

## **Draft Extract of Minutes from the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 11 May 2022**

**Proposal:** Full planning application for the proposed erection of 5 no. buildings for commercial development to provide flexible light industrial, general industrial, and storage and distribution uses, with ancillary offices, associated car parking, formation of new accesses, and landscape planting, following demolition of existing buildings.

**Applicant:** HE2 Reading 1 GP Limited

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 127 to 196.

The Committee were advised that updates contained within the Supplementary Planning Agenda included:

- Additional clarification regarding a potential calculation of employment opportunities created by the proposed development, and clarification that the scheme was in accordance with planning policy regarding economic development;
- Clarification that the set back of the proposed development from the boundary would ensure the angle of view would not be significantly altered;
- Reference to additional comment received after the publication of the agenda with regards to preservation of the building on the site due to its history.

Keith Baker, Woodley Town Council, spoke in objection to the application. Keith stated that Woodley Town Council's Planning Committee had considered this application and had recommended refusal for a number of reasons. Keith stated that the current plans reflected parking provision for up to 28 articulated lorries, which was simply not appropriate and would overwhelm the highways infrastructure surrounding the site. Keith added that Viscount Way was not suitable for large volumes of traffic due to its width and proximity to a large number of residential properties. Keith stated that additional HGVs had been granted permission to the area recently as a result of an application from another company, whilst noting that this application would further add to this problem. Keith felt that the situation would be unsustainable on Viscount Way should this application be approved. Residents were also concerned that the additional noise and air pollution generated by this development would have a detrimental impact. Woodley Town Council's Planning Committee noted that the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework, CP1, advised that planning permission would be granted for development proposals that avoid areas where pollution including noise would impact on the amenity of future occupiers. Keith felt that the proposed building to the east of the site would be overbearing due to its height and massing to those neighbouring properties on Gemini Road, whilst operations taking place outside of regular business hours would be detrimental to residents on neighbouring streets.

Kai Meade, neighbour, spoke in objection to the application. Kai stated that the traffic assessment report provided by the developer did not consider any HGV movements within the report, whilst being incorrectly calculated and was a reason for refusal. The results of air quality testing within the surrounding area between November and January last year indicated that air quality levels were already breaching the WHO levels of what was considered safe, whilst the report added that further testing would be required within the summer months whereby pollution levels would be at least sixty-percent higher. Kai stated that residents were already suffering immensely due to existing haulage businesses which were creating pollution, affecting the health of residents and the development of local children's lungs. Kai added that Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) planning and environmental health officers were acutely aware of the damaging situation on residents health, with a noise report, medical records and various dust analysis having been submitted. Kai was of the opinion that residents of the Redrow and Baker's Place developments would be condemned to the same extreme health damaging pollution as experienced by other residents, and Kai urged the Committee to refuse the application.

Julian Temple, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Julian commented that he was the author of 'Wings over Woodley', and felt that the former Miles Aircraft Headquarters was important to the local community and to aviation history. An online petition to save this local landmark had attracted over 4,500 signatures, whilst polls on local social media had seen most responses favouring retention of the building. The building had been subject to three separate listing requests to Historic England, and whilst the building had not met the required criteria this did not mean that it was unimportant. Julian stated that a built heritage statement was submitted by the applicant when requested by the WBC conservation officer and promoted by Councillor Boyt, however Julian was of the opinion that this report was woefully inadequate and he had uploaded a four-page review of his own which he would have expected the conservation officer to review both documents, visit the site and produce a revised report to the planning officer. Julian added that there was no sound reason as to why the architecturally distinguished headquarters could not be repurposed as part of the site's redevelopment. Julian queried whether all options for conserving the site had been fully explored.

Tai Shopido, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Tai wished to give a healthcare professional and ex-Berkshire Commissioner perspective of the application. Tai stated that there was a growing prevalence of COPD and other cardiovascular conditions across the Borough in addition to the growing number of hospital conditions in relation to these conditions. Tai stated that he had not opened his windows for 6 years due to pollution in the area. Tai referenced the chaos caused by large numbers of HGVs already present in the area, and urged the Committee to refuse the application.

Andy Ryley, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Andy stated that the scheme would redevelop a brown field site as strongly

encouraged by WBC policies. Key benefits would be provided including a modern and energy efficient commercial building, an increase of between 70 and 180 new jobs, approximately 2700m<sup>2</sup> additional commercial floor space, a significantly increased separation distance of 7.5m to residential properties on the eastern side of the site, reduced noise from the current use as a result of improved design and reorientation of buildings, improved access on to Headley Road East and dedicated onsite parking which had been accepted by highways officers, significantly improved soft landscaping across the site including across the eastern boundary of the site with substantial amounts of new tree plantings as agreed with the landscape officer, new wildlife habitats including native planting and nesting boxes, and a contribution to WBC's employment skills programme. Andy added that the site was not locally or statutory listed nor was it within the conservation area, whilst the remainder of the aircraft site had been redeveloped over time into residential and industrial use, and no suggestion had been made for these surrounding developments that there was any heritage significance to be considered. Andy stated that the building conservation officer had no objection on heritage ground for this site, whilst Historic England had carefully considered the site and had concluded that the building was not worthy of statutory listing, however photographic documentation would be required. Andy confirmed that WBC highways officer had demonstrated no adverse highways impact as a result of the proposals, and confirmed that the application would conform to local and national planning policies. Andy urged the Committee to approve the application.

Shirley Boyt, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Shirley stated that all Bulmershe and Whitegates Ward Members were united against the proposed development. Shirley stated that of the 250 objections to the application 110 were against the demolition of the Miles office building, whilst an online petition seeking to retain and restore the building had received over 4,500 signatures. Shirley felt that the building could be upgraded internally to modern standards and be used for any number of commercial purposes, and voiced disappointment that the applicant had not considered these options and had instead chosen a standardised industrial unit. Shirley asked that the last remaining piece of Woodley's aviation history be retained. Shirley stated that paragraph 185 of the NPPF stated that planning policy and decisions should take into account the cumulative effects of pollution, health, living conditions and the natural environment. Shirley commented that the technical note to the transport assessment stated that the site was not designed to accommodate distribution type activities, and as such this was not considered within forecasting options. Shirley added that the technical note did not make sense when taking into account 20 HGV loading bays were proposed, of which several if not all units could be used for distribution, which would bring additional HGVs and forklift trucks into an area where the health, wellbeing and safety of residents was already seriously compromised from existing haulage operators. Shirley felt that this application should, at the very least, be deferred to await a fresh transport assessment to include a forecast of additional HGV movements. Shirley raised concerns that no detrimental impact was identified in terms of environmental health in the absence of modelling for the number of new HGVs entering the area. Shirley stated that

the impact on residential amenity via the bulk and overbearing nature of unit 10 would be significant and had not in her opinion been adequately addressed by the fencing and landscaping proposals. Shirley sought clarity that the new employment opportunities would account for the 160 or more jobs, many of which being skilled engineering jobs, that would be lost from the company currently occupying the site.

Graham Vaughan, case officer, responded to a number of points raised by public speakers. Graham stated that the site currently had no restrictions on the numbers of HGVs or the time when they could arrive and works could commence. Graham added that the use of the site had been in place for some time, and there was no planning permission in place to control that use. Agreement of the proposals would give WBC control over various aspects of the site compared to the current arrangement. Graham commented that the scheme included an access road which would join up Headley Road East and Viscount Way, which should be more attractive for HGV movements when compared to Gemini Road. Graham stated that a condition was proposed regarding signage, to encourage vehicles to use the vehicular access road rather than via Gemini Road. Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage and Compliance, stated that part of the road to the south was private. As the site was currently unrestricted, granting planning permission would allow an element of control in terms of access and vehicle movements. Chris added that B2 use of the site had been conditioned to 35 percent of the total floor space which would reduce pressure on parking. Graham Vaughan stated that the heritage officer had been consulted and had not objected to the application, whilst Historic England had considered that the site did not warrant listing via their designated listing process. Graham added that the planning system was plan led, whereby policies were in place to determine applications. The NPPF stated that schemes needed to be determined via a balanced judgement process, and for this application that meant balancing the significance of the built structure compared to the benefits of the proposed scheme. It was deemed that the building no longer expressed the original use of the site as the Woodley airfield had been removed to the extent that the building did not read as a part of its surroundings. The officer judgement was that when the benefits of the scheme were weighed up against the significance of the structure, the benefits clearly outweighed the significance in this case.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey was of the opinion that it was wrong for the last piece of the Borough's ties to the Battle of Britain to be removed, and felt that the proposed use of the site was located in the wrong area. Graham Vaughan stated that the site had been designated for such a use under WBC's core strategy.

Andrew Mickleburgh commented that a very significant number of people felt that the site retained significant historic importance. Andrew sought officer comment on reports circulated by Councillor Boyt regarding noise and particulate monitoring with respect of Lilly May Court as to whether the focus on those reports were on the site adjacent and what might be the net impact on residents should this application be approved, sought clarity as to whether

the intention of condition 11 was for the majority of access to be via Headley Road East, queried whether access to the new road would be restricted to site users, and queried whether other bodies similar to Historic England might have been consulted with regards to consideration of the value of the building. Graham Vaughan stated that officers acknowledged the ongoing investigations at Lilly May Court, and the Committee needed to be clear as to what were existing impacts and what impacts might come about as a result of this scheme. Graham added that it was not for this scheme to solve any existing issues, however the scheme needed to ensure that it did not have a detrimental impact in and of itself. Graham stated that officers and consultees were satisfied that the scheme would not have a detrimental impact subject to conditions. Chris Easton confirmed that the proposed new road would be privately owned, and it would be up to the operator to implement remedial action.

Chris Bowring queried whether the existing planning permission placed any restriction on the number of HGVs on the site currently. Graham Vaughan confirmed that the number of number of HGVs on site was currently unrestricted.

Stephen Conway stated that noise and pollution was already a considerable problem in the area, whilst this application would add additional HGV movements and it was reasonable to assume that the this could add to the existing issues. Stephen queried whether the lack of official designation as a historical asset meant that the Committee could not place value on the site as an asset of local importance. Graham Vaughan stated that the NPPF gave regard to non-designated heritage assets within the decision making process, and added that a balanced judgement was required when considering the harm or loss of an asset compared to the benefits of the proposal. Officers had determined that the benefits of this proposal outweighed the significance of the non-designated heritage asset, as the building was no longer within its original context nor surrounded by an airfield. Brian Conlon, Operational Lead – Development Management, stated that the building at present had no statutory or legal protection, and therefore could be converted or renovated subject to conditions. WBC had no control over the site at present, whilst officer had to carefully balance aspects including public opinion, designation, references of value against the benefits of the proposal.

Stephen Conway commented that officers had appeared to make an on-balance judgement based largely around the siting and surroundings. Stephen added that it was clear that the site was of huge significance to many residents, which was only made stronger as the wider side had been removed and redeveloped. Stephen felt it difficult to conclude how the issue regarding HGVs would not be made worse by the approval of this application. Emma Choules, Environmental Health officer, stated that the applicant had submitted an air quality assessment which had been considered against modelling and local and national statutory objectives and targets in England. There was no current national targets or objective value for PM 2.5, whilst the air quality would be managed during the demolition and construction phase via the construction and environmental management plan condition. With regards to

noise, the site currently had no restrictions in this capacity. Subject to conditions units 1 to 8 were deemed to produce acceptable levels of noise given the layout of the site, whilst units 9 and 10 would require a noise fence and would not be allowed to accept night-time deliveries. In addition, each unit would be required to produce a noise management plan.

Stephen Conway queried whether the Committee were allowed to consider the cumulative impact of air pollution in the area, which this development would add to. Emma Choules stated that the indications from the adjacent site's investigation had not shown an issue, however additional monitoring would be required. Brian Conlon stated that this was an application for one specific part of a wider site, and the Committee had to consider the standards that must be applied for this site, and then assess how this site could support, mitigate and control itself via conditions. Graham Vaughan stated that it had been demonstrated through the report that this site would have a negligible impact on air quality in the area.

Stephen Conway queried whether the façade of the building could be maintained through redevelopment. Graham Vaughan stated that the Committee was being asked to determine the application in front of them in accordance with local and national planning policies and guidance. Graham added that clear harm would need to be demonstrated in terms of loss of heritage as a reason to refuse the application. Brian Conlon stated that if the design was deemed unacceptable then the Committee would be required to specify why the design was unacceptable or unattractive.

At this point of the meeting, Chris Bowring proposed that the meeting be extended by 30 minutes to a maximum finish time of 11pm. This proposal was seconded and carried.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that aircraft factories were large by design, and she could not accept that retaining the front of the building whilst redeveloping the rear was not deemed to be of value. Pauline felt that a revised scheme which retained the front of the building whilst redeveloping the rear of the building would achieve the goal of providing a modern and purpose-built site whilst retaining the important historical frontage which residents placed significant value on. Brian Conlon stated that the justification of a façade required demonstration that the frontage was performing a positive historical amenity role. Pauline Jorgensen commented that Woodley had very strong links to its aviation history including many roads named after aircraft, whilst there was a clear demonstration of the value placed on the building from the public in the form of petitions and objections to the building's removal.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that if the frontage was retained then the heritage would be preserved, and there were many such examples across Berkshire. Gary added that the previous engineering use was not a twenty-four-hour operation, and the 20 HGV loading bays would inevitably lead to additional noise and pollution. Gary stated that he would be in support of a motion to defer the application to allow time to address concerns raised by the

Committee. Graham Vaughan stated that this site was a core employment area, and the use of the site was not a change of use but a redesign.

Brian Conlon was requested to provide a form of words, should Members be minded to defer the application. Based on concerns raised by Members, Brian suggested that the debate would appear to indicate deferral of the application in order to allow them to more fully understand the context of the site and to allow a site visit to be undertaken to allow consideration of the heritage aspects of the site and environmental health issues raised.

Bill Soane queried whether the façade of this building could be designated locally as an asset of community value as had other such buildings had been in the area, and raised concern that other operators in their area could lose their operations licence as additional objections could be received as a result of this application.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey clarified that she had not made the comments referred to on agenda page 139.

Gary Cowan proposed that this application be deferred, to allow the Committee to more fully understand the context of the site and to allow a site visit to be undertaken to allow consideration of the heritage aspects of the site and environmental health issues raised. This proposal was seconded by Stephen Conway and upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** That application number 213106 be deferred to allow the Committee to more fully understand the context of the site and to allow a site visit to be undertaken to allow consideration of the heritage aspects of the site and environmental health issues raised.

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