

Planning Statement

LAND TO THE R/O 27-43 BLENHEIM ROAD
CAVERSHAM
READING
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Introduction

This statement is submitted in support of a planning application by First Avenue Estates Ltd for the erection of five dwellings (3no. three and 2no. four bed) at land to the rear of 27-43 Blenheim Road, Caversham, Reading.

The application is accompanied by the following reports:

- i) Design and Access Statement – Key Land Estates Architects
- ii) Ecological Survey – Calyx Environmental Ltd
- iii) Tree Survey and AIA – Harrison Arboriculture
- iv) Transport Assessment - I-Transport
- v) Vehicle Noise Assessment – Paragon Acoustic Consultants

1 The Site and Surroundings

The site lies within the defined urban area of Caversham (Reading) in a sustainable location close to a range of services and transport links including central Caversham. The site is located on the western side of Blenheim Road to the rear of the established frontage properties and comprises of an overgrown site with a rectangular shape. Access is via an existing access in between 29 and 31 Blenheim Road where there is already a dropped kerb in place and entrance gates. The proposal will re-use this access which is wide enough to provide vehicular access via a private drive for a development of this scale (see Transport Assessment).

Site entrance with dropped kerb and entrance gates



The site does not form part of the adjacent gardens being physically separated by walls and fences. Having lain empty for many years and clear of vegetation, it has become overgrown with self seeded trees and bushes and as a result the site is now the subject of a woodland area TPO. The Arboricultural Assessment describes the site as being an area of 'unmaintained scrub to the rear of 27-43 Blenheim Road and 12-30 Kidmore Rd...' It notes that there is some evidence of previous tree clearance which has now regenerated. The tree survey also indicates most of the trees within the site are of a C Category (i.e. 'trees of a low quality and value').

There are remnants of built development on the site including a former brick built building in the north east corner and the footings of former structures. The site has been the subject of dumping of garden waste over a number of years.

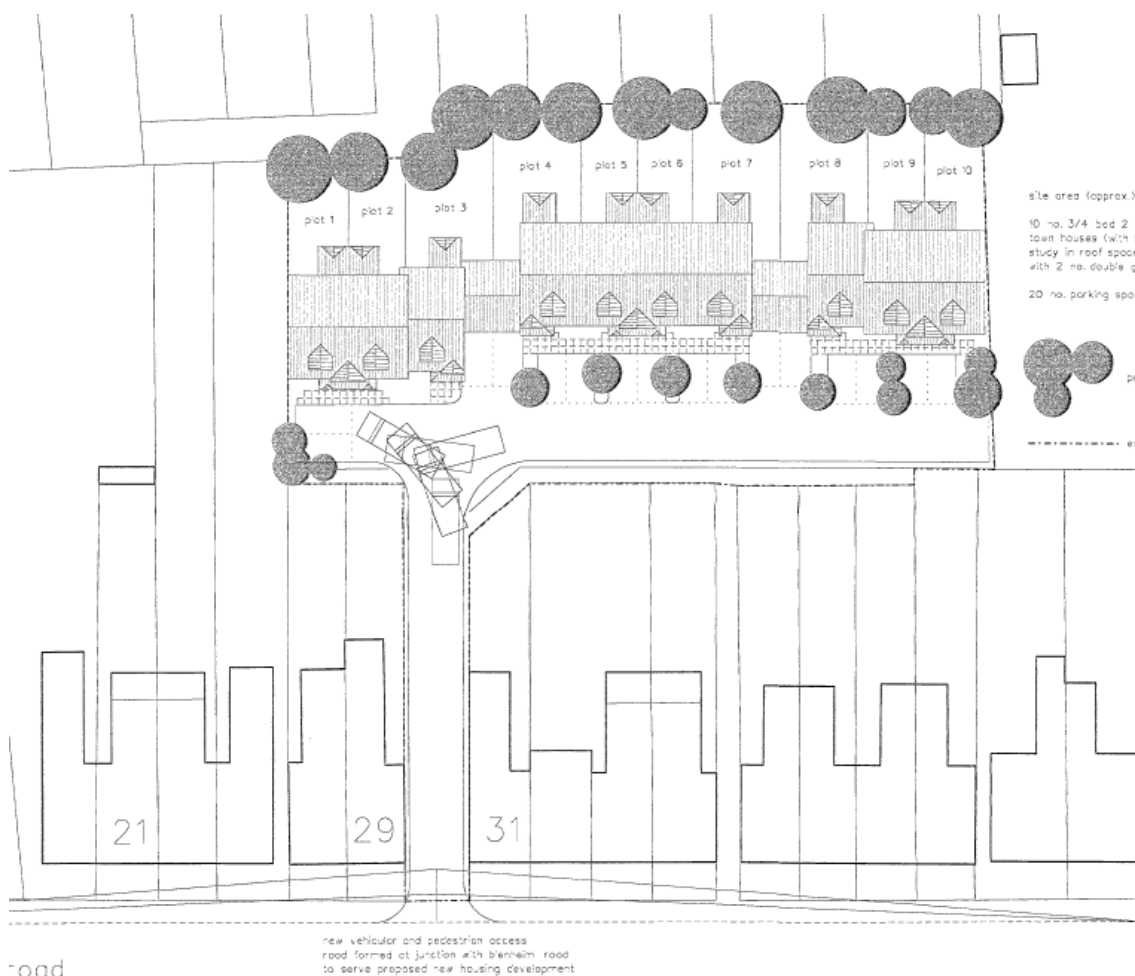
The surrounding area is highly mixed in character, comprising mainly of 2 storey detached, semi-detached and terraced houses of traditional appearance.

2 Planning History and Pre-Application discussions

The site was the subject of two previous applications, both of which are now relatively historic in that they pre-date adoption of the current Development Plan and both versions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012 and 2018). The details of both applications are set out below:

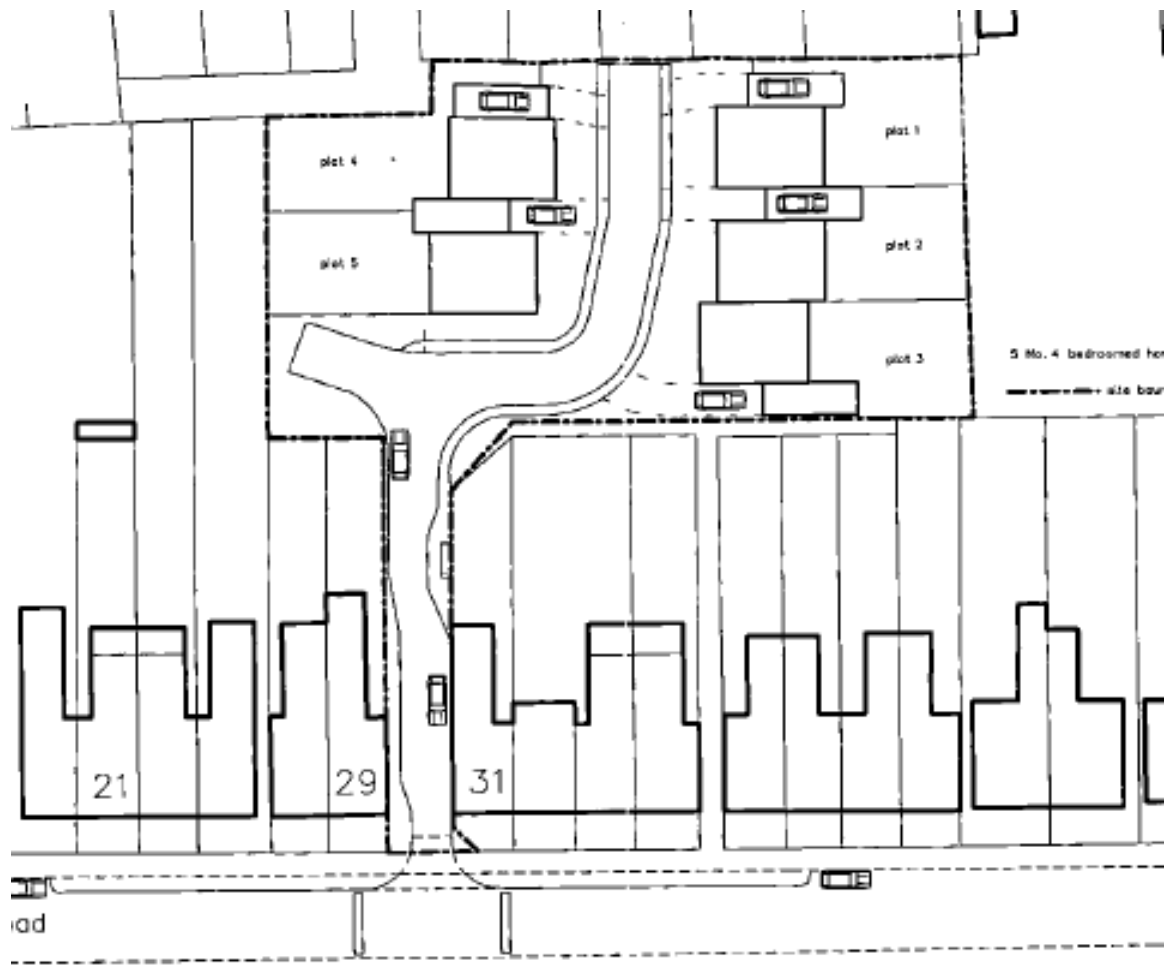
99/0482/FD – Erection of 10 mews style terraced houses (see site layout below). Refused 18th August 1999. Dismissed at appeal on 17th June 2000 on the following grounds:

- Cramped, overdevelopment harming the character of the area;
- Impact on living conditions to 29 and 31 Blenheim Road from 10 dwellings;
- Loss of amenity by way of overlooking and overshadowing;
- Inadequate visibility at proposed new junction;
- Inadequate width of access.



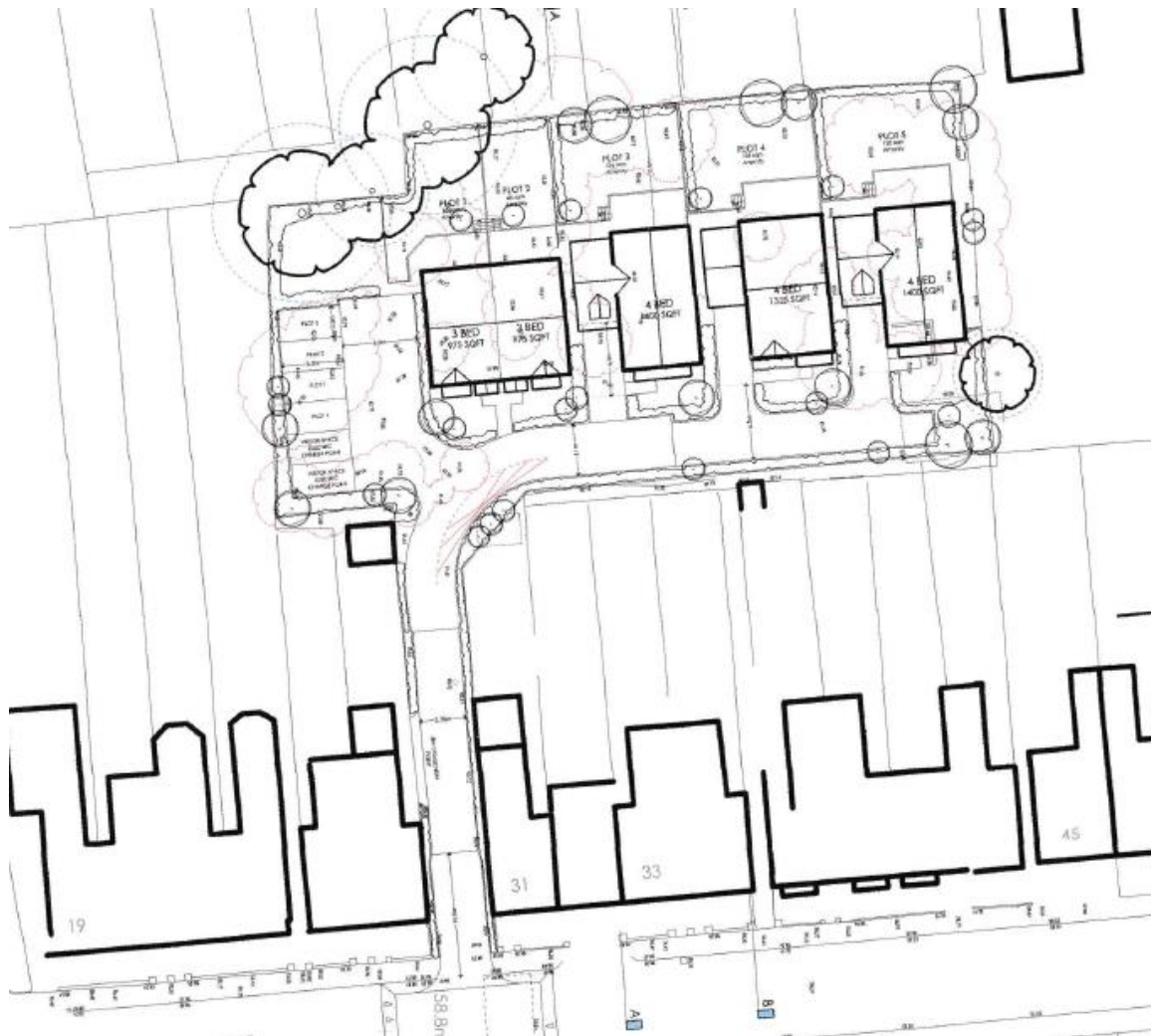
00/00487/OUT – Erection of 5 houses (outline) – see site layout below. Refused 8th June 2000 on the following grounds:

- Inadequate visibility at proposed new junction;
- Inadequate width of access;
- Displacement of 12 on street parking spaces;
- Inadequate footpath widths;
- Overbearingness and loss of daylight/sunlight (primarily plot 3);
- Loss of privacy, noise/disturbance by virtue of the access road.



In terms of pre-application discussions, a scheme for 5 dwellings was presented to the Council in March 2018 and a response issued by the Planning Officer in June 2018. An extract of the site layout is set out below. The main points in the pre-app. response were as follows:

- The Council did not object to the principle of residential use on the site in 1999.
- OS maps in 1932 confirmed that the site was already segregated from the adjacent gardens;
- The provision of 5 dwellings allows the site to retain an adequate level of spaciousness. Plot sizes, garden depths and separation distances to proposed and existing dwellings are all considered to be satisfactory;
- The scale of the dwellings at two storeys is not excessive and would reflect the mix of dwellings in the area. Roofs should be hipped and not gable;
- Any future application should be accompanied by a full tree survey and a biodiversity report;
- Separation distances are sufficient to avoid any overlooking or loss of privacy;
- An application will need to demonstrate how it would mitigate the impact on the two neighbouring properties from use of the access;
- The proposed dwelling mix (3 x 4 bed and 2 x 3 bed dwellings) meets the aims of Policy CS15;
- The width of the access is acceptable;
- In accordance with Policy DM6, 20% affordable housing provision will be required, secured by way of a legal agreement.

Pre-application submission (site layout)

Prior to the pre-application discussions with planning officer's, a pre-app meeting was also held with the Highway Authority (Darren Cook on 24th January 2018) to discuss the access arrangements. A further meeting was held with the Planning Department on 23rd July 2018 to finalise the design (Matthew Burns).

3 Relevant Planning Policies

Government Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (2018) - Paragraph 7 states that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development. There are three overarching objectives to sustainable development which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways: economic, social and environmental objectives. The environmental objective includes the need to make efficient use of land. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10).

The revised NPPF places significant weight and benefit on pre-application engagement which it states ‘...*has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties*’. (Paragraph 39).

Paragraph 63 states that provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential development that are not major developments other than in designated rural areas. The glossary defines major development for housing as development where 10 or more homes are provided or sites with an area of 0.5 hectares or more.

The revised NPPF promotes the effective use of land to meet the need of homes and other uses subject to safeguarding and improving the environment and living conditions (paragraph 117). Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land (paragraph 122).

Paragraphs 124-132 are concerned with design. It states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- Establish a strong sense of place;
- Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development;
- Sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting;
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible;
- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.

**Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008
(Altered 2015)**

The following policies are considered relevant:

Policy CS1 – Sustainable Construction and Design. Requires the design and site layouts to use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.

Policy CS4 – Accessibility and the Intensity of Development. States that the scale and density of development within the Borough will be located to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities.

Policy CS7- Design and the Public Realm. Requires all development to be of high quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of reading within which it is located. The following components of development will be assessed: Layout, urban structure & urban grain; landscape; density and mix; scale, height and massing; and architectural detail and materials.

Policy CS15 – Location, Accessibility, Density and Housing Mix. States that density and mix will be determined by location. Developments should provide an appropriate range of housing types and tenures. in accordance with the findings of a housing market assessment. Net densities below 30dph will not be acceptable.

Indicative density ranges are as follows:

Town Centre: Above 70dph

Urban: 40-75dph

Accessible suburban: 35-55dph

Less accessible suburban: 30-50dph

Policy CS16 – Affordable Housing. States that all proposals of 15 dwellings and above will provide 30% of the total number of dwellings in the form of affordable housing.

Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (Altered 2015)

Policy SD1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development – States that a positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained with the NPPF.

Policy DM4 – Safeguarding Amenity. States that development will not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties in terms of privacy and overlooking; access to sunlight and daylight; visual dominance and overbearing effects; noise and disturbance; artificial lighting; vibration; dust and fumes, smell, crime and safety. The position of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important.

Policy DM5 – Housing Mix. States that on new developments for 10 or more dwellings outside the central area and defined district and local centres, planning decisions will ensure that over 50% of dwellings will be of 3 bedrooms or more, and the majority of dwellings will be in the form of houses rather than flats, having regard to all other material considerations.

Policy DM6 – Affordable Housing. States that on sites of less of between 5-9 dwellings 20% will be required.

Policy DM10 – Private and Communal Outdoor Space States that flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens. The design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of similar spaces in the vicinity, clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces, ensure that they are appropriately related to main entrances, enhance safety and the perception of safety for future residents and the general public, and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing and overshadowing.

Policy DM12 – Access, Traffic and Highway Related Matters. States that consideration will be given to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment.

4 The Proposal

The proposal is for the erection of 5No. dwellings. This chapter addresses the principle considerations for a site of this nature within an existing built up area in the following order:

- i) Principle of development;
- ii) Design and local character;
- iii) Amenity of neighbouring and future occupiers
- iv) Housing mix and affordable housing;
- v) Trees, landscaping and ecology;
- vi) Transport;
- vii) Archaeology.

Principle of Development

The site of 0.2hectares is in a sustainable location, being only a short distance away from Central Caversham where there is a range of shops, services and local facilities. It is located within an existing defined urban area, in a location which is free from environmental or heritage constraints (e.g. Green Belt, conservation areas, listed buildings) where the principle of redevelopment for residential purposes is acceptable. The Development Plan supports housing in this location (CS4 and CS15) and there are no policies which would seek to resist the redevelopment of the site in principle. Within 'accessible suburban areas', the density recommended is 35-55dph and a minimum of 30dph. This proposal has a density of 25dph which is considered appropriate given the sites location and the need to retain generous buffers for tree retention and spatial separation to neighbouring boundaries.

The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and paragraph 8 identifies three objectives to sustainable development comprising (i) economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental. These are interdependent but need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The proposal meets with all of these roles, as follows:

- i) An economic objective

The proposed development provides a number of material benefits to the local economy:

- It provides 5no. houses assisting to meet identified housing needs and the national requirement to demonstrate and maintain a 5 year housing land supply;
- It would result in local employment opportunities in the construction industry. For every new home built, up to two jobs are created for a year (as set out in the Government Housing Strategy for England (2011);
- Provides contributions to the Council in the form of the New Homes Bonus that can be spent on local infrastructure enhancements;
- The new residents resulting from the scheme will help to sustain the key services in the area.

ii) A social objective

Wider benefits to the wider community include:

- Providing high-quality residential accommodation which represents a high standard of design;
- Contribution towards affordable housing in the Borough;
- Increases opportunities for home ownership;
- Increase the number of residents in the locality to support local community facilities.

iii) An environmental objective

The scheme provides a number of benefits to the wider environment such as:

- The site is sustainable located within the urban area of Caversham, with public transport links and services located in close proximity;
- The proposal makes effective use of land;
- The scheme responds positively to local context, respecting the character and appearance of the area;
- Secures a landscaping scheme, to the benefit of the site and the surrounding area including retaining existing trees;
- Secures features which will enhance biodiversity

By meeting the economic, social and environmental objectives the proposed development accords with the sustainable development principles contained within the NPPF.

Design and local character

The context of the application site and the surrounding area has been carefully analysed and fully taken into account in designing the application proposal. In particular, the design of the proposal is informed by the local context. In designing the proposal, regard has been had to the relevant development plan policies and in particular the Core Strategy and Site and Detailed Policies Document. The result is an integrated and distinctive development that reflects the scale of adjacent properties and also responds positively to local character in terms of the form of building designs, materials, layout and landscaping. Further details on all of these matters is provided with the architect's Design and Access Statement.

The main points are as follows:

- The scheme will provide for 5 No. family sized dwellings (3 and 4 bed) in a sustainable location.
- The buildings will be 2 storey in height, with a side hipped roofs as requested by officers at pre-app. stage.
- The proposal is for a linear pattern of development with new houses facing towards Blenheim Road.
- The buildings respect the amenity of adjoining properties and will be of a high quality traditional design in keeping with the existing street scene.
- A private and secluded area of amenity space is provided to the rear of each property.
- There are 12 parking spaces allocated to the development (2 no. for each dwelling and a further 2 which can either be allocated to visitors or to the existing residents of 29 and 31 Blenheim Road who currently have no off street parking). The site is within a short walk of a range of bus routes.

The existing site has been unused for a number of years and has become overgrown and unkempt. The proposal equates to a density of 25 dph which is considered appropriate given the context of the site, its constrained nature and the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

The proposed layout is for a linear pattern of development with each property facing the new driveway and the rear garden boundary of properties in Blenheim Road. This was considered to be the most sympathetic form of development as it would reflect existing building orientation in the area as well as maintaining maximum separation distances to the rear garden boundaries. Sections are provided to illustrate the relationship between existing properties, their boundaries and the new dwellings. A landscaped area is retained at the top of

the access road to ensure that views are not dominated by built development. This is illustrated on the landscape masterplan which shows retained trees and planted areas and opportunities for new planting.

The proposal maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area and is therefore considered to be consistent with Policy CS7.

Amenity of Neighbouring and Future Occupiers

The siting of the proposed building has taken into account the siting of the adjacent dwellings and window positions and ensures that no loss of amenity will occur as a result of loss of light, privacy or overbearingness. Care has been taken in positioning the front elevation as these windows will have elevated views of the rear gardens of existing properties along Blenheim Road. The siting, roof height and design of the proposed dwellings meets the comments raised at pre-application stage with amendments including a reduction in the number of front facing bedroom windows. Separation distances are well in excess of recommended distances between main elevations.

The applicant has commissioned a Vehicle Noise Assessment to assess the predicted noise levels associated with vehicular traffic that is likely to be associated with the occupiers of the new properties and in particular 29 and 31 Blenheim Road. The conclusion of the report is that the occupiers of 29/31 Blenheim Road are very unlikely to suffer loss of amenity and that there would not be grounds for refusal based on noise.

Policy DM4 is therefore met as there would be no significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing properties.

Housing Mix and Affordable Housing

The proposal provides for family sized properties (i.e. 3 and 4 bed properties) which meets an identified need in the Borough (supporting text to Policy CS15). The applicant is agreeable to providing 20% affordable housing provision on the site in the form of a shared ownership property. Policy DM6 is therefore met.

Trees, Landscaping and Ecology

The application is accompanied by a Tree Survey and Ecological Survey which address these issues in detail. The tree survey confirms that the trees proposed to be removed are within the C category (trees of a low quality). The ecology report has not identified any ecological potential for the site and has found the site to generally be of a low ecological value. Compensatory measures recommended include bird nesting boxes, maintenance free bat tubes within the proposed house nearest to the retained trees and landscaping suitable for food and nesting. This can be secured as a planning condition.

Transport

The proposed houses will be accessed from Blenheim Road via the existing driveway. The proposal complies with the Council adopted parking standards (Zone 3) and this level of parking provision is considered appropriate given the sustainable location of the site, being only a short walk from central Caversham. Two additional visitor spaces are provided over and above the normal SPG standard and the applicant is also providing vehicle charging points for some of the new houses and one of the visitor spaces.

Archaeology

The pre-application response confirms that any archaeological investigation can be completed under a condition to any planning permission granted.

5 Summary and Conclusions

The planning application provides for the redevelopment of the site to provide 5No. new dwellings in a linear form. The proposal meets in full the Council's adopted policies and should be supported for the following reasons:

- The proposal makes the optimum use of a site in a sustainable location well related to key facilities and bus services and as such receives strong support from national and local policy (NPPF and Policy CS4).
- In accordance with the NPPF (2018), the proposal has been the subject of pre-application discussions with the Council and these provided positive feedback. The main comments related to additional information on noise, trees and ecology. The form of development including its layout was not opposed in principle. This submission includes reports dealing with all of the outstanding matters raised by officers with the conclusion being that none of them are an inhibition to the residential redevelopment of the site. Previous applications and appeals have not opposed the principle of housing on this site.
- The proposal is designed to reflect the scale, proportions and spacing of existing development within this location. The local area is characterised linear development of various traditional designs.
- The proposal provides for a family sized dwelling which meets an identified local need (Policy DM5). The applicant agrees to provide affordable housing at a ratio of 20%.
- The siting, design and spatial separation of the dwellings will ensure that adjacent properties are not the subject of any loss of amenity. The Noise Assessment confirms that adjoining residents are very unlikely to suffer from noise from vehicles. Policy DM4 is met.
- The proposal retains existing areas of planting and will only result in the loss of poor quality C category trees. New areas of planting are provided. The ecology report does not identify any constraints to redeveloping the site on ecology grounds. Mitigation forms part of the proposal.
- The site is accessible to public transport modes and provides for adequate car parking and secure cycle storage in accordance with the standards required in a Zone 3 locality. Two additional spaces are provided for visitors.