

APP REF: P/OUT/2023/02644

ADDRESS: Land West of Church Hill and Land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane, Marnhull

APPLICANT: Mr Paul Crocker

DESCRIPTION: Hybrid planning application consisting of: Full planning permission for a mixed-use development to erect a food store with cafe, plus office space and 2 No. flats above. Erect building for mixed commercial, business and service uses (Class E), (e.g., estate agents, hairdresser, funeral care, dentist, vet). Form vehicular and pedestrian accesses and parking. Form parking area for St. Gregory's Church and St Gregory's Primary School. Carry out landscaping works and associated engineering operations. (Demolish redundant agricultural buildings). Land west of Church Hill. Outline planning permission (to determine access) to erect up to 120 dwellings. Land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane.

CASE OFFICER: Robert Lennis

URBAN DESIGN OFFICER COMMENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| SUPPORT | |
| SUPPORT SUBJECT TO CONDITION(S) | |
| UNABLE TO SUPPORT | X |
| NO OBJECTION | |
| REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION | |
| OTHER / PRE-APP | |
| NO COMMENT TO MAKE | |
| HAS PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION TAKEN PLACE WITH YOU? | No |

Main issues:

Tess Square Site

- PROW need to be better integrated into the proposed footpath network.
- Weak connection into POS to the north would be a deterrent to using the space.

Butts Close Site

- The proposed density is higher than that of recent neighbouring development. Density implications if there is a need for a greater number of larger detached dwellings.
- Proposals do not reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development.
- Topography not considered sufficiently in relation to building heights.
- Scale and orientation of dwellings in relation to neighbouring context.

- The relationship between the proposed built form and the open spaces including natural assets to the site is lacking.
- Front / back orientation of dwellings proposed.
- Site layout does not consider the required foul sewer easement.
- Overreliance on cul-de-sacs – would be an inefficient use of land and limit internal permeability.
- Desire lines not followed / attractiveness of route is poor and therefore active travel not promoted.
- Proposed positioning of play spaces would limit passive surveillance.
- The proposed distribution of affordable housing would not create a tenure blind scheme.
- Poorly integrated parking with limited scope for relief through street planting.

Comments on proposal:

This hybrid application consists of a full planning application for a mixed-use development at the Tess Square site and an outline application with all matters reserved except for access for up to 120 dwellings at the Butts Close site. Given that the sites are two separate parcels, I will be commenting separately for each of the sites: the Tess Square site and the Butts Close site.

TESS SQUARE SITE

Context and Character

The character study is translated into the proposals for the Tess Square site. The Rough-Cut Stone and Smooth Dressed Stone within the materials palette are in keeping with the local palette. The grey slate tile would also coalesce with the existing palette while remaining visually recessive. The oak window and door frames would add finishes that are consistent with rural development as identified within the Design & Access Statement (DAS).

Movement & Connections

Vehicular access is proposed from Church Hill, with a vehicular access to the mixed-use development to tie in with the existing access to the surgery and associated car parking. Another vehicular access is proposed to serve the school drop off area with a small circular route for vehicles.

In terms of pedestrian access and circulation, there are three PROW that cross the site: N47/30 (N of the site), N47/31 (S/SW) and N47/33 (NW). The proposed pathways are shown to provide good links between the proposed development

and N47/33 to the north west of the site. Proposed pathways through the site are shown to provide links between the retail and commercial development, the school drop off area and to the school beyond the site, with paths meandering through the POS while providing direct links. The proposals appear to involve a re-routing of PROW N47/30 in order to bring the ROW through the commercial / retail units, but clarification is required on this as the site plan appears to still show N47/30 as it is currently (as shown below).

Excerpt of Block Plan



This is repeated for PROW N47/31 which does not appear to tie in with the footpaths that are shown to meander through the POS within these proposals (as shown over the page). The application needs to address the rights of way on site to ensure that the wider links beyond the site are facilitated. The proposed on-site footpath network should either incorporate existing PROW or make provision for amendments to these routes to tie in with the links to the proposed development. Paragraph 100 of the NPPF states; *“Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails”*. Where active travel is promoted, the National Design Guide (NDG) states that *“Public rights of way are protected, enhanced and well-linked into the wider network of pedestrian and cycle routes”*. Policy 24 of the North Dorset Local Plan (NDLP) stipulates that; *“Layouts should be designed to promote accessibility and local permeability making connections with neighbouring areas and reinforcing existing connections”*.

Excerpt of Block Plan



Streets & Spaces

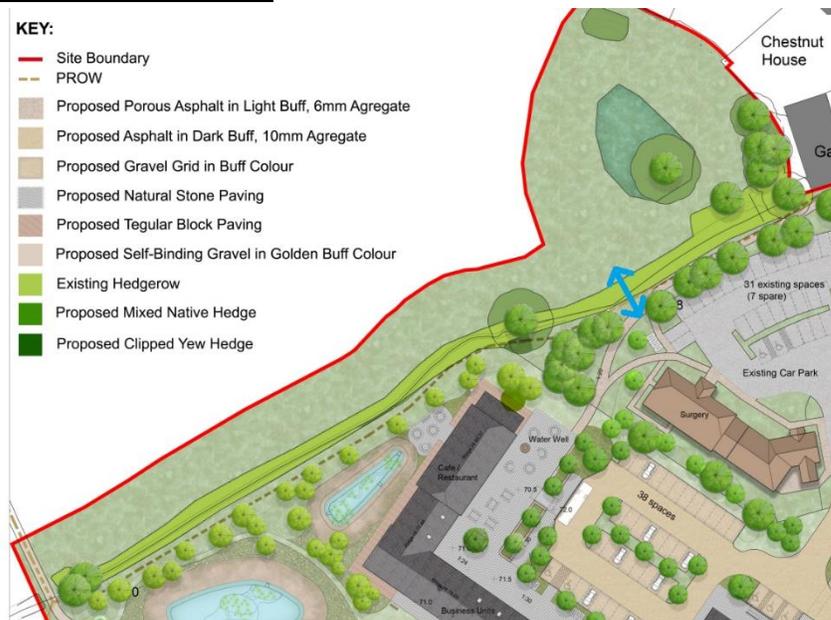
The relationship between the open space and the proposed development is generally shown to be a positive one. However, in their current form the proposals would see the area of open space at the north of the site severed from the rest of the development. The hedgerow would act as a barrier to pedestrian movement into this space and it is unlikely to be utilised if pedestrians have to take the route highlighted in orange on the annotated block plan below.

Annotated Block Plan



A link to this space, as shown by the blue arrow on the annotated block plan below, would serve to open up this space for further public amenity space.

Annotated Block Plan



In terms of hard landscaping, the surface materials proposed appear appropriate to both the character of the site and the proposed development.

Parking

The parking arrangement proposes generally well-integrated parking for the site. The exception to this is at the SE of the site where street planting is noticeably sparser than that elsewhere within the proposals. This approach would not optimise the assimilation of the development at this site. Regarding parking, the NDG states; *“Well-designed parking is attractive, well-landscaped and sensitively integrated into the built form so that it does not dominate the development or the street scene”*. The additional seven parking spaces for the Surgery are a welcome addition to the proposals.

Conclusion

While it is considered that the Tess Square proposals respond well to the character of Marnhull and contain several positive features, I am unable to support the proposals while the pedestrian connections to existing PROW are lacking. This current approach would contravene National Planning Policy, Local Planning Policy, and National design guidance.

BUTTS CLOSE SITE

The application site for the Butts Close site measures 7.99 hectares (ha) with 120 dwellings proposed, which would equate to 15 dph (dwellings per hectare). Two previous outline applications relate to a proportion of the Butts Close application site; application 2/2018/0448/OUT for 58 dwellings (3.05 ha & 19 dph) which was withdrawn and application P/OUT/2021/03030 for 39 dwellings (2.72 ha & 14 dph) which was approved on 02/03/23 with conditions stipulating that development within the developable area be limited to 39 dwellings (condition 18).

Both examples of neighbouring developments given in the DAS include applications for lower densities than is being applied for with the Butts Close site, as demonstrated below.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Musbury Lane | 7 dwellings @ 0.64 ha = 11 dph (dwellings per hectare) |
| Crown Road | 72 dwellings @ 5.24 ha = 13 dph (dwellings per hectare) |
| Butts Close site | 120 dwellings @ 7.99 ha = 15 dph (dwellings per hectare) |

The Musbury Lane application (P/OUT/2021/05708) has been refused for the following reasons: *“The proposal would lead to a significant adverse change to the character and appearance of the area, it would impact on public views of the countryside, and diminish the tranquillity of the lane, which would be contrary to policies 4, and 24 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016). The adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of providing 7 dwellings when assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) taken as a whole”.* (Decision Notice 08/03/23)

The Crown Road application (2/2018/1124/OUT) was granted on appeal. Incidentally, the DAS refers to the P/OUT/2021/05266 application for Crown Road, which is the same site, but for 70 dwellings. This application is still under officer consideration. The Crown Road site is the most pertinent example to this application because of the size of the site and proposals. I would advocate for a reduced density to the proposals based on the assessment of local densities alone. The need for a reduced density is amplified when considering the context and character of the site in relation to the proposals.

Context and Character

Regarding character, Policy 24 within the NDLP states; *“In places that already have a positive image or character, the design of new development should respond to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture”.* I do not consider that the proposals show plans for a scheme that would reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development. The plans show a high quantum of terraced development with eight separate terraces shown, amounting to approximately 26 dwellings. A high proportion of terraced housing

on a scheme is not characteristic of a rural edge of settlement development. Paragraph 130 (c.) of the NPPF states; *“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting”*. I do not consider that the plans show how the development can be sympathetic to the local character of Marnhull. The housing mix and type of dwelling would have a significant impact of the residential capacity of the site. A necessity for a higher proportion of detached or semi-detached dwellings than is currently shown would likely require a larger amount of land per plot. Building for Healthy Life (BHL) advises that memorable places are created when designers *“Understand where positive local character comes from: streets, blocks and plots (urban grain), green and blue infrastructure, land uses, building form, massing and materials often underpin the essence of the distinctive character of settlements rather than architectural style and details”*. This notion reinforces the need to build appropriate character into developments prior to reserved matters stage by ensuring that design principles are embedded into the design of a scheme at an early design stage.

While the aspiration to keep built form low-profile in relation to Schoolhouse Lane is appreciated, this approach would divide the site into two very distinct parcels and give the impression that these are two separate developments within the Butts Close site. This severance is reinforced by the separate plot numbering for the bungalows and the two storey dwellings. Building heights designed in relation to topography and responding to the existing built form adjacent to the northern boundary is advised. While the site is gently sloping, there is a 12m fluctuation from the south rising to the north. This should be reflected within the building heights plans, as is demonstrated for the Tess Square site. A Building Heights Parameter Plan is recommended. Furthermore, in relation to topography, Policy 24 of the North Dorset Local Plan (NDLP) states; *“Layouts and roads should take account of local topography, the natural features on a site and the needs of the mobility or sensory impaired”*.

The DAS asserts; *“The scale of the proposal has been carefully considered to best relate to the neighbouring context and tie the scale of proposal in with the surroundings”*. Existing dwellings 6-10 Butts Close sit close to the northern boundary of this site, therefore sensitive treatment is required. A large 4B detached and two storey unit is shown on the indicative proposals to sit closest to the northern boundary which would be less than 15m from 6 Butts Close. The proposals also show a small buffer area of open space between the site’s northern boundary and indicative plots 1-7. This area reads as SLOAP (space left over after planning) and I am not convinced that this is the best design solution in relation to existing dwellings at Butts Close. Conversely, existing dwellings 1-10 New Street have deep plot depths which indicative plots 9-18 do not appear to respond to effectively enough.

The “Opportunity to maximize the existing natural assets of the site including the trees, hedges, and views”, as identified in the DAS (pg44), has not been realised through the plans. Natural features of the site appear to have been designed around as an inconvenience rather than designed to celebrate these assets to the site and the design of the scheme. The most notable example of this is the design response to the tree at the east of the site (below).

Excerpt from the indicative site plan



The approach sees built form sit side-on and squeezed up to the tree which would be bound to the north and west by plot boundaries (presumably intended to be close boarded fencing). Two dwellings are shown to front towards the tree, however these should ideally be set back further from the tree to ensure that the tree is not engulfed by hard surfacing.

There are numerous examples of front to back orientation of dwellings on the indicative layout where incomplete perimeter blocks expose plot boundaries to public spaces and blur what is private space from public space. Manual for Streets (MFS) states; “In general, it is recommended that streets are designed with the backs and fronts of houses and other buildings being treated differently. The basic tenet is ‘public fronts and private backs’”.

Excerpts from the indicative site plan

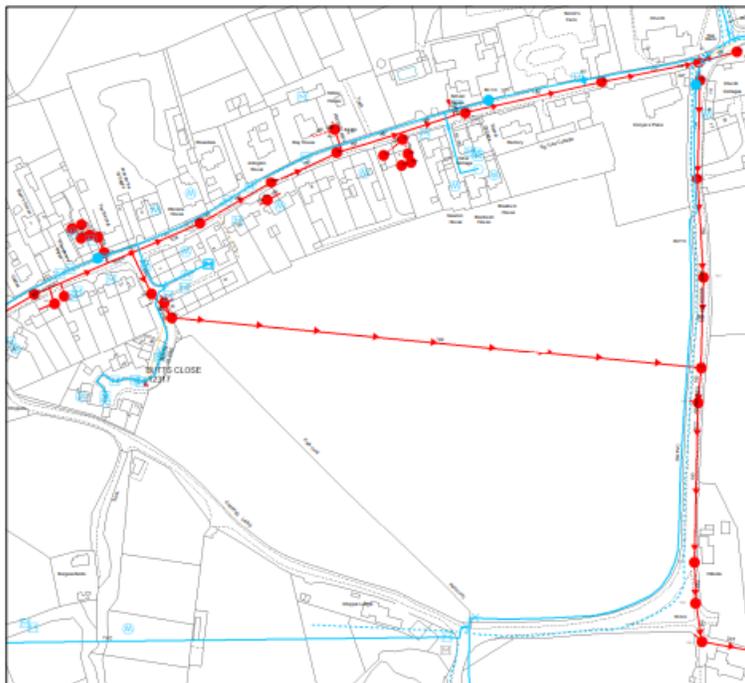


In terms of private amenity, there would be a stark contrast between the private amenity space afforded to plots located towards the north of this site and those of existing plots that back onto the northern boundary of the site. This approach would jar with the existing character of the immediate surrounding area.

Wessex Water have advised (30/11/23) that there is an existing 150mm public foul sewer that crosses the site (as shown in the map below). As Wessex Water have stated; *“the proposed site layout conflicts with the statutory easement”*. A revised submission would need to demonstrate that the required easement could be accommodated.

Wessex Water Map – Butts Close

Land off off Butts Close & Schoolhouse Lane Marnhull



Movement & Connections

The approach to movement and circulation within the submitted plans is a major concern. Vehicular access is proposed at Butts Close and at Schoolhouse Lane. While a link between Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane is provided on the indicative plan, the layout is structured through a series of cul-de-sacs. The prevalence of these cul-de-sacs would limit the internal permeability of the development. The proposals do not appear to adequately respond to turning for emergency and refuse vehicles. There are seven turning heads shown on the indicative layout which would appear an inefficient layout in terms of circulation, permeability, and quantum of hard surfacing. Manual for Streets (MFS) advises; *“Caution must, however, be exercised when planning for cul-de-sacs, as they may concentrate traffic impact on a small number of dwellings, require turning*

heads that are wasteful in land terms and lead to additional vehicle travel and emissions, particularly by service vehicles”. Furthermore, MFS states; “Routeing for waste vehicles should be determined at the concept masterplan or scheme design stage. Wherever possible, routing should be configured so that the refuse collection can be made without the need for the vehicle having to reverse, as turning heads may be obstructed by parked vehicles and reversing refuse vehicles create a risk to other street users”.

Public right of way (PROW) N47/28 crosses the Butts Close site. This route connects to PROW N47/29 at Butts Close. In the DAS, the plans are said to follow the existing PROW N47/28; “The footpath on the site has been designed to mark the link the Right of Way N47/28 (Access from Chippel Lane on the West towards Butts Close to the North”. However, the ‘Indicative Site Plan Affordability’ (below) suggests that the PROW (N47/28) would run along the principal street instead of in line with pavements. In this scenario, deviation from the existing PROW would be necessary.

Excerpt of the Indicative Site Plan: Affordability



Desire lines are not respected by the indicative site plan, as highlighted by the excerpt of the plan over the page. This approach would go against Policy 24 of the NDLP; “Layouts should be designed to promote accessibility and local permeability making connections with neighbouring areas and reinforcing existing connections”. The internal legibility of the scheme, as shown, is poor. The promotion of active travel should be prioritised within the design of the scheme, particularly in the context of the climate emergency. Paragraph 104 of the NPPF states; “Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that: opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued”. Furthermore, regarding active travel the NDG states; “Prioritising pedestrians and cyclists mean creating routes that are safe, direct, convenient and accessible for people of all abilities”.

Excerpts from the indicative site plan



Streets & Spaces

Street hierarchies should give priority to pedestrians and cyclists to ensure that the scheme promotes active travel. This involves ensuring that routes are both functional in the form of following desire lines and that they are attractive routes to encourage walking and cycling. The indicative site layout shows several instances of dwellings backing onto streets, limiting the passive surveillance that dwellings fronting toward public spaces offer. This current approach would limit passive surveillance and opportunities for social interaction while increasing opportunity for crime. The relationship between the proposed built form and open space as shown is a concern. The approach would go against local policy and national guidance on open space design. The design approach to open spaces in relation to built form should be drawn from Policy 24 of the NDLP; *“The sensitive and creative treatment of public and private spaces within and around a development is important”*. Policy 25 (Amenity) of the NDLP states; *“Poorly designed public spaces and routes can also lead to unwanted social contact”*. In terms of National policy, paragraph 130 (f.) of the NPPF states; *“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience”*. The NDG states that *“Well-designed public and shared amenity spaces feel safe for people who occupy the buildings around them, and also for visitors and passers-by. They help to overcome crime and the fear of crime. Careful planning and design create the right conditions for people to feel safe and secure, without the need for additional security measures”*.

The rationale for the proposed placement of the LAP and the LEAP is not outlined within the DAS. This gives the impression that the location of play spaces has been assigned at random, particularly because the passive surveillance towards the LEAP would be minimal if placed where the indicative plans propose.

Homes

While the housing mix would not be fixed at this stage of design a proposed mix is provided. This proposes a mix of 2bedroom, 3bedroom and 4bedroom dwellings. The vast majority of the unit types proposed are 2 & 3 bedroom dwellings with the remaining 11% made up of 4b dwellings. This figure appears particularly low considering that this would be a rural edge of settlement development. With only 13/120 dwellings as larger detached dwellings, this approach would limit the use of these dwellings as feature plots rather than having lower density edges to development with distinct character areas. As such, the low proportion of larger detached dwellings would make it a challenge to taper the density of the development to the southern, western, and eastern edges.

The quantum of terraced development indicatively shown appears incongruous to existing development in Marnhull. While terracing is present in the village, it is generally low grade in terms of massing such as the terraced bungalows at Butts Close and Marnhull Close.

At 48 units from the total 120 proposed, the plans are compliant with NDLP Policy 8 which states that *“40% of the total number of dwellings will be affordable”*. However, the distribution of the affordable housing on the ‘Proposed Affordable Housing Site Plan’ is poor. Affordable housing is proposed to be concentrated in a large cluster at the west and centre of the site. Regarding affordable housing, the NDG states; *“Where different tenures are provided, they are well-integrated and designed to the same high quality to create tenure neutral homes and spaces, where no tenure is disadvantaged”*. It is not considered that the illustrative distribution of affordable housing would be well-integrated. Policy 7 of the NDLP states; *“National policy encourages local planning authorities to deliver a wide choice of high-quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive mixed communities”*. The proposed distribution of affordable housing would not create an inclusive mixed community for the Butts Close site.

In terms of materials, it is said within the DAS that dwellings will offer *“visual variety that embraces the style and materials of the cottages and houses in the local context”*. While materials are a reserved matter, it is generally expected that indicative unit types and illustrative elevations are provided at outline stage. The approach to the design of the layout would see several plot boundaries exposed to public spaces with conflict between the private and the public realm. While the effects of exposed plot boundaries can be mitigated by sensitive treatments such as walled boundaries and planting, a better approach is to utilise perimeter block development to ensure the tenet of public fronts and private backs.

Parking

The parking arrangement proposes a range of parking solutions including tandem, frontage, parallel, courtyard and garage parking. Tandem parking appears to be the predominant parking method shown on the indicative plans. Building for Healthy Life (BHL) cites “*Over-reliance on tandem parking arrangements*” as a criterion of poor design.

Excerpts from the indicative layout



The examples above show how parking would jut out into the open space and not be relieved by street planting. This approach would not sensitively integrate parking into the built form. The NDG states; “*Well-designed parking is attractive, well-landscaped and sensitively integrated into the built form so that it does not dominate the development or the street scene*”.

Informal parking in turning heads would be an issue as currently designed. The examples below show turning heads that would not discourage informal parking which would have implications for emergency and refuse vehicle turning. It is advised in MFS that; “*To be effective and usable, the turning head must be kept clear of parked vehicles. Therefore, it is essential that adequate parking is provided for residents in suitable locations*”.

Excerpts from the indicative layout



Parallel parking bays that would serve as visitor / unallocated parking spaces are a welcome feature of the indicative site layout that would seek to formalise unallocated parking in favour of informal parking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while I'm conscious of the layout being indicative at this stage, I do not feel that the array of issues raised could be overcome within a reserved matters application while maintaining the density of 15 dph alongside the quantum of open space shown. The notion of 15dph at this site is questionable, given the review of local densities and the character of the site in relation to what is proposed.

I recommend that the site be taken to Design Review Panel (Design West) in order to comprehensively resolve the myriad of design related issues with the Land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane proposals.

Policy consideration:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraphs 100, 104, 130

North Dorset Local Plan (2016)

Policy 7 – Delivering Homes

Policy 8 – Affordable Housing

Policy 24 – Design

Policy 25 – Amenity

National Design Guide (2021)

Building for Healthy Life (2020)

Manual for Streets (2007)

OFFICER: Sophie Smith

TITLE: Urban Design Officer

DATE: 18/12/23