

Southern Planning Committee – 6th January 2016

UPDATE TO AGENDA

APPLICATION No.

15/2391N – Outline Application for Erection of up to 10 dwellings

LOCATION

Land to the Rear Of New House Farm, CLAY LANE, HASLINGTON

UPDATE PREPARED

4th January 2016

OFFICER REPORT

Employment Land

Since publication of the agenda, there has been some concern expressed regarding the loss of employment land associated with the proposals. In response to concerns regarding the loss of employment land, the applicant's agent has stated that the site is not suitable for current or future employment uses both within the Planning Statement and a supplementary letter.

Paragraph 22 of the NPPF states that;

'Planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose.... Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits having regard to market signals and the relative need for the different land uses to support sustainable local communities.'

Although this statement refers to planning policies and not how planning applications should be considered, it provides a steer as to how the government wishes Local Planning Authorities to consider sites allocated for employment use and as such, this is a material consideration.

Local Plan Policy E.7 and emerging Policy EG3 seek to protect existing employment sites such as this one. Policy E.7 states that the redevelopment of existing employment sites will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:

- The present use harms the character or amenities of the surrounding area
- The site is not capable of satisfactory use for employment and overriding local benefits would come from the proposed development; or
- It can be demonstrated that there will be no detrimental impact on the supply of employment land or premises in the borough

Emerging Policy EG3 advises existing employment sites will be protected for employment use unless;

- Premises are causing significant nuisance or environmental problems that could not be mitigated; or
- The site is no longer suitable or viable for employment use; and
 - There is no potential for modernisation or alternate employment uses; and
 - No other occupiers can be found.'

Whilst the proposal is a non-confirming use within the open countryside, the site performs a valuable function by offering flexible employment floor space to small businesses in the area. The applicant asserts that the present use causes harm to the character and amenity of the area.

It is acknowledged that there would be some benefit from removing the existing buildings and outside storage areas from the site and this would enable to the council to consider a future reserved matters scheme which is more sensitive to the visual amenities of the area and the surrounding countryside. However, the present visual harm is not overly significant and therefore it is considered that this benefit carries limited weight. The use of the site for employment purposes is not therefore causing significant nuisance or environmental problems relating to character or amenity.

The applicant has also stated that they consider that the site is no longer suitable or viable for employment uses. However, this argument mainly relates to the fact that there is limited scope to expand the site owing to its location within open countryside. Whilst it is accepted that there is limited scope to expand the site, this does not warrant its loss neither does it quench the need for employment floor space in the area, as is demonstrated by the presence of a number of businesses operating from the site and the fact that the site has not been marketed for employment uses / or other alternative complimentary uses.

There would be some local benefit through the provision of affordable housing in the locality and the delivery of some additional housing. However, owing to the small size of the scheme, such benefits are limited and would not justify the loss of an employment site alone.

With respect to the supply of employment land, the Local Plan Strategy examination Inspector has indicated, via his interim views letter published in November 2014 that the Council needs to be more ambitious in terms of jobs growth. The Council commissioned Ekosgen to look at what would be realistic job targets and they have indicated that it should be 0.7% instead of the 0.4% shown in the LPS. This means planning for an increase in jobs from around 13,900 to 31,400 over the Plan period. Crewe is our main employment centre and the Inspector has indicated that he is happy with our settlement hierarchy and general distribution in PG6 [Policy], albeit that he would like to see some

more employment / housing development in the north. So to meet this significant up lift in job targets the Council will need good employment sites.

The employment land generated by the site is needed to provide for the emerging employment strategy in the Local Plan which looks to a 2030 horizon and, while setting the scene for HS2, it this does not take account of it. HS2 will mean an even greater requirement for suitable employment land and the Council will take account of this in the next Local Plan once the current LPS is approved i.e. the policy direction is clearly to maintain a supply of good employment sites and this is in line with the NPPF idea of creating sustainable communities / need for sustainable development.'

This site is not ideally located in terms of its location within open countryside and also its accessibility in terms of public transport and by foot. Thus, whilst the employment floor space that is accommodated at this site is in demand, there are clear benefits of relocating it and expanding it in a more sustainable location elsewhere in the Borough, for example in or adjacent to Crewe nearby where the site would be more accessible. This is the main vision and aspiration of the landowners / applicant and this development would assist in this by allowing them to secure an alternative site elsewhere via the proposed s106 legal agreement. Subject to this, there would be no detrimental harm to the supply of employment land in the borough and consequently the proposal would not deviate from the spirit of Local Plan Policies E.7 and EG.3 and advice within the NPPF para 22.

Other Matters

Updated comments from the Council's Affordable Housing Section to specify the exact level of affordable housing (on-site and / or commuted sum towards offsite provision) have yet to be received at the time of writing this update. As such, if Members are minded to approve, it is recommended that authority be delegated to the Head of Planning (Regulation) in consultation with the Chairman of the Southern Planning Committee to approve the application as per the resolution on page 55 of the agenda reports pack.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to updated affordable housing provision and in accordance with the relation outlined on page 55 of the agenda reports pack.