

38/2005/407

SUMMERFIELD DEVELOPMENTS

ERECTION OF OFFICE BUILDING WITH PARKING AND RECEPTION FOR USE AS REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL CENTRE AND FORMATION OF NEW BUNDING TO SURFACE WATER RETENTION PONDS AT BLACKBROOK BUSINESS PARK, TAUNTON AS AMENDED BY AGENTS LETTER DATED 19TH OCTOBER 2005 AND PLANS 46413/1EXW/COOL/P1 WITH LANDSCAPE DRAWING SP.1156.12 AND SP.1189.1A.

25033/24159

FULL PERMISSION

PROPOSAL

The proposal is for the erection of a three storey office building of 2820 sq m with parking and reception for use as a Regional Fire Control Centre at the southern end of Blackbrook Business Park. The work also involves the formation of additional bunding next to the surface water retention ponds.

The proposed Control Centre will replace all of those existing in the south west and will be one of nine regional control centres in England. This forms part of the Government's major investment in modernising the Fire and Rescue Service. This will provide a number of new jobs for the area, 120 based on the latest projections, although the final decision on staffing numbers has yet to be taken. There will be additional visitors to the building for a range of fire and rescue activities and so numbers will vary. In the event of major emergencies it is likely that there will be significant visitors and staff attending the building. Due to the critical nature of the operations undertaken within the building there is a requirement for the provision of alternative power in the event of the loss of mains power. This means there is a requirement for standby generators and fuel storage to maintain power in emergencies. Security fencing to the site is also a requirement. Site levels are currently 13 to 13.5 m above ordnance datum (AOD) and the site lies partially within a flood risk zone. Due to the importance of the facility access in times of flood is necessary to meet the guidance in PPG25. It is proposed to provide a finished floor level of 14.3AOD to provide protection during the 1 in 1000 year storm with a provision for climate change and freeboard. Car park areas will be will be no less than 13.8m which will ensure access above the 1 in 1000 level. To provide additional protection improved bunding to the storage ponds are proposed. Further mitigation in the form of an emergency access onto Blackbrook Way is proposed to ensure that there is safe access during extreme flood events. A landscape bund along Blackbrook Way will also prevent water entering the site and the flood proofing of the building will ensure further protection of the building.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY observations awaited. WESSEX WATER there is sufficient spare capacity for foul sewerage to serve this site and connection may be

made to onsite sewers currently under a Section 104 Agreement with the main developer. There is sufficient spare surface water capacity to serve this site. The Flood Risk assessment is not completely accurate in the way it describes the operation of the attenuation pond but this makes no difference to the flood risk. The Sewage Treatment Works and terminal pumping station has sufficient capacity to accept extra flows from the development. The area is supplied from the Taunton Ring Main so there should be no significant impact on the distribution system. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY the Environment Agency has been involved since August 2005 with ongoing discussions with the applicant, and their consultant, Faber Maunsell, regarding the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) for the site. The Agency is aware that the potential flood risk mitigation works for the site may be in the process of revision at this time, and therefore at odds with some of the drawings submitted with your consultation. Furthermore, it is understood that a revised FRA may be submitted to your Council in the near future. In terms of its response to this proposal, the Agency would prefer to wait for the additional information mentioned above to be submitted, before making a formal reply in respect of flood risk related issues. In accordance with section 64 of PPG25, the Environment Agency therefore advises that the current consultation documents do not contain sufficient information to enable a full and proper assessment of the proposal in terms of flood risk and surface water disposal. The Agency would request that the application is held in abeyance until such time as this information is provided by the applicant/agent, and further consultation undertaken. If your Authority wishes to approve the application notwithstanding the above concerns, the Agency would be grateful for a further opportunity to discuss the application. Further discussion needs to take place prior to any Planning Committee Meeting, to determine the application or, prior to any delegated decision being made. In the context of such discussions it would be useful to the Agency to be advised of all material considerations which are influencing the determination of the application. Such a request is made in accordance with PPG25. Conditions suggested concerning oil/fuel storage, no foul water discharge to groundwater or surface waters, provision of oil interceptor and notes re oil storage, waste management licence and landfill gas investigation. I refer to the Agency's letter dated 7th October, 2005, and your subsequent consultation dated 27th October, 2005 regarding the above. Following the submission of additional information from the applicant's agent, Faber Maunsell, the Agency hereby formally withdraws its flood risk related objection to this proposal, subject to the application of the following conditions re floor level and parking level, surface water drainage details, no occupation until flood prevention bund completed, emergency exit route, flood contingency plan and notes re culverting watercourses and surface water drainage.

ENGLISH NATURE the Dormouse and its habitats are fully protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994. English Nature is not content with the methodology used to survey and due to the absence of sufficient information would initially object to the application. In light of the landscape master plan English Nature is pleased that the existing hedgerows will be improved and enhanced and new provided to improve the connectivity to other dormouse habitat at Blackbrook. We would want to see that the hedgerows are managed for dormice and that it largely remains uncut. An extract from the Dormouse Conservation Handbook on hedgerow management practice is attached. SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST it is commendable that a survey has been carried out to ascertain the importance of the site for dormice prior to determination. Regrettably the survey has not used current best-practice technique and we are concerned the

presence of dormice may have been overlooked and would like to register a holding objection. Following conversation with the Nature Conservation Officer the Somerset Wildlife Trust would like to withdraw their initial holding objection. We are pleased to note that the landscape plan includes both the reinforcement of existing hedges and the creation of new connecting hedgerows. While we understand that the intention is for the planting scheme to consist of entirely native species it does appear as though there are several non-native species include within the hedgerow planting design. For instance hedge types one and two include non-native Italian alders. We would strongly recommend the use of appropriate native species throughout the hedgerow planting scheme.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER subject to some species changes the scheme is reasonable given the security requirements of the development. My main concern is the south west corner of the site where there is greatest need for landscape mitigation. Subject to minor species changes to benefit/encourage dormice the proposed scheme is now acceptable. NATURE CONSERVATION OFFICER I have researched the historic dormouse surveys and have spoken to English Nature. We are in agreement that the methodology used for the 2005 survey should have used nest tubes. This is an accepted method of survey to be used especially where there is no hazel on the site. To insist on further survey work at this time would give inconclusive results. I understand English Nature would support an approach to gain habitat for the species, by the retention of the southern hedgerow (marked 'A' on the survey) and to reinforce this boundary and others with native species shrub planting to include hazel. I believe this is in line with current landscape proposals.

ONE LETTER OF OBJECTION has been received raising the following issues:- loss of ponds on environmental and wildlife grounds; concern over lack of pedestrian and cycle access from Blackbrook Way, additional amenities such as shops/restaurant should be considered, car access to Blackbrook Way needs to be considered.

POLICY CONTEXT

RPG10 - Regional Planning Guidance for the South West, Policy SS14: Taunton, Policy RE2: Flood Risk.

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 - Sustainable Development, STR4 - Development in Towns, POLICY 1- Nature Conservation, POLICY 18 - Location of Land for Industrial and Business Development, POLICY 48 - Access and Parking, POLICY 49 - Transport Requirements for New Development, POLICY 60 - Floodplain Protection.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1- General Requirements, S2 - Design, EC1 - Employment Development, M1 - Transport, Access and Circulation Requirements, M2 - Parking, EN5 - Protected Species, EN9 - Tree Planting, EN28 - Development and Flood Risk.

ASSESSMENT

The proposal is to erect a three storey office building to act as a Regional Fire Control Centre for the south west. The site is located within the built up area of Taunton on the southern end of the existing Blackbrook Business Park and the main issues to be considered in terms of the proposal are the nature conservation impact, the landscaping, parking, design and flood risk attenuation.

The site lies in an area where dormice have been known to live on nearby sites. While initial concern was raised by both the Somerset Wildlife Trust and English Nature it is accepted that in relation to this site itself there are no dormice and no adequate habitat. The southern boundary hedgerow is the nearest suitable habitat and the scheme proposes improvements to the planting in this hedgerow. This hedge will also be linked to others as part of the landscaping scheme and in order to manage this in a suitable manner it is recommended that a hedgerow management plan be agreed as a condition.

The existing site is poorly landscaped other than the existing boundary hedge to the south. The proposal will improve landscape planting around the site with native species, including on a bund to be provided on the Blackbrook Way side of the site. This will assist in screening the security fencing required within the site. The proposal provides 83 parking spaces within the site. This is considered acceptable given the scale and use of the building. Policy M3 of the Local Plan seeks to provide up to 80% of the PPG13 maxima. For office development this would equate to 75 spaces. However given that in emergencies operational parking at the site would be vital it is not considered that the additional spaces provided are a material increase warranting an objection to the proposal.

The building proposed is a three storey structure with provision of a plant room on the roof and is constructed of brick and external clad panels. The design is specific to the fire control needs and will exceed current environmental standards. The building is sited at the end of the Business Park and the provision of a modern design of building in this location is to be welcomed.

The main issue in relation to the site is the flood risk given the importance of the building and the need for emergency access during flood events. In order to overcome Environment Agency concerns and to comply with PPG25 requirements a number of mitigation measures are to be undertaken. The levels across the site are to be raised by approximately 1 m to achieve an adequate floor level. The area adjacent to the storage ponds is to be altered to provide additional bunding to address the peak flood flows. An emergency access onto Blackbrook Way is to be provided and there will also be a banked area to be provided along the length of Blackbrook Way which will be planted up to ensure adequate screening and prevent flood water entering the site. The Environment Agency has confirmed that the revisions are acceptable and meet their requirements and there are a number of conditions requested as a result.

In summary the provision of an office building in this location is an acceptable one in principle and is one which will benefit the economy of the area. The landscaping and nature conservation issues can be addressed by condition and the design, layout and parking provision are considered acceptable. The revision addresses the flooding concerns of the Environment Agency and the application is considered to be acceptable and is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, landscaping, hedgerow management plan, access, parking, emergency access usage, visibility onto estate road, finished floor level at 14.3 m AOD, oil/fuel storage, no discharge to ground or surface waters, oil interceptor, fence details, external lighting details, details of enclosures for generators, parking level, surface water drainage details, no occupation until flood prevention bund completed, emergency exit route, flood contingency plan and notes re hedgerow management, oil storage, waste management license, landfill gas, energy efficiency in construction, culverting watercourses and surface water drainage.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:- The proopsed office building is considered acceptable and to comply with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2, EC1, M2, EN9 and EN28.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

CONTACT OFFICER: 2456 MR G CLIFFORD

NOTES: