

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 24 NOVEMBER, 2004

Report of the Development Control Manager

MISCELLANEOUS ITEM

38/2004/464 CONSTRUCTION OF 3 BAY INDUSTRIAL TYPE BUILDING TO HOUSE INCIDENT RESPONSE VEHICLES, TAUNTON FIRE STATION, LISIEUX WAY, TAUNTON

PROPOSAL

The proposal comprises the construction of a 3 bay industrial type building constructed of plastisol sheeting, to accommodate an incident response unit for Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. The building immediately adjoins the existing fire service site, and would incorporate a portion of land which has been designed in the Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit as a recreational open space to remain undeveloped. The land currently comprises an attractive grassed area along Lisieux Way.

Since 11 September and the Madrid bombing disaster, the Government has introduced new Civil Resilience measures to respond to such terrorist incidents and to other major emergencies including industrial and domestic accidents, chemical spills and collapsed buildings, natural disasters, and floods and earthquakes, and the Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has secured a grant to accommodate an Incident Response Unit to serve the County. It is intended that it would be based at the Lisieux Way site, and it would respond to national emergencies as required. 9 such units would be provided in the south west, with 80 in total in England and Wales.

At present the Incident Response Vehicle is stored in the open air at their Chelston Depot, and this is considered totally unsatisfactory for the sophisticated kit which is provided. The Government grant would fund the garaging of the unit.

One of the main purposes of the unit is to provide a mass decontamination facility in the event of chemical, biological or radiological contamination. One unit can decontaminate up to 200 people in one hour.

The proposed 3 bay building is large enough to accommodate the Incident Response Vehicle, a high volume pumping unit, which is likely to be assigned to the Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, and additional specialist kit which is anticipated in the future.

The Fire and Rescue Service consider it necessary to accommodate the unit at Lisieux Way because Taunton is best placed geographically and the key settlement in the County; there is no spare capacity at any existing site; the unit should be based at a fire station manned by whole-time fire fighters; after a decontamination incident, the cleaning of the unit needs to be carried out by whole-time fire fighters, and it would be impracticable and expensive to locate the unit away from any existing fire station site, such as on an industrial estate; the unit would cause little

disturbance locally because it is only called into use in an exceptional emergency; and that whole-time fire fighters would be trained in situ next to the fire station.

The Council has already raised objection to the proposals on the grounds of loss of open space under delegated powers. However, in light of the additional justification subsequently received Members are now asked to reconsider the Council's position.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LEISURE OFFICER observations awaited at the time of agenda preparation.

POLICY CONTEXT

Policies S1 and S2 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan seek to safeguard, inter alia, the appearance and character of any affected landscape or street scene.

Policy EN25 seeks to resist development which would harm the open character of areas designated to remain undeveloped on the inset maps.

ASSESSMENT

Notwithstanding that the local plan has defined the area as a recreational open space to remain undeveloped in terms of its importance as a 'green lung' or 'breathing space', it is considered that the exceptional need for the unit and the over-riding public benefit is such that an exception could be made to the policy.

RECOMMENDATION

That NO OBJECTION be raised subject to conditions of time, materials, and details of new fence and hedgerow to be approved.

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