

# **EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 2024**

**Councillors Present:** Richard Somner (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Jeremy Cottam, Paul Kander, Geoff Mayes, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Clive Taylor and Joanne Stewart (Substitute) (In place of Ross Mackinnon)

**Also Present:** Simon Till (Development Control Team Leader), Sharon Armour (Legal Services Manager), Gareth Dowding (Principal Engineer (Traffic and Road Safety)), Gemma Kirk (Senior Planning Officer), Lydia Mather (Principal Planning Officer), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer (Scrutiny and Democratic Services)) and Thomas Radbourne (Apprentice Democratic Services Officer)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Alan Macro and Councillor Ross Mackinnon

### **PART I**

#### **1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the inclusion of the following amendment:

- Correction of typographical error 'Lanford' to 'Langford'.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### **3. Schedule of Planning Applications**

##### **(1) Application No. and Parish: 23/02965/FULMAJ, Midgham**

1. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 23/02965/FULMAJ in respect of a proposed Logistics Hub comprising a three-storey block of approximately 7,800 square metres Gross Internal Area (GIA) accommodating offices, laboratories and associated ancillary uses; a yard; a garage and storage building; a single storey gatehouse; and associated internal access roads, car and cycle parking, landscaping, lighting, drainage and boundary treatments at land east of Goddards Way, Thatcham.
2. Ms Gemma Kirk (Senior Planning Officer) introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion the report detailed that the proposal was acceptable in planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main and update reports.
3. Mr Gareth Dowding confirmed that he had no further comments in relation to Highways matters.
4. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Mr Anthony Fenn, Parish Council representative, Mr Simon Pike, adjacent Town Council representative, Ms Tracey

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Underwood, objector, and Mr Danny Clarke, applicant, addressed the Committee on this application.

### **Parish Council Representation**

5. Mr Anthony Fenn addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#).

### **Member Questions to the Parish Council**

6. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following response:
  - Mr Fenn was not aware of when the settlement boundary had last been reviewed.

### **Adjacent Town Council Representation**

7. Mr Simon Pike addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#).

### **Member Questions to the adjacent Town Council**

8. Members did not have any questions of clarification.

### **Objector Representation**

9. Ms Tracey Underwood addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#).

### **Member Questions to the Objector**

10. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
  - Flooding had been particularly bad during the most recent winter due to heavy rainfall. The field adjacent to the proposed development had been flooded, and the extent of the flooding had been worse than in the previous two years.
  - It was confirmed that Network Rail had cleared their ditches two years previously. This had been the first time they had done this in many years, but it had not made much difference to the local flooding situation.
  - Areas of the proposed site had been flooded in the most recent winter.
  - Ms Underwood confirmed that she owned both fields to the east of the development site and that both fields had been flooded recently.

### **Applicant Representation**

11. Mr Danny Clarke addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#)

### **Member Questions to the Applicant**

12. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
  - The proposal would provide Thames Valley Police with a centralised facility. Existing facilities no longer required would be sold on or demolished.
  - Although it was proposed to have an element of vehicle maintenance at the new site, this would not serve the whole Thames Valley Police fleet.
  - A number of different forms had been considered for the building. The proposed design was a balance between a compact and functional building while retaining

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space for landscaping. A three storey building was considered to be the optimum for the site.

- It was proposed to use a buff coloured brick for the main building, which had been chosen to blend with the surrounding landscape.
- It was proposed to have a flat roof to accommodate solar panels and technical equipment necessary to serve the building.
- Parking areas would be constructed from permeable materials.
- Lighting would be controlled by motion sensors between 11pm and 7am. The impacts of the lighting on bats/biodiversity had been considered in line with guidance and best practice. It was not proposed to have 24/7 operation at the site so illumination of the site at night would not be significant.
- It was confirmed that the site would not be used for 'blue-light' police operations.
- While limited numbers of staff may need to work at the site in the evenings/at night, this would not be a regular occurrence and the building would not be fully illuminated when staff were present.
- If the application was approved, construction would be expected to start towards the end of 2024 and would take 18–24 month to complete.
- Consideration had been given to housing equipment in locations other than the roof in order to reduce the height of the building, but this would require more ducting below ground, which would affect the site's permeability, or it would increase the mass of the building.
- The flooding assessment had been carried out before the decision was made to sink the building by 0.5m. It was proposed to review the drainage strategy to take account of this change.
- National and local standards required developments to consider downstream flooding and drainage impacts as well as surface water that may arrive from upstream locations.
- The Flood Assessment had reviewed the surface water and fluvial flood risk across the local area. Flooding impacts would vary according to the severity of the rainfall event. Drainage designs sought to replicate natural processes as closely as possible and would include having areas of standing water. Parking areas and other non-road surfaces would be porous, so the site would respond to rainfall in a natural way, with water soaking into local sustainable drainage systems to be slowly directed downstream. West Berkshire's standards for surface water management were particularly stringent. This meant that there would be very little discharge from the site over the course of a year. In the event of a severe weather event, discharge would be equivalent to that from a greenfield site. It was stressed that the drainage system for a single development could not be expected to address pre-existing flooding issues in the wider area.
- It was confirmed that the emergency exit would only be used if the main entrance was blocked. Similar gates at other sites had never been used, however, there was an operational requirement to provide one.
- The proposed facility would replace two large buildings and would draw personnel from a number of other sites across the South East.

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- Construction of a new facility was much more cost-effective than refurbishing existing sites. Also, temporarily relocating staff during the refurbishment works would have a significant operational impact.
- The search for a site had been ongoing for four years and this was the only viable option that had been found.
- Around 400 people would be transferred to the site, but allowance was made for 12% growth over a 25 year period.

### **Ward Member Representation**

13. Councillor Chris Read addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#)
14. Councillor Owen Jeffery addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 8th May 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#)

### **Member Questions to the Ward Member**

15. Members asked questions of clarification of Councillor Read and were given the following responses:
  - He had spoken to at least eight out of 12 objectors who had attended the Midgham Parish Council meeting. The application had also been flagged by Woolhampton Parish Council due to concerns about ribbon development.
  - He was not aware of any residents in favour of the development.
16. Members did not have any questions of clarification of Councillor Jeffery.

### **Member Questions to Officers**

17. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
  - It was confirmed that planning permission ran with the land and owners could sell land with planning permission attached, which would remain implementable until it expired. The extant planning permission for this site would be a valid fall-back position at appeal.
  - It was confirmed that Thames Valley Police had purchased the site.
  - Because the proposed conditions would mitigate the flood risk impacts flooding had been given neutral impact in the planning balance. The site was within Flood Risk Zone 1, it included areas where there was a higher risk due to surface water. It was recognised that land below the site lay in zones with a higher flood risk.
  - Although the proposed building was higher than in the extant permission, it had a smaller footprint with more landscaping and green space. The height had been reduced and landscaping improvements incorporated in response to comments from an external landscape consultant appointed by the Council. On balance, the additional height was considered to be acceptable.
  - It was explained that while certain matters could be addressed through planning conditions, they should not be used to redesign the scheme. The National Planning Policy Framework set tests for conditions and required that they be reasonable and related to the development. If Members were unhappy with the proposed height, they could either refuse the planning application or defer the

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decision to allow negotiation with the applicant, who may or may not agree to amend the design.

- Officers did not feel that the proposed increase in height was significant in terms of landscape impact, since the reduced footprint of the building would confine the impact to a smaller area. However, it was accepted that the decision was finely balanced.
- It was confirmed that details had been submitted with regards to sustainable construction and officers were content that the maximum standards would be achieved given the applicant's requirements for the building.
- Members were advised that the settlement boundary relating to the residential settlement had been reviewed as part of the Housing Sites Allocations Policy Document in 2017. A review of the Protected Employment Area boundary was ongoing as part of the Local Plan Review. It was proposed that this site would be within the revised Protected Employment Area, but the assessment of this application had been according to the current designation.
- It was confirmed that the Flood Authority had not been consulted on the amended design with the building lowered down within the site by 0.5m. However, the matter would be revisited as part of discharging the pre-commencement drainage condition. Members were advised that if they were not confident about this aspect, then they could choose to defer the decision until the flood risk assessment had been completed for the revised design.
- It was explained that the Flood Alleviation Schemes in Thatcham were designed to protect the existing residential development to the east of Thatcham and the extant development at Colthrop. This application had been designed to different standards to those older developments, which had included limited/poor surface water mitigation, and had contributed to widespread flooding in 2007. This applicant had been required to limit surface water run-off to no more than that for the present, greenfield use, and this would be managed through on-site drainage measures.

### **Debate**

18. Councillor Jeremy Cottam opened the debate. He had opposed the previous application and viewed the current application as mitigation for this. He stressed the need to review all the flooding issues. He indicated that he was opposed to development of the site in principle, but it was not possible to revoke the extant permission, which if implemented would attract 900 HGV movements per day and would only create a small number of jobs. He felt that the applicant would be a trusted and a responsible landowner. The proposal would also bring quality jobs to the area. If this application was not approved, then the Police could sell the site to a commercial developer. He felt that the Police could be trusted to comply with the imposed conditions. Also, he felt that the proposed design struck an effective compromise between building height and footprint. A larger building would have a greater impact on flood risk. He accepted that flooding was an issue for the area around the site.
19. Councillor Justin Pemberton had reservations in terms of the impact of the development on flood risk. He recognised the concerns of neighbouring landowners, but he was satisfied that the pre-commencement condition would ensure appropriate mitigation. He did not consider it would be worth deferring the decision in order to try and negotiate a reduction in the building's height, since this may lead to a different set of issues. He indicated that he was minded to support the application.

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20. Councillor Vicky Poole had noted the lack of enhanced level training opportunities in the area and welcomed the fact that the proposal included provision for laboratories and associated research. She felt that the development could be improved so it would be more in keeping with the area. She acknowledged concerns about ribbon development, but she recognised that each development had to be considered on its own merits. While she was concerned about the proposed height of the building, she felt it was in keeping with other commercial properties in the area and the proposed design would help to mitigate flood risk. She expressed concern that a flood risk assessment had not been completed on the amended design and highlighted potential downstream flooding issues, but she had confidence that officers would consider this as part of the pre-commencement condition. She indicated that she was undecided on which way to vote.
21. Councillor Clive Taylor had not been aware of the previous application, but he felt that it should be a major consideration. He considered the current application to be the 'lesser of two evils' and indicated that he was minded to support the application.
22. Councillor Jo Stewart expressed concerns about downstream flooding impacts. She highlighted recent events that had affected the Holy Brook, which had come close to flooding nearby houses. While she appreciated residents' concerns about the proposed building height, she felt that increasing the building's footprint to accommodate the reduction in building height would have a significant impact. She noted that most people employed at the site would be brought in from existing facilities, but some staff may move to the district and there would be additional, local employment opportunities. She agreed with the concerns expressed about the previous application. Although she was concerned about traffic from the site, on balance she was supportive of the application.
23. Councillor Paul Kander had not been on the Committee when the previous application had been considered, but he indicated that he would have objected to the height of the building. He felt that the key issues were related to building height and flooding. He trusted the officers to assess the flooding impacts of the amended design. He felt that Thames Valley Police could be trusted to resolve any issues that arose in an appropriate way. He highlighted that the surrounding economy would be bolstered by the development. He agreed that there would be no point in deferring the application to negotiate on building height and the worst case scenario would be implementation of the extant permission. He indicated that he was minded to support the development.
24. Councillor Jo Stewart proposed to accept Officer's recommendation to: delegate to the Development Manager to grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the report and update report; and delegate to the Development Manager to issue a further decision notice to the applicant substantially including parts of conditions that related to confidential information; and delegate to the Development Manager to issue decision notices, including making any minor and or consequential amendments to conditions. This was seconded by Councillor Jeremy Cottam.
25. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Jo Stewart, seconded by Councillor Jeremy Cottam to grant planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** to delegate to the Development Manager to grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the report and update report; and delegate to the Development Manager to issue a further decision notice to the applicant substantially including parts of conditions that relate to confidential information; and delegate to the

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Development Manager to issue decision notices, including making any minor and or consequential amendments to conditions.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....