

	<b>South Gloucestershire Council</b>
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<b>Telephone</b>	<b>01454 863545</b>
<b>Application Number</b>	<b>P22/01300/O</b>
<b>Description</b>	<b>Erection of up to 180 dwellings, a local shop and associated infrastructure (Outline) with access to be determined; all other matters reserved</b>
<b>Address</b>	<b>Land At Sodbury Road Wickwar South Gloucestershire GL12 8PG</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>20/04/22</b>
<b>Case Officer</b>	<b>Jon Ryan</b>

The following are urban design comments on the above application. A site visit was carried out on 19<sup>th</sup> April which has informed these comments.

#### **Policy background**

While I will defer to policy comments from planning policy colleagues, there are a number of key policies, both local and national, which fundamentally affect this application and development of the proposed site. The key local policies are CS1 'High Quality Design', PSP1 'Local Distinctiveness', and PSP11 'Transport Impact Management'. The key national policies include the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Design Guide.

In terms of the key policy issues, the most pressing is the lack of local convenience store and post office. While there are other facilities, such as a community centre, primary school, pub and café, it is the lack of food shopping provision which causes the biggest issue. In effect, residents living in this proposed development will be almost completely reliant on the use of private vehicles to access necessary daily and weekly food sources. A bus service does exist and it is possible to cycle, but this lack of key local facilities means that the sustainability of the development as a whole is brought into question.

In particular, it is PSP11 which applies here. Given the lack of the key local facilities, this application is not policy compliant. The issue of private vehicle trips and a lack of sustainability is particularly important given that the Government and South Gloucestershire Council have declared Climate Emergencies (<https://www.southglos.gov.uk/environment/climate-change/climate-emergency/>).

Connected to this issue is the lack of detailed or convincing information relating to the provision of a convenience store and therefore lack of access to key services and facilities (PSP11). This will be a car-dependent development. Merely stating that the application includes the potential provision of a new convenience store is insufficient to base a positive decision on, given that this facility could easily not be provided due to a lack of demand or unfavourable market conditions. The proposed location of shop makes sense from a visibility perspective but is positioned at nearly the far southern point of the site area, at the point furthest from the existing built-up area. While this location would benefit the population in the immediate vicinity, it would be less accessible to the population to the north.

Another related issue is the lack of suitable pedestrian connections to the centre of Wickwar (referred to with PSP11 para 5.23). While the literal proximity of the centre is relatively close, the quality of the route is poor. There are narrow pavements along much of the route, very close to sometimes fast-moving and heavy vehicles, and there is a need to cross the main road at various points due to pavements abruptly stopping with no easy crossing points. All these factors combine to create access

issues.

The development site is also outside of the Wickwar settlement boundary. New development has also not been previously granted on the western side of the B4060, as far north as the Wickwar Youth Centre, and there is a clear development divide visible across the eastern and western sides of the road. The new developments on the eastern side of the road combine to form an elongated and ribbon-like form of development which reaches past the comfortable limits of the central area.

#### **The design and access statement**

In terms of the information set out within the design and access statement, it refers to the March 2012 NPPF but the latest version is dated July 2021. There is no mention of the National Design Guide. There is no mention of PSP11 'Transport Impact Management'. The final paragraph on page 11 trails off with no end.

There is a general lack of detailed information in terms of how the proposed number of units can be accommodated within the site. This is needed to ensure that the number of dwellings can in reality be accommodated. For example, it is customary for Outline applications to provide indicative layouts which demonstrate the deliverability of the numbers of dwellings. This process also allows the slightly more strategic road layout to be tested and ensures deliverable blocks.

There is a lack of thorough context and character appraisal. The character appraisal (page 18 of the DAS) focusses on the High Street but the back lanes (Buthay and Back Lanes) are equally locally distinctive and contain numerous interesting and locally distinctive features. The site visit identified clear positive character features, including hierarchy of development pattern and principal materials. Although illustrations provide some context, photos would be more helpful.

Back Lane and High Street natural stone.

Above: The best locally-distinctive materials found locally include natural stone, brick detailing, timber cladding and clay tiles.

New-build details from the housing developments to the east of the application site. The above photos show the use of natural stone, which is positive, while the bottom images show recon stone of varying quality.

As an overall approach, it is better to primarily reference the best and most significant local character elements, then take account of modern features. This will provide a stronger baseline to create more locally distinctive design. For example, for Wickwar, the historic High Street and back lanes should be used as the primary reference, in terms of the forms, materials and approach to hierarchy, with the more modern developments perhaps contributing in terms of the use of natural stone and some detailing and other materials. Natural local stone should be the primary building material, in combination with brick and possibly timber cladding, with some render. It is also worth noting that the two other developments (Bellway and Linden Homes) to the east of the B4060 were permitted pre-NDG and latest NPPF.

The general arrangement of parcels within the site makes logical sense, with green buffers to the sides of the existing GI and another buffer along the western edge. The two access points would allow for a circulation through the site and could help spread the intensity of traffic on each junction at peak travel times.

Page 47 of the DAS sets out the building heights but is very general. It essentially says that the whole development (except the retail use) could be up to 2.5 storeys. While I would not object to the use of 2.5 storey elements, these should be focussed along the primary circulation routes, and at the end of terminal vistas, with lower, mews and more standard house types off the primary route and to the rears of the principal dwellings, which would reference the historic development patterns found locally. This approach should be linked with the street hierarchy information, provided in subsequent pages.

The street hierarchy information is sensible and sets up the opportunity to create a more legible scheme. Requirements for shared space routes should include varying paving materials, such as more textured block paving, attention to natural landscaping features, a comfortable distance between front doors and carriageways (for safety).

Page 58 sets out criteria for the primary corridor. The first bullet point states 'generally consistent in urban form'. With reference to the historic core of Wickwar, there is very little consistency in terms of forms, either building facades, materials or roof forms. There are clear vertical separations visible and that fine organic grain is one of the key character elements both here and within most historic settlements of this type and age. That sense of variety and interest is critical to achieve.

This page also notes 'predominantly brick with feature render plots to key buildings'. This approach is not supported by evidence from the historic character of Wickwar, where the principle and best building material is natural stone. The most interesting features combine stone, brick detailing (quoins and doorway/windows surrounds) and timber. Render is seen along the High Street and within the modern developments, but the natural stone anchors the settlement and when combined with boundaries finished almost exclusively in natural stone, this gives a clear indication of the approach which should be taken. Key listed buildings are also all natural stone.

Roof tiles are indicated as finished with grey, but again, this is not supported by the locally significant built forms, which are generally finished in terracotta, either as pantiles or double Roman tiles.

Page 61 provides a snapshot of what looks like a more developed layout for the site. This information in its entirety is needed to demonstrate that the proposed numbers can be accommodated on the site and that the amenity of future residents will not be harmed.

Page 67 indicates that most of the green buffer along the western edge of the site will need to accommodate a large attenuation basin. Clearly the design of this basin will need to be carefully considered as this could conceivably eliminate a significant proportion of the site from everyday use and impact on the open space provision.

Boundary treatments are critical and the use of stone walling is one of the most obvious local references and this should be consistently provided within the site. The boundaries, street design and building form all need to be considered together. For example, stone walls could be provided with hedging behind which in time would grow and combine to form a positive impression, which combines definition, local materials and a softer element.

Any solar panels should be set within roofs of darker grey material only, not terracotta. PSP6 'Onsite Renewable and Low carbon Energy' requires major greenfield development to reduce CO2 emissions by a further 20% via use of renewable and/or low carbon energy generation sources.

Boundary walls should be the same as the principal material of the house. The only exception to this is the use of red brick boundary walls where the principal house material is off-white render, but as noted above, the focus should be on natural stone.

Parking: Again, this needs to be linked to the movement and built form hierarchy, with the higher-density approaches along the primary route and lower-density towards the edges. Where parking will be provided on both sides of the primary route, it is sensible to indicate different approaches to parking, as this will help reduce the visual impact within the streetscene. For example, where perpendicular frontage parking is provided on one side of the street, on the opposite side, parking between buildings would reduce visual impacts.

Electric car charging needs to be carefully considered at this stage to make sure that both below ground and above ground infrastructure is provided and designed in.

Bin collection: ideally for terraced properties, bins should be stored and accessible from the fronts of properties, designed into high quality storage enclosures which would ideally combine with a porch canopy. This would avoid the need to bring waste bins either through the house or insecure back alleys.

The location of the shop makes sense from a visibility perspective from the main road but it is positioned at nearly the far southern point of the site area, at the point furthest from the existing built-up area. While this location would benefit the population in the immediate vicinity, it would be less accessible to the population to the north. Given the lack of safe crossings, this is a further issue.

#### **Design Review Panel advice**

As you know, the NPPF supports LPAs utilising Design Review Panel services and have regard to the outcomes from these processes. The Design West Panel (<https://www.designreviewwest.org/about>) gives the council and developer partners access to, and the benefit of, an advisory panel of built environment experts, selected depending on the nature of the scheme and stage in the design process. It may be appropriate to suggest that this application be reviewed by the panel.

*129. Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life<sup>47</sup>. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels. (Para129 NPPF)*

#### **Summary**

As set out above, there are numerous identified issues, some of which could be dealt with through the design process, but some which are more significant. The lack of existing local key facilities, principally a convenience store, is a real issue. I cannot realistically see how the application can be seen to be acceptable without even this most basic local provision. The lack of any evidence to suggest a new convenience store in the location proposed would be a realistic proposition, demonstrates the issue. This results in an in-principle objection. The accessibility and design issues, combined with a lack of information upon which to properly assess the application, results in an objection.

**Many thanks,**

**Matt Haslam**  
**Senior Planning Officer (Urban Design)**