Crest NICHOLSON

# Hunts Grove, Gloucestershire

## Environmental Statement

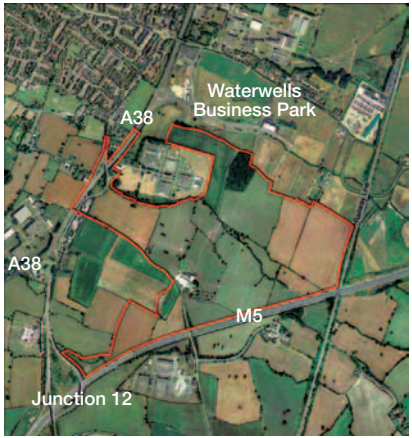
## Non Technical Summary

LDADESIGN

# Introduction

An Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared by Crest Nicholson Developments Ltd in support of a planning application to Stroud District Council for a mixed-use development at Hunts Grove, Hardwicke, Gloucestershire. This followed an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This document is a Non Technical Summary of the ES.

The planning application site area comprises approximately 105 hectares of land to the north of M5 Junction 12 within Stroud District. The application site is bordered by development and highways on all sides including the Waterwells Business Park to the north, the M5 Motorway to the south and south east, and the A38 Bristol Road to the west.




The land proposed for development is currently in agricultural use and the existing farming operation centred on Colethrop Farm will cease once development commences.

Site location

# The Development Proposal

A comprehensive and sustainable development proposal has been put forward for Hunts Grove with the following main components:

- New Housing – Up to 1750 new houses with 30% of these being affordable homes.
- Employment development – An area of 5.75 hectares of employment development creating local jobs.
- Community facilities - A new 'Neighbourhood Centre' providing a range of community and medical facilities and local shops.
- A one-form entry Primary School located within the centre of the development.
- A new vehicular access from the A38 Bristol Road.
- Two new vehicular access links to Waterwells Business Park to the north.
- Other associated infrastructure.
- Over 32 hectares of public open space including recreation facilities, children's play areas, informal open space and 1.2 hectares of land reserved for allotments.
- New sports pitches and associated car parking and changing facilities, including senior and junior football pitches, a cricket field, and a multi use synthetic pitch.
- A dedicated nature conservation area.

The development will be constructed over several years with 500 dwellings provided by 2011.

## Outline Planning Application Masterplan

# Environmental Considerations

The ES considers the environmental effects of the proposed development. The assessment is based upon the proposed development as summarised above and illustrated on the Outline Planning Application Masterplan. The masterplan sets out the layout and distribution of development proposed within the site including areas for public open space and recreation.

To determine which environmental issues should be considered by the EIA, Crest Nicholson requested a 'Scoping Opinion' from Stroud District Council prior to the commencement of detailed assessments. A number of organisations, including the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency, and English Nature were consulted at this time and the scope of the EIA and the detailed methodologies to be employed, were agreed. These issues are summarised below and reported in full within the ES.

# Planning Policy

The Hunts Grove site is allocated for mixed-use development under Policy HN1 (MU1) of the Stroud District Local Plan (Adopted November 2005). The development will be constructed over several years and will provide 500 dwellings by 2011 with the remainder constructed between 2011 and 2016.

The planning application proposals for Hunts Grove conform fully with the key principles and policies of the Adopted Stroud District Local Plan and the Gloucestershire County Structure Plan. The development of up to 1750 dwellings and the mix of associated uses would create a sustainable urban extension to the Principal Urban Area of Gloucester and is in accordance with National Planning Guidance and Planning Policy.

The development proposals incorporate high quality design to ensure the efficient use of land within a strong landscape framework. The Outline Planning Application Masterplan provides for access to a wide range of community facilities, employment and public transport services to minimise the need to travel by car.

These issues are set out fully within the *Planning Statement* and the *Design and Access Statement* prepared and submitted to Stroud District Council in support of the planning application.

# Alternative Sites

A number of alternatives to development at Hunts Grove were considered and evaluated during the preparation of the Stroud Local Plan. Each site was considered at the Stroud Local Plan Inquiry against a range of planning and environmental factors. The Hunts Grove site was selected following a thorough analysis and examination of the alternatives and the principle of development at Hunts Grove was confirmed by the Local Plan Inspector.

Following examination of the alternative sites, Hunts Grove was carried forward into the Adopted Stroud District Local Plan (2005) to meet the strategic housing requirement for Stroud District over the period to 2011 and beyond.

# Landscape and Visual Amenity

The application site comprises an area of agricultural land which is bordered on all sides by highways and built development. The site lies outside the boundary of the Stroud District Special Landscape Area and is 1.2 km from the nearest boundary of the Cotswolds AONB.

The application site contains over 100 mature trees, a small woodland (Hunts Grove Wood), a belt of vegetation along the Shorn Brook watercourse and a network of native hedges. Visual surveys have confirmed that the site is well contained within the local landscape although views are possible from a small number of local roads and residential properties and from elevated locations within the AONB.

The Outline Planning Application Masterplan has been carefully designed to minimise adverse landscape and visual effects and the majority of natural features have been retained and incorporated into areas of strategic open space. Built development has been avoided across the higher parts of the site to the north east to minimise visual intrusion and substantial tree and shrub planting is proposed along the site boundaries and within development areas to provide screening and a high quality landscape setting for new development. Whilst some limited loss of existing vegetation will occur, overall, the significance of effects on existing landscape features and the visual amenity of the local environment is assessed as minor.

# Ecology

The site contains a range of habitats including broadleaf woodland, linear tree belts, species rich hedgerows, individual mature trees, ponds, watercourses and a number of farm buildings. These habitats have been surveyed over a period of several years and are known to support a range of species including great crested newt, badgers, bats, and birds.

The majority of existing habitats (including watercourses, Hunts Grove Wood, hedgerows and trees) will be retained and connected to new areas of open space and a dedicated nature conservation area will be created to the south western corner of the site. A stone barn adjacent to Colethrop Farmhouse and known to be used by bats will be retained.

The proposed development will result in some limited loss of habitat including native hedgerows, small ponds and a number of trees which may be suitable for roosting bats. These losses will be associated with the construction phase of the development and will be compensated in time, by the proposed creation and management of new natural features which will enhance the ecological value of the site in the longer term and provide opportunities for a diversity of species.

# Cultural Heritage

A comprehensive range of archaeological studies and surveys have been undertaken to establish the potential for archaeological deposits at Hunts Grove and the potential impact of the proposed development. These studies have confirmed that the application site contains no nationally important Archaeological Sites, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas although some other less significant archaeological features have previously been recorded on the site.

Archaeological field surveys and excavations completed during 2002 and 2005 revealed two main areas of late prehistoric (Iron Age) and Roman activity within the site. The most significant of these is a late Iron Age/Roman farmstead towards the north eastern corner of the site, although this is not considered sufficiently important to warrant preservation in situ. In addition, surveys have recorded a number of historic hedgerows within the site.

The proposed development will have no effect on any Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas or archeological features of national importance. Where evidence of below ground archaeology has been revealed within the site, these remains will be preserved by excavation and record as part of a programme of pre construction archaeological mitigation work, the details of which will be agreed with the County Archaeologist. There will therefore, be no significant effects on archaeology as a result of the proposed development.

# Agricultural Land

The application site is currently in agricultural use and comprises a mix of arable land and pasture for the grazing of cattle. A report examining the relevant agricultural circumstances of the site has been carried out and the development proposal has been assessed against National Planning Policy, set out in PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'.

The majority of the land affected by the development (74%) is classified as sub Grade 3B or lower in the agricultural land classification system, or is non-agricultural land. However, areas of higher quality land occur within the site and the proposed development will result in the permanent loss of approximately 27 hectares of 'best and most versatile agricultural land', as defined in PPS7.

This loss of agricultural land was considered in detail at the Stroud District Local Plan Inquiry and whilst the adverse effects were recognised, these were not considered of sufficient weight to outweigh the need to meet housing requirements and the other benefits associated with the development of the Hunts Grove site.

The land within the application site forms part of a substantial mixed arable and dairy unit. This unit is centred on Haresfield and extends in total to 426 hectares. No farming activity would take place within the site upon completion of the development. The effects of the proposed development on the main farm business will not be significant and no other significant agricultural effects will result.

# Transport

A detailed Transport Assessment (TA) has been carried out to examine the implications of the proposed development on the existing highway network using a traffic model agreed with Gloucestershire Highway Authority. This study indicates that under current conditions the majority of the highway network is operating within capacity during both the morning and evening peak periods. However, feedback from the local community has indicated that congestion can form on key junctions during peak periods.

Whilst the proposed development will generate additional traffic, the construction of a new site access on the A38, along with improvements to the existing highway network, will ensure that the additional traffic can be accommodated without giving rise to significant adverse effects. Work will be carried out to improve traffic flows at the Cross Keys Roundabout and at M5 Junction 12 to the approval of Gloucestershire County Council and the Highways Agency.

In addition, the proposed development will provide a range of sustainable options that minimise the need to travel by car including the creation of new cycleways and footpaths that link into the existing infrastructure. Existing bus services will be extended into the site to connect the proposed development to both Gloucester and Stroud.

# Hydrology and Drainage

Surface water from the proposed development will be discharged into three existing watercourses, namely the Dimore Brook to the north, the Shorn Brook running through the centre of the site, and Haresfield Stream to the south west of the site near to M5 Junction 12. A baseline drainage assessment has confirmed that these watercourses are in good condition and free from contamination.

Initial flood analysis of the site has shown that none of the watercourses present a flooding risk to the development. The main watercourse bisecting the site, the Shorn Brook, is capable of containing the 100-year flood within its channel and the development proposed will not affect the existing flooding regime of the brook. A further detailed flood risk assessment will be carried out as part of the detailed design of the development.

The rate of surface water discharge from the site will be limited to existing greenfield rates by the construction of sustainable drainage systems including attenuation basins and below ground storage. There will therefore, be no increase in risk of flooding as a result of the proposed development. Best practice design and construction methods will be agreed with Stroud District Council and the Environment Agency to prevent contamination of existing watercourses and protect water quality both during construction and following completion of development.

# Ground Conditions

A desk study of existing ground conditions has been carried out to determine the likely potential for areas of contaminated ground being present within the site. This study included a review of historical information, including maps and environmental information, and confirmed that there are no recorded animal burial sites within the site and no known or recorded evidence of contamination.

In addition, a site walkover and a soil sampling exercise was completed with the results submitted for contamination analysis. None of the samples recovered were found to contain elevated levels of contamination. As a result of the desk study and soil sampling exercise, the risk to human health resulting from development of the site is assessed as low. No sites of geological or geomorphological interest will be affected by the development.

An area of sand and gravel identified within the site has been subject to detailed analysis and the deposits are considered of insufficient quantity to justify extraction. The application site will not therefore, require extensive remedial work prior to the commencement of construction and the existing ground conditions are considered suitable for the development proposed.

# Air Quality

An air quality assessment has been carried out to determine the effects of construction and development at Hunts Grove on local and regional air quality. The main issue likely to effect air quality is dust generated by construction activity including earthworks, the handling and stockpiling of materials, and the use of unpaved haulage routes.

However, dust effects are unlikely to occur at distances greater than 100m from the generating activity and with few potential receptors within 100m of the site, the air quality assessment has concluded that dust impacts are likely to be of minor significance. Nevertheless, stringent dust control measures will be put in place through the agreement with Stroud District Council of a Code of Construction Practice and a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) prior to the commencement of work on site.

In the longer term, impacts on air quality are primarily related to changes in emissions from vehicle exhausts associated with changes in traffic flows and speeds on local routes. The air quality assessment has concluded that whilst a slight increase in pollutant concentrations may occur, the increase will not exceed air quality objectives and is not considered significant. The increase in local traffic flows associated with the development is also predicted to result in a local increase in greenhouse gas emissions. However, this local increase would not necessarily result in an overall increase in $CO^2$ levels and in the context of total UK emissions, is not considered significant.

# Noise and Vibration

The assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development included surveys of existing noise and vibrations levels at a number of representative locations within and around the site. These surveys confirmed that the majority of noise affecting the site is associated with traffic noise from the M5 Motorway, which borders the site.

Existing noise levels along this edge of the site have the potential to adversely affect proposed residential properties and to address this, a 3m high noise bund/barrier will be constructed along the length of the M5 boundary. Dwellings on the outer edges of the development area closest to the M5 will require additional consideration to ensure noise levels in living spaces do not exceed the limits defined by World Health Organisation guidelines. This may include the orientation of buildings, or the provision of alternative means of ventilation (other than windows) in the affected rooms.

Vibration from traffic generated by the development will have no noticeable effect and the increase in noise levels due to traffic generated by the development will be negligible. Noise and vibration due to construction operation will affect nearby sensitive receptors, which would eventually include residents of the new properties to be built in the early phases of the Hunts Grove development. Noise and vibration levels will increase during this period, although the temporary nature of the works and temporary noise mitigation measures will reduce the significance of these effects to an acceptable level.

# Services and Utilities

Enquiries have been made with the utilities companies regarding the provision of services for the development. The utility companies have confirmed, with the exception of Gas and British Telecom services, that there is insufficient capacity within the existing utility network immediately adjacent to the site to service the proposed development. All utility companies have confirmed however that they would be able to supply the needs of the development provided that further reinforcement works are carried out. The details of these works will be developed and agreed as the detailed design of the development proceeds.

Existing service supplies in the A38 corridor would be subject to diversion and protection works to accommodate the proposed new site access. The utility companies have confirmed that these works can be designed and implemented to mitigate the effect of the development on their respective apparatus. Service connections within the site will be routed within highway corridors wherever possible to avoid impacts on existing vegetation and other natural features. The existing utility network does not therefore impose any significant constraint to development of the Hunts Grove site.

# Socio-Economic Impacts

The potential socio-economic impacts of the proposed development have been assessed in order to determine the baseline of existing socio-economic conditions and to identify the potential effect of the proposed development on local services, jobs and education provision.

The assessment concluded that the overall impact of the proposed development on the socio-economic conditions of Hardwicke and the district of Stroud is, on balance beneficial. A summary of each element is provided below.

Population: The development would almost double the size of the population of Hardwicke. The developer would provide or contribute to facilities to meet the needs of the new population.

Education: A one-form entry primary school would be provided on-site. The developer would make financial contributions towards additional secondary school places.

Healthcare: A medical centre would be provided within the development.

Housing: The provision of up to 1750 dwellings, 30% of which would be affordable, would meet the housing needs of Hardwicke and Stroud District.

Community Facilities: The development would provide a range of community facilities in a neighbourhood centre to meet the needs of the new population. This would include local shopping facilities, a doctor's surgery, a community centre, community offices and a public house.

Open Space: The development proposes over 26 hectares of public open space to include sports pitches and children's play areas.

Employment: The proposal includes 5.75 hectares of employment land consisting of B1, B2 & B8 uses. It is estimated this employment site will create 837 new jobs.

## Mitigation Measures

Each chapter of the ES addresses mitigation measures, including the ways in which existing environmental features can be retained and safeguarded through the development programme, as well as measures to avoid and minimise adverse impacts during both the construction and operational phases of the development.

Control measures to ensure that mitigation is implemented in accordance with agreed parameters will be put in place through the imposition of planning conditions by Stroud District Council, agreed standards of Construction Practice through submission of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan and an ongoing programme of monitoring and review.

## Further Information

Further information about the Environmental Impact Assessment is contained in the full Environmental Statement, which can be inspected at the offices of Stroud District Council, Ebley Mill, Westward Road, Stroud, GL5 4UB.

Copies of the Environmental Statement, either as hard copy or on CD, can be purchased from LDA Design, consultants to Crest Nicholson Developments Ltd. To request a copy, please contact Kirsten Phipps, LDA Design, Worton Rectory Park, Oxford OX29 4SX, telephone 01865 887050.

Information regarding the Hunts Grove development is also available on the Crest Nicholson web site at www.crestnicholson.com.

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