

Full Council

Title:	Land North of Rycote Lane Thame OX9 2BY
Date:	15 October 2024
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

[P24/S2886/FUL](#)

Mixed-use development incorporating the relocation of Thame Livestock Market and comprising a building accommodating agricultural sales, administrative offices, welfare facilities and associated uses together with a commercial development comprising 11,981sqm (GEA) of B2/B8 with ancillary E(g)(i) and E(g)(iii), all with access, parking, highway works, landscaping, drainage and ancillary operations.

Background

1. Members will recall that full planning permission was granted in February 2020 for a new livestock market for Thame, application [P17/S4415/FUL](#). That permission on around 6.8 hectares of land would have provided a sizeable building for livestock and chattels sales and also included space and green areas to provide overnight accommodation for livestock. The facility was recognised as providing a significant improvement in welfare terms that also provided better connections to a choice of vehicle routes.
2. As the application fell outside of Thame's boundary the Town Council submitted comments without making a recommendation. The comments made covered concerns regarding traffic safety and impact, with particular attention to the Moreton Road turn, the nature of the A329 westwards and the likely pattern of arrivals and departures from the site.
3. Variations received since approval was granted have focused on changes to the local highway route in response to Highway Authority advice and to enable a short section of the access road to be built to sub-base level without full drainage details being signed off. This allowed the 2020 Cattle Market permission to be considered commenced, and therefore extant in perpetuity.

Proposal

4. The applicant is proposing that a smaller cattle market of around 4,400 sq.m. would be built, an approximately 33% reduction on the permitted building, on just over 4 hectares of land. The reduction has mostly come about through the loss of the undercover lairage and chattels sales areas and two areas that had been identified for supporting commercial uses. Ancillary uses include a café, a conference facility and offices over two floors. Access would be taken off Rycote Lane in line with the granted permission.
5. Three commercial units comprising heavy industry / warehouse units with ancillary office and light industrial uses have been proposed on some 2.93 hectares of land to the north of the cattle market building. Access to this area would be taken from the internal road network serving Christmas Hill Business Park to the east.
6. The submitted Planning Statement states that the developer has committed to build the cattle market building and its associated infrastructure to enable relatively easy occupation by Thame Farmers Auction Mart Ltd. The developer is ready to enter into a planning condition

/ Section 106 Agreement to ensure the building would be delivered in this condition ahead of any occupation of the commercial buildings.

7. Landscape buffers have been proposed for the boundaries and for the land between the warehouse and cattle market areas.

Traffic

8. The original permission and the now completed Christmas Hill Business Park required a change in the alignment and width of Rycote Lane. The Business Park is also served by a new, 3-metre-wide shared foot and cycle path that links to the older footpath network east of Moreton Road.
9. It is proposed that the Cattle Market would retain sole use of its permitted access. The submitted Transport Assessment (June 2024) and off-site plan proposes that the Rycote Lane / A329 carriageway be widened to allow for a right turn into the site similar to that provided for the Christmas Hill Business Park. The shared foot and cycle path would be extended to the Cattle Market's entrance, set back 1 metre from the road's edge.
10. The provision for the Cattle Market on-site vehicle parking is:

Vehicle type	Quantity
Cars	40, of which 11 have EV points
Cars – disabled spaces	5
Bicycles	Not declared
Articulated HGVs	68
Trailers (and vehicles)	27
Washdown	@ 5 articulate HGV spaces

11. For the industrial / warehouse units the vehicle parking is:

Vehicle type	Unit 16	Unit 17	Unit 18
Cars	21 (incl. 6 EV)	21 (incl. 6 EV)	32 (incl. 8 EV)
Cars – disabled spaces	2	2	2
Bicycles	24	24	48

12. The bicycle provision for the industrial / warehouse units has used the standard for industrial floorspace, which is higher than warehouse uses. The overall provision by type for all of the units does, however, treat the office space as being ancillary. It is not known if the Highways Authority would consider this to be acceptable as offices are typically more densely occupied than B2 space.
13. In terms of traffic generation, the average arrivals and departures reported as part of the Transport Assessment carried out in December 2017 have been reused. The Thame Farmers Auction Mart have confirmed that the figures have not materially changed. Around 50 HGVs or livestock trailers arrive before 10:30 am and around 100 buyers arrive before 11:00 am. Large or heavy vehicle departures tend to happen in the afternoon onwards, with the staff generally departed by 8pm. This, and capacity assumptions for the site's access will be assessed by the Highways Authority.

Employment

14. The employment proposed at the Cattle Market is expected to be modest, with new opportunities possibly arising only from ancillary uses such as the café. This is, however, expected for an operation that mostly carries out its sales functions on just 2 days a week.
15. The applicant has submitted an Economic and Social Benefits Assessment (August 2024). The applicant's Assessment notes that the employment units are expected to yield over 150 jobs between them. This figure is based on figures obtained from the adjoining Christmas Hill site; using proxies similar to those used for TTC's own evidence base which would treat the office space separately the floorspace data would suggest around 180. The applicant's Assessment has calculated that once displacement has been taken into account the site could yield around 105 new direct and indirect job opportunities for South Oxfordshire residents.
16. The assessment has also provided economic and employment benefits for the existing Cattle Market site post-redevelopment. This has taken a cautious approach, suggesting 40 apartments on a site accompanying the 1,500 sq.m. of retail TNP2 seeks. Their methodology suggests around 77 on and off-site jobs could be provided.

Design and landscaping

17. The applicant has submitted a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) that assess the impact of the development from differing viewpoints in the surrounding area. The list of viewpoints includes Manor Farm cottages, which front Rycote Lane to the west of the site; the Rycote Lane / Moreton Road junction; the footpaths across and to the north of the Oxford Golf Club; and the bridleway between North Weston and Rycote Lane.
18. The Assessment notes that the initial development will have an adverse or major adverse impact on the landscape but that this could be largely mitigated as landscaping matures (the impact is described as "minor neutral"). The exceptions to this are the footpath to the north of the golf course and the views from Manor Farm Cottages, with the impact considered major adverse at the start of works, and "moderate neutral" by the time the landscaping matures. These assessments have not considered the impact on views in wintertime.
19. In terms of mitigation, it is proposed to keep the northern boundary's existing treeline. The applicant has also shown a bund on the western side of the site that would be planted with young, established native trees and a shrub screen. Similar trees and shrubs would be planted around the swales that will provide a visual break between the Cattle Market at commercial units. The front of the site would be treated with similar planting, and an ornamental pond with native species planting.
20. The eastern boundary is lightly treated in landscape terms as the adjoining site's western boundary should provide a more than adequate break between the two developments. The eastern side of the access road has an area identified for public art. This could provide an interesting gateway for the site that will be accessible from the main shared foot / cycle path.
21. The front of the Cattle Market building will slightly overlap the enclosed livestock pen area at the rear. The offices would be clad with insulated light grey panels, laid horizontally, with slate grey window frames. Vertical timber cladding would sit over a recessed, two-storey high porch up to the apex. The Cattle Market signage would site within that recess, just above the entrance doorways into the building. The recess should help contain any light spill, if the signage is illuminated. The roof would be covered with insulated panels that would be a slightly darker grey. Roof lights would help provide natural light to the sales floor area.
22. The livestock pen area would have vertically fixed wood cladding at first floor to eaves / apex height, with precast concrete panels beneath. The rear ground level of the building would

remain open, for access and ventilation. The roof would be clad with fibre cement sheets with rooflights allowing natural light to the pen areas beneath. Such materials are commonly used within agricultural settings. The windows, gutters and doors would match the slate grey of the Cattle Market's office windows.

23. Notwithstanding its atypical mass, when viewed from Rycote Lane the Cattle Market could be considered suited to this gateway setting, as an agricultural use is not unusual within a rural area or edge of town location.
24. The commercial units will be seen through glimpsed views from Rycote Lane and more readily from the footpaths noted above, particularly before the landscaping has matured. The proposed choice of materials would match those used in both style and colour palette of the Christmas Hill Business Park, including the use of translucent wall panels arranged in "T"-shapes on end walls. The proposed heights of the units would be 15 metres to the ridgeline against the 14.5 metres of the tallest units in the existing Business Park. The applicant has stated within their Planning Statement (paragraph 4.6), however, that floor levels on this site will be on average 2 metres lower than those of the existing development, meaning they should sit a little lower in the landscape.

Flood risk and drainage

25. The applicant's August 2024 Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy notes the risk of river flooding is low, at less than 0.1% per year. The site does have some areas at medium risk of surface waters, with some pockets at high risk (greater than 3.3% per annum) but the expected water depths modelled by the Environment Agency do not, however, appear significant. The District and County specialist officers will lead on these matters as the site's risk does not require input from the Environment Agency.
26. Drainage from car parking areas, rooves, and hard surfaces will pass directly or via geocellular crate storage into the swale in the centre of the site. From there it will be released into a diverted culvert that runs from the Christmas Hill Business Park to the watercourse to the west. The system has been calculated to allow for a 1 in 100 event, with a 40% increase in water volume to cater for climate change.

Sustainability

27. The applicant has submitted separate Energy and BREEAM Sustainability Statements for the Cattle Market and employment uses. It is proposed that a mechanical ventilation heat recovery system is used alongside heat pumps for hot water and space heating with electricity partly delivered through the use of PV panels. This would help deliver a carbon reduction of just over 40% of those of a standard build, slightly over the requirement of Local Plan Policy DES10. A sizeable rainwater capture tank is also proposed to help with the washdown of relevant areas.
28. For the commercial elements similar technologies are proposed for heating, ventilation and energy generation. This is claimed to deliver a carbon reduction in excess of 72%, well over the 40% required by Local Plan policy.

Ecology and biodiversity

29. The submitted Ecological Impact Appraisal (August 2024) notes that the northern boundary has weed / shrub species below a line of willows next to a ditch that is acting as a linear pond. This has been recorded as containing DNA from Great Crested Newts. This boundary will be both retained and protected throughout development.
30. The southern hedgerow adjacent to the A329 contains a modest range of species and is in good condition with regards to habitat. A section of hedge some 110 metres long would be cleared to enable access and vision splays, similar to the extant permission. New landscape

planting with native trees and shrubs and habitat formation in terms of swales and a permanent pond will be made. Bat and bird boxes are proposed as well but there will be an overall loss of biodiversity. This would have to be reprovided off-site.

Planning Policy

31. The proposal has particular implications for both Thame's existing Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) and the reviewed Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP2), which is currently at public examination. TNP Policies WS1, WS14 and WS15 set out principles for the redevelopment of the Cattle Market which would allow for a mixed-use development. The policy has already been part-superseded by the recognised need for a small footprint food store in Thame (approximately 1,500 sq.m. net floorspace) which is reflected through TNP2 Policy GDR1, to help reduce the need for residents to travel for food. This need may have grown since the loss of the Co-op store from Thame's Town Centre.
32. Policy GDR1 currently has little weight, but one clause that appears to be supported is that the redevelopment of the Cattle Market must not happen until a new one becomes operational. This proposal would appear to enable this. The redevelopment of the site could also see longer term amenity and environmental improvements through a marked reduction in the numbers of HGVs and trailers travelling to and through the Town Centre.
33. Any redevelopment of the existing Town Centre site would be likely to create employment opportunities and help keep the wider Town viable and vibrant in line with the community's vision and objectives. The retail supermarket use opposite is classed as primary shopping frontage, and the TNP2 proposes extending the retail frontage to the site. TNP Policies designed to encourage the retention and creation of employment within the Town Centre (e.g. Policies WS7, WS10) are, therefore, considered to apply as the definition of Town Centres within the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is compatible with the site.
34. Following the grant of the Christmas Hill Business Park, the District Council confirmed that they would count that employment land and floorspace towards Thame's employment provision. This site's potential provision should also be assumed to apply. TNP2 contains an allocation to provide 5.5 ha (net) of employment land in order to address past loss and provide new, quality premises to help address some of Thame's ageing employment stock. With the Plan at Examination, this proposal would be in addition to that 5.5 ha and this requires consideration.
35. The proposal would, as noted above, enable a key Town Centre site that had been the subject of multiple planning applications in the past, mostly for a very large supermarket. A flexible, positively written policy was defined within the TNP in order to provide an appropriate, enabling Masterplan for the site to ensure a wide range of benefits for the community. The policy itself is not at fault and market interest in the site is also known to exist.
36. The original allocation has stalled, not failed, primarily due to the presence of the Cattle Market, which as a facility of regional importance should not be put at risk. The proposal is considered a practical means to deliver both a new livestock auction site and enable the regeneration of the old. Were this application to have come forward either before TNP2 was submitted for Examination or after its adoption the benefit of the proposal would be regarded as considerable.
37. While the Thame Employment Allocations Evidence noted the demand for employment land in Thame introduced a risk of introducing an imbalance between employment and housing locally the proposed gain would be made against a background of further windfall housing development. The additional employment land and floorspace could also serve as a buffer

against future speculative employment provision and would act to reinforce Rycote Lane as an employment cluster.

38. To ensure the application is viable the District Council have, in pre-application discussions with the applicant, requested proof that the development would be financially viable and that the Cattle Market will be able to operate into the future with a reduced land and floorspace area, compared to the extant permission. This would be subject to independent assessment at the applicant's cost. These requirements appear reasonable, given the Cattle Market's importance.
39. The development proposal would appear to offer a reliable means of delivering multiple benefits identified within the made and emerging Thame Neighbourhood Plans. These benefits would not only serve Thame's residents but also those of neighbouring parishes, in line with both Thame's market town role and the vision within the Thame Neighbourhood Plan.

Other matters

40. The applicant has identified an area at the site's entrance that can be used to deliver public art as required by the District Council's Arts Development Strategy.
41. Animal welfare should be improved due to the better conditions the animals would have while being sold.
42. The Town failed to have the boundary of Thame extended to match the western boundary of the proposed new Cattle Market facility. The Town's Charter may, therefore, need amending to enable the Cattle Market to be held outside of Thame Parish.

Recommendation

43. This proposal is on land in Great Haseley Parish. The Town Council could submit comments on matters it believes either relevant, or helpful, as before. Alternatively, the Council could, for the reasons given above, make a recommendation.