

Application No: 12/1456N

Location: Land Off Beswick Drive, Crewe

Proposal: The proposal is for a 5,550sqm student accommodation facility consisting of two accommodation blocks with associated car parking, access and landscaping.

Applicant: David Smythe, Swansway Garages Group

Expiry Date: 16-Jul-2012

### **MAIN ISSUES**

- Principle of Development
- Sustainability of the Site
- Amenity
- Design
- Flood Prevention/Drainage
- Highways
- Renewable Energy Provision
- Trees and Landscape
- Ecology

### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

**Refuse**

### **REFERRAL**

The application is referred to the Southern Planning Committee as it is a major application.

#### **1. SITE DESCRIPTION**

The application site is an irregular shaped parcel of land which is located to the southern side of Beswick Drive within the Crewe Settlement Boundary. The site is surrounded by a small parade of shops to the north, a hotel to the east and existing student accommodation to the west.

To the south of the site is Valley Brook and the application site is located within a Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3 as identified by the Environment Agency Flood Maps. There is an Oak tree located within the centre of the site with tree cover along the

boundary with Valley Brook. These trees on the site are protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

The site comprises a parcel of vacant land which appears to have been cleared previously and has now partially re-vegetated with grass and scrub.

## **2. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This is a full planning application for 5,500 square metres of student accommodation. The proposal would consist of two T-shaped blocks, block A would have 118 bedrooms and block B would have 86 bedrooms (total of 204 bedrooms). The two buildings would be located at right angles to each other with the Oak tree retained between the two buildings. A total of 33 car parking spaces would be provided to the north of block A.

## **3. PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS**

10/1588N - Full Planning Application for the Erection of an Office Development (B1 Use Class) with Associated Landscaping, Car Parking and Access Arrangements – Approved 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010

P03/1239 - Variation of Conditions 7 & 20 (P03/0639) – Withdrawn 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004

P03/0639 - Outline Application for Mixed use Development comprising Student Accommodation, Offices and Pub/Restaurant together with Access, Car Parking and Landscaping – Approved 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2003

## **4. PLANNING POLICIES**

### **National Policy**

The National Planning Policy Framework

### **Local Plan Policy**

E.1 (Existing Employment Allocations)

BE.1 (Amenity)

BE.2 (Design Standards)

BE.3 (Access and Parking)

BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)

BE.5 (Infrastructure)

NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)

NE.9 (Protected Species)

NE.20 (Flood Prevention)

TRAN.9 (Car Parking Standards)

### **Regional Spatial Strategy**

DP1 – Spatial Principles

DP2 – Promote Sustainable Communities

DP4 – Make the Best Use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure

EM18 – Decentralised Energy Supply

## **Other Considerations**

The EC Habitats Directive 1992

Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010

Circular 6/2005 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System

## **5. OBSERVATIONS OF CONSULTEES**

**United Utilities:** No objection, the site should be drained on a separate system with only foul drainage connected into the foul sewerage system.

**Highways Authority:** There is an existing issue with insufficient car parking and displacement. The transport statement makes reference to PPG13 and the Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan parking ratios. The CNLP parking standards would permit a maximum number of 68 spaces; the TRICS data base backs this up with results showing 71 spaces for similar size developments. In view of the existing problems a reduction in spaces would not be appropriate. The proposed development would only offer half the number of spaces and Beswick Drive and the surrounding roads/car parks already suffer with displaced parking from the existing student accommodation.

Since the completion of the draft traffic surveys in 2006 there has been a material change to the development assumptions and traffic patterns as the Council has been granted planning permission for the Crewe Green Link Road and gained funding. The Crewe Green Link Road will revise patterns of traffic using the Crewe Green Roundabout with some arms experiencing a reduction and others an increase in flows. A improvement to this junction is now required and improvements to the provision of cycling infrastructure are required and a contribution should be sought given the emphasis towards sustainable modes of transport within the TA.

The Strategic Highways and Transportation Manager is unable to support this application as any additional displaced vehicles onto the surrounding network will cause severe harm. An up to date Transport Statement and a robust Travel Plan are also required.

**Environmental Health:** Conditions requested in relation to contaminated land, hours of construction and pile foundations.

**Cheshire Wildlife Trust:** Cheshire Wildlife Trust would like to make the following comments;

- A protected species survey report by Biota dated April 2012 submitted with the current application is, word-for-word, the same as that submitted in April 2010 for the previous scheme, with the exception of an additional paragraph on great crested newts referring to earlier surveys of a pond within the Business Park. Although it is appreciated that conditions may not have changed substantially in the intervening period, the near-exact similarity between the two reports does tend to suggest that all elements of an updated survey may not have been carried out

on site as required. CWT would have expected the application to be accompanied by an updated protected species survey, based on a revisit of the site.

- The protected species survey should include the full great crested newt survey results from Biota's surveys carried out in May and June 2010; these post-date the April 2010 survey report and are therefore of relevance to the current application. However, apart from a passing reference in paragraph 3.4, no details have been supplied.

- Paragraph 2 refers to a data search made in 2010 and included as an appendix to the report – no such appendix is attached.

- During construction the Valley Brook corridor must be protected from direct and indirect pollution arising from on site activity. Apart from the proposed coppicing of existing trees, the Brook and its banks should be managed to achieve a net biodiversity gain from the proposed development. The Brook corridor should be cleared of any rubbish. Banks should be managed to ensure that alien and/or invasive species are eradicated, and to prevent direct access to much of the watercourse.

**Natural England:** This proposal does not appear to affect any statutorily protected sites or landscapes, or have significant impacts on the conservation of soils, nor is the proposal EIA development. Refer to Natural England standing advice.

**Environment Agency:** Object to the application. The FRA submitted with this application does not comply with the requirements set out in paragraph 9 of the Technical Guide to the National Planning Policy Framework. The submitted FRA does not provide a suitable basis for assessment to be made of the flood risks arising from the proposed development.

## **6. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

One letter of support has been received raising the following points;

- This proposal could bring wider benefits to the south east residential areas of Crewe
- By providing better student accommodation it could help reduce peak hour traffic in the Macon Way/Nantwich Road area from students forced to live further away. It could also reduce levels of street parking in Ludlow Avenue and Stanthorpe Avenue
- It may also help stop the Hungerford Road area deteriorating into an area of uncontrolled, poorly maintained private lettings which are beginning to effect the quality of the neighbourhood

## **7. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Design and Access Statement (Produced by AEW Architects and dated April 2012)

Planning Statement (Produced by AEW Architects and dated April 2012)

Draft Transport Statement (Produced by Shepherd Gilmour and dated April 2011)

Flood Risk Assessment (Produced by Shepherd Gilmour and dated May 2011)

Geo-Environmental Desk Study (Produced by Shepherd Gilmour and dated May 2011)

Aboriginal Survey, Impact Assessment and Method Statement (Produced by Lowther and dated March 2012)

These documents are available to view on the Councils website.

## **8. OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **Principle of Development**

At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be seen as a golden thread running through plan making and decision taking. For decision taking this means *'approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay'*.

The site is an existing employment allocation and is subject to Policy E.1.1 of the Local Plan. Policy E.1.1 states that the uses on the site should include;

*'B1 and any uses required by and associated with Manchester Metropolitan University. For the avoidance of doubt, such uses include classroom/teaching facilities, residential accommodation for students, indoor and outdoor sport and recreational facilities'*

As student accommodation is included within this definition the principle of development is considered to be acceptable.

### **Sustainability of the site**

The site would be sited in a sustainable location alongside the existing student accommodation for Manchester Metropolitan University. The site would have easy access to the university, a shop, food outlets and a public house. The site is therefore considered to be sustainable.

### **Amenity**

There are no residential properties in close proximity to the site. The existing student accommodation and hotel are set at angles to the proposed buildings with sufficient separation distances. As a result it is considered that there will be no impact upon residential amenity.

### **Design**

The proposed buildings would both be T shaped. Block A is to the west of the site and would be a mix of four and five storeys in height and would contain 118 bedrooms, block B which would be located adjacent to the Travel Lodge car park would be four storeys in height and would contain 86 bedrooms. The buildings would be located to either side of the central Oak tree which would be retained as part of the proposed development. There is an existing informal pedestrian route which runs across the site and across a bridge over Valley Brook; this route links the office buildings on the opposite side of Valley Brook to the parade of shops and

gym on the application side of Valley Brook. This route would be maintained as part of the proposed development.

The proposed buildings would be clad in black facing brick with render panels and white glazed bricks to create horizontality across the building. The blocks would be distinguished through the use of bands of different coloured glazed bricks which would run vertically and horizontally between the windows. The shape of the buildings includes a number of steps in the elevations to help to reduce the bulk of the buildings.

The height of the buildings is considered to be appropriate. Although part of block A would be five storeys in height it would be sited at a lower level to the existing student accommodation. This change in land level would mean that the proposed building would not appear taller than the adjacent buildings. Block B would be four storeys in height and would be taller than the adjacent parade of shops and the Travel Lodge. This height is also considered to be acceptable given the height of the buildings further to the west.

The proposed accommodation would be of a modern design and the bulk of the buildings would be reduced through the staggered elevations and the use of different blocks of material. Concerns have been raised previously regarding the prominence of the entrance points to both blocks, the plans have now incorporated render panels and canopies to help increase the prominence of the entrance points and this is considered to be acceptable.

The buildings would be of a modern appearance which is acceptable given the appearance of the existing buildings adjacent to the site and the office buildings on the opposite side of Valley Brook. The use of materials such as black brick and render are considered to be acceptable and has been used on the Emperor Court Office Building and the adjacent hotel on the opposite side of Valley Brook.

### **Flood Prevention/Drainage**

The site is located within a Flood Zone and is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment. The FRA states that there will be finished floor levels of the development will higher than the 1 in 100 year flood level from Valley Brook and as a result the flood risk from this source would be negligible.

In terms of ground water flooding the FRA identifies that the natural ground water is 2.3m below existing ground level and the risk is negligible. According to the FRA a sewer to the north of the site would not pose a risk to the development due to land levels proposed as part of the development.

The EA have been consulted and have raised an objection to the application on the grounds that the FRA does not comply with the requirements set out in paragraph 9 of the Technical Guide to the National Planning Policy Framework. Therefore the submitted FRA does not provide a suitable basis for assessment to be made of the flood risks arising from the proposed development and this issue will form a reason for refusal.

## **Highways**

The proposed development would create 204 one bed apartments for student accommodation with a total of 33 off-street car parking spaces. The maximum car parking standards contained within Appendix 8.1 of the Local Plan identify that Use Class C2 (Residential Institutions) requires one car parking space for every three beds. This would give a maximum requirement of 68 spaces to serve the development. This number of spaces is consistent with similar size developments on the TRICS database with results showing 71 spaces on similar developments. As a result the proposed development would provide less than half of the required parking requirement.

In this case the surrounding roads and private car parks already suffer from displaced car parking from the existing MMU accommodation. Allowing this development with less than half of the maximum car parking standards would result in a further increase in displaced parking which would be detrimental to highway safety. Therefore this issue will form a reason for refusal.

In terms of traffic generation, the traffic surveys within the draft transport statement do not take into account material changes in development assumptions and traffic patterns following the approval of the planning application for the Crewe Green Link Road and the approval of its funding. The Crewe Green Link Road revises patterns of traffic using the Crewe Green Roundabout.

Forecasts for the redistributed traffic flows and projected Crewe growth have confirmed that a junction improvement scheme is now required at this location and the council has developed a range of solutions which will be consulted on and be incorporated into the emerging Local Infrastructure Plan. To deliver any of these improvements potentially requires the review of the provision of cycling infrastructure on the roundabout to achieve the required forecast additional highway capacity within existing highway boundaries.

There is strong emphasis within the Transport Assessment on sustainable modes and it is considered that a contribution is required to support the future provision of cycling / walking facilities at Crewe Green Roundabout. Should the application be recommended for approval the level of contribution would need to be negotiated and secured via a S106 Agreement.

## **Renewable Energy Provision**

A feasibility report submitted with the application identifies that the 10% renewable energy provision will be met through the use of solar thermal water generation or through the use of combined heat and power (CHP) boilers. This is considered to be acceptable and this issue will be controlled via a planning condition.

## **Trees and Landscape**

A Tree Preservation Order (Area designation) covers much of the site from Crewe Green Road to the west to University Way to the east. A prominent mature Oak tree protected by the Order stands centrally within the application site with various Willows and Alder (some of which have been previously pollarded) located along the edge of Valley Brook which contribute to the screening of the site. An Arboricultural Survey has been submitted in support of the application which has recorded 10 individual and four groups of trees within the site.

The submitted Arboricultural Survey has identified two trees of moderate quality and value (B1) a Sycamore (T4 of the report) to the south east of the site and the aforementioned mature individual Oak (T107). The remaining trees have been assessed as low quality and value. These categories are considered to be an accurate assessment of the quality of the trees within the site.

The report identifies four trees (2 Hawthorns, a Sycamore and an immature Oak) that require removal for the development. All four are deemed to be of low quality and do not contribute significantly to the wider amenity of the area. One tree (an Ash) has been identified as unsafe and requires removal as it is considered a threat to the highway. A Horse Chestnut has also been identified as unstable due to poor rooting.

Coppicing works have been recommended to the groups of Willow which follow the boundary of Valley Brook due to the current poor quality of existing pollards. The report suggests that the pollarding works will reduce the required root protection area (RPA) of these trees and improve the management of the trees in the future. This approach effectively allows for the development footprint to be located closer to the belt of Willow trees.

The report proposes the retention of the mature Oak tree between Blocks A and B and suggests that this could be achieved by reducing the tree by 25% to prevent damage to the tree by development. This approach does not concur with advice contained within BS5837 which advises that the impact of the proposed development must allow for space and the trees future growth and maintenance requirements. A 25% reduction of the tree is not considered to be appropriate management in order to retain the tree within the development footprint as currently proposed and further consideration should be given to modify the design so as to avoid any unnecessary or inappropriate pruning.

The proposed site layout plan also shows the protected Oak enclosed between Blocks A and B and surrounded by hard standing with a low level brick retaining wall. Whilst the tree is partly surrounded by existing hardstanding which has compacted part of the root environment of the tree, there are concerns that an increased area of the root protection area will be covered by hard standing and the enclosure of the tree by the size and massing of the two blocks will impact upon the long term health and safe well being of the tree. The impact of the development upon this TPO tree will form a reason for refusal.

It is not considered that there would be an impact upon the wider landscape as although some screening vegetation would be lost the development would be seen

in the context of the adjacent developments. The landscape proposals included within the application are considered to be appropriate.

## **Ecology**

An updated protected species survey has been provided following concerns raised by the Councils Ecologist

The survey identifies that there is no evidence of Great Crested Newts, Bats, Water Vole or White Clawed Crayfish. The Councils Ecologist is satisfied that there will be no significant ecological issues associated with the development subject to the imposition of conditions to secure the recommendations contained within the protected species survey and protective fencing along the boundary with Valley Brook.

## **Other issues**

The proposals would allow a pedestrian link to be retained around the periphery of the site to the Valley Brook which is considered to be an important feature which should be retained.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

The site is located within the Crewe Settlement Boundary on a site which is allocated for such uses. As a result the principle of development is considered to be acceptable.

The proposal is considered to be of an acceptable design within a sustainable location and there would be no impact upon residential amenity. There would be no ecological impacts from this development.

The application site is located within flood zones 2 and 3 and the submitted FRA relies on data from 2008 and does not comply with the requirements of paragraph 9 of the Technical Guide to the NPPF. This issue will form a reason for refusal.

The level of car parking that would be provided is not sufficient to serve this proposed development and the proposal would exacerbate existing displaced parking problems in the area.

The site is located within close proximity to an existing Oak tree which is protected by a TPO. The extent of the works to this tree and the proximity of the development to the tree would have a detrimental impact upon the health and long term well being of this tree.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REFUSE**

- 1. The proposed development relates to the provision of 204 one bed apartments for student accommodation with the provision of 33 off street parking spaces. This level of parking provision is less than half of the maximum standard identified at Appendix 8.1 of the Local Plan and the area suffers from displaced parking from the existing student accommodation. The lack of off-street car parking on the site would further increase displaced car parking and would be detrimental to highway safety and the character and appearance of the area. As a result the proposed development would not be sustainable development and would be contrary to Policy BE.2 (Design Standards) and TRAN.9 (Car Parking Standards) of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 and the NPPF.**
  
- 2. The application site is located within flood zones 2 and 3 as identified by the Environment Agency. The submitted FRA does not comply with the requirements set out in paragraph 9 of the Technical Guide to the NPPF and does not provide a suitable basis for an assessment to be made of flood risks arising from the development. Furthermore the FRA relies on data from 2008 and is not considered to be up-to-date. In the absence of this information, to allow this development would be contrary to the NPPF, the Technical Guide to the NPPF and Policy NE.20 (Flood Prevention) of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011**
  
- 3. The proposed development would be located in close proximity to an Oak Tree which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order. The submitted arboricultural report suggests that this tree should be reduced by 25% to prevent damage to the tree from the development. The extent of tree reduction to accommodate the proposed development is not considered to be appropriate management in order to retain this tree. Furthermore the tree would be surrounded by hard standing and a retaining wall within the root protection area and together with the buildings to either side the development will have a detrimental impact upon the long term health and well being of the tree. The development would be contrary to Policy NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats) of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 and the NPPF.**

