

7 October 2021

**Land East of Two Bridges Road, Sidford**  
**Planning Application: 21/1723/MRES subsequent to 18/1094/MOUT**

Following the appeal hearing in front of a planning inspector in July 2019, the planning application 18/1094/MOUT to build a business park on the land east of Two Bridges Road at Sidford was upheld. This provided the applicants with outline planning permission to progress with building there. The inspector's decision left only the scale of the site's infrastructure and its appearance to be determined at a later date by the District Council.

The scale of the buildings is now covered by this latest planning application, 21/1723/MRES. I understand that the appearance of the buildings, their architecture, will still remain to be decided upon at a later date, probably in early 2022.

The applicants have over recent months, as will be evident from looking at the site, been undertaking some significant preliminary landscaping and flood alleviation work, not least straightening the course of the brook that flows through the site.

As the District Councillor for Sidmouth Rural Ward within which this site is located, I attended a site meeting on 1 October with fellow Sidford Ward District Councillor, Marianne Rixson, to meet with the applicants' agent, Joseph Marchant. We wanted to look at what works have been undertaken so far and to understand where the proposed buildings would be located.

The site has clearly had significant works undertaken so far and to my mind the works look as if the applicants are doing what has been required of them. Indeed, we were told that in the southern third of the site where the flood improvement works have taken place there will soon be about 2,200 native trees planted there. I understand that across the remainder of the site considerably more trees and planting will eventually take place. We were assured that as a result of all of the planting the site will become more ecologically rich than when it was a field.

I believe that the applicants' intentions are that building work would not commence for probably another 24 months allowing the initial planting to mature.

I understand that the flood improvement work will make the site less liable to future flooding allowing a greater flow of water through the site, reducing potential flooding in local lower lying areas.

I noted that all the current ground levels of the flood improvement area would be its future ground levels. The plans submitted with the latest application show the cut and fill across the site to create the base levels.

When trying to understand where the buildings would be located and their scale, we were able to use the "Proposed Block Plan" site plan that is part of the latest application's document submissions to the District Council.

The key information about the buildings that I took from our discussions was -

1. The site layout, as set out in the Block Plan, is the same as included in the previous 2018 application, and there will be fewer buildings than originally proposed when the site was reviewed as part of the 2012 Local Plan process.

2. Many of the buildings will now be a storey lower than had been proposed in 2012 and are as proposed in the 2018 application. The planning inspector included this detail in Condition 4 of his decision.
3. The ridge heights of the buildings will be roughly no higher than those of the bungalows facing the site on Two Bridges Road, with the exception of the two larger buildings at the front of the site (coloured red and light blue on the Block Plan) that would be about the same height as the former police house facing them on Two Bridges Road;
4. All the buildings, with the exception of two larger ones (coloured red and light blue on the Block Plan) closest to the Two Bridges Road, will be single storey at heights of about 5 metres to their eaves and 6 to 6.5 metres at their ridges.
5. The two larger buildings will be two storey office buildings at a height of about 6 metres to their eaves and about 7.5 metres to their ridges.
6. The buildings' height detail was covered at the planning inspector's hearing.

In the run up to the site meeting Mr Marchant provided me with an informal letter in which he set out the applicants' intentions and approach to the final phases of developing the site. Mr Marchant's intention was to try to ease any remaining local resident concerns about what is, and will, be happening at the site, and he has allowed me to reproduce the content of his letter. His letter is below –

“As you know, in late 2019, we sought to vary the Conditions on the Appeal Decision in order to allow the landscape works to be brought forward early. The original Inspector's Conditions meant that no implementation could occur until all designs for the buildings and other built elements were in place. The adjustment to the wording meant that we were able to bring forward the archaeological dig and the earthworks to secure the flood benefits, along with the landscape provision for new trees, hedges, new Devon banks and the meadow as early as possible, such that the landscape has a chance to mature as soon as it can. The applicants and I could see the benefit of landscaping maturing as soon as possible.

As I explained to you, having worked in this industry for over 25 years, I do know that in most cases where development is proposed, local residents are naturally concerned with impact. Where planting or the level of landscape to be provided is a significant element, this is not always fully appreciated or understood by local people, and, in some cases, averting this misunderstanding can reduce concern. I am conscious that understanding plans of the site remains a difficulty for some. With the benefit of the earthworks related to the landscape area, the new Devon banks, the flood basin and the enclosure to the tree zones of the site, it is now possible to depict where the planting will occur and therefore to more easily interpret the plans. I am pleased that you have agreed to view these works with me.

It may be that the turfing and tree and hedge planting will have started when we visit the site. The seeding has already occurred. This is the meadow rich seed mix for the main flood improvement area. Turfing is due to start at the end of this week and into next. In respect of the Devon banks along Laundry Lane, until recently, it has not been possible to lay this turf due to the dry weather, such that it would survive. With recent heavy rain, we can now proceed with this. The tree planting will also start in coming days. My understanding is that over 2200 trees and hedge whips have been ordered and will be planted across the site as planned. The ambition is that by the early spring of next year,

these planted elements will be well established and will have a full growing season ahead of them next year. Some of the trees that will go onto the site will be quite significant in size and hopefully within a year or two, will have a significant impact.

I would hope that on the site visit, we can look at this element of the investment, such that you can advise any local people that may come to you with queries. I think it will also be of significant interest to see just how much open space is allotted to the development, which I think will be of comfort to many local people. Again, this is an element that I think may have been under appreciated from the technical documents. A site visit should bring this to life.

The second issue which I think has been of concern to many local people, has been the worry that the development may be overbearing in its height. As you know, the recent appeal scheme detailed the layout, which is fully approved. The height of the ridges and eaves was supplied as an indicative figure. This indicative figure enabled the modelling of the Landscape Impact Assessment. As you are aware, the greater majority of the development is single storey. A few buildings are two storeys.

The concern of many local people was that the scale of the buildings may expand to more closely represent the scheme that was supported by the Inspector in the 2012 Local Plan Inquiry. This was a much denser scheme. To put to bed that concern, I can confirm that the scale, as now submitted, will be as detailed in the LVIA of the appeal scheme, to exactly the heights that were identified at that stage.

The current Reserved Matter application will hopefully avoid a worry from local residents that somehow the Reserved Matter would be submitted showing two and three storey buildings across the site. The scale that is shown in the Reserved Matters application which is currently submitted is as low as possible, particularly given that the greater majority of buildings are single storey.

My hope is that a combination of a large part of the landscape being in the ground, and a confirmed position from the applicant on the scale of buildings, will mean that those most affected by the development will hopefully obtain some peace of mind, knowing that the single storey scale of the majority of buildings, to match exactly with L002 Rev A and SK001, and the positioning and extent of landscape works will mean that the development is much less impacting than they had anticipated, giving regard to residents' outlook and relationship with the development site.

I look forward to being able to explore these things with you so that when you are approached by local people, you are able to put them at ease”.

I have been asked by some residents about what they might usefully say as part of the consultation on the latest application, for which the closing date is 14 October. The application and its supporting documents are accessible at –

<https://planning.eastdevon.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=QV41TVGHFQE00>

Given that the latest application is in effect about scale, I hope that the information that I have obtained will assist residents as they consider whether they are reassured by the scale of the buildings. Whatever residents' opinions on the latest application, these can be made directly to the District Council as part of its current consultation process.

Further, I hope that Mr Marchant's letter is helpful to residents and that the wider information I have set out here is also useful.

Since this note was drafted the Sidmouth Town Council's Planning Committee has met and considered this application. It was unable to support the application giving its reasons as –

### **UNABLE TO SUPPORT**

The Council continues to oppose the establishment of employment land in this location but subsequent to the approval on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, viewed the application regarding scale without prejudice.

Members were unable to support the application regarding scale as they felt that the location of larger and taller buildings (Blocks N & K) closer and more prominently next to the road was detrimental to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They suggested that those buildings could be relocated further back into the site so that the height and size of buildings increased as the distance increased from the main roadway.

As a member of this Committee, I participated in the discussions and I and share its concerns about the scale of the two higher buildings at the front of the site and would welcome anything that could be done to reduce their scale.

Best wishes

John Loudoun  
Ward Member  
Sidmouth Rural