

Application No: 16/3021N

Location: Former car park at Radway Green Road, Alsager, Crewe, CW1 5UJ

Proposal: Change of use from car park (sui generis) to a mixed B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution). To be used for the storage of Cabins and Modular Accommodation and used as a Depot to work from.

Applicant: Emma Sands, AD Modular Ltd

Expiry Date: 18-Aug-2016

CONCLUSION:

This is a retrospective application on a 'brownfield' site, for a business providing employment. Whilst it is within the open countryside, it is ideally situated for access to the M6 making it locationally sustainable.

From an economic sustainability perspective, the scheme will provide employment opportunities in the local area and other economic benefits that would derive from that employment provision.

From an environmental and social perspective the proposal is considered to be acceptable in the impact upon, amenity, parking, highway safety and traffic generation terms.

Subject to the retention of the hedgerow on the boundary with Radway Green Road, to a minimum of 2 metres in height, the impact on visual amenity is considered to be acceptable.

It is necessary to impose a condition restricting the hours of operation in order to protect the amenity of nearby residential properties.

The proposals are considered to be a sustainable form of development which would comply with the relevant local plan policies and would not compromise key sustainability principles as set out in national planning policy.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve subject to conditions

DEFERRAL

The application was deferred from the Southern Planning Committee meeting on 9th August 2017 to allow Members to visit the site prior to making a decision.

CALL IN

The application has been called in to Committee by Cllr Marren on the grounds of the modular units being stacked high causing harm to the character of the area.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is for a retrospective change of use from a car cark (sui generis), to a mixed B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) use. It is used for the storage of cabins and modular accommodation used as a depot to work from.

Fundamentally the site is being used for the storage of modular buildings that are then distributed to where they are needed.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises a largely triangular shaped plot situated on the south eastern side of Radway Green Road, Alsager. It was formerly a car park serving the Radway Green ammunition factory run by BAE Systems.

RELEVANT HISTORY

No relevant planning history relating to this site.

NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY

It should be noted that the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 27th July 2017. There are however policies within the legacy local plans that still apply and have not yet been replaced. These policies are set out below.

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030 July 2017

PG 2 Settlement Hierarchy

PG6 Open Countryside

SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles

SE 1 Design

SE 2 Efficient Use of Land

SE 4 The Landscape

SE 5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

SE 9 Energy Efficient Development

SE 12 Pollution, Land Contamination and Land Instability

SE 13 Flood Risk and Water Management

PG 1 Overall Development Strategy

EG 1 Economic Prosperity

EG 2 Rural Economy

EG 3 Existing and Allocated Employment Sites

LPS 23 Radway Green Brownfield Alsager.

Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Adopted Local Plan 2011

BE.1: Amenity

BE.4: Drainage, Utilities and Resources

NE.17: Pollution Control

E.1: Existing Employment Allocations

The Haslington Neighbourhood Plan has only reached Regulation 7 stage and as such carries no weight.

National Policy:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

CONSULTATIONS:

Parish/Town Council: No comments received at the time of report writing.

Highways: No objection.

Environmental Protection: No objection.

Network Rail: No objection subject to units not being stored within 2 metres of the boundary with the railway.

Environment Agency: No objection.

Health & Safety Executive (Explosives Inspectorate): No objection subject to the modular buildings not being stacked to more than 12 metres in height.

Flood Risk Manager: No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS:

Neighbour notification letters were sent to neighbouring properties and a site notice posted.

At the time of report writing representations have been received from 5 properties. These can be viewed in full on the Council website. The representations express several concerns including the following:

- The site is an eyesore and needs to be screened
- The buildings are unsightly
- A planning application should have been submitted prior to the site coming into use
- Damage to highway verges
- Loss of privacy
- There are more units on the site than has been applied for

APPRAISAL

The key issues to be considered in the determination of this application are set out below.

Principle of Development

The site is the former car park for the BAE Systems site and is allocated as an existing employment site in the Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan. It is within Strategic Site Allocation LPS 23 in the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

LPS 23 seeks to ensure that the site as a whole provides high quality employment for the area. The modular building business may not be considered to meet this requirement; however there is no definition within the policy of what constitutes high quality. The business does provide local employment and has been operating from the site for in excess of a year. If the business moved from the site it could easily be returned to its former use as no significant engineering works have taken place.

Spatial Planning have stated that there is no specific definition of 'high quality employment' and no definitive development brief for the site at the current time.

Given the strategic vision for the site in the future, it is considered that consent should be granted for a temporary period of two years, in case proposals come forward for significant redevelopment of the site.

Subject to a temporary consent for three years, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle.

Sustainability

The National Planning Policy Framework definition of sustainable development is:

"Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate. Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment"

There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy

an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places

and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

These roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Highways

The Head of Strategic Infrastructure (HSI) has assessed the application and raises no objection to it. This is due to the fact that the site was previously a large car park and therefore the change of use would be unlikely to lead to an increase in vehicle movements.

The HSI considers that the visibility at the access is acceptable and does not cause detriment to highway safety. There is adequate parking provision within the site to ensure that on-street parking is not generated from the site. There is no issue with on street parking in the area caused by the loss of the car park to the BAE Systems site.

Visual Amenity

When the development first came to the attention of the Council the modular buildings were stacked two high adjacent to the boundary with Radway Green Road, which was having a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the area. Following discussions with the applicant all the double stacks adjacent to the boundary were reduced to single storey.

The hedgerow on the boundary has now been allowed to grow to a height that provides additional screening to the site. This has improved the appearance of the site and it is considered that if the application is approved, a condition should be imposed requiring retention of this hedgerow at a **minimum** height of 2 metres in order to ensure that an adequate level of screening is provided. The 'Principle of Development' section of this report refers to allowing a temporary permission for a period of three years. This would also allow for monitoring of the screening and operation of the site.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The Framework includes a strong presumption in favour of economic growth.

Paragraph 19 states that:

'The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth'.

Specifically, in relation to the rural economy the Framework identifies that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.

'The economic benefits of the development need to be balanced against the impact upon the open countryside.

The applicants occupied the site without the benefit of planning permission as they were under the misapprehension that it was not required. When approached by the Council they submitted the application and following advice, removed the double stacked units from the boundary of the site and submitted a revised layout plan.

The company has made it clear that it wants to work with the community and provide local employment, and to this end has been having active discussions with members of the Alsager Partnership.

Due to its previous use as a car park, it can be considered as previously developed land, albeit that it lies within open countryside. The Framework in paragraph 17 encourages the reuse of previously developed (brownfield) land provided that it is not of high environmental value. As the site was a hard surfaced car park, it certainly had no significant environmental value.

In paragraph 19 of the Framework, it is clear that the Government requires the planning system to do everything it can to support sustainable economic growth and to encourage not impede sustainable growth.

This is a business that is providing employment and supplying modular buildings to many sectors including industry, schools and healthcare. The site being in such close proximity to Junction 16 of the M6, is ideally placed for a business of this type that supplies sites across the country and as such it is considered to be locationally sustainable.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The approval for the use of the site would retain existing employment to the benefit of the employees and the area.

Residential Amenity

Objections have been received from local residents expressing concerns about the impact on the visual amenity of the area, loss of privacy and operating at weekends, early mornings and late evenings.

The issue of visual amenity is an important one and as set out in this report, additional screening by the hedgerow is ongoing and should be secured by condition.

Having regard to privacy, the modular buildings, other than the office and welfare buildings are not and will not be occupied. As such they should have no adverse impact on the privacy of nearby residential properties.

The application form states that the hours of opening would be 7.00am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, however the occupier of a nearby residential property has supplied photographs and emails stating that the site has been operating out of these hours. This includes Saturday at 8.00am and Sunday at 8.30pm.

Without a planning permission in place and the appropriate conditions being imposed, it is not possible for the Council to control this. Therefore should approval be granted, in order to control operations on the site, it is recommended that a condition should be imposed restricting operations to 7.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 1.00pm on Saturdays and no working on Sundays or public holidays. This would give flexibility to the business whilst also protecting the residential amenity of nearby properties.

Conclusion – The Planning Balance

This is a retrospective application on a 'brownfield' site, for a business providing employment. Whilst it is within the open countryside, it is ideally situated for access to the M6 making it locationally sustainable.

From an economic sustainability perspective, the scheme will provide employment opportunities in the local area and other economic benefits that would derive from that employment provision.

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The proposals are considered to be a sustainable form of development which would comply with the relevant local plan policies and would not compromise key sustainability principles as set out in national planning policy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Approved plans**
- 2. Temporary permission for three years**
- 3. Hedgerow boundary with Radway Green Road retained at a minimum of 2 metres in height**
- 4. Modular buildings shall not be stacked on top of each other adjacent to the boundary with the site**
- 5. Modular buildings shall not be stacked in sets of more than 2**
- 6. Modular buildings shall not be stored within 2 metres of the boundary with the railway line**

- 7. Hours of operation restricted to 7.am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 1.00pm Saturdays with no working on Sundays and public holidays**

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/informatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning (Regulation) has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Southern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

