

Origin3 Ref – 19-025

South Somerset District Council
Development Management
Brympton Way
Yeovil
Somerset
BA20 2HT

12th August 2019

Dear Mr Baimbridge

RE: Pre-Application Advice - Land at Manor Farm, Templecombe

On behalf of our client, Gleeson Strategic Land Ltd, I am writing to supply you with some information prior to our pre-application meeting on the 4th September 2019 regarding a residential proposal on brownfield land at Manor Farm, Templecombe. I attach a site location plan at Appendix 1.

Through this pre-application dialogue we hope to reach agreement on various planning related items with a view bringing forward a planning application at the site in due course.

The proposed development is for circa 80 dwellings with appropriate access, landscaping, public open space, drainage and associated infrastructure.

Alongside this letter and the site location plan, I enclose a concept masterplan and design document for your consideration.

Site Location and Context

The site is located on the south-eastern edge of Templecombe. It is approximately 4 hectares in size and comprises four small open pasture fields, several large farm buildings / barns, areas of gravel and concrete hardstanding, several slurry pits to the north, east and south of Manor Farm with a gravel entrance driveway off Combe Hill / A357 together with a number of mature trees along the driveway, to the west of the barns and around the Manor Farm itself. Please refer to the pre-application summary to aid in understanding the site.

Several local facilities and amenities are present in Templecombe and these support sustainable, day-to-day living. There is a primary school, Templecombe surgery, village hall, recreation ground and play area, café and a Co-Op convenience store has recently been approved and is currently being fitted out. Additionally, a prestigious engineering company, Thales is based at Templecombe, this site being one of only 10 in the UK. Thales have recently been granted planning permission to expand.

There is a railway station with a direct, hourly service to London Waterloo and Exeter. There are bus stops with services running to Yeovil, Wincanton and Bruton. Both the facilities and transport services are within walking distance of the site.

There are no local or national environmental designations on site, except for it being within a Mineral Safeguarding Area. The site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1 'Low Probability'.

With regards to heritage, Manor House (Grade II* Listed Building) is close to the site but as a result of the area's topography and existing intervening built form (west side of the A357 and Manor Close) there will be no inter-visibility between Manor Farm and the site.

Planning History

The site has a planning history of being promoted through the Local Plan. The Council sought to allocate the site for housing in the South Somerset Local Plan 1991-2011 (adopted 2006). Initially the site was not included within the Deposit Draft Local Plan, but the Inspector's report recommended the site for inclusion within the Development Area. As a result, the Council included the site into the draft in January 2004. After consideration of representations and various stages of draft modifications to the Plan, the site was finally removed and not included in the adopted Local Plan. The reasons were related to the strategy for the distribution of growth as opposed to any site-specific matters.

Planning permission for residential development on the site has been sought on part of the site before and has been refused:

- 04/01581/OUT – permission for 15 dwellings was refused on the basis of potential to cause harm to an archaeological site and the proposal was submitted in advance of the completion of the Local Plan and was therefore considered to prejudice the Local Plan process.
- 06/02405/OUT – permission for 16 dwellings was refused as it was considered that the proposal would involve considerable new residential development in an area of countryside outside the defined development area. It would therefore result in an unacceptable and unsustainable form of development contrary the South Somerset Local Plan 2006 and the proposal would appear as an incursion of built form into the open countryside, to the detriment of the character and setting of Templecombe. Concerns over the archaeological significance of the site was dealt with in detail by the County Archaeologist and it was concluded that there was inadequate evidence to require that the application be refused on potential harm to an archaeological site.
- 07/01308/OUT – permission for 17 dwellings refused for the same reasons as 06/02405/OUT. Archaeology and heritage matters were not considered unacceptable.

The main reason for refusal has been that the site is outside development limits. Planning policy has evolved since the consideration of these applications, Policy SS2 (see below) allows for development in settlements such as Templecombe, the emerging Local Plan Review offers further growth in the settlement and the NPPF focuses on housing growth and recognises the need in rural areas.

The Proposal

The proposal is for the demolition of existing buildings/structures and the construction of a residential development of circa 80 homes (Use Class C3) with associated public open space, access, drainage and landscape infrastructure (all matters reserved apart from access) Manor Farm, Templecombe.

Vehicular and pedestrian access will be taken from Combe Hill from the western boundary of the site.

Any development would be suitably and sensitively designed in response to the surrounding environment, context and site topography, complimented by comprehensive landscaping of the site. Please refer to design concept document for further details.

Planning Policy

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to determine planning applications in accordance with the adopted Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The adopted Local Plan currently forms the Development. The emerging Local Plan review would form a material consideration in the context of this pre-application submission.

Adopted Local Plan

South Somerset Local Plan (2006 to 2028) was adopted on 15th March 2015. The plan sets out the long-term spatial vision for managing and accommodating growth in South Somerset.

The settlement hierarchy is set out within *Policy SS1: Settlement Strategy*. Although not named, Templecombe is categorised as a Rural Settlement, which is the lowest tier of settlement to which growth can be attributed.

Policy SS2: Rural Settlements, allows growth which is commensurate with the scale and character of a settlement if it increases the sustainability of that settlement in general and provides either housing to meet an identified local need, and/or creates or enhances community facilities and services, and/or provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement. To qualify as a Rural Settlement, a place needs to have at least two or more key services that are listed in the Local Plan. The policy sets out that proposals for housing development are permitted in such locations. Templecombe qualifies as a Rural Settlement and therefore housing development is considered to be acceptable.

Rural Settlements, such as Templecombe are required to deliver at least 2,242 dwellings over the plan period, this is set out in *Policy SS5: Delivering New Housing Growth*, which distributes development across the settlement hierarchy.

Material Considerations

Five Year Housing Land Supply

South Somerset District Council last published a 5-year housing land supply position in August 2018, at that time they were only able to demonstrate a housing supply of only 4 years. Until the Council reviews this position, it stands.

Planning applications for housing should be considered in the context of the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ where the Council cannot demonstrate a sufficient five years supply of deliverable housing land as required by national policy.

South Somerset Local Plan Review

The Local Plan Review will cover the plan period 2016-2036. The Council are currently consulting on the Preferred Options until 18th September 2019.

Emerging *Policy SS1: Settlement Hierarchy* identifies Abbas and Templecombe as one of twelve “Villages” where new housing growth would be supported. The supporting text refers to a figure of approximately 60 dwellings per Village. Emerging *Policy SS2: Delivering New Housing Growth* identifies a minimum figure of 1,314 dwellings across the Village category. 471 dwellings are already committed (with a further 121 already completed) leaving a residual figure of circa 722 dwellings to be delivered across the twelve Villages.

The figure of 60 dwellings across this new tier is considered to be an arbitrary one, not reflective of the individual sustainability of each settlement. Templecombe with its mainline railway station, major employer and services and facilities that are present is a highly sustainable settlement, which could take a level of growth which is more reflective of its role and function. Additionally, evidence supporting the Local Plan Review “The Potential for Rural Settlements to be Designated ‘Villages’” identifies that the settlement has the potential to deliver 75 dwellings, the site contributes to these 75 dwellings.

The Local Plan Review document sets out that in the absence of identified development areas, development in Villages will be expected to take place adjacent to the existing built settlement. The subject site is adjacent to the existing built settlement of Templecombe.

The Local Plan Review identifies Templecombe as an appropriate location to accommodate additional growth. A review of the summary of consultation responses received during the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation (which preceded the Preferred Options document) identified a mixed response of people in favour and in opposition of the “Villages” category being taken forward as a Preferred Option. There appears to be no objection to Templecombe being identified as a Village at this stage and actually the sustainability credentials of Templecombe were identified in support of its allocation as a Village.

Neighbourhood Plan

There is currently no Neighbourhood Plan or Designated Neighbourhood Area for Abbas and Templecombe.

Other considerations

The South Somerset Peripheral Landscape Study for Templecombe identifies the land adjoining Manor Farm as having a low landscape sensitivity and having a moderate to high capacity to accommodate built development. This study identifies the site as one of three sites capable of delivering housing within Templecombe.

The site is included on Part 1 of the South Somerset Brownfield Register. The register identified the site as a deliverable residential site for between 70 and 78 units. Furthermore, the site was considered as suitable, available and developable for 93 dwellings by the developer panel in the Council’s Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, 2018 (Ref: E/ABTE/0013).

Planning Assessment

A number of studies have already been undertaken in support of the proposed development, some are yet to be completed or require further work, however a summary of the findings are set out below and explain how the site is suitable for the residential development proposed and constitutes sustainable development which should be approved in line with paragraph 38 of the NPPF.

Principle of Development

The Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land and in accordance with the NPPF, proposals for residential development should therefore be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

It is our contention that Templecombe provides a suitable and sustainable location for housing. The settlement provides access to several local facilities and amenities including a primary school, doctors surgery, village hall, play area, café and a grocery store is currently being fitted out. The settlement also has a railway station providing access to Yeovil and other local regional locations as well as London and Exeter.

Indeed, the emerging South Somerset Local Plan Review identifies Abbas and Templecombe as one of twelve “Villages” where new housing growth would be supported. It is apparent that sites outside the current defined settlement limits for Templecombe will be required to meet housing needs.

The site is well related in a functional manner to the edge of the settlement and the site has no statutory designation constraints. The site is entirely located within flood zone 1. The application site is not covered by any environmental or landscape designations which indicate that development should be restricted.

The site was considered as suitable, available and developable for 93 dwellings by the developer panel in the Council’s Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, 2018.

Furthermore, the site is considered to comprise brownfield land given its presence on the South Somerset Brownfield Register. It is therefore recognised by the Council as a suitable site for residential development and in accordance with national guidance this is a signal to the development industry that this is the case. It should be noted that paragraph 68 of the NPPF supports this approach to identifying land on brownfield registers to support housing delivery. The Part 1 Brownfield Register identified the site as being a deliverable residential site for between 70 and 78 units.

Central Government is committed to bringing brownfield land back into use. The Housing White Paper (Feb 2018) states that *"We must make as much use as possible of previously-developed ('brownfield') land for homes – so that this resource is put to productive use, to support the regeneration of our cities, towns and villages, to support economic growth and to limit the pressure on the countryside"*.

Paragraph 84 of the Framework reaffirms this commitment by stating *"The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist"*.

Heritage

The main built heritage constraint of the site's development is its presence within the setting of the nearby buildings at Manor House (listed grade II*) but as a result of the area's topography and existing intervening built form (west side of the A357 and Manor Close) there will be no inter-visibility between Manor Farm and the site.

There are no designated archaeological assets on the site. Detailed magnetometry has been carried out because of the site's association with the medieval Preceptory of the Knights Templar. This has found no evidence of the Preceptory building.

It is worth noting that archaeology and heritage matters were not considered unacceptable in the last planning application submitted on this site.

Landscape

The proposed development will have low/negligible visual impact in the long distance views across the valley as it will be seen in the context of surrounding development in Templecombe and would be development which is evident in the landscape like other existing villages/farmsteads in the area, so is in keeping with character and visual appearance of the area.

The likely impact of the development would be greater in the few local views available but it would replace an existing very prominent feature on the site (i.e. large scale barns) and the impact can be mitigated by open space and planting in strategic locations whilst still allowing view out and some of the development being seen.

Arboriculture

There are no ancient or veteran trees within influence of the site and none of the trees on site are protected by a TPO or Conservation Area. Overall arboricultural constraints on the site are low owing to the size and location of the trees and the scope to replace these without harm to public amenity.

Ecology

The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory ecological designation. Based on the survey work undertaken to date, the site generally offers limited opportunities for protected species, with some minor potential associated with field margins and the ponds for reptiles and amphibians.

Potential effects on protected species groups on site will be assessed, to be informed by the specific faunal surveys. Full mitigation strategies will be prepared for each of the impacted species should they be determined to be present following assessment of the likely significant effects and review of the masterplan.

Flood Risk and Drainage

The Site is located in Flood Zone 1, denoting a low risk of flooding from rivers or the sea. The Site is also at a low risk of flooding from all other assessed sources (pluvial, groundwater, and artificial).

The underlying geology and observations reveal that the site and surrounding areas currently drain via infiltration into the ground. The preferred strategy would therefore be to drain surface water into the ground via detention basins and permeable paving. The detention basins would be located along the eastern parts of the site, at the lowest topographic points, tying in with the landscape buffer. A network of swales can convey surface water runoff from all parts of the site into the basins, subject to gradients. These would provide amenity benefits, treatment, as well as attenuation of surface water.

Foul flows resulting from the development will be discharged from the site into an existing Wessex Water foul sewer running along the western site boundary. Due to levels falling away from the sewer, a foul pumping station is likely required.

Access

Vehicular access to the site is proposed via a new simple priority junction from the eastern side of A357 Combe Hill.

The site is within easy walking and cycling distance to the main facilities and services in Templecombe and pedestrian access is proposed from a footway adjacent to the vehicular access on the northern side of the A357, providing opportunities to access the services and facilities by foot.

Design

A concept masterplan and design document is submitted alongside this letter and whilst the proposal is for an outline application, this illustrates how the proposed arrangement can be sensitive to the site and surroundings, taking into consideration the site's constraints.

Summary

In summary, the proposal comprises sustainable development. The application site is located within a Rural Settlement identified as suitable for residential development in the adopted Local Plan. Additionally, there are no significant constraints on site that would prohibit development, such as ecological or landscape designations.

The site is also considered suitable, available and developable in the Council's HELAA, and is included on the Council's Brownfield Register, recognising that it is a deliverable residential site. Coupled with this, the site has a history of Local Plan promotion.

Looking ahead, the Council's emerging policy context looks to elevate the status of Templecombe by categorising it as a Village, therefore directing additional new housing growth to the settlement. The site itself is in a sustainable location, adjacent to the village development limits as required in emerging policy.

This pre-application submission comes forward to allow South Somerset District Council to consider all options in light of its current lack of a five year land supply. We are aware of recent development activity at Templecombe, which includes potential greenfield development for housing.

It is important to note that a five year land supply of deliverable housing is a minimum requirement and not a cap to development. The ability of a Council to be able to demonstrate a five year supply of housing should not impact onto the weight given to the benefits or impacts attributed to a proposed scheme and each planning application should be determined on their own merits.

The proposed development would deliver significant economic and social benefits. The construction of housing brings with it economic benefits in terms of job creation (direct and indirect), additional spending power, and payment of the New Homes Bonus and Council Tax. Also, the provision of a significant number of market and affordable housing must be afforded significant weight in an area which cannot currently demonstrate a sufficient supply of housing land. The site is immediately deliverable and available.

We would welcome your views on the proposals set out within this letter and the accompanying concept masterplan and pre-application summary. If there is any further information you require, please do let us know.

Yours sincerely,

D.J. Norris

David Norris MRTPI
Director Planning

T: 0117 980 4900

E: david@origin3.co.uk

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan
Appendix 2 – Concept Masterplan
Appendix 3 – Pre-Application Summary