown Farm site thereby bringing the latter more firmly within the envelope of a redefined Basingstoke Settlement Policy Boundary.
- 1.3 The Draft Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan Update was published for a 6-week consultation from 22 January to 4 March 2024. The weight to be attached to draft Policies SPS10 and SPS5.4 may alter in the period up to the publication of the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan Update depending on the nature of representations received to the Regulation 18 consultation exercise.

1.4 The development of the Oakdown Farm site, if considered to comprise an extension to Basingstoke, would reduce the distance between the settlements of Basingstoke and North Waltham. However, it is considered that this would not lead to any physical or visual coalescence between the two settlements due to the intervening topography and potential for on-site mitigation through the siting and massing of the development and landscape design. Similarly, the proposal would not lead to the coalescence of the settlements of Basingstoke and Dummer due to the intervening distance and the barrier of the M3 motorway.

## **2. Siting, scale and massing**

2.1 There are a number of aspects of the proposal's siting, scale and massing to which no objection is raised, some of which demonstrate an improvement compared with the appeal scheme (ref. 22/00667/FUL):

- a) It is welcomed how the units are turned through right angles compared with the siting of the warehouses in the appeal scheme. This would reduce their visual bulk from many viewpoints. There would be a sense of openness in views in a south easterly direction from the A30 in between the units towards the M3. It is recognised that there would still be many oblique viewpoints which would be dominated by the overlapping side walls of the proposed warehouses. However, in these cases, the bulk of the walls of the units would be reduced given that it would comprise a series of smaller walls at varying distances instead of having the monolithic presence which characterised units 1 and 2 in particular of the appeal scheme.
- b) It is welcomed how the proposed units are sited such that more of the car parking and service bays are located towards the sides and southern rear of the units. This allows a cleaner 'look' from the A30 and many other viewpoints as the frontages of the units are dominated more by landscaping and the units themselves.

2.2 However, I do have a number of concerns regarding the proposed development which are set out in the remainder of this section 2 of this response. I request that consideration is given to how these concerns could be addressed. Many of these comments relate to how this Oakdown Farm site would mark an important gateway into the town of Basingstoke along the A30. A gateway into a town should be marked by pleasing and noteworthy features such as an array of attractive buildings or attractive natural features.

2.3 I do not believe that large warehouses in themselves, by virtue of their appearance, would constitute what most people would term 'attractive buildings' fit to mark the gateway into the town. I am aware that it is an increasingly common feature of motorway junctions around the country to be accompanied by large warehouses. But I consider that it is part of the established and valued character of Basingstoke that many of the arterial routes into the town are marked by tree lined avenues and dominant views of vegetation. This is particularly the case with the A30. It is also the case with arterial routes such as the A33 as it approaches the Ringway from the direction of Reading. Having discussed this matter with the council's Landscape Architect, it is therefore proposed that one of the key design objectives of this development should be to not prejudice the established character of a 'green' and tree lined environment at

this south western edge of the town. Even though it would be difficult to completely screen the proposed warehouses, every effort should nevertheless be made to minimise the visual impact of these buildings on the surrounding area. The resident or visitor passing along this stretch of the A30 by the application site should have an experience and awareness of a gateway to the town which is dominated by a tree lined and well vegetated route rather than by large buildings. The following paragraphs explore these issues in more detail in order to find the right balance between it being buildings or landscaping which dominate this entrance to the town.

- 2.4 I have some concerns over the siting, height and massing of Unit 1 which is now nearer the A30 compared with Plot 1 of the appeal scheme. The Inspector, in paragraph 52 of the appeal decision letter dated 15 December 2022 (22/00667/FUL), stated that “However, from VPtC at a point on the Wayfarers Walk, by the junction of the A30 with Trenchards Lane, Plot 1 cannot be adequately mitigated for even by Y15; there would be a substantial adverse visual impact on the user.” Yet the photomontage of the currently proposed Unit 1 at Year 15 in winter for Viewpoint C (Figure 7.45 Rev L) shows it to be more visually prominent than the Plot 1 which was criticised by the appeal Inspector (see the photomontage in Figure 7.43 Rev B of Core Document A84R submitted to the Inquiry with a local authority planning reference of 22/00023/REF). I request that the applicant further considers how the visual impact of Unit 1 can be mitigated. Options could be produced showing the visual impact of the northern elevation of Unit 1 pushed back further south into the site or the building could be reduced in height or both.
- 2.5 I also have some remaining concerns over the visual impact of the siting, height and bulk of the proposed units in views from the A30 frontage along the northern boundary of the site. This concern also relates to views in a south easterly direction towards the application site from further afield including some of the key views such as Viewpoint S along the public footpath to the west to North Waltham. Notwithstanding the overall reduction in visual impact of the current proposal compared with the appeal scheme, the question remains as to whether the current proposal still has an unacceptable visual impact on the character of the surrounding area and will harm the gateway status of this arrival along the A30 into Basingstoke. I believe that this concern is justified by the photomontages of Viewpoint Y for Year 0 in summer (Figure 7.71 Rev L) and for Year 15 in summer (Figure 7.72 Rev L). These photomontages show the view of Units 1 and 2 from close to the roundabout access to the site on the A30. I consider that even the Year 15 view in summer shows how the warehouses would strike a prominent tone in the landscape and townscape.
- 2.6 This concern over the visual impact of the units in views from the A30 and further afield is underlined by an examination of how the heights of the buildings have changed since the appeal scheme. The Site Section Comparison plan (drawing 19155 1007 Rev PO1) is useful here. For example, the ridge height of the building itself on Plot 1 of the appeal scheme has reduced from 21m to 18m with the current proposal. Yet, this reduction in height has been partly offset by the increased plateau height from 147.88m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) with the appeal scheme to 149.425m AOD with the currently proposed Units 1 and 2 which occupy a similar space. Therefore, there has only been a reduction in the overall height of Plot 1 of the appeal scheme in the landscape from 168.88m

AOD to 167.425m AOD with Units 1 and 2 of the current proposal. This represents a small reduction in the height of Units 1 and 2 in the landscape (compared with Plot 1 of the appeal scheme) of only 1.455m. One may question whether such a small reduction in the height of the building in the landscape of around 1.5m is significant given the height of 18m of Units 1 and 2 of the current scheme and that Unit 1 is sited closer to the A30 compared with Plot 1 of the appeal scheme. There are slightly larger reductions in overall height with some of the other units on the site. For example, the currently proposed Unit 5 has a ridge height AOD which is around 2.5m lower than the comparably sited Unit 2 in the appeal scheme. The currently proposed Unit 6 has a more substantial reduction in ridge height AOD which is around 5m lower than the comparably sited Unit 2 in the appeal scheme.

- 2.7 Even if one makes an allowance for how the 3 buildings in the appeal scheme have been broken up into 6 smaller buildings as currently proposed, these small reductions in the overall height of the proposed Units 1 and 2 in particular (which are by far the most visually prominent in the scheme) may be insufficient to render them acceptable in landscape and townscape terms.
- 2.8 In considering the value of views along the A30, I am aware that paragraph 55 of the Inspector's decision letter in respect of the appeal scheme states that "Given the absence of footways along the A30, the only receptors on this road would be car drivers. Along the road the proposed buildings would be set back by distances varying from around 70-90 metres from the edge of the proposed footway on the south side of the road and the scheme would benefit from sections of the retained tree belt. Mitigation planting on the northern side of the site would be of varying depths and would be layered with 'instant' hedging and climbers on the retaining walls". It is also noted that paragraph 56 of the decision letter states "Drivers would have only fleeting views of the scheme as they travelled along the A30 resulting in minor adverse impacts".
- 2.9 I consider there is reason to attach some weight to the impact of the current proposal on views along the A30. This is due to the very limited weight to be attached to the proposed allocation of Southern Manydown in the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan Update as referenced in section 1 of this response above. In the event of a development coming forward on this draft allocation site then one may expect a significant number of pedestrians and cyclists associated with Southern Manydown to be able to view the Oakdown Farm site from Southern Manydown itself and whilst using the cycling and pedestrian routes along the A30 which would be expected to come forward.
- 2.10 For these reasons, I request that the applicant considers how the visual impact of Units 1 and 2 (as shown in the photomontages of Viewpoint Y) can be mitigated. Options could be produced showing the visual impact of the northern elevation of these units pushed back further south into the site or the buildings could be reduced in height or both. A photomontage of Viewpoint Y in winter at Year 15 would assist this assessment. It would also be useful to see photomontages of the remaining Units 3 to 8 from near the access roundabout in Years 0 and 15 in both summer and winter.

### 3. Elevations

- 3.1 No objection is raised to the proposed elevations which will allow the buildings to complement better their natural context compared with the appeal scheme. The green cladding of the lower parts of the buildings will harmonise with the surrounding vegetation. The horizontal grey cladding of varying shades for the upper levels will help the building fade to some extent into the skyline. The dark grey frame enclosing the reception area with its larger expanse of glazing will help to highlight the entrance to the buildings. This legible approach will be informed by the limited extent of orange cladding on Units 1 and 2 around the entrance although the precise tone and colour of this cladding will need to be chosen with care to avoid it being overly visually intrusive.

**Key Issues:** character; architectural quality.