

Appendix 2 to Item D5

APPLICATION TM/05/3315 – OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED COMMERCIAL SERVICES HQ AND ALTERATIONS TO EXISTING ACCESS AT POPLARS BUSINESS PARK, LONDON ROAD, WROTHAM

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site visit Poplars Business Park, London Road, Wrotham on Tuesday, 17 January 2006.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr R E King (Chairman), Mr A R Bassam (Vice-Chairman), Mrs V J Dagger, Mr J B O Fullarton, Mrs E Green, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr T A Maddison, Mr A R Poole, Ms B J Simpson, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mr F Wood-Brignall. *Mrs Dagger was present as the local Member.*

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley and Mr P Hopkins (Planning), Mr R Dines (Highways) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services).

THE APPLICANT: Mr P Lott (KCC Highway Services) and Mr D Crofts (R P S Planning).

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES: Tonbridge and Malling BC: Mr M Coffin (local Member) and Mrs M Geary (Planning); Wrotham PC (Mr H Rayner and Mr P Gillin).

- (1) The Chairman opened the meeting by explaining that its purpose was for Members of the Committee to see the application site and listen to the views of statutory consultees and technical officers.
- (2) Mr Hopkins introduced the application by saying that the purpose of the proposal would be to serve the West Kent road network as one of three divisional "super depots" within the County following reorganisation of its Highways Services. He pointed out the proximity of the M20 and M26. The application sought outline permission for the demolition of existing warehousing and storage areas on the site and the erection of a 3 storey office building, garaging for lorries, a salt barn and storage areas, with associated car parking and landscaping to form an integrated Road Services Depot.
- (3) Mr Hopkins explained that an illustrative layout had been submitted with the application to show how the structures and necessary elements of the development might be arranged on the site. Comments made about the proposal had been based on this illustrative layout, although it was not intended to be definitive at this stage and was likely to change.

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- (4) Mr Hopkins then stated that the site was approximately 1.7 hectares in area. He pointed out the Oakdene Transport Café on the north western boundary as well as the neighbouring residential properties on the south western, western and south eastern boundaries and the farmland to the north east and east.
- (5) Mr Hopkins said that the site lay within the Metropolitan Green Belt, although its southwestern half was part of a larger site within the Green Belt that was identified for redevelopment in the Local Plan. The site was also within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the North Downs Special Landscape Area.
- (6) Mr Hopkins then pointed out the location of the access and parking at the front of the site, the office, salt barn, retention pond, perimeter parking spaces and indigenous landscaping on the illustrative layout.
- (7) Mr Hopkins concluded his presentation by saying that the Planners had asked for clarification and further information on a number of issues. Further consultation would follow once this was received. He then identified the main issues that would need to be considered in determining the application. These were:
- the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and whether or not this was outweighed by very special circumstances;
 - the impact of the development on the Landscape (taking into account that the land was within an AONB and SLA);
 - the impact of the development on local amenity given the proximity of residential properties;
 - the impact of additional traffic generated by the development.
- (8) Mr Crofts (RPS Planning) that the applicants were looking to provide further information to address the concerns of the Borough and Parish Councils. They were particularly concerned about the impact on the Green Belt and AONB. A Landscape and Visual Assessment would also be provided within the next few weeks.
- (9) Mrs Dagger (Local Member) said that her main concern (shared by CPRE) was over the impact of additional emissions, given the proximity of the M26. Mr Hopkins confirmed that the questions of air quality and air pollution had been raised by the Parish Council who had drawn attention to measurements taken by the Borough Council. The concerns and accompanying data had been referred to the applicants and the Planners were taking further advice.
- (10) Mr Crossley answered Members' questions by saying that there were Air Quality Monitoring Stations all over the County, which each covered a wide

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area. Their precise location was factored in to any calculations of measurements taken of sites in their proximity.

- (11) Mr Rayner (Chairman – Wrotham PC) said that he would not repeat what he had already told the Planners. There was, however, additional information that Members might find useful. He had known the site since 1985 when it was a full time packing station. The site had then been unused from November 1985 to 2003. A number of applications had then been brought forward to Tonbridge and Malling BC for general use. Permission had always been refused.
- (12) Mr Rayner then explained that the hardcore at the northeastern end of the site was officially green space that had been laid without permission.
- (13) Mr Rayner continued by saying that the site behind the trees was a Residential Home for the Mentally Handicapped. The Health Authority had informed him that it had not been notified about the proposal. Mr Crossley confirmed that the Health Authority had now been contacted.
- (14) Mr Gillin (Wrotham PC) said that he was concerned about the size and scale of the proposed development in a residential setting. According to the illustrative layout, there would be a three storey office block with an HGV depot in the centre. The applicants had stated that a vehicle would be entering and leaving the site every 20 seconds. This needed to be very carefully considered. So too did the visual impact of large buildings and 100 car parking spaces.
- (15) Mr Hopkins said that information in the application indicated that 182 vehicles would enter and exit the site during peak hours (0800 to 0900 and 1700 to 1800). This would incorporate people travelling to and from work as well as the operational side. Mr Crossley confirmed that this would include office staff from Gravesend as well as operational staff.
- (16) Mr Dines (Divisional Transportation) said that traffic consultants had been asked to look at the detail of capacity. In general terms, the proposal worked in terms of capacity. However, it still needed to be examined in detail before final advice could be given.
- (17) Mrs Dagger said that there was a concern that the danger was that no less than three junctions could be blocked as a result of the proposal.
- (18) Mr Maddison asked about the height of the salt barn and why the offices needed to be three storeys high. Mr Crofts replied that, at present it was proposed that the salt barn would be 13 metres high and that if the offices were to be three storeys, this would amount to 11 metres. Recently received information from KCC Property, however, suggested that there would be

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fewer people working on site, needing less floor space. Therefore the size of the office building could be reduced. Information received at Christmas suggested that the amount of salt to be stored would be 4,000 rather than 2,500 tonnes. It was not intended that it would be any higher but it would cover a larger footprint. In order to lower it, the footprint would have to increase further.

- (19) Mr Coffin (Tonbridge and Malling BC Member) asked how many alternative sites had been looked at. Mr Crofts said that about 50 sites had been looked at. Mr Hopkins said that Planners were awaiting details of this search. Mr Gillin said that Wrotham PC had sent a long letter to the applicants asking for evidence of the search. The Parish Council supported the co-location strategy but remained to be convinced that this was the right one.
- (20) Mr Rayner asked whether the existing Highways centres would remain or close. Mr Dines said that he did not know. Mr Crossley said that all the Highways Management sites were subject to review. If permission were granted to this proposal, there would have to be an impact on other sites, but it was not known which ones. In planning terms, however, this was not a consideration.
- (21) Mr Rayner said that, nevertheless, the suitability of existing sites should be strongly considered before this Green Belt site was sacrificed to a development of this nature.
- (22) Mr Davies asked how water would be drained from the site (given the gentle slope to the south). Mr Hopkins indicated that details had not been submitted with the application and could be covered by condition. Mr Rayner said that the existing drainage ran underneath the M26 to the hotel, then into a tributary of the Medway, which it joined near Beltring.
- (23) In response to a question from Mr Fullarton, Mr Dines said that Kent Highways was not responsible for the Motorway network. It was unlikely that permission would be granted for an additional access directly onto the M26 from the site.
- (24) Mr Crofts confirmed that vehicles would be able to take on fuel at the site, necessitating storage facilities. He was not yet sure where this would be as the proposal was still at the outline stage. The strict regulations for garages would therefore apply on site.
- (25) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The notes of this site visit would be appended to the Head of Planning Applications Group's report to the determining Committee meeting.