

## Full Council

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>42 to 48 Queens Road OX9 3NQ (<a href="#">P22/S4155/FUL</a>)</b>  <b>Demolition of 44 Queens Road and the outbuildings to Nos. 42. Proposed erection of 22 dwellinghouses (including 8 affordable homes) with gardens, car parking, garages, bin stores, and new estate road access. Closure of access onto Queens Road serving 46 Queens Road and re-arranged access off new estate road. Provision of garden area to 46 Queens Road. Re-arranged access to 42 Queens Road off new estate road and erection of new garage for No. 42.</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 August 2024</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer</b>

### Background

1. The application site is approximately 1.05 ha in area and is accessed off Queens Road close to the Kings Road junction. At the road frontage are two semi-detached Victorian dwellings, numbers 46 and 48 Queens Road, built with contrasting detail brick walls and slate tile roofs. Behind this pair is number 44, which is a 3-bedroom, brick and concrete tile property granted permission in 1971. Number 42 Queens Road is a "Tudor" Arts and Craft property built prior to 1947 that sits to the rear of the site. Vehicle access to numbers 46 and 48 is taken from a driveway to the south side of number 46. Access for numbers 42 and 44 Queens Road is taken from a tarmacked drive that passes between number 46 and Thame Sports and Social Club.
2. The grounds of number 42 were split between a formal garden and an extensive area containing a hobby railway track, buildings and landscaping. Most of the hard railway infrastructure was removed between 2019 and 2020, along with many immature trees.
3. In November 2023 the applicant met with officers and Councillors from the Town Council for a pre-application discussion.

### Proposed Development

4. It is proposed to retain most of the existing housing but demolish 44 Queens Road to provide 21 new homes (net). Number 42 will be retained as a family home. The declared mix is:

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	Total
Market			8	6		14
Affordable	2*	6**				8
*Flats **Includes 2 x 2 bed flats						22

5. The existing access serving numbers 46 and 48 Queens Road would be stopped up. Access for these two properties would be taken from the existing driveway that passes between number 46 and Thame Sports and Social Club. This would be widened and visibility splays would be formed at its junction with Queens Road to meet highways standard.

6. Some 31 new vehicle parking spaces, 15 garage spaces, 3 visitor spaces and two motorcycle spaces are proposed. Secure spaces for bicycles would be provided within the proposed garages and 10 separate, purpose-built stores.

## Housing need

7. The District Council have recently informed the Town Council that Thame’s outstanding, combined housing requirement from the 2012 Core Strategy and 2035 Local Plan is now 143 dwellings. While the reviewed Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP2), currently at Examination, contains sufficient allocations to meet that requirement the site would contribute towards it.
8. The proposed, advertised housing mix and tenure is not in line with Thame’s March 2022 Housing Needs Assessment. Exacerbating this is that four of the 3-bedroom dwellings could be used as 4-bedroom homes, which would further skew the provision. The District Council has given pre-application advice on its assessment of housing needs, which are based on the 2014 SHMA. In that advice it is stated that the case officer looked at draft TNP2 Policy GDH3 and decided to give this “very limited weight”. This appears to overlook the District Council’s own policy on housing needs evidence, which states:

“Policy H11: Housing Mix

5. The mix of housing should have regard to the Council’s latest evidence and Neighbourhood Development Plan evidence for the relevant area.”

9. The supporting text for this policy states at paragraph 4.50:

“4.50 ...In order to meet the needs of current and future households, the mix of housing should have regard to the Council’s latest evidence, monitoring and delivery and Neighbourhood Development Plan evidence where applicable for the relevant area.”

10. It is clear the policy refers to evidence, not policy in either draft or adopted state. The Town Council’s evidence on housing needs was produced by the internationally renowned consultancy, Aecom, who produced an addendum in February 2024, in response to specific queries from the District Council. The evidence it is based on represents the most up to date position on housing need within Thame and should be used to comply with the District Council’s own 2035 Local Plan Policy H11. Using the Aecom evidence could result in the following housing mix:

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	Total
Market	1.12	3.36	5.614	2.842	1.06	14
Affordable*	0.704	2.112	3.529	1.786	0.669	8.8*
*Calculated on 40% yield of 22 homes, i.e., 8.8 dwellings. A financial contribution would be sought equivalent to 0.8 of a dwelling to contribute to off-site provision.						22

11. Such a mix would contribute to Thame’s assessed needs. Not applying the above or a reasonably close alternative will harm the provision of an affordable housing mix deemed appropriate for Thame’s population (not the wider District’s) and for the affordability and availability of a choice of market homes in Thame that best suits Thame’s needs.

## Transport

12. The applicant has provided a Transport Statement which compares expected trip rates from the proposed development with the current and proposed dwellings. As vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists from all 25 units would share a single access onto Queens Road all have been included within the Statement. It is worth noting that 3 of these units already exist and one replaces

number 44. Four dwellings' worth of existing traffic is, therefore, counted within the Statement's conclusions.

13. The applicant has estimated the total number of daily trips the 25 homes would be expected to generate is around 82 arrivals and departures. The peak morning hour (taken as between 08:00 – 09:00) is thought to generate almost 10 trips and the peak evening hour (17:00 – 18:00), just over 9. These figures are close to the estimates provided by applicants for similar recent sites in Thame.
14. The maximum allowable car parking spaces provided is above Oxfordshire County Council's residential parking standards for plots 21, with space for three arguably for plot 20, too. Plot 22 has driveway and garage space for 4. Fifteen spaces are shown to be provided within garages, including 2 existing garages that serve numbers 46 and 48 Queens Road. Plots 2, 3 and 17 have parking (garages included) for 2, but their driveways are 8.5m long, meaning that occupants or visitors may be tempted to park with their vehicles overhanging the highway. This would appear to be contrary to 2035 Local Plan Policy TRANS5.
15. In terms of bicycle parking, the applicant has proposed secure, covered spaces on the plans for roughly equivalent to one per bedroom. The County Council will provide the leading commentary on these matters.

## **Flood Risk**

16. The development's flood risk is currently shown as "medium" for surface waters on the Environment Agency's long-term flood risk mapping. It is likely, however, that tunnel and embankment structures built as part of the hobby railway are distorting flown Lidar surveys and may not represent the true risk.
17. The District Council has proposed conditions requiring approval for foul water and proposed and subsequently installed sustainable drainage systems.

## **Ecology/biodiversity**

18. The applicant has submitted an Ecological Impact Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, dated May 2024. The Assessment has looked at the green infrastructure on the site and the ability of existing structures to host wildlife such as bats. The Assessment notes that along with the demolition of the miniature rail infrastructure there was a loss of existing habitat including many trees and shrubs. Most of the remaining value can be found within the site's hedgerows, some of which are important to the local area. There are examples with lesser, site-level importance and some of those would be removed as part of the proposal.
19. The overall proposal will, however, give rise to some 108m of new and 27m of enriched native species hedgerow. The District Council's Ecologist has commented. The officer notes that the existing hedgerows will not necessarily be able to be protected once the development is in place. Depending on the detail of the final scheme, some off-site contributions may be sought through conditions.
20. The District Council's Forestry Officer has responded to the applicant's separate Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Arboricultural Method Statement. They have advised the removal of a group of trees and hedgerow in the south-east section of the site (Groups 4 and 6) rather than have them significantly reduced in height to allow natural light into gardens. These form the boundary with the Lord Williams's Lower Schools playing fields. The Officer has proposed the removal of all the Leylandii trees on the boundary with Lord Williams's.

## Energy

21. The applicant has submitted an Energy and Sustainability Statement (February, 2024). To meet Local Plan 2035 Policy DES10 it is proposed that a fabric-first approach will reduce carbon emissions by around 56.7%. Together with the adoption of air source heat pumps for water and space heating the overall reduction is estimated to be approximately 62.6%.

## Design and amenity

22. The application should be considered against the SODC Local Plan 2035, the 2013 made Thame Neighbourhood Plan, the South and Vale Joint Design Guide and TNP2 policies.
23. **Density.** The SODC Local Plan Policy STRAT5 requires that homes are built to at least 45 dwellings per hectare, unless there is justification reason for a lower density. The proposal would result in development of less than 25 dwellings per hectare (dph). The applicant has argued within their Planning Statement that this would be appropriate, given the density of the surrounding homes.
24. The applicant's Planning Statement demonstrates that density varies locally. To the immediate north and west of the development site densities are low, less than 14 dph off Queens Road through to 25 - 30 dph (Seven Acres). The block immediately south of the tennis court and bowling green is also low. To the immediate west and area south of Chiltern Grove, however, densities are higher, at around 33 dph and rising to 58 dph.
25. The applicant has noted the adjacent Lord Williams's Lower School site, which had been allocated through the Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy HA5 for 135 homes at a net 25 dwellings per hectare. That policy was, however, written for a specific allocation and was in conformity with South Oxfordshire's contemporaneous development plan policy. The allocation has since been abandoned as the site could not be developed without significant County Council support. While the matter of density on that site is material it is clear the site cannot be developed at 25 dph. It is therefore considered that the allocation site's policy has been largely superseded by Local Plan 2035 Policies STRAT5 and DES7 (which seeks the efficient use of land) for the purposes of considering a windfall planning application.
26. The developer states that their development would be sympathetic to the neighbouring housing which is of low density. While density is a factor in establishing local character, the "grain" of development is also relevant. The majority of homes on Queens Road are built on regular, relatively narrow plots, which would allow for higher densities to be achieved.
27. The developer has also proposed an area of affordable housing at 57 dph immediately adjacent to areas the applicant has recorded as having the lowest density locally, less than 14 dph, while claiming their proposal is in keeping with the local area. It is clear the site could comfortably yield more housing than currently proposed.
28. **Landscaping and public open space.** The District Council's Landscape Architect has provided comments on the inadequacy of the information provided for boundary treatment and landscaping matters. Pre-application advice given to the applicant covered how their development would be expected to meet policy. Specific advice was given on the quantum of public open space that would be required to meet District Council standards, 0.07ha of public open space and a further 0.01ha for a Local Area for Play (a LAP), or 800 sq.m. in total.

29. Careful measuring of the open space shows about 460 sq.m. is proposed, split into two main blocks by a service road. The area to the south of the service road would host an insect hotel and bird boxes placed on an existing, mature Sycamore tree. This area would retain a thick privet hedge of about 15 metres in length. It is proposed that the area is sown with wildflower turf, mixed grasses and wildflowers. To achieve potential as a semi-natural area the grasses and wildflowers would have to be allowed to grow to their full height, which could restrict the use of the area as casual amenity space.
30. The northern area of open space would host the LAP. This area is also proposed to be split by a footpath linking to Plot 16's main entrance, with the main area of about 140 sq.m. hosting play equipment and a small seating area. This play space is devalued by being split by access to a private dwelling and will be less usable due to its proximity to Plot 16. Conflict between open space users and the residents is likely meaning either private or public amenity will be harmed. The quality of the public open space does not meet the expectations of 2035 Local Plan CF5 and Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy ESDQ4. The District Council may choose to make further comments on the amount of open space proposed.
31. **Amenity.** The proposal would allow for a small amenity area to be reprovided for 46 Queens Road, a benefit for both its occupants and the street scene. The amount of amenity given to the market homes is mostly very generous. The exception is Plot 16. This plot is, as described, immediately adjacent to the play area. The areas of "amenity space" at the front and side of the building are used for paths or not capable of giving any standard of private amenity. The rear garden does provide some 75 sq.m. of private amenity space which, while reasonable, does not make up for the confusion that could arise between the public / private realm that renders the remaining amenity space on this plot unusable. The standard for a 3+ bedroom house is 100 sq.m. of amenity space that is not compromised. The proposed provision is contrary to both 2035 Local Plan Policy DES5 and DES6.
32. The amenity space provided for the affordable housing exceeds the standards required by SODC Design Guidance with a mix of sunny and shade areas available for the occupants for the proposed flats.
33. In terms of room size, all of the rooms described as bedrooms on the plans appear to conform to the national described space standards. The affordable flat units should have good access to natural light and ventilation.
34. Notable, however, are plots 17 – 22 which are 4-bedroom homes with "attic rooms" which would be capable of use as habitable rooms, subject to satisfying building regulations. Plots 3 – 6 are 3-bedroom properties that would each have a room on their first floors proposed as studies. These rooms are just (0.4sq.m.) below the minimum floor area needed to be called single bedrooms under the national space standards. As they would, however, be larger than the area required by national guidance for a single adult living within a house in multiple occupation it is considered they should be counted as bedrooms.
35. **Design.** The submitted Design and Access Statement only briefly covers how the character of the local area influenced the scheme's design. It makes reference to the area's traditional houses, i.e., Victorian / Edwardian, and how the scheme has been modelled to provide a uniform style, which does overlook the existing Arts and Craft inspired number 42 Queens Road that will occupy the most prominent position within the development. It mentions the area's houses often have contrasting bricks, projecting gables and pitched rooves. The Thame Design Codes contain specific advice for those looking to develop in this area of Thame, but it is not mentioned in this Statement.
36. The Design Codes are mentioned in the Planning Statement. While it is not clear if the design evolved with reference to the Codes, the proposal does incorporate front gardens and drives of

varying depths, many of which are shown to include trees that will in time overhang the pavements and highway, notable features of the area. The planting immediately in front of the terrace of affordable housing is thin compared to the areas proposed for the rest of the scheme but similar examples do exist nearby. What is missing, however, are any obvious boundary treatments for the frontages. Low walls and fences are typical in East Thame.

37. The site is not without existing constraints and opportunities, and the Statement does identify these. The description of how the layout evolved does, however, appear to be an exercise in justifying why the design led to large, detached dwellings (described as “medium” and “slightly larger” which, it is claimed, has led to an efficient use of space with a range of dwelling sizes. The rationale for dividing the open space into two rather than placing the bulk of the open space elsewhere in the scheme has not been explained. It is not felt that the requirements of the 2035 Local Plan Policy DES3 has been successfully met but in demonstrating how the proposal meets the objectives and principles from the South Oxfordshire Design Guide, particularly with regards to density, layout open space.
38. The affordable housing is highly distinguishable from the private housing, contrary to 2035 Local Plan Policy H9 and Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy H8. The grain, plot size and parking arrangements make them stand apart from the market housing. The flats are the weakest part of the design, being a large unit with entirely hipped rooves rather than gables and notably lacking in features that add interest and character to some of the larger units, such as chimneys, shaped fascia and dormers. This does seem contrary to the Statement’s statement that a unified theme had been sought. The terrace of affordable housing in contrast features gables and the staggered frontages provide interest similar to those provided for some of the larger units.
39. Detailed plans of the housing types do not show the finer detail such as guttering and downpipe routing, etc., contrary to Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy ESDQ27.

## Summary

40. The proposal could be argued to respond well to the low density of the adjacent dwellings to the north of the site. Higher density is, however, also found very close to the site and 2035 Local Plan Policies Strat 5 and DES7 both require higher density to make sure land is used efficiently, particularly in sustainable locations. Decision making should be made with reference to the development plan as a whole. The development should, therefore, respond to the higher density in this character area location and as such the proposal is contrary to Strat 5 and DES7.
41. In not using Thame’s needs mix the development is contrary to 2035 Local Plan Policy H11 and TNP2 Policy GDH3. It is highly likely that using Thame’s needs mix would help the development comply with Local Plan 2035 Policy H9 and Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy H8 in providing affordable housing that is visually indistinguishable from the site’s market housing. Furthermore, in providing 4, 3-bedroom homes with “studies” able to be used as bedrooms by adults (as suggested by Government guidance) the housing provision on this site has been skewed to provide mostly 4-bedroom market homes (10) against a Thame-specific need of less than 3. In doing so, the scheme is contrary to emerging TNP2 Policy GDH3.
42. The open space is likely to be less usable and cause conflict due to it being split with part immediately adjacent to Plot 16, contrary to Thame Neighbourhood Plan Policy ESDQ4 and 2035 Local Plan Policy CF5. The amenity of Plot 16 will in turn be harmed, contrary to Local Plan Policies DES5 and DES6. The decisions that led to this layout have been inadequately explained within the applicant’s Design & Access Statement, contrary to Local Plan Policy DES3.
43. Plots 2,3 and 17 have driveways that could lead to cars overhanging the highway, which is likely to be contrary to 2035 Local Plan Policy TRANS5.

**Recommendation**

44. For the reasons given above, it is recommended that Thame Town Council objects to this application.