

## **Gavray Drive Ecological Stakeholder Discussion**

**Venue:** Zoom Conference Call

**Date:** 15 October 9:30am

**Attendees:** Neil Rowntree (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust), Pat Clissold (Save Gavray Meadows for Bicester), Pam Roberts (Save Gavray Meadows for Bicester), Dominic Woodfield (Bioscan UK Ltd), Carole Hetherington (Langford Village Community Association)

**Apologies:** Caroline Ford (Cherwell District Council), Bernadette Owens (Cherwell District Council), Steve Wheatley (Butterfly Conservation)

**Project team attendees:** David McFarlane, SP Broadway (DM1); Hoda Taher, SP Broadway (HT); Russell Crow, L&Q Estates (RC); Aritz Kaushik, L&Q Estates (AK); Darren Mace, L&Q Estates (DM2); Peter Chambers, David Lock Associates (PC); Arwel Owen, David Lock Associates (AO); Sarah Murray, Edge Urban Design (SM); Tom Wigglesworth, EDP (TW)

### **Item 1: Welcome and overview of consultation**

**1.1.** DM1 opened the meeting and gave introductions and apologies for absence were noted.

### **Item 2: About L&Q Estates**

**2.1.** RC explained that the issue with land control for Gavray Drive has been resolved as L&Q now control the whole Bicester 13 allocation.

**2.2.** RC said that L&Q Estates are committed to the delivery of the Gavray Drive site and ensuring all competing interests align.

**2.3.** A stakeholder asked if L&Q Estates would take on the management of the open space on the site? RC explained that the mechanism for the long term management of open on the site is undecided.

### **Item 3: Planning update**

**3.1.** PC explained that Policy Bicester 13 is the key focus in terms of what the development must adhere to.

**3.2.** PC said that Gavray Drive is an important site for Cherwell's housing delivery, given its allocation for up to 300 houses.

**3.3.** PC said that L&Q Estates had submitted a pre-application submission to Cherwell District Council (CDC) in the summer to begin the discussion with officers and get some guidance in terms of the scope of the application. PC added that L&Q Estates have been in discussion with Caroline Ford at CDC which has led to separate discussions with Charlotte Watkins, LP Biodiversity Officer and Oxfordshire County Council on drainage at the end of August. CDC

will be responding to the submitted Environmental Impact Assessment scoping report in early November and will provide their pre-app response at the same time.

**3.4.** A question was asked how CDC have responded to the reduction in unit yield given that indicative submitted plans show around 200 homes proposed? PC said that CDC have indicated that L&Q Estates must justify the reasons for the reduction in units but acknowledged the site constraints and complexity.

#### **Item 4: Ecology mitigation and management strategy discussion**

**4.1.** TW went through a presentation on the ecological constraints and opportunities, proposed avoidance and mitigation, restoration and enhancement and biodiversity net gain.

**4.2.** TW said that the information on habitats and species on the site has been obtained through numerous historical surveys and data searches dating back to 2004. TW added that EDP started updating the surveys in August 2019 and will be finished later this year and that the detailed scope was provided to Charlotte Watkins, Butterfly Conservation, BBWOT and Natural England in April 2020.

**4.3.** TW explained that the most noticeable trend on site from the many surveys that have been undertaken is the lack of management and the encroachment of scrub so L&Q Estates are looking to restore the grass and bring it back into management.

**4.4.** TW explained that the development will avoid the Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and the Conservation Target Area (CTA). TW added that L&Q Estates will also implement measures during construction to protect the important habitats that are not being developed which will form part of the overall mitigation strategy.

**4.5.** TW said there is a policy requirement for net biodiversity gain but that the calculation method doesn't capture particular enhancements for protected species and the value of bringing this site into long term management.

**4.6.** It was asked whether the development parcels shown in the plans are now fixed? RC said that the masterplan is not completely fixed as L&Q Estates are still working through the viability and technical assessments – however the consultant team are tasked with exploring the deliverability without development in the Conservation Target Area. The stakeholder said this is '*welcome news*'.

**4.7.** It was commented that the mitigation and management strategy is excellent and that they are happy to work with the team. The stakeholder said they will reserve comments on the biodiversity net gain point as they have a few issues with the condition assessments but that they believe 10% net gain is probably achievable. It was agreed that L&Q Estates will provide working net gain calculations to stakeholders.

**4.8.** A stakeholder asked whether the development, as is proposed, can '*wash its own face*' in open space calculation terms without any need to go into the retained habitats? SM said yes. The stakeholder commented that hopefully there is enough open space to route most of it through the designated route. Another stakeholder asked how L&Q Estates will support

future management of the wildlife site? RC said future management is something L&Q Estates are looking to discuss in more detail over the next 4-5 weeks before bringing forward a plan.

#### **Item 5: Discussion on masterplan update**

**5.1.** SM displayed draft versions of the Constraints Plan, Opportunities Plan, Consolidated Constraints & Opportunities Plan, and latest Masterplan.

**5.2.** SM explained that protection of the Conservation Target Area is a key consideration across the land. SM added that a noise buffer may be needed alongside the railway line that runs along the northern edge, that L&Q are keen to retain the routes of the various existing public rights of way and that testing is being undertaken of the extent of the floodplain on the site.

**5.3.** SM explained that the most significant part of the development will be in the north western section and that L&Q Estates are exploring the potential for development in the south eastern corner for C2 (residential accommodation and care to people in need of care) and C3 (dwellings) uses.

**5.4.** SM said that L&Q Estates are still in the process of exploring densities across the site and how the numbers will be delivered.

**5.5.** A stakeholder asked whether the north western area will contain flats? SM said it will be a combination of detached, semi-detached and terrace properties and that there may be the inclusion of some flats but this will be subject to density testing and mix of houses. The stakeholder also asked whether this will include 30% affordable housing? SM said yes.

**5.6.** A stakeholder said they have no issue with the retirement provision suggested as retirement and extra care apartments may be better suited neighbours for the sensitive parts of the site than open market housing.

**5.7.** A stakeholder commented that affordable housing could be provided by increasing the density on the west which would protect the borders of the CTA. RC said a mix will be put in place by a housebuilder. The stakeholder asked what the effect of creating a building platform along the east of the site will be on drainage to the CTA and on the East-West footpath? DM2 said L&Q Estates intend to keep the platform outside of the CTA and the footpath at its current level.

**5.8.** A stakeholder said they are keen to work with L&Q Estates on CTA management but that they need reassurance about the mechanism of delivery. Another stakeholder said they want to be reassured that the plans will be realised but they are aware that this is an outline planning application. Another stakeholder added that they would also like to be reassured on the flooding and drainage proposals on the site as there has been flooding in Langford. The stakeholder added that they will be taking a careful look at how plans progress for C2 uses on the site as the area is “surrounded” by C2 use and they do not want to become known as the retirement side of Bicester.

**5.9.** RC said L&Q are anticipating that they will go beyond the level of detail that an outline planning application would usually provide on this matter. RC added that he will look to make clear to any housebuilder buying the site, that they have signed up to its long term ecological management.

**Item 6: Community input and open discussion** (questions were taken throughout all items covered)

### **Item 7: Next Steps**

**7.1.** RC said that L&Q Estates see ongoing consultation will be carried for Gavray Drive and that later this year they expect a full public consultation which may be a leaflet drop in the local area and a questionnaire and feedback form on the GD website which is currently live. RC added that another stakeholder discussion in a few weeks time would be useful and now that the consultation process has started, L&Q Estates hope to see a planning application submitted at the end of this year or early next year.

Steve Wheatley of the Butterfly Conservation sent the following email in advance of the discussion:

*“From: Steve Wheatley  
To: Tom Wigglesworth  
Cc: Hoda Taher  
Date: 15/10/2020*

*Dear Tom and Hoda,*

*Apologies, I cannot attend the stakeholder discussion.*

*Butterfly Conservation has no major objections to the proposed Ecological Management & Mitigation Strategy 2020 (edp0124\_r042a). If this plan was implemented we feel it would conserve the existing butterfly and moth interest.*

*There are a few minor amendments and refinements to the proposed management that we would propose. I will send these over separately.*

*Best regards,*

*Steve Wheatley”*