

## **NORTHERN PLANNING COMMITTEE –5<sup>Th</sup> October 2016**

### **UPDATE TO AGENDA**

#### **APPLICATION NO.**

16/2121M

#### **LOCATION**

Guy Salmon Knutsford, Manchester Road, Knutsford, WA16 0ST

#### **UPDATE PREPARED**

27/09/2016

#### **KEY ISSUES**

##### **Administrative error**

Reason for Councillor call-in in report related to another application in Knutsford.

Reasons for call-in should read: Councilor Hayley Wells Bradshaw shares the concerns of the Knutsford Community Groups and Knutsford Town Council as it is not in keeping with design and style in Knutsford and grossly inappropriate changes especially the proposed cladding in the Green Belt.

##### **Comments received by Knutsford Conservation and Heritage Group (KCHG) not shown in report**

1. Knutsford Conservation and Heritage Group (KCHG) objects to this application on the following grounds:

(i) The proposed design is totally inappropriate to its setting. The application shows a failure in understanding the importance of Knutsford's heritage USP – its built, natural and cultural heritage which attracts residents, businesses and visitors. Knutsford is simply not "anytown" (an expression used generically by the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions). Instead:

- Knutsford has been described by CEC<sup>1</sup> as "one of two key historic towns in Cheshire East and its heritage and distinctiveness need to be maintained and enhanced". (The other town cited is Nantwich, not located in the Green Belt.)
- As stated by CEC's Leaders (former and current): "I understand how important Knutsford is to Cheshire East, let's be very clear on that."

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<sup>1</sup> Cheshire East Local Plan "Shaping our Future. A Development Strategy for Jobs and Sustainable Communities". CEC document of January 2013.

Knutsford is an incredibly special town, one of our two key heritage towns with Nantwich and it is a place we want to preserve.”<sup>2</sup> And [Knutsford is] “a beautiful, beautiful town, a desirable place to live with wonderful heritage.”<sup>3</sup>

- According to the Sunday Times<sup>4</sup>, Knutsford is rated amongst the ‘Top 50 Best Towns and Suburbs to Live’ in the UK.
- Knutsford makes an important contribution to the Borough’s economy. A key part of that derives from the town’s attraction to residents, businesses and visitors. As examples:
  - “a large proportion of the £40.8m generated at the site [of Booths Park, Knutsford] is likely to be captured in the local economy, supporting local retailers<sup>5</sup>.” (CEC recognises Booths Park as a key employment area in the Borough.)
  - The town attracts many visitors<sup>6</sup>, contributing significantly to the visitor economy of Cheshire East, Tatton Park (adjacent to Knutsford) itself contributing a “net output to the local economy of £8.8m” in 2011<sup>7</sup>.
- One of the principal landowners in Knutsford is The Crown Estate. As it stated in 2015<sup>8</sup>: “An exceptional place merits exceptional planning.” There is a theme here of enabling the growth of Knutsford whilst respecting continuity. As Pevsner stated in 1971<sup>9</sup>: “Knutsford is the most attractive town of its size in Cheshire”. KCHG and other Knutsford Community Groups have worked closely to help achieve consensus in the scale and locations of key future development proposals.

(ii) The factor of context at (i) above, evidenced robustly, is relevant particularly with the Manchester Road A50 location of the garage at a key gateway to the entrance to the town. To KCHG, if the dealership wishes to make a statement, it should be in keeping with Knutsford and its heritage distinctiveness, not incongruous. The existing appearance of the dealership is acceptable in the rural area in which the showroom is positioned, near the edge of the settlement of Knutsford. To KCHG, the dealership’s image could be argued to be enhanced by its existing building design quality.

(iii) CEC’s Residential Design Guide<sup>10</sup> emphasises the importance of good design. Although the Design Guide is for residential use, its principles apply

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<sup>2</sup> Comment of Councillor Jones. [www.knutsford.com](http://www.knutsford.com) of 16 November 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Comment of Councillor Bailey. Knutsford Guardian, 13 April 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Dated March 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Planning application 13/3293M: Booths Park, Knutsford. Economic Need and Benefits. Regeneris Consulting. August 2013.

<sup>6</sup> As evidenced by visitors from all over the UK and all over the world to Knutsford Heritage Centre, as recorded in its Visitors Book.

<sup>7</sup> Planning application 12/1166M: Bewilderwood outdoor adventure attraction. EIA Scoping Report. Bidwells. 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The Crown Estate: “Knutsford – Helping to meet long term needs”. Document of June 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Pevsner N and Hubbard E: “The Buildings of England. Cheshire”. 1971.

<sup>10</sup> The Cheshire East Borough Design Guide. A Supplementary Planning Document. January 2016.

also to other uses – as at the Rolls Royce and Land Rover dealership. In particular, KCHG notes its following messages:

- “We need to ensure ... that new development is positively designed to reflect the character of the Borough. New developments need to harmonise rather than jar with the settlements from which they evolve.”
- “We have created places that have watered down the character and variety within our town and villagescapes, undermining the remarkable qualities of our area by creating places with little or no regard for local context and that look like anywhere else in the country rather than being specific to here.”

(iv) The issue of environmental sustainability, always relevant, seems of particular relevance when the application’s stated reason for the proposed works is simply: “to update the appearance” of the dealership “to the current Land Rover corporate identity”. To some people such might seem a relatively trivial reason and unimpressive for the relative sophistication of the dealership’s target buyer market.

(v) The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, para 87) requires “very special circumstances” to justify the approval of inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Such circumstances have not been set out.

2. KCHG is concerned about this case and is aware that Cllr Wells-Bradshaw has requested call-in to CEC’s Northern Planning Committee. Whether or not that call-in request is agreed, KCHG’s objection pertains. The case is important in itself and even more so as an indicator of CEC’s seriousness of purpose in applying practically its stated recognition of Knutsford, and the principle of “Sense of Place” in CEC’s Residential Design Guide. In short, CEC’s response to this application is a good test of the Council’s values and at a key time, as Knutsford and elsewhere accommodate more development through growth policies.