
Grovefield Way

Proof of Evidence

Prepared on behalf of Hinton Properties (Grovefield Way) Ltd

LPA Ref: 16/02208/FUL

PINS Ref: APP/B1605/W/18/3214761

December 2018

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1.0 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 I am an Urban Designer and a Chartered Town Planner. I hold a BA(hons) and a Master's Degree in Urban Design. I am a member of the Urban Design Group. I have over 20 years' experience in masterplanning, town planning and townscape design and assessment.
- 1.2 I am a Partner with Barton Willmore, the UK's largest multi-disciplinary planning and design practice. The practice acts for the public and private sector and has an in-house team of urban designers, architects, town planners and landscape architects. We operate from 13 offices across the UK.
- 1.3 Prior to joining Barton Willmore I ran the Glasgow Office for Turley Associates. I now work extensively throughout the UK on a broad range of masterplanning, architectural design and environmental planning work.
- 1.4 My company is currently involved in projects that range from the master planning of major urban extensions of several thousand properties to redevelopment of inner-city brownfield sites. We work throughout the UK, in both the rural and urban environment. In the last year I have secured permissions for several business and employment parks across the UK and we are currently working on similar projects in Nottingham, Carnforth and in Birmingham.
- 1.5 I have given masterplanning, town planning and urban design advice on numerous schemes. I have also given landscape and urban design evidence at Local Plan Inquiries and a number of planning appeals. I was an Advisory Board Member of Architecture and Design Scotland between 2005 and 2010.
- 1.6 The evidence I have prepared, and which I provide for this appeal, is true and has been prepared in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

2.0 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE, BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 This evidence is submitted on behalf of Hinton Properties (Grovefield Way Ltd) in respect of an appeal against the refusal of a 'Hybrid application seeking detailed planning for 5,034 sq. m of commercial office space (Use Class B1), 502 sq. m day nursery (Use Class D1), 1,742 sq. m supermarket food retain unit (Use Class A1), a 204 sq. m coffee shop retail unit and drive through (Use Class A1 and A3) with associated parking and landscaping and infrastructure works. Outline planning permission sought for the erection of 8,034 sq. m (Use Class B1) together with associated parking, landscaping and infrastructure works of commercial office space (use Class B1), together with associated car parking, landscaping, landscaping and infrastructure works, with all matters reserved (except for access)' ('Appeal A').

2.2 On 14th December 2017 Cheltenham Borough Council (the 'Council') decided to go against the recommendation of their Officers and refused the Application. Three reasons for refusal were given. Reason 3 is of relevance to my evidence and states:

'The proposed layout of the site results in a predominance of hard standing and retaining structures which result in a poor appearance and do not create an attractive streetscape or strong sense of place which responds to the character of this transitional location. The position of the buildings including the drive through coffee shop and supermarket close to the edges of the site give the layout a cramped and contrived appearance exasperated by exterior features such as the drive thru lane and external yards. The proposal is therefore harmful to the surrounding area by reason of its visual impact and also fails to create a high-quality business environment in this edge of town location. For these reasons the reasons the proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy SD4 of the Joint Core Strategy and CP7 of the Local Plan.'

2.3 In the early part of 2018 a revised application ('Appeal B') was subsequently submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council in which the scheme was amended to substitute the Costa Coffee outlet at the front of the site with new office blocks. On 18th October 2018 that application was refused. Design was not raised as a concern with Appeal B and thus my evidence does not deal with this appeal in any great detail.

2.4 My evidence should be read alongside the evidence of James Griffin who addresses issues of planning policy and the overall planning balance that needs to be struck in reaching a decision and Mr Davies who addresses landscape matters.

Methodology

2.5 To inform my assessments and in order to provide my advice, I have visited the Appeal Site and surrounding area and I have undertaken my own assessment of the effects of the proposed development.

- 2.6 I have studied the base line position, in terms of the nature, scale and disposition of neighbouring buildings. I have also looked at the materials that have been used, both on neighbouring buildings and within the existing business park. I have also considered the existing urban structure in terms of the disposition of development and its relationship to highways infrastructure etc. These factors have all helped to inform by assessment of the appropriateness of the scheme in urban design terms.
- 2.7 Photographs contained in Appendix B have been taken from public vantage points within the vicinity of the Appeal Site. Photographs were taken using a digital camera with a lens focal length approximating to 50mm, to give a similar depth of vision to the human eye. In some instances, images have been combined to create a panorama. Photographs were taken during periods of good visibility.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF')

3.1 National policy is set out in The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') and those parts of particular relevance to my urban evidence are summarised below.

3.2 Section 12 of the NPPF is concerned with achieving well-designed places.

3.3 Paragraph 124 states that:

The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

3.4 Paragraph 127 states that Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) 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;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) 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.

3.5 Paragraph 130 notes that:

Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

Planning Practice Guidance

- 3.6 The NPPF is supported by the Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') which contains guidance on the design of new developments with reference to the relevant policies contained in the NPPF.

The importance of good design

- 3.7 Paragraph: 001 Reference: 6-001-20140306 notes the importance of good design and states: Good quality design is an integral part of sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises that design quality matters and that planning should drive up standards across all forms of development. As a core planning principle, plan-makers and decision takers should always seek to secure high quality design.

Achieving good design is about creating places, buildings, or spaces that work well for everyone, look good, last well, and will adapt to the needs of future generations.

Good design responds in a practical and creative way to both the function and identity of a place. It puts land, water, drainage, energy, community, economic, infrastructure and other such resources to the best possible use – over the long as well as the short term.

- 3.8 Paragraph: 004 (Reference ID: 26-004-20140306) goes on to address how good design can guide planning and development proposals. It states that:

Development proposals should reflect the requirement for good design set out in national and local policy. Local planning authorities will assess the design quality of planning proposals against their Local Plan policies, national policies and other material considerations.

Local planning authorities are required to take design into consideration and should refuse permission for development of poor design. Local planning authorities should give great weight to outstanding or innovative designs which help to raise the standard of design more generally in the area. This could include the use of innovative construction materials and techniques. Planning permission should not be refused for buildings and infrastructure that promote high levels of sustainability because of concerns about incompatibility with an existing townscape,

if those concerns have been mitigated by good design (unless the concern relates to a designated heritage asset and the impact would cause material harm to the asset or its setting which is not outweighed by the proposal's economic, social and environmental benefits).

Policy CP7 of the Cheltenham Borough Council Local Plan Second Review (Adopted 2006)

- 3.9 Policy CP7 of the Local Plan states that Development will only be permitted where it: (a) is of a high standard of architectural design; and (b) adequately reflects principles of urban design; and (c) complements and respects neighbouring development and the character of the locality and/or landscape (note 3). Extensions or alterations of existing buildings will be required to avoid: (d) causing harm to the architectural integrity of the building or group of buildings; and (e) the unacceptable erosion of open space around the existing building.
- 3.10 It goes on to note that the fact that a particular form or location of development is the most cost-effective option is not justification for an exception to CP7 (per Note 4).

Policy SD4 of the Joint Core Strategy (Adopted 2017)

- 3.11 The (JCS) is a partnership between Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council, supported by Gloucestershire County Council.
- 3.12 Policy SD4 is concerned with Sustainable Design and Construction and requires new development to follow best practice in terms of sustainability. It covers a range of topics including legibility, context amenity and public realm. Importantly the focus is on sustainable design, which is at the heart of the policy. These are all matters that can be dealt with at the detailed design phase and are typically covered by the requirements for building regulations, which ensure that sustainable developments are quite properly brought forward.
- 3.13 I note that the LPA does not have any specific design requirements or standards that address developments in a so called 'transitional' location.

4.0 SITE CONTEXT, SITE DESCRIPTION AND VISIBILITY

Site Context

- 4.1 The Appeal Site is bound to the north west by a band of woodland vegetation which runs along the southern edge of the A40 dual carriageway. A large BMW car garage indents the Appeal Site boundary to the immediate north east. It comprises an access road (Corinthian Way), main and ancillary buildings and large areas of surface and underground parking together with associated landscaping. The main building is modern in style, with a flat roof and large sections of glazing together with white cladding to the BMW section of the building and black cladding to the Mini section of the building. The ancillary buildings are of a matching style and comprise glazing and white cladding. The external surfacing surrounding the building is predominantly tarmac. The building is 5 storeys high and highly visible from the surrounding area.
- 4.2 To the south, the Appeal Site is bound by North Road West, which connects Grovefield Way in the east and Badgeworth Road in the west. A row of approximately ten semi-detached properties lie on the southern edge of North Road West, to the south of the eastern part of the Appeal Site. These properties are of traditional build, two storeys in height and comprise red brick and white/beige render construction with clay tile pitched roofs. The properties are generally set back from the road behind driveways and front gardens. The Redding's District and Community Centre is also located on the southern edge of North Road West, to the immediate west of the properties. It is a single storey, pitched roof building of red brick construction, set back behind the adjacent properties with a car park serving approximately 30 cars. A single agricultural field lies to the south of the western part of the Site, between the community centre and Badgeworth Road.
- 4.3 The Appeal Site is bound to the west by two detached properties on the northern edge of North Road West. Both properties are two storeys in height and of traditional red brick construction with slate pitched roofs, set back from the road behind an established hedgerow. Badgeworth Road runs along the western edge of these two properties.
- 4.4 To the east, the Appeal Site is bound by Grovefield Way and the BMW garage which indents the Appeal Site boundary to the north east. A residential estate lies to the east of Grovefield Way and comprises two storey dwellings orientated around a series of cul-de-sacs. The exterior of these properties are predominantly buff stone cladded with slate pitched roofs. A narrow band of established vegetation runs between the residential estate and Grovefield Way. To the north east of the residential estate is a retail park on the southern edge of Grovefield Way, including large warehouse buildings typically with white cladding to their exterior. There is also a large area of associated customer parking which is laid to tarmac. On the northern edge of

Grovefield Way is the Arle Court Park and Ride, located to the immediate east of the BMW garage.

Site Description

- 4.5 The Appeal Site comprises an irregular shaped parcel of land, which tapers towards its western boundary and is indented to its north eastern boundary by the BMW garage. The eastern part of the Appeal Site appears to be used as a site compound and includes areas of hardstanding, various construction materials and a porta cabin. A mound approximately 2-3m in height is located in the south eastern corner of the Appeal Site. A small attenuation basin is located close to the northern Appeal Site boundary. The remainder of the Appeal Site is open grassland.
- 4.6 The topography of the Appeal Site is relatively flat with a slight gradient sloping from a highpoint of approximately 40m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) on the eastern boundary to a low point of approximately 31m AOD on the western boundary. The mound in the south east corner of the Appeal Site rises up to approximately 41.8m AOD and the attenuation basin adjacent to the northern boundary falls to approximately 30.68m AOD.
- 4.7 The eastern Appeal Site boundary is defined by a combination of black metal railings and Herras fencing, which appears to facilitate temporary access into the Appeal Site off Grovefield Way. A row of nine semi mature trees line the grass verge of Grovefield Way, just beyond the Appeal Site boundary fencing and include a mixture of sycamore, hornbeam, ash and cherry trees, approximately 6m in height. These are described in greater detail in the evidence of Mr Davies.
- 4.8 The southern Appeal Site boundary is defined by an outgrown hedgerow comprising predominantly ash, sycamore, hawthorn and elm species, approximately 8m in height. There is a short section of security fencing in the south western corner of the Appeal Site where there is a break in the boundary hedgerow.
- 4.9 The western Appeal Site boundary is defined by an outgrown hedgerow comprising predominantly hawthorn species together with several ash and willow trees. This vegetation separates the Appeal Site from the grounds of the adjacent detached property.
- 4.10 The western section of the northern Appeal Site boundary is defined by the narrow band of woodland which separates the Appeal Site from the adjacent A40 dual carriageway. The eastern section of the northern Appeal Site boundary is defined by Herras fencing which separates the Appeal Site from the adjacent BMW access road and car park.

Urban Grain

- 4.11 In terms of urban grain, there is no consistent pattern. There is no direct frontage onto the A40 as that road is separated from the Appeal Site by a dense belt of vegetation. The BMW dealership is however visible from the road.
- 4.12 The detached housing to the south of North Road West (eastern end) fronts on to the road with the properties served off private drives. Whereas as those to the east of Grovefield Way (Frampton Mews and Tiverton Way) back on to the road and are separated from it by a dense belt of vegetation.
- 4.13 The BMW dealership stands in isolation at the Appeal Site entrance and dominates local views. Other than occupying the road frontage there is little else to tie it to this location.

Visibility

- 4.14 Views of the Appeal Site are limited to its immediate surroundings by virtue of the surrounding built form and vegetation. The key views of the Appeal Site are summarised below and in the evidence of Mr Davies and illustrated on the Photographs at Appendix B.
- 4.15 Open views across the Appeal Site are possible from the adjacent BMW garage, including from the access road and car park areas as well as elevated views from the main building (Photographs 01 & 02).
- 4.16 Partial views of the Appeal Site are possible from the A40 to the immediate north, with the intervening vegetation filtering these views. The adjacent BMW garage is also visible in these views (Photograph 13).
- 4.17 Views of the Appeal Site from North Road West to the immediate south are predominantly screened by the southern boundary hedgerow, although occasional glimpsed views through this vegetation to the interior of the Appeal Site are possible (Photographs 08 & 10).
- 4.18 The majority of views from properties on the southern edge of North Road West are similarly screened by the southern boundary hedgerow, although occasional first floor views look over the boundary hedgerow towards the eastern part of the Appeal Site.
- 4.19 Partial views of the interior of the Appeal Site are also possible from the first floor windows of the detached property on the northern edge of Grovefield Way, immediately west of the Appeal Site.
- 4.20 Views from Grovefield Way to the immediate east look across the interior of the Appeal Site, with trees along the eastern boundary providing some partial filtering of views (Photographs 03, 04 & 05). The BMW garage screens the Appeal Site from view as Grovefield Way continues north east (Photographs 14 & 15).

- 4.21 Views from properties within the residential estate to the immediate east of Grovefield Way are generally screened by the intervening tree cover although occasional first floor views from properties on the western edge of Chalford Avenue look towards the eastern part of the Appeal Site (Photographs 05, 16 & 17).

5.0 RESPONSE TO THE REASON FOR REFUSAL AND URBAN DESIGN EFFECTS

The Proposed Development

- 5.1 Although the Appeal Scheme is a hybrid application with certain aspects reserved for future consideration, considerable thought has gone in to creating a scheme that acknowledges the importance of the site and its setting. The scheme also sensitively responds to its location on the edge of the settlement and provides an appropriate transition from the neighbouring area to the centre of the business park. These matters are addressed in greater detail below.
- 5.2 This approach is also apparent from the landscape strategy, which provides a coherent and attractive framework which links the exterior of the business park to the interior, via a well-structured soft landscaping scheme and a complementary hard works strategy. This is described in greater detail in the evidence of Mr Davies. It is however worth stating that the landscape strategy and the philosophy behind the urban design approach are inextricably linked and collectively seek to provide a high quality environment.
- 5.3 The LPA Committee Report which is appended to the Council's Statement of Case (ref 16/02208) sets out in some detail the proactive approach that the Appellant has taken to try to resolve the Council's concerns.
- 5.4 Paragraph 6.5.7 states that:

Offices now consider that the most serious shortcomings in the layout have been overcome and that whilst the indicative layout within the outline application did embody more of the ideals of urban design, it was purely indicative at that stage and the LPA are not able to resist realistic alternative designs where they reach an acceptable standard. The majority of the buildings (except the supermarket) do now front the spine road and the quality of the landscaping, the layout of the car park and the quality of the public spaces have been significantly improved.

- 5.5 It then goes on to discuss individual buildings and at Paragraph 6.5.10 states that:

It is fair to say that the supermarket and coffee shop are of a relatively standardised design. However, it is clear that all of the buildings which form part of the 'full' application use a similar architectural language and a similar palette of materials. This has also been designed to pick up on the language, material and colours utilised within the BMW building. The nursery building is relatively simple in design, however as mentioned above it has been improved since submission and again uses features such as grey framing and projecting eaves to continue the narrative of the group of buildings. The office buildings present largely glazed elevations to the spine road which adds a sense of vibrancy and activity to the site. The other elevations

are simpler with smaller windows and an undercroft area at ground floor. The buildings have been designed to be simple and flexible to allow for the requirements of different occupiers.

5.6 Notwithstanding the Officer's observations, the scheme was refused for the following reason:

Reason 3: The proposed layout of the site results in a predominance of hardstanding and retaining structures which result a poor appearance and do not create an attractive streetscape or strong sense of place which responds to the character of this transitional location. The position of buildings including the 'Drive thru' coffee shop and supermarket, close to the edges of the site give the layout a cramped and contrived appearance exacerbated by exterior features such as the 'drive thru' lane and external yards. The proposal is therefore harmful to the surrounding area by reason of its visual impact and also fails to create a high quality business environment in this edge of town location. For these reasons the proposal is considered to be contrary to policy SD 4 of the Joint Core Strategy and CP7 of the Local Plan.

Urban Design Effects

5.7 Before I deal with the individual elements of the reason for refusal, it is worth restating that the applicant and the local authority spent some 10 months working together to improve the design to a point where both parties were content with both the layout and the architecture. This was informed by presentations and discussion at the Architectural Panel and a series of in house consultations at Cheltenham Borough Council. This fact is reflected in the considered view (one presumes of the urban design officer and case officer) contained in Paragraph 6.5.15 of the December 2017 Committee Report.

'Officers therefore are satisfied that the proposal is acceptable in terms of layout, the design of buildings and their size and height.'

5.8 As an independent design adviser commissioned for the purposes of this appeal, my professional view is that the appeal scheme is a well-considered proposal. There is clear evidence of an integrated urban design and landscape strategy – which is critical to produce good examples of this type of development. There is also consistency of architectural style and materiality. The non-B1 uses are not standard in their appearance. Their architectural style and materiality is consistent across a range of buildings and uses. The LPA officers who were demanding a level of design quality here were successful in negotiating these improvements. These discussions encouraged the design team to improve the scheme – which they duly did.

5.9 I now respond to the particular criticisms cited in the Reason for Refusal that emerged from debate at Committee under the following headings.

The predominance of hardstanding and retaining structures would result a poor appearance and do not create an attractive streetscape or strong sense of place.

- 5.10 The attractiveness or not of streetscape and/or the evaluation of a strong (or otherwise) sense of place, has to be seen in the context of a developments' location and function. This land was granted planning permission in May 2007 as B1 industrial and has been subject to a series of applications since that time for reserved matters, ancillary infrastructure and more recently a mix of supporting/complementary uses alongside B1. While a masterplan was submitted as part of the 2012 outline application, officers admit that it was '*purely indicative*' in nature and that the LPA could not resist realistic alternative designs going forward. That said the applicants design team has worked with officers and evolved the design through consultation.
- 5.11 The site and/or the permission had no specific design guidance/design brief and/or design policy applied, over and above the standards normally expected for these types of land uses. Policy CP7 is a relatively high level design policy and is the only design policy referenced in the Committee Paper. No specific design conditions on either streetscape or sense of place were attached to the earlier extant permission, except for a reference to the indicative masterplan. That aside, throughout the determination process, the incumbent design team has sought to address concerns expressed from LPA consultees.
- 5.12 Streetscape was improved with the inclusion of public realm works and improvements to green spaces running parallel to the spine road, the extent of landscape and public realm around key buildings was increased, as were landscape buffers where appropriate. The orientation and design of buildings was also considered further to alleviate officer concerns.
- 5.13 This approach has resulted in a well-designed scheme relative to its location and purpose. Comparable recently approved nearby developments and others along this stretch of the A40, tend to have a less sophisticated approach to layout, the extent of hard standing and its visual impact and/or place making qualities. The nearby B&Q development and the ASDA Superstore are all dominated by hard standing with very limited attention given to landscape strategy or visual impact. The GCHQ complex presents very open views of large areas of hard standing and is entirely visible from the A40.
- 5.14 None of this is particularly surprising. The nature of these edge of town uses is that they appeal to car borne transportation and therefore must satisfy council policy relative to parking ratios etc. I would strongly advocate that the scheme subject to this appeal would seem to offer much more consideration in terms of landscape strategy, visual impact, mix of uses, public realm and building design than many comparable projects.
- 5.15 As Mr Davies explains in his evidence, the urban design approach is consistent and inspired by the landscape vision for the site. A strong high quality landscape edge along Grovefield Road provides the setting and introduction for a series of buildings of different scale on this western edge. These buildings and the landscape that sits around and between them provides an attractive and consistent edge treatment to Grovefield Road. The gateway through this

attractive edge treatment sits at the entry point to the main internal access road. But as can be seen from the various CGI's and sections from this viewpoint (see landscape proof Appendix 4 and section drawings), the main internal access road (and the gables of the buildings aligned to it) affords views of the longer distance woodland to the west of the site and along the A40.

- 5.16 Furthermore, the landscape strategy creates a clearly defined structure that utilises hard and soft landscape materials to unify the Appeal Scheme. The further breaks in level throughout the site as it runs west, enable the use of retention and planting to further reduce the visual impact of car parking throughout.
- 5.17 One final consideration that I believe has a further general bearing on the subject of 'sense of place' referenced in RFR 3, is the principle of a mixture of uses itself. Many historic edge of town developments are single use in nature, resulting in large numbers of people leaving the site during the day for a variety of reasons. I would contend that an appropriate mix of uses on site can only help retain people in the site, increase pedestrian activity and ultimately improve the place. In the LPA Committee report, officers themselves refer to the Employment Land Review in this regard. Paragraph 6.6.6 highlights that in principle, *'non B1 uses can encourage the provision of office based businesses and ultimately make it a more desirable place'*.
- 5.18 In my professional opinion and in the context of regularly masterplanning and reviewing other commercial and business schemes, this is not a commercial development that ignores design or visual impact.
- 5.19 The layout is undoubtedly efficient, however while there is appropriate car parking, the extent of hardstanding does not differ at all from what one would expect to see, and indeed does see in other nearby schemes. The overall landscape vision, the orientation of buildings along the main access road, the treatment of the Grovefield Road edge, the clever use of retaining walls and levels relative to planting and the design and orientation of the buildings, all help break up the impact of views of that hardstanding and of the private car.

The position of buildings including the 'Drive thru' coffee shop and supermarket, close to the edges of the site give the layout a cramped and contrived appearance exacerbated by exterior features such as the 'drive thru' lane and external yards.

- 5.20 To begin, I am unclear what is meant by the the expression 'contrived appearance' referenced in the RFR. I have, therefore, focussed my response on all other aspects of this RFR. In addition, the office buildings close to the main access road as it runs west through the site do not seem to be the focus of this part of the RFR and therefore I will focus my response upon the Non B1 buildings that sit closer to Grovefield Road.
- 5.21 I would again refer to the Council Committee Paper and specifically Paragraph 6.6.11:

Whilst the distribution of the uses on the site has not significantly altered, the overall quality of the scheme in terms of how the buildings address the street, the spaces between them and the landscape approach has improved since the submission of the proposal (this will be discussed further below). This helps to ensure that the business park has an 'identity' which is apparent from the entrance to the site to its furthest extent. As such whilst the non- B1 uses still occupy the eastern-most part of the site it is now considered that they will not appear as a separate parcel of commercial uses but will be integrated into the language of the site.'

- 5.22 The package of visuals, Appendix 4 of Mr Davies Proof and section drawings, consider the views fully from a number of perspectives along Grovefield Road and clearly show an attractive and well designed edge. I would draw your attention to the indicative masterplan for the extant permission, which showed significantly more development along this edge. Furthermore, the buildings that were proposed in the extant scheme are larger B1 footprints that have a significantly greater impact in terms of height and massing. Development is also significantly closer to the road edge.
- 5.23 When one fully takes into account the relative platform levels and building heights of both the supermarket and the Costa Coffee and the levels of planting proposed around these buildings, I would contend that far from being 'cramped', the frontage is in fact relatively open and rich.
- 5.24 The largest single building on this frontage is of course, the BMW dealership which already exists. I would further suggest that the revised approach helps enable the landscape strategy by encouraging strong views west through the site terminating in the woodland that sits at its western edge. The CGIs do not in my opinion show a congested frontage to Grovefield Road in any way.
- 5.25 The location and orientation of all three non-B1 uses that can be seen from Grovefield Road has been given significant thought. Sections H-H No. 178-98 and J-J No. 178-99, show this very clearly.
- 5.26 I would then turn my attention to the matter of 'exterior features' and specifically the drive thru lane and the external yards. Both these aspects were the focus of significant alteration and improvement on the back of earlier LPA consultation responses. The rear yard of the supermarket was relocated to enable a larger landscape buffer to the rear. Similarly, the visual impact of the drive thru lane was lessened by the relocation of car parking spaces to facilitate an increased landscape buffer.
- 5.27 I have considered in detail the configuration of the drive through lane of the coffee shop and note that there is no technical objection to it on highways grounds. I have also compared it to other drive through lanes nationally and again find nothing unusual in it. Post the design response to Officer concerns, it is now separated from the spine road by nearly 3 metres of

planting and sits some 1.5m below the main access road itself. The access lane is a single carriageway width, which widens slightly at the point where the coffees are ordered and collected. There are also a small number of parking spaces associated with it.

- 5.28 Taking all these factors into account, and when one considers how development will actually look with the higher level planting above the drive thru lane fully matured (see Appendix 4 of landscape Proof), then given the openness of that edge I do not see a ground level element on the scale of the drive thru lane exacerbating that vista to any significant extent.
- 5.29 Conversely, if the LPA view were to be upheld, then I would still argue that the coffee shop is in the optimum location from both an urban design and a sustainability perspective. It provides a counter balance to the prominent BMW dealership. It's a small and visible gateway building that sits at the gateway to the site. For external road users its location and its drive thru function, allow access without necessitating visitors entering into the business park beyond.

Supermarket and coffee shop are of a relatively standardised design.

- 5.30 Policy CP7 of the Local Plan states that Development will only be permitted where it: (a) is of a high standard of architectural design; and (b) adequately reflects principles of urban design; and (c) complements and respects neighbouring development and the character of the locality and/or landscape (note 3). It goes on say that the fact that a particular form or location of development is the most cost-effective option is not justification for an exception to CP7.
- 5.31 Taking each of these in turn I would comment as follows.
- 5.32 It is clear from the illustrative material that has been submitted with the hybrid application that the Appeal Scheme adopts a palette of high quality, contemporary materials that will unify the scheme and provide an attractive environment. This is not standard fair.
- 5.33 There is a clear structure to the development, which is based upon the linear development facing on to the internal access road. This provides legibility to the scheme and serves to largely conceal the parking associated with the Appeal Scheme. In the early part of the proof I have described in detail the nature and scale of neighbouring development and how this has influenced the disposition of development within the site.
- 5.34 The non-B1 uses, the Aldi supermarket, the coffee outlet and the nursery are of a contemporary design. They are not of standardised design. This approach is entirely consistent with the approach to the design of the business park as a whole and specifically to the design of the BMW building to the north. For clarity, both Aldi and Costa (in keeping with many of their competitors) have standard design approaches. Outwith signage, they have not taken this approach on this site. Indeed, the view of the design team was that it would be inappropriate

for these buildings to adopt a different architectural vocabulary to that already approved and in the case of the BMW buildings, constructed on site.

- 5.35 Without dwelling on this aspect further the Committee Paper clearly reflects the Officer's views at the time, that the:

'standard of design of the individual buildings is acceptable and appropriate for a modern business park'.

- 5.36 Indeed, their conclusion goes on to say that 'the buildings will appear as a family of buildings which is important in giving the site an identity as a high quality business park'. It is notable that there are no design issues with appeal B. The architectural style is to a significant extent set/or at least very heavily influenced by the extant permission. Indeed, this consistent architectural style further underpins my view that the Appeal scheme goes some way to helping create a strong sense of place. The materials deployed for the buildings will only help unify the development.

And finally - The proposal is therefore harmful to the surrounding area by reason of its visual impact and also fails to create a high quality business environment in this edge of town location.

- 5.37 This aspect is more fully considered in the evidence of Mr Davies however, from an urban design perspective, I have already noted that a comprehensive series of public and private viewpoints were considered. The Appeal Site is located adjacent to the existing settlement edge and views of the Appeal Site are therefore relatively localised. The existing BMW dealership to the immediate north east of the site is readily visible from the surrounding area.
- 5.38 In considering the impact of the proposed retail building on the neighbouring area it should be noted that the maximum storey height would not exceed 2 storeys. This is entirely appropriate given the heights of neighbouring properties to the south of North Road West and has been informed by our site assessment. It is also very important to keep the scale of development in context.

Visual Effects

- 5.39 The impact on local views are dealt with more fully in the evidence of Mr Davies. I have already noted that a comprehensive series of public and private viewpoints were considered in the evolution of the masterplan approach.
- 5.40 The Appeal Site is located adjacent to the existing settlement edge and views of the Appeal Site are therefore relatively localised. The existing BMW dealership to the immediate north east of the site is readily visible from the surrounding area.

Local Plan Policies

- 5.41 The reason for refusal is very specific in that it identifies the particular areas where harm is alleged to occur. It is claimed that the Appeal Scheme is contrary to Saved Policies SD4 of the Joint Core Strategy and CD7 of the Local Plan.

Office Development

- 5.42 In considering the impact of the proposed office building on the neighbouring area it should be noted that the maximum storey height would not exceed 2 storeys. This is entirely appropriate given the heights of neighbouring properties to the south of North Road West and has been informed by our site assessment. It is also very important to keep the scale of development in context.
- 5.43 The Office building is limited to a maximum height of 2 storeys. It also has to be remembered that the office would be surrounded by parking and landscaping.
- 5.44 It is clear from the CGI in Appendix C that the proposed office would be attractive, in keeping with the scale of neighbouring and entirely appropriate.
- 5.45 The CGI at Appendix D of this evidence illustrates how a 2-storey office building can be accommodated in the interior of the office park via a well-structured linear landscape scheme. This approach has the benefit of not only creating an attractive environment, but it also has the benefit of leading people into the office park.
- 5.46 The CGI at Appendix C shows the Costa Coffee outlet at the entrance to the site (proposed under application 16/02208).
- 5.47 The positioning of this single storey building at the entrance to the Appeal site works well from both a commercial and aesthetic point of view. In design terms the location of the building acts as a counter balance to the BMW dealership on the opposite side of the road and also provides a transition to the proposed two storey office buildings.
- 5.48 In commercial terms a Costa Coffee outlet provides a resource for occupiers of the office park and for residents and passing motorists. Such a facility is not uncommon on contemporary business parks.
- 5.49 Policy CP7 of the Cheltenham Borough Council Local Plan Second Review (Adopted 2006)
- 5.50 Policy CP7 of the Local Plan states that Development will only be permitted where it: (a) is of a high standard of architectural design; and (b) adequately reflects principles of urban design; and (c) complements and respects neighbouring development and the character of the locality and/or landscape (note 3).

5.51 It goes on say that the fact that a particular form or location of development is the most cost-effective option is not justification for an exception to CP7.

5.52 Taking each of these in turn I would add to my earlier comments as follows:

High standard of architectural design

5.53 It is clear from the illustrative material that has been submitted with the hybrid application that the Appeal Scheme adopts a palette of high quality, contemporary materials that will unify the scheme and provide an attractive environment. I would contend that this approach address policy CP7 in three ways.

5.54 Firstly, the standard of design is appropriate for a modern business park. Secondly, while the architecture is bespoke to this particular development the unified architectural approach and materials palette results in a 'family of buildings'. This is not a standardised approach. Thirdly, there is a strong interaction between the architectural approach and the broader urban design and landscape strategy.

5.55 Moreover, I struggle to understand how the extant permission and Appeal B can be said to be acceptable in design terms, whereas Appeal A is not. Indeed, given the relatively minor differences in the various proposals, it is difficult to see how one form of development can be considered contrary to the development plan whereas another is not.

Reflects the principles of Urban Design

5.56 On this last point there is a clear structure to the development, which is based upon a strong frontage onto Grovefield Road and then linear development facing on to the internal access road. I have described the former in detail earlier in this section as it was the focus of the RFR.

5.57 Regarding the latter point. The spine of development and public realm that then runs west through the scheme toward the existing planting on the A40, provides a particularly high quality street feel at the heart of the development. The separation of the pedestrian and vehicular traffic along that street only add to the sense that a pedestrian could use and enjoy this environment. The street provides a legibility to the scheme and the long distance views of woodland bring a key aspect of the landscape strategy to life. The breaks in level and linear nature of the buildings further serve to help conceal the parking associated with the Appeal Scheme.

Complements neighbouring development

5.58 In the early part of the proof I have described in detail the nature and scale of neighbouring development and how this has influenced the disposition of development within the site.

- 5.59 Policy SD4 of the Joint Core Strategy (Adopted 2017)
- 5.60 The (JCS) is a partnership between Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council, supported by Gloucestershire County Council.
- 5.61 Policy SD4 is concerned with Sustainable Design and Construction and requires new development to follow best practice in terms of sustainability. It covers a range of topics including legibility, context, amenity and public realm. Importantly the focus is on sustainable design, which is at the heart of the policy.

Legibility

- 5.62 I have already explained the scheme has been structured to create an attractive and legible environment through the alignment and location of buildings fronting on to the internal spine road.

Context

- 5.63 Similarly, I have described how the scale, location and siting of the proposed buildings have been informed by a detailed assessment of the local context, informed by an ongoing discussion with officers.

Sustainable Design

- 5.64 Clearly the mix of uses gives rise to sustainable design. Similarly, the location of the site is in a sustainable location.

Conclusion

- 5.65 My overall conclusion is that the Appeal scheme is a well-considered scheme and that considerable thought has gone into creating a high-quality development which responds sensitively to its site and setting. I therefore see no reason why planning permission should not be granted on design grounds.