


Oxford Core Strategy Examination Statement of Oxford City Council		www.oxford.gov.uk  OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
C/M8/4	Matter 8 – Strategic Locations Issue 4 – Summertown	

i) What process led to the identification of this area?

This area had been involved in issues of planning policy for some time. The Cherwell Valley is one of Oxford’s “green lungs” and we recognise that it is essential to keep it open in order to protect the setting and special character of Oxford. For that reason the specific Green Belt boundary was adopted in September 1997 following detailed consideration of the boundary at the 1994 Local Plan Inquiry. The Green Belt boundary defines the area of the Cherwell Valley but excluded the Land at Summertown.

In the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, the Land at Summertown was designated as “safeguarded land” because it is an area that does not contribute to Green Belt purposes but is not covered by other protection policies. The Local Plan Inspector concluded that “the integrity of this part of Cherwell valley would not be compromised” by development and that “there is no necessity to keep the land open in the long term” (CD7/7, paras 4.5.2-4.5.3). Safeguarded land was to be “kept free to fulfil its purpose of meeting possible longer-term development needs” (Policy NE.3 of the Local Plan). The Land at Summertown has therefore been under consideration for it’s long-term development potential for a number of years and so it was only appropriate that its potential was re-examined through the Core Strategy being above the 10 ha threshold for what we consider to be a strategic site.

The Employment Land Study (CD14/27) did not consider the site suitable for employment use due to its limited accessibility for employment uses and proximity to a range of sensitive uses. The options considered in the Preferred Options were therefore residential use or to retain its safeguarded land designation. Due to its sustainable location, low ecological value on the majority of the site, moderate intrinsic landscape quality, the majority of the site being out of Flood Zone 2 and 3, the need for housing and the site’s capacity for a significant number of dwellings it was considered suitable for residential development.

ii) Why is it considered to be a sustainable location for development?

Land at Summertown is highly sustainable being located close to the heart of Summertown. The area is within easy walking/cycling distance of Summertown district centre and of the very frequent buses direct into the city centre and with the

potential to extend services northwards towards the Northern Gateway. Summertown itself has a good range of retail, leisure and community facilities, which new residents could access, but lacks public open space. The site itself currently has limited publicly accessible open space and its development could result in the creation of some publicly accessible open space for new and existing residents of Summertown. Vehicular access to the site would be via Marston Ferry Road to the south. In addition, pedestrian and cycle access could be through Diamond Place to the west and through the existing footpath to the north.

iii) Are there better alternative sites to this?

There are many merits to this site as mentioned above and few constraints. There are no other sites of a strategic size in Oxford that are more suitable for residential development as determined by the work within the Preferred Options. Southfield Golf Course (East and West) was the only other site of a strategic size considered for residential and this was considered unsuitable because of the significant ecological and hydrological constraints identified through independent studies.

iv) What evidence is there that it would be likely to come forward within the Plan period?

The area that makes up the Land at Summertown comprises Summer Fields School and its playing fields, Wadham College's playing field and St Johns College land and allotments. Appendix 1 indicates the land owners. Officers and Members of the Council have met with representatives from all three landowners to discuss the policy approach and the likelihood of development on the site. The general consensus was that all landowners were in agreement that the policy approach should be to identify the land as suitable for development and that it was considered possible that the area could come forward for development sometime during the Core Strategy period.

The majority of the area is owned by Summer Fields School. At present the school uses and needs all its land for current operational purposes. There are no plans for relocating but if circumstances change this could be an option for the Governors. However, forecasting much beyond five years is difficult to do. The school is largely boarding with some day boys. Parental demand may change over the next twenty years and so to maintain the maximum flexibility for the Governors (both present and future) it makes sense for the school's land to be included in the Core Strategy as a potential site.

It is also possible that the school may consider releasing some of their playing fields for redevelopment whilst remaining at the main school site, as long as it didn't compromise the successful operational requirements of the school.

Similarly, Wadham College would not want to compromise its current need for a recreational facility for its students but is happy that its land is included within the strategic site as there may be opportunities to move the location of the recreation areas within the site to create a buffer to the river corridor.

St Johns College owns land in the south east corner, and is also happy for its land to be included within the area to be brought forward within the Core Strategy period not least because it might provide an alternative access that could be considered and to help ensure suitable flood alleviation measures.

In the circumstances, the strategic site is suitable and there is a reasonable prospect that the site, in whole or in a large part, may come forward for development during the Core Strategy period. As such it is considered a developable site according to PPS3. As explained on page 50 of the Core Strategy, the availability of the site will be monitored up to 2019. If the site is needed but still unavailable, the situation will be reviewed and if necessary a review of the Site Allocations DPD immediately be undertaken to identify further sites.

v) What impact would the development have on the surrounding area, including the Meadows?

The ecological report (CD14/29) concluded that the New Marston Meadows SSSI is over half a kilometre away and on the other side of the river so is unlikely to be affected by development of the Land at Summertown. The Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation are also some distance away, or over the river, and it is not thought that development would have any direct impact upon them.

The ecological report concluded that the majority of the site was of relatively low intrinsic ecological value. It recommended that the wildlife corridor strip of land immediately alongside the River Cherwell be excluded from development and some hedges and trees within the site are worthy of retention. These could be protected through the SPD and would not hinder the deliverability of the site.

The HRA (CD4/4) assesses the impact of the Land at Summertown on the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The site is, at the closest point, about 1.4 km from the SAC and the HRA concludes that it is not likely to have significant effects on the SAC. It also says that, in any event, new public open space created as part of any future development in Summertown would be likely to ease potential recreational pressure from Summertown on Oxford Meadows SAC because it will be creating new public open space.

While the area does adjoin sensitive landscapes, the site is flat, well screened and on the edge of the built-up area. The 2005 Local Plan Inspector surmised that the

amenity of the area would not be materially harmed by development as the site is well contained and visually separate from the meadows alongside the River Cherwell and did not think it necessary to keep this land open in the long term (CD7/7).

The development has the potential to positively impact upon the local area. As well as providing more public open space, which Summertown currently lacks, additional residents will help support the businesses in Summertown and its role as a district centre. Due to its very sustainable location, the site has the potential to have a residential travel plan and be a low-car development with low trip generation.

With regards to the impact on primary school provision, the County Council's representations to the Proposed Changes (Appendix 4 of their representation) summarises the options tested for Summertown (200 dwellings and 500 dwellings). They conclude that with 200 dwellings, provision could be accommodated in expanded existing schools. With 500 dwellings a new single-form entry primary school would be required needing 1.34ha. The size of the Summertown site means that there is potential on the site to accommodate a new primary school if required. Discussions with the County have indicated that there is sufficient existing and planned secondary school capacity to accommodate the additional secondary aged pupils that would be generated by the new housing.

