

38/2007/193

ABBAY MANOR DEVELOPMENTS LTD

ERECTION OF PHASE 1 OF B1 OFFICE DEVELOPMENT WITH ASSOCIATED TEMPORARY CAR PARK AT FORMER GOODS SIDINGS, FIREPOOL, TAUNTON AS AMENDED BY LETTER DATED 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2007 AND PLANS NOS. 06/51 L01.01D, L02.01F, L02.02E, L04.02C, L04.01B AND SK1212.06.01B

323181/125405

RESERVED MATTERS

PROPOSAL

The proposal is a reserved matters application for around 7000 sq m of office over 5 - 7 storeys on the land at the former East Goods Yard. The office building lies to the south of the railway line and north of the proposed Northern Inner Distributor Road and consists of phase one of the employment site granted outline permission in 2004. The massing of the office building is informed by the triangular shape of the western end of the site. The approach to the building from the new relief road and the train station are considered important. The building steps from west to east across the site and the height reflects the heights set out in the Taunton Design Code.

The design of the building is intended to meet the Very Good BREEAM rating with orientation of the building to allow use of solar gain and grey water recycling used to flush toilets.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY I have no objections in principle to the development. Outline consent has been granted for the whole site subject to a Section 106 Agreement to deliver, amongst other things, a part of the strategic route, the Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road. The plan submitted with the application show a road layout which is yet not approved. On the assumption that it will be approved then it is clear that any access onto it should have adequate visibility splays and any site have adequate on-site parking and turning facilities to enable all vehicles using it to enter and leave the highway in forward gear. To that end I have had a meeting with the applicants and highlighted issues in terms visibility and turning which need amending. I understand amended plans will be submitted and look forward to receiving them. On the basis that I am confident that the problems can be ironed out. I would not seek to recommend a refusal of the application but deal with it by means of Grampian conditions. The following conditions should be attached to any consent. No development until suitable access has been submitted and approved, no development until the road layout has been submitted and approved and no occupation until the distributor road required for access has been completed and open to traffic. There will also be a requirement to condition the access, visibility splays, parking and turning. NETWORK RAIL whilst there is no objection in principle to this proposal I give below my comments and requirements

for the safe operation of the railway and the protection of Network Rail's adjoining land.

1. **FENCING** - This development will create a trespass and vandalism risk on to the railway. In the interests of promoting public safety, it is recommended that a 1.8 m high trespass resistant fence be erected parallel to but separate from the railway fence.
2. **ROADS** - The Department of Transport recommends the provision of a safety barrier adjacent to the railway, alongside all roads, turning circles and parking areas where the railway is situated at or below the level of the development. The safety barrier should be designed to cater for specific loadings dependent on the road traffic anticipated.
3. **DRAINAGE** - Additional or increased flows of surface water should not be discharged onto Network Rail land or into Network Rail's culvert or drains. In the interest of the long-term stability of the railway, it is recommended that soakaways should not be constructed within 10 m of Network Rail's boundary.
4. **SAFETY** - No work should be carried out on the development site that may endanger the safe operation of the railway or the stability of Network Rail's structures and adjoining land. Care must be taken to ensure that no debris or other materials can fall onto Network Rail land.
5. **SITE LAYOUT** - It is recommended that all buildings be situated at least 2 m from the boundary fence, to allow construction and any future maintenance work to be carried out without involving entry onto Network Rail's infrastructure. Where trees exist on Network Rail land the design of foundations close to the boundary must take into account the effects of root penetration in accordance with the Building Research Establishment's guidelines.
6. **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - The design and siting of buildings should take into account the possible effects of noise and vibration and the generation of airborne dust resulting from the operation of the railway.
7. **LIGHTING** - Should the development include proposals for external lighting, I must point out that this may conflict with Network Rail's signalling system. The developers should be required to obtain Network Rail's approval of their detailed proposals.
8. **LANDSCAPING** - In the interests of safety, all new trees to be planted near Network Rail's land should be located at a distance of not less than their mature height from the boundary fence. Details of planting schemes should be submitted to this office for prior approval.

CREATING EXCELLENCE I have inspected the revised drawings that have now been submitted to you. I am pleased to report that these have satisfactorily responded to the design criticisms that were articulated during our useful review meeting held together with the applicants as a consequence of their original submission. **CIVIC SOCIETY** welcome the contemporary design of these offices. They are tall and on a high site relative to the main part of the town centre to the south, so their appearance is more important than is normal for offices in peripheral locations. Their northern face will also be a major element in the initial impression of the centre of Taunton for those travelling on the railway and particularly those arriving from London. In this respect this is another gateway building. We believe that the generally good design could be improved in the following ways.

1. The plant rooms and prestige suites appear as a set of boxes on the highly visible roof line. We suggest that more variety in the roof line is desirable, generating a greater sense of flow, and would like to see a greater effort being made to disguise the plant rooms which appear so different from either façade of the building. Perhaps there should be a larger suite complex on the roof of the lower western blocks to balance the large suites on the eastern blocks.
2. The north (railway) façade would be greatly improved by some moulding or larger articulation, providing more interest and relieving the effect of a succession of very flat surfaces. We understand the need for the building to be a seal against dust and noise from the tracks, but believe that the

building should make better use of the north light by having larger, (particularly taller, rather than square) windows in the terracotta faced blocks. 3. On the southern façade we find the doorways to be almost unnoticeable. Surely the building would benefit from a stronger emphasis of the entrances and wouldn't it be a good idea to provide a canopy over the arrival spaces? 4. On the materials we believe that a light cream render would be better than a plain white render: we have reservations about the proposal for terracotta tiling on the northern face, but these are linked to the extent of the tiling and if the area devoted to glass increased as we suggest above we feel that the building would no longer appear from the north as a rather uninspiring pile. We cannot see details of how the effects and flow of water will be controlled. Given the use of render it is important that it is thrown clear so that staining can be avoided. Can you check this detail. We are pleased to see the design aims for a high BREEAM/Ecohomes rating but question the design statement that says very good will be achieved but the key objective for the development is excellent.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER the previous application for the site includes a condition requiring site investigation, risk assessment and any proposed remedial work to be submitted before work is carried out on site. This condition should still apply. There are other conditions on the 1999 application relating to contaminated land (28 – 31). The information required by these could be included in the same report required by the main contaminated land condition. It would be preferable if the developer could provide one site investigation and risk assessment report for the site as a whole rather than having one for each of the smaller areas and this would save time and costs. The offices are close to the railway lines and the strategic road. A noise assessment should be carried out to determine what measures may be necessary to ensure an acceptable noise level in the proposed offices. Noise should be taken into account in the design and layout of the buildings. Acoustic glazing and ventilation should be used when other methods are not practical. The proposal shows offices at the western end of the site and a car park on the rest of the site with no indication of a noise barrier by the railway line. This arrangement will not provide any shielding to most of the nearby flats. There are some conditions re noise on the 1999 application, however these refer to noise affecting the dwellings on the site. As noise from the railway and road could affect people working in the offices I would recommend a noise condition and note.

2 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- the block rises 20 feet above the water tower making it a 'landmark' that could be seen from many aspects of Taunton and the surroundings; it doesn't seem to fit in with the Urban Design framework which aims to protect views of Taunton –church towers and views to the Blackdowns; present views enjoyed would be compromised; parking for 148 cars seems grossly inadequate; parking in the area is already tight and it will put undue strain on the surrounding area; Phase 2 may compromise the area even more in the future; high density means high traffic volume in an area where congestion is already a problem; the elevation with large panels punched with regular window openings does not come close to being in keeping with any local building; if the building were lowered it would mean fewer people and the parking spaces more relevant to the occupancy of the building and views of church towers and the Blackdowns would be less compromised.

POLICY CONTEXT

RPG10 – Regional Planning Guidance for the South West, SS5 – Principal Urban Areas, EN3 – The Historic Environment, EN4 – Quality in the Built Environment, HO5 – Previously Developed Land and Buildings.

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 – Sustainable Development, STR4 – Development in Towns, Policy 9 – The Built Historic Environment, Policy 48 – Access and Parking, Policy 49 – Transport Requirements for New Development.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 – General Requirements, S2 – Design, EC1 – Employment Development, EC10 – Accessibility of New Development, M1 – Non-residential Parking Requirements, M2 and M3 – Parking, EN16 – Setting of Listed Buildings, EN25 – The Water Environment, EN32 – Contaminated Land, EN34 – Control of External Lighting, T3 - Firepool, T33 – Taunton’s Skyline, T34 – Approach Routes into Taunton.

ASSESSMENT

The proposal is Phase 1 of the employment part of the East Goods Yard site at Firepool and involves a 5 - 7 storey office building in a prominent location adjacent to the railway line and the proposed Northern Inner Distributor Road. The proposal provides a significant level of office space in compliance with the outline approval granted in 2004. The main issues for consideration are the design of the building, its impact and the access to it.

Access to the site will be via the new Northern Inner Distributor Road which is yet to be constructed. A notional route has been agreed between the developer and the Highway Authority and the submitted plan reflects that general proposal. Clearly the development can't be properly developed until such time as the road is provided and the Highway Authority has suggested a Grampian style condition to ensure that this is the case. Given that the developer owns the land on which the road is to be built this is considered to be an appropriate condition. Concern over the visibility at the access and impact on the parking layout have been addressed by the revision to the plan and this element of the scheme is now considered suitable to be conditioned. The scheme provides for 149 parking spaces in a surface car park and under the building. This level of parking complies with the standard for office use as set out in the Local Plan. Development of the adjacent site will need to be assessed in the future to ensure the parking for the site is maintained in line with policy.

The design of the building in general is considered to be an acceptable one in terms of its scale and massing and is welcomed in principle by the Civic Society. Creating Excellence initially had concern over the plant enclosures at roof level, the extent of render panels on the south frontage and the break in the panelling on the north elevation. These issues were addressed in the amended scheme submitted and the revised elevations are considered acceptable and also address a number of the issues raised by the Civic Society. The roof level is stepped and the plant enclosures relate to the higher level only, the front is designed to read more as one and is stepped in relation to the road and there are entrance canopies designed into

the doors. The building is stepped against the road to soften the impact on the frontage and allow for access visibility. The building will form a back drop to the Pump House building to the south. However the design and distance of 30 m across the road is considered sufficient not to detract from the setting of the listed building.

The building will be seen from a number of public vantage points from the surrounding area, including the railway station and the Obridge Viaduct. However in the longer term these views will be seen in conjunction with the residential development of the remainder of the site and that of the adjacent Firepool site. Whilst it will have some impact on Taunton's skyline, the scale of the building is considered to be in line with that envisaged in the Urban Design Framework and care has been taken over the design of the building to try and ensure that it will be distinctive and will add to the character of the skyline and approach to the town.

Environmental Health have drawn attention to the issues of noise and contamination which were conditioned on the outline permission. The noise issue is being addressed by the provision of a noise proof barrier fence to the northern boundary. This together with the building itself will reduce noise in respect of development to the south, while the offices themselves will need to be protected by sound insulation designed into the building. Given that the original condition is out of date a more appropriate noise condition is now considered appropriate.

The proposal forms the first part of the East Goods Yard redevelopment at Firepool and the re-use of this brownfield site is an important first step in the redevelopment of the area.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to further views of the Highway Authority the Development Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and permission be GRANTED be subject to conditions of no development until suitable access has been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, no development until the road layout has been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and no occupation until the distributor road required for access has been completed and open to traffic, visibility splay, turning, parking, noise, materials samples and detail of roof eaves, parapets, coping to render elevation and external canopies.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:- The proposal is considered to comply with outline scheme and Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2, EC1, M2, EN16, EN25, T3 and T33 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: 356398 MR G CLIFFORD

NOTES:

