

Woodstock Community and Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Appendix 7 – Friends of Old Woodstock feedback (March and July 2019)

Submission 1

March 18, 2019

Old Woodstock – 268 households. Roads – A44 Manor Road - 110 households; Barn Piece estate – 112; Hill Rise - 46

- Development site location – three quarters of a mile north of Woodstock town, bordered by Hill Rise and Vanbrugh Close.
- For residents of Old Woodstock, travelling on foot or by vehicle, the only access for all essential amenities in Woodstock - health, education, provisions, recreation – is to use the A44 Manor Road.
- The site is seen by many as a poor choice for development, because of the problems of access from the A44 or through the existing housing estate, and because of the very real dangers faced by pedestrians using the narrow pavements on their way to town.
- The development was strongly opposed locally, and paradoxically the current consultation seems to have given rise to considerable anger against Blenheim, even if perhaps better directed at West Oxfordshire District Council. A surprising number of residents still want to oppose the development, even though opportunity seems now to be limited to addressing the planning application when published in 2019/2020.
- Other residents however accept the imminence of the development, and wish to address the issues it raises, namely the dangers to pedestrian on the A44, access to the new site, and the impact on the existing community.
- Friends of Old Woodstock, an association of residents of the area, encourages residents to engage in local discussion and contribute fully to the current review of the town.

Access to the site from Vermont Drive and Rosamund Drive

- Currently, there is no vehicular access to the site, other than a farm gates on the A44 and at the end of Rosamund Drive, and a narrow gap between the houses in Hill Rise.
- Access to the site from Rosamund Drive would mean removing the play area and half sized football field, both of which are greatly valued locally. This popular facility could be moved and perhaps improved, but there is strong feeling in the area that it should be preserved as a popular feature, and would be ideally placed to form a link and social mixing destination between the new community and existing.
- Footpath and cycleway links between Hill Rise, the new community and the Barn Piece housing estate should be preserved, skirting the play area and utilising the existing informal footpath behind the houses in Hill Rise. This path is currently maintained by householders and is well used by residents in Barn Piece and Hill Rise, and is also a route towards the town through the Barn Piece estate avoiding the A44.
- Residents have no wish for Rosamund Drive and Vermont Drive to be swamped with traffic from the new settlement, and would not see that as an improvement.
- The junction near the play area of Rosamund Drive with Vanbrugh Close, and the nearby junction of Rosamund Drive with Vermont Drive both have narrow roads, and vehicles pass at these

junctions only with care and at slow speed. Vermont Drive is the only road into and out of the Barn Piece housing estate. The strong opinion locally is that these roads would be unsuitable to carry traffic from the new development as well as the estate they currently serve.

Layout of the new site

- The whole of the eastern edge of the new site is bounded by a wooded lane known locally as 'Balliol Lane', privately owned (not by Blenheim) but with permission for local people to use it (dogs on leads) for access to the countryside to the north, and which joins the public footpath from Woodstock to Wootton at Field Barn. The lane is mentioned in the Wootton Enclosure Act Of 9 George III dated 1769. All possible connections to the lane should be made in the new layout of housing, roads and paths.
- The local community would like to be consulted further about the density and type of housing to be built (there is local experience in build environment and urban design), and would like there to be a maximum of open spaces and throughout an open plan design.
- An informal path runs behind the houses in Vanbrugh Close, occasionally used by locals to access Balliol Lane. These residents have expressed a wish for there to be a 'buffer zone' or space between their back gardens and the new housing. This could be wooded or shrubs, or simply a green space. However, designers say that such spaces soon become unkempt or misused, and the best protection of privacy and open aspect for everyone is for gardens to back on to each other. This remains contentious.

Access to the new site from the A44

- A small part of the new site turns around the end of Hill Rise to join the A44 at a point beyond the 30mph signs and currently governed by a 50mph speed limit. The A44 is not wide here, and there is a bend for traffic entering Woodstock from the north. The developers have said that it is their intention for construction traffic to access the site at this point on the A44, and permanent access to the site here also seems likely.
- To this end, the 30mph speed limit could be extended north, and an acceleration area provided for traffic emerging from the new site turning towards the town. Alternatively, a roundabout could be constructed on the site, and the A44 diverted to use it, this might slow traffic entering the Woodstock built up area.
- In the view of local people, this should ideally be the only access and egress to and from the new site, maintaining only cycle and footway traffic through the play area to the Barn Piece estate, and not vehicular traffic.

Danger to pedestrians on the A44

- Arguably the most serious, important and contentious aspect of the planned new development is the pre-existing condition of the A44 main road and pavements at certain points, compared to the considerable increase particularly in pedestrian traffic to the town and schools.
- The very least that could be expected of the public authorities and the developer in substantially increasing the population of Old Woodstock is that there is a safe pedestrian route, both for schoolchildren to reach the schools at the other side of Woodstock, and for others to reach the town's amenities of health, provisions and recreation. The latter may include young and old, pushchairs, mobility scooters and wheelchairs.
- At Farm End, the road width narrows so that large vehicles can pass only at slow speed and close to – sometimes over running - the kerbs each side. The pavements are also narrow, and even when traffic is flowing freely (the road has a slope down into Woodstock) heavy vehicles with

large overhanging mirrors pass very close to the heads of pedestrians. Broken wing mirrors are constantly seen littering the roadway. The perception of danger here is high.

- A suggestion has been made to introduce a priority system at this most hazardous narrow section of the A44. The increasing number of very large goods vehicles could then use this section one at a time, perhaps with a further narrowing of the road width to guide such vehicles away from residents using the footpath.
- Further along the A44 at the Black Prince public house, where traffic speed increases with the descent, there is a bend, another narrowing of the carriageway, and a narrow pavement. A light metal pole barrier separates vehicles from pedestrians. Parts of this barrier have been demolished by vehicles three times in as many years. Any pedestrian passing at such a moment could not have survived.
- Only minor improvements to these dangerous areas may be possible (perhaps a stronger barrier, minor widening of the pavement where possible) and safer, off road solutions should be sought.
- Woodstock Town Council has closely followed local discussion on this subject and has recently agreed to write to the County Council for a timely safety audit of this section of the A44. In addition, informal talks have been held with County Council officials, who understand the issues and will investigate further. They will also be consulted by the developers later this year.

New paths and cycleways

- The suggestion has been made, and considered for some years past, of a new cycle and footway, which could be built to link Old Woodstock with other parts of the town, mainly the schools.
- This idea is not without its problems, such as the need for safe and substantial construction over the water meadows and the river. Such a path could be imagined as lonely in places and unlit, perhaps prone to anti social or sinister behaviour. Low level lighting could be considered, but is unlikely to be popular as bringing light to the countryside and affecting wildlife. Local residents also fear that any path across the fields to the river could make those fields a target for future development.
- Such a path could be aimed either at Brook Hill, or more in the direction of the schools on the other side of Woodstock, and could cross the river further east, at Glyme Close or even at the Owen Mumford factory, thus connecting with Green Lane and onwards to the schools. It could be started at any point to the east of the new development, and therefore not interfere with the privacy of houses in Vanbrugh Close or Mavor Close.
- For shoppers and other pedestrians needing to walk to the town, a new route could be created by means of a pedestrian crossing at Hill Rise (where there is a wide gap in the houses giving access from the new site to the A44) and creating a new gap in the Blenheim Palace wall directly opposite. Pedestrians could then walk safely inside the Palace wall to the public footpath at The Causeway, or walk further to the Town Gate, avoiding the busy A44 altogether.

The Dangers on the A44 Manor Road

- There have been no fatal accidents on this specific stretch of the A44, as far as anyone can remember, and that is often a criterion for using public money to improve highways. However, the worry and stress about such very evident dangers is very real. In this case, the evidence is clear for anyone to see with their own eyes, and anyone observing the two pinch points mentioned above will not want to stand there for more than a few moments, fearing for their safety

Bad accidents happen unexpectedly, loved ones are given bad news. Local people would not forgive the authorities or developers if someone lost their life for want of action.

The Money

- Everything costs money, and the County Council would say that there is no money for projects such as this. Also, various landowners may have to be consulted, and solutions to local concerns may not be found before the development is a reality. Developers will create a fund for infrastructure (section 106 money), and a review of the whole town is currently underway jointly between the Town Council and Blenheim to decide how this money should be spent to improve the future of Woodstock as whole.
- A problem may be that problems associated with developing this particular site in Old Woodstock find themselves in competition for the money primarily needed for the town, including a doctor's surgery, school classrooms and facilities, and this seems unfair as the problems existed before the site was chosen.
- Inaction concerning the dangers of the A44 could form grounds for objection when the planning application is published later this year or early next year, when heard by the District Council Planning Committee.

These concerns and suggestions are offered for discussion in the hope of feedback from the developers to residents of Old Woodstock, long before the planning application for this particular site is settled and published.

Submission 2 – feedback from FoOW public meeting

March 27, 2019

At a public meeting on 27th March 2019, open to all Old Woodstock residents, 71 households were represented.

At the meeting, the residents of Old Woodstock expressed strong opposition to housing development on the site adjacent to Hill Rise, because of the potentially increased concentration of pedestrians and motorists on the A44, which is the only link between the site and the town of Woodstock, and the real dangers present there.

The A44 Manor Road carriageway and pavements cannot be widened at already dangerous points between Farm End and the Black Prince public house. Safer off-road routes for pedestrians and cyclists have not been explored by either the developer or the Authorities, and may present additional time-consuming difficulties of funding, land ownership, acquisition and design, well beyond the start of building. Even if alternative routes are provided, this specific section of the A44 Manor Road will remain a danger, and a risk to health due to increased air pollution.

In addition, promises to engage residents in discussions regarding layout and impact upon existing communities have not yet been met.

To be specific, the public meeting identified the following issues that must be addressed:

- we understand that vehicular access to the site is to be made from an open stretch of the A44 north of Hill Rise, although it is difficult to imagine an entirely safe design. A roundabout has been suggested, which could improve safety and also slow traffic entering the built up area. The developers have said that all construction traffic will enter the site at this point, and not use Vermont Drive or Rosamund Drive;
- we are entirely opposed to vehicular access to the site from Vermont Drive and Rosamund Drive, where the carriageways and junctions are too narrow to sustain increased traffic from the new

development. At these junctions, including the junction of Rosamund Drive with Vanbrugh Close, vehicles currently pass only with care and at slow speed. However, footpaths and cycleways should connect Hill Rise, the new development and the Barn Piece estate;

- Old Woodstock has no community facilities whatsoever, other than the valued and popular play area. This must remain in its present location and is ideally placed to serve both new and old communities equally. It needs to be improved and extended, perhaps to include the provision of a modestly sized pavilion for community meetings.
- In order for us to be positive and to look for possible solutions, two pedestrian and cycle routes to the town have been suggested, to prevent the increased community from daily running the gauntlet of the 1200 vehicles per day on the A44, 5% of which are sizeable HGVs.
- One such path/cycleway, inside the Palace grounds and accessed via a new pedestrian crossing at Hill Rise, would give safe access to the town centre for health, provisions and recreation facilities. The other, from the east side of the site to the east of the town would access the schools. The latter would cross fields, wetlands and the River Glyme and in order to be entirely safe for schoolchildren might need to be railed on both sides, hard surfaced and well lit during hours of dusk or darkness. Both paths would need to meet standards for mobility impaired.
- We believe it to be entirely the responsibility of the developers and public authorities to find completely safe solutions to the dangers to life and limb of pedestrians using the A44 Manor Road, pre-existing and exacerbated by the planned development, before building commences.
- We have encouraged full participation in the current review and consultation, but none of concerns have yet been addressed or answers to our questions given. Once the planning application is finalised will be too late, and we ask for early feedback to our concerns.

Submission 3

July 2019

1. Existing informal paths

There are currently informal paths from a gap in the houses in Hill Rise, along the backs of Nos. 19 – 35 Hill Rise and around the edge of the existing play area to give access to the Barn Piece housing estate (112 houses) and from there into Manor Road and on into the town. This is seen as an essential connection between the Hill Rise community and the Barn Piece community, as well as an access for Hill Rise families to the play area. In reverse, it provides a connection between the Barn Piece housing estate and Hill Rise, and from there across the A44 to the community woodland path, and from there to connect up to the Oxfordshire Way into Blenheim parkland and other countryside.

What is suggested is a 'green corridor' between the back gardens of the houses in Hill Rise and the new development, to protect and encourage this connectivity as described. Similarly, there is an informal path between Rosamund Drive and the existing play area, along the backs of the houses Nos. 1- 15 Vanbrugh Close, leading to an ancient path (mentioned in the 1760 Enclosure Act) known locally as Balliol Lane (original Manor House owned by Balliol College, path or driftway used by workers and animals to local fields). This lane leads directly north from the A44 to fields, immediately adjacent to the eastern edge of the new development site and a local 'permissive' path connecting to the public footpath from Woodstock to the next village of Wootton.

Again, we have suggested a 'green corridor' behind the houses in Vanbrugh Close, to provide connectivity for residents of Hill Rise, Barn Piece and other parts of Old Woodstock, as well as residents of the new development, to Balliol Lane and the countryside beyond. Elsewhere in this note, new off-

road routes from the new development to Woodstock schools are discussed, perhaps commencing in the vicinity of this part of the new development.

2. The play area and vehicular access to the new site [Hill Rise]

The point has been strongly made locally that the existing play area is the only public facility serving the whole of Old Woodstock, it is greatly valued and well used for many years, and is well supervised, central and ideally located to serve the existing communities of Hill Rise, Barn Piece and the rest of Old Woodstock. If moved elsewhere within the new development, it will be removed from existing communities.

The suggestion has been made by the developers that the play area could be moved and even improved, in order to give vehicular and other access to the new development through Vermont Drive and Rosamund Drive, passing the junction of Rosamund Drive with Vermont Drive and that with Vanbrugh Close. Local people are very strongly of the opinion that, even if this was not the only access to the new site, these roads and junctions are far too narrow to carry increased traffic from the whole newly developed area, now and for the future.

The developers have already suggested that all construction traffic will enter the site via an entrance from the A44 north of Hill Rise, moving the 30mph limit to include this. We do hope that they keep to this promise, and that the A44 is the only access to the new site.

3. Safety on the A44

The A44 Manor Road is the only pedestrian and vehicular route between Old Woodstock and Woodstock town. All our residents, including the new families occupying the developed site, have to use the A44 to get to the schools, doctors, shops, amenities and other parts of the town. This is a strategic route from south to north, and traffic has increased considerably in size and volume over the years and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

This road, particularly it's junction with Farm End and at a bend outside the Black Prince public house, is narrow and dangerous, is closely bounded by buildings, and pedestrians are particularly at risk on the narrow pavements there. Lives are in peril here, have been for some time, and the solution is not simply to increase the population using it by half again.

Woodstock Town Council have unanimously passed resolutions to press the developers and County Council about finding mitigation for these specific locations, where they agree there is real and present danger, a catastrophe waiting to happen, should an HGV go out of control for example.

There seem to be very few possible solutions in relation to the road and the pavements themselves, except priority systems, hardly practical in relation to noise, air pollution and congestion caused by delayed traffic, or a bypass.

Two new off-road pedestrian and cycleway paths have long been suggested, one from the east side of the new development across fields, water meadows and a river to Glyme Close, for use by schoolchildren to get to school. In order that one set of dangers on the A44 is not replaced by another set of dangers on this path (e.g. drowning, perverts), this would have to be well constructed and safe throughout its length, a hard surface, fenced and lit.

If it is not well constructed and seen as safe, parents will not allow their children to use it, and the increased numbers of schoolchildren will continue to use the dangerous A44 until a tragedy occurs. It is

acknowledged that design, cost, negotiations with landowners and above all safety are all urgent considerations, none of which have been commenced by the authorities as far as we know.

The other essential off-road route suggested would be for shoppers and others needing to reach the town, from Hill Rise across the A44 by way of a new signalled pedestrian crossing, and on via a new opening in the Palace wall to a safe path parallel to the A44 towards the town. Here there would be a choice of exits by way of existing public footpaths, either back to the A44 having avoided the dangerous pinch points mentioned above, or on into the town centre via the Blenheim Town Gate.

Again, this path would have to be well presented and maintained, to include disabled access, in order that shoppers and others can safely reach the shops, doctors and other amenities in the town and be persuaded not to continue to use the dangerous A44 pavements. Safety on the A44 seems not to have been considered when the Local Plan was finalized and presents an enormous problem to be solved now.