

## **GFA/19758/1 – SEEDA**

### **Extension to Brunel House and erection of 17 incubation units for B1 use (Faringdon Business Centre). Land adjoining Health Centre, Volunteer Way, Faringdon.**

#### **1.0 The Proposal**

- 1.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of 17 Class B1 start up units and an extension to office accommodation at Brunel House with associated cycle and car parking. Class B1 includes offices, light industry and research and development uses.
- 1.2 The applicant is the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the Regional Development Agency for the South East, which is responsible for the sustainable economic development and regeneration of the South East of England.
- 1.3 The site, 0.49 ha in area, is located to the northwest of Faringdon Health Centre, and is a linear plot that runs parallel to Volunteer Way, a road which serves both Brunel House and a modern housing development to the east. To the west lies the Pioneer Road industrial estate.
- 1.4 The site is an allocated employment site for B1 purposes as defined by Policy E3 of the adopted Local Plan.
- 1.5 A copy of the plans showing the location of the proposal, elevations and design of the buildings, together with extracts from the accompanying design and access statement, are attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.6 The application comes to Committee because a number of objection letters have been received.

#### **2.0 Planning History**

- 2.1 In February 1998 outline planning permission was granted on appeal for residential & employment development, including a new Health Centre on land to the north of Park Road. This included the application site, and as part of the S106 agreement, Brunel House was to be built when the houses were constructed to ensure the employment use was implemented.
- 2.2 In November 1999, the reserved matters were approved for 67 dwellings.

#### **3.0 Planning Policies**

- 3.1 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011*  
Policy GS5 (making efficient use of land and buildings) seeks to promote the efficient re-use of previously developed / unused land and buildings within settlements (provided there is no conflict with other policies in the Local Plan).
- 3.2 Policy E3 (sites for business development) allocates the site for Class B1 business development. Paragraph 11.35 states that 'in this location development should be designed to enhance visually the approach to the town'. It also states that proposals for other uses will not be permitted in view of the proximity of the site to housing and the sensitivity of its location.
- 3.3 Policies DC1, DC5, DC6, DC8, DC9 and DC14 (quality of new development) are relevant and seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design / landscaping; does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours; suitable social and physical infrastructure exists for the development, or will be provided; the development is acceptable in terms of highway safety and will not result in adverse surface water run off.

#### 4.0 **Consultations**

- 4.1 Faringdon Town Council does not object to the application but requests the following be given consideration: "Planners are asked to ensure that area is properly landscaped on the road facing side".
- 4.2 County Engineer – no objections, subject to conditions and a financial contribution to extend the 30mph speed limit on Park Road and other highway improvements.
- 4.3 Drainage Engineer – no objections (subject to conditions).
- 4.4 Environmental Health – no objections, subject to conditions requiring further details on the proposed bio-boiler and its chimney.
- 4.5 Waste Management Team – no objections.
- 4.6 Environment Agency – Due to workload prioritisation we are unable to make a full response to this application, but have assessed this application as having a low environmental risk.
- 4.7 Crime Prevention Design Advisor – 'Having looked at this proposal and visited the site, I have no adverse comments to make. The individual security of these units is always an issue and I would be more than willing to discuss this with the applicant'.
- 4.8 Consultant Architect – comments attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.9 Architects Panel – 'A generally satisfactory scheme, need to consider cladding details and materials to street elevation'.
- 4.10 9 letters of objection have been received, which are summarised as follows:
- As submitted, it is an overdevelopment of the site. The density proposed on such a small area is excessive. It will also dwarf nearby residential properties and be detrimental to the area.
  - There is no need for buildings like these in this part of Faringdon. There are lots of empty units elsewhere in both Faringdon and Shrivenham.
  - The amount of development will increase traffic movements in the area and cause congestion. It will also place undue demand for parking in the area. The Health Centre parking is already occupied at full capacity. The proposed parking spaces will be insufficient.
  - Deliveries to these units by larger vehicles will be dangerous to pedestrians and children who play nearby.
  - The access road and proposed number of parking spaces is inappropriate for this type of development.
  - When buying houses here a couple of years ago residents were told that there was planning to build no more than 2 units (identical in design to Brunel House) on this land, so why are there now 17 units? And why are industrial buildings proposed next to a housing estate?
  - This will affect the future value and saleability of nearby dwellings. It will also lead to loss of views for some residents. (These are not material planning considerations).
  - The buildings are too high. The tower element and power plant area near the Health Centre in particular are too high, inappropriate and need to be reduced with the whole development becoming single storey.
  - The materials proposed are out of keeping with the Cotswold stone of nearby dwellings. There is also concern over their long term maintenance.
  - Who will maintain the buildings and landscaped areas?
  - The proposed woodchip heating system will create smoke pollution.

- The proposal will result in the loss of the willow wall.
- The sewerage system is unable to cope at present. Further development will only exacerbate existing problems.
- The land would be much better used as an overflow car park for the Health Centre and more housing (but not flats).

## 5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The main issues in this case are considered to be 1) the principle of the development in this location, 2) the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, 3) the impact of the proposal on neighbouring properties, 4) the safety of the access and parking arrangements and 5) drainage issues.
- 5.2 On the first issue, the site is allocated in the adopted Local Plan as a site suitable for Class B1 development only. Due to the close proximity of the site to housing and the general sensitivity of its location, proposals for other business uses would not be acceptable. The principle of a development of Class B1 start up units is therefore considered acceptable and appropriate in this location.
- 5.3 Regarding the second issue, the development in the form proposed is not considered to be out of keeping with the locality or an overdevelopment of the site. The layout has been designed to conceal parking and servicing activity within the site, with the buildings presenting a modest and appropriate face to Volunteer Way.
- 5.4 In terms of the design, the use of towers, green mono-pitched roofs and varied materials such as brick and cladding provides welcome articulation to both the roofscape and elevations of the development, which enhances the architectural quality of the scheme. Whereas new business developments often comprise of portal steel framed sheds clad in metal profile sheeting, the proposed design and materials of this proposal are considered to be considerably better and wholly appropriate for this location. Furthermore the extension proposed to Brunel House is considered to be a welcome addition that will visually improve this building. As such, Officers positively endorse the style of the development proposed and consider its visual impact to be wholly acceptable. The Consultant Architect considers that the design of the buildings should be supported, commenting in particular that the corner element near to the Health Centre provides a positive focal point to the development, and that the units framing one of the entrances to the parking and servicing area will provide positive visual interest.
- 5.5 The scheme is proposed to be comprehensively landscaped, which includes removal of the willow wall. The wall was constructed as an acoustic buffer between the new houses in Volunteer Way and the Pioneer Road industrial estate. Your Officers consider the removal of the wall is acceptable, as its maintenance has suffered of late, leading to the majority of it dying. The new buildings proposed under this scheme will act as a replacement acoustic buffer.
- 5.6 Turning to the third issue, the impact on neighbouring properties, it is considered that no undue harm would be caused to those properties directly opposite the site. The proposed layout and built form visually conceals the parking and servicing areas. As stated above, the buildings also provide a buffer to these properties where any noise that may be generated from day to day operations will be contained. The heights of the buildings are not considered to cause any undue loss of light or overshadowing of neighbouring dwellings.
- 5.7 In respect of the bio-boiler, further details on its design and associated chimney will be required to ensure that it is not visually intrusive and is not unneighbourly. A pre-commencement to development condition requiring further details is therefore suggested to address this.

- 5.8 On the issue of parking and access, the proposed arrangements are considered acceptable. The parking provision shown provides 1 space per 31sqm of floorspace for the site as a whole. Adequate visibility can also be achieved at the new access to ensure pedestrian and highway safety.
- 5.9 On the issue of drainage, the additional units would not overburden the existing system.
- 5.10 Financial contributions are being sought for highways improvements to meet the need generated by this proposal to improve the local highway network.

6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *That authority to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair in order to allow the completion of a S106 Agreement to secure the required highways financial contribution.*
1. *TL1 Time Limit – Full Application*
  2. *MC2 Sample Materials*
  3. *ID12 Restriction on use to B1 only.*
  4. *ID2 Restriction on industrial permitted development*
  5. *ID21 Submission of drainage details*
  6. *Access in accordance with specified plan*
  7. *Turning space in accordance with specified plan*
  8. *Car parking layout in accordance with specified plan*
  9. *Submission of landscaping scheme, to include hard landscaping and boundary treatments.*
  10. *Storage facilities block, bin storage and cycle parking to be constructed and available for use prior to first occupation.*
  11. *ID3 Restriction on outside storage*
  12. *ID23 Mezzanine floors restriction*
  13. *Prior to the commencement of development full details of the bio-mass boiler shall be submitted to, and approved by, the District Planning Authority. Such details shall include types of fuel, and the size, design and location of chimneys, flues and intakes. The boiler shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.*
- 6.2 *That authority to refuse planning permission is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning & Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair should the Section 106 Agreement not be completed within the 13week period (which ends on 28 June 2007).*
- 6.3 *The reason for refusal would be based on the lack of necessary financial contributions towards improving local highway infrastructure.*