Key Issues –
Prior to Terence O’Rourke Ltd’s (TOR) involvement in the project a planning application was refused for residential development on land including the current site. The original application was a significantly larger proposal, covering a site area of 74.7ha that included the Blenheim Villa scheduled monument (SM). The proposal included up to 1,200 dwellings (including a care village), a site for a primary school, 930sqm of retail space, up to 13,800sqm of employment (B1/B2/B8), a transport interchange, football facility, public open space, associated infrastructure, engineering and ancillary works.

The application was refused on a number of grounds: scale, harm to the setting and significance of Blenheim Park and Garden, Blenheim Palace and Blenheim Villa SM, harm to the setting of Bladon and Woodstock Conservation Areas, landscape impact, urbanizing influence, inappropriate mix of proposed uses, amongst others.

TOR submitted a new application on behalf of Blenheim Estate and Pye Homes in April 2016 and received permission in February 2017. The new application amended the old in a number of ways, including: significantly reduced site area, dwelling number reduced to 300, reconsidered landscape treatment so that a wider landscape buffer is provided alongside the A44, additional open space and landscape planting along the eastern edge of the development to protect the setting of the SM, provision of information boards to raise awareness of the below ground SM and its history, relocated access junction so it’s closer to the existing settlement edge and other improvements.

Purpose of the project
The Blenheim Estate comprises a number of trusts that collectively own the estate and it is the landowner of the application site. The trustees ensure that the estate is managed in a positive and appropriate way, and as custodians of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) are responsible for ensuring the WHS is properly repaired, maintained and protected for the enjoyment of future generations. The hybrid application submitted by the trustees (Vanbrugh Unit Trust) and local house builder, Pye Homes, provides up to 300 much needed dwellings in the area and acts as ‘supporting development’ providing funds for the maintenance and restoration of the WHS to ensure its long term viability.

Description of the project
The proposals include up to 300 dwellings, public open space, landscape planting, children’s play areas, public open space, footpaths, cycleways and sustainable drainage systems. The 16.7 ha site is located to the south east of Woodstock, immediately abutting the residential edge of the settlement. There are no landscape, cultural or ecological designations within the site. Blenheim Villa SM, which is the buried remains of a Roman Villa and associated fields and paddocks, lies immediately to the east of the site in the adjoining field. The Blenheim Palace estate lies beyond the A44, which forms part of the site’s southern boundary. Blenheim Palace WHS includes numerous listed buildings set within a Grade I registered park and garden.
## Lessons learnt

**The leading role of the landscape and visual impact assessment and the cultural heritage assessment** - The site is in proximity to several designated heritage assets, including the WHS and Blenheim Villa SM. The new proposals drew on the key sensitivities highlighted by the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) and the cultural heritage assessment, which culminated in a sensitive design that avoids or mitigates significant impact on these assets. The LVIA work ensured a beneficial balance between built form and landscape features, providing a gradual transition from the rural setting of Woodstock to the urban edge, enhancing the approach to Woodstock and responding positively to the boundary of the WHS as well as the setting of the SM.

**The importance of submitting a hybrid application** - Submission of a hybrid application, with the provision of detailed information on the first phase of development, enabled the demonstration of the scheme’s high quality bespoke design, which will complement Woodstock’s historic character. The character and appearance of the existing urban edge will be significantly improved as a result of the development proposals being landscape-led via the EIA.

**Re-scoping** - Although not a mandatory stage in the EIA process, it was considered important to re-scope for the new application. This ensured that time and effort were spent on potentially significant issues only, which were identified as: archaeology, cultural heritage, community, social and economic effects, landscape and visual effects and traffic and transport. Information on the other topics that had been covered in the original application was submitted as supporting information.

**Good external communication** – Not only was good communication important between the cultural heritage, landscape and design specialists, but good relations with Historic England and the County Archaeologist were critical to avoiding objection and ensuring the proposals achieved planning permission as smoothly as possible.

Early communication with Historic England and the County Archaeologist on the design of the scheme led to useful input and ultimately the recording of significant beneficial effects within the environmental statement, including a gain in knowledge of on-site archaeology through excavation and improvement in knowledge and awareness of the Blenheim Villa SM. The latter was achieved through positive future heritage interpretation and management of the site, and safeguarding the wider landscape to the south east of the Villa. It is proposed that the SM site should be promoted as part of a heritage trail of Woodstock and its early origins.

A scheme of off-site mitigation was also proposed (within land controlled by the Blenheim Estate), regarding the reinstatement of a historic route known as ‘Heh Straet’. The commitment to reinstating this route provides an opportunity to increase awareness of its significance, as well as providing a location for important interpretation of the nearby Blenheim Villa SM.

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