WORK SHEET FOR : Mrs B Polnik

Application Number : F/2001/3171

Applicant : Power Investments Ltd C/O Halson Mackley Partnership.

Location : Car Park, Denmark Street, , Wokingham.
Proposal : Proposed erection of B1 Office building.

Site Notice Displayed ? :

YES	NO	DATE
✓		2.2.01

Date of Neighbour Notifications : .....

Date of Site Visit : 2.2.01

Date Registered : 15/01/2001

Earliest Date for Decision : 11/02/2001

Latest Consultation Date/Site Notice Expiry Date : 11/02/2001

This application will have expired on: 12/03/2001. You need to make a decision 1 day prior to this date for this application to count as determined in less than 8 weeks.

Consultation Responses :

- Highway Authority: some concerns over loss of town centre parking but unlikely to be sustained at appeal. Contribution should be made towards improving pedestrian cycle and public transport accessibility complemented by GTP. Recommend holding objection.
- Conservation Architect: proposal fails to enhance or preserve the character or appearance of the conservation area, or space to the rear of Denmark St. It also fails to respect the grain, appearance and historic plot layout of the town centre. It would dissect this space with the bulk of the building form being isolated from the recent modern office development of Seymour House.

Planning Issues :

- Landscape Architect: difficult to consider full visual and physical impact without a detailed study.
- Policy & Plans: recommend refusal unless design can be improved and exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated to demonstrate need for office floorspace
- Archaeologist: Archaeological evaluation required

Relevant Planning History:

99/69747/O:
Outline application to provide for 550m2 of offices. Refused 14.10.99 on the following grounds:

(i) speculative scheme with no identified need resulting in undue pressure for housing
(ii) detrimental impact on character of conservation area
(iii) loss of privacy to Sale Garden Cottages
(iv) unacceptable impact on infrastructure.

This application was dismissed on appeal in August 2000. Inspector considered that it was possible to construct a building which could be designed so as not to unduly affect residents in Sale Garden Cottages and dismissed the appeal on the 3 other grounds.

O/2000/0446:
Outline application for 475m2 of office floorspace. Listing letter sent out to Ward Councillors recommending refusal on grounds (ii) and (iii). However the application was withdrawn prior to decision notice being issued.

Proposal: Proposal is for a 3 storey building (with the third storey being in the roofspace) linked to the 3 The Courtyard by a link bridge at 2nd floor level. It would provide for 495m2 of office floorspace.

Appraisal: Main issues:

A. Principle of development in town centre location:
Policies OS1, LD1, LD3, S1, S4 & BU1 of BSP, EN1, PSE1, STV1 and SE2 of SEALP: and WOS1, WOS3, WBE1, WEM4, WSH1 and WSH2 and WSH22 of WDLP

The application site is located within Wokingham Town Centre boundary, but outside the primary or secondary shopping areas. It is located in a sustainable location which would minimise the need for travel by private car. As such, it complies with criterion (d) of Policy WOS1 and criterion (c) of WOS3.

In terms of sustainability and the opportunity for reducing travel and increasing alternative modes of transport, the application site is very well placed. Office development is considered to be an acceptable town centre function within the Town Centre according to Policies WSH1 and WSH2. Policy BU1 of the Berkshire Structure Plan (BSP) sets criteria for new business, industrial, distribution and storage development. These comprise meeting local needs provided development does not lead to pressure for additional housing or create transport problems. It also takes account of completions and outstanding permissions for office and other development.

Policy WEM4 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) states that outside core employment areas business development will only be acceptable where the proposal conforms with the principles of BSP Policy BU1. The proposal seeks to provide 495m² of floorspace. No additional information has been provided to indicate that the development will be for a local business which needs to relocate.

Policy WSH22 identifies sites within the Town Centre for B1 (office) use where such development should be located. It states that employment development will be limited to these sites. Whilst the site is not one of those the reason for restricting sites is derived from paragraph 8.34 of BSP which states while town centres are normally suitable places for office development in terms of transport accessibility, major office scheme will not generally be acceptable in Wokingham and Windsor town centres because of environmental and traffic concerns.

The Inspector at the previous appeal noted a number of vacant office buildings/sites and concluded that there was inadequate justification for the proposed development giving rise to undue pressure for housing in the area. As there has been no material change since the appeal decision in August of last year it is recommended that this applies also to the current application. In view of this it is recommended that the application be refused on employment grounds.

B. Impact on the character and appearance of Wokingham Conservation Area:
Policies EN4, EN5, EN6, EN7 of BSP; SBE1/2, SBE12, SBE14/15 and SBE21 of SEALP; WOS10, WHE2, WHE4 and WHE15 of WDLP

The application site is located within Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and an Archaeological Site. The Conservation Area, in the vicinity of the site, is characterised by commercial uses. As such, there is no objection to the proposed office development in terms of its impact on the commercial character of the area.

The character of this section of the Conservation Area is highlighted below. Denmark Street was historically dominated by narrow fronted burgage plots. In many cases these have been adapted in order to house more modern buildings. These generally reflect the existing historic form and fit into the overall street scene. The typical structures of the street are mainly two or three storeys and generally gable fronted in red brick or render.

Policy WHE2 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) states that the Council will seek to retain and enhance those features that make up the distinct character of the Conservation Areas. This will include open spaces, setting of buildings and the relationships between buildings. Policy WHE4 states that new development must respect the landform, the historical local plot layout and characteristic relationships between buildings, respect the historic massing and scale, respecting distinct

building relationships and proportions of buildings plus design and materials.

The proposed office building would represent a 3 storey building linked to existing commercial buildings, via a bridge at second floor level, in what would have originally been gardens. The imposition of such a bulky development, which is exacerbated by numerous dormer windows at second floor level would represent an alien feature which would be totally at odds with the grain of the Conservation Area. It would fail to respect the plot layout and characteristic relationships between buildings. Although on the previous appeal the Inspector commented (para 17.) that he could conceive of a solution whereby the in-depth pattern of existing development could be reflected in the appeal site, it is considered that is not achieved by the current proposal. In addition whilst it is physically linked to 3 The Courtyard the design does not relate well to this host building. The adjoining buildings give the appearance of 2 storey buildings, albeit that 3 The courtyard utilises the roofspace by use of rooflights as opposed to dormer windows as proposed.

As such, it would introduce a building alien in location and failing to respect local plot pattern. It would be totally out of keeping with other buildings in the Conservation Area, even those more modern in nature such as 3 and 4 The Courtyard and introduce an alien feature in the Conservation Area. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policies SBE12, SBE14, SBE15 of the SEALP and Policies WOS10, WHE2 and WHE4 of the WDLPDD.

The scheme lies within an archaeological site. As such there are possible remains and the archaeological evaluation would be needed in accordance with Policy WHE15. Subject to this being done it is not considered the proposal would be detrimental.

C. Impact on residential amenity:
Policies EN1 and LD3 of BSP; SBE2 and SBE5 of SEALP; and WOS3 and WBE1 of WDLP

The application site is located to the north-west of residential properties on the far side of Cockpit Path, known as Sale Garden Cottages. These have very shallow front gardens, and are located in a rectangle, with a communal garden in the centre. Sale Garden Cottages take the form of single storey terraced bungalows which have their main doors and either bedrooms, living rooms or kitchens fronting onto Cockpit Path. The ground levels to the south-east of the car park are such that the cottages would have an elevated view of the site over the 2m high existing boundary hedge.

The proposed building would have a number of windows at all 3 levels facing the cottages. The nearest being located 28m from the front elevation of these cottages (24.5m on appeal application). The maximum height would be 9m.

It could also introduce a bulky building in relatively close proximity to the bungalows adjacent which would represent an overdominant feature to the detriment of the residential amenity of Sale Garden Cottages. This is compounded by the lack of opportunity for substantial planting.

Whilst on the previous appeal the Inspector felt that this reason for refusal could be overcome by appropriate measures such as use of high level windows, roof lights and dormers this is not apparent in the design of the building other than the use of dormers. In view of the above it is considered that the development could appear overdominant and result in loss of privacy and overlooking, to the detriment of the amenity of neighbouring residential properties. As such, it would be contrary to Policies SBE2, SBE5 of the South East Area Local Plan and Policies WOS3 and WBE1 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft).

D. Impact on highway safety, parking and accessibility:
Policies OS1, LD5, T5, T6 and S2 of BSP; ST3 & ST5 of SEALP; WOS3, WBE9, WSH31, WT1, WT2, WT5 & WT6 of WDLP

The site occupies what is currently part of Denmark Street car park. This land was leased to Wokingham District Council, which expired on 29 September 1999. Other areas of the car park, such as that adjacent to Seymour House and alongside Cockpit Path are owned by Wokingham District Council. The applicants have rights of access to Denmark Street and the car park is now run by a private company on behalf of the owners. The proposed office development would potentially result in the net loss of minimum of 13 spaces which are currently available for public parking.

There have been a number of recent applications for development on town centre car parks, namely at Easthampstead Road. The Rose Street redevelopment would also result in the loss of a car park. No evidence is available that at present there would be an unacceptable loss of parking in the town centre. The Council's parking policy is being reviewed as part of the Local Transport Plan, but on current evidence Wokingham is adequately provided with parking compared with neighbouring towns. In the circumstances it is not considered that a reason for refusal could be substantiated on the basis of the loss of a number of parking spaces.

The proposed office development will inevitably result in additional traffic movements along Denmark Street. This junction is the end of two-way movements along the street. The Highways Section have previously indicated that whilst there would be an increase in traffic movements, it is unlikely that this issue could be substantiated as a reason for refusal.

E. Impact on proposed environmental improvement area
Berkshire Structure Plan Policy EN1; South East Area Local Plan Policy PTC7; Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) as modified Policies WBE10, WBE14.

Policy WSH19 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) refers to environmental improvements to town centres. This is to ease the use for those who have mobility problems and to increase their general attraction to shoppers. The Denmark Street car park is an entry point to the town centre and as such should benefit from improved security and softening large areas of hardstanding with landscaping. The proposed building would not provide an enhancement to the public realm. However, the scale of the development and the scale of improvement should be comparable with the buildings to the south. As such, there would need to be much more emphasis on structure planting throughout the site and adjacent to Cockpit Path. This could be provided within the site but would result in the loss of additional spaces. However, it is not considered that this could be substantiated at appeal as a reason for refusal.

F. Service, Amenity and Infrastructure requirements
Berkshire Structure Plan Policy LD6; South East Area Local Plan Policy SPS1; Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) as modified Policies WOS4, WR8, WR12(a).

Policy WOS4 states that development proposals will be expected to have regard to existing levels of infrastructure, services and amenities. However this applies to developments exceeding a net increase of 500m². The current proposal falls short of this threshold and SAI contributions are therefore not applied.

Conclusion The scheme is for a speculative office development within Wokingham Town Centre. There is no objection on the grounds of sustainability. The proposal is for a development on a site which has not been identified in the Local Plan for such a purpose, it is considered that there is adequate office floorspace available, committed and designated within the town centre.

The development fails to respect the grain, appearance and historical burgage plot layout of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area. It would introduce an alien feature and would not respect the distinct relationship of buildings on the road frontages. The location of the development would appear overdominant and result in a potential loss of privacy to the residents of Sale Garden Cottages.

Highways have concluded that it would not be possible to raise an objection on the basis of the loss of town centre parking provision.

Finally whilst the current proposal is smaller than that previously refused (99/69747/O) and links into an existing building via a bridge, it does not overcome the previous reasons for refusal and refusal is recommended on the same grounds with the exception of SAI contributions as it falls below the 500m² threshold.

Application Number F/2001/3171
~~Conditions~~/Reasons for Refusal

No	Std Con	Std Reas	Non Std Conditions / Reasons for Refusal

Recommendation REFUSAL, for the following reasons:

1. The proposal would be detrimental to the character of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area in which it is situated as it fails to respect the historic grain, layout and appearance of the Conservation Area by reason of its indicative siting and design. It also fails to respect the established relationship between buildings, which is concentrated on the road frontages. As such, it is contrary to Policy EN5 of the Berkshire Structure Plan, Policies SBE12, SBE14, SBE15 of the South East Area Local Plan and Policies WOS10, WHE2 and WHE4 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) as modified.

2. The proposed office development would appear overdominant and potentially result in loss of privacy to the residential properties known as Sale Garden Cottages. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policy EN1 of the Berkshire Structure Plan, Policies SBE5, SBE7 of the South East Area Local Plan and Policies WOS3 and WBE1 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) as modified.

3. The proposed office development would result in additional speculative floorspace for which there is no identified need. As such it would be contrary to Policy BU1 of the Berkshire Structure Plan, Policies PSE1 and SE2 of the South East Area Local Plan and Policies WOS1, WOS3, WEM4 and WSH22 of the Wokingham District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) as modified.

LODDON AREA LOCAL PLAN POLICIES:
SOUTH-EAST AREA LOCAL PLAN POLICIES:
WOKINGHAM DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN POLICIES:
GREEN BELT LOCAL PLAN POLICIES:
BERKSHIRE STRUCTURE PLAN POLICIES:
MINERALS LOCAL PLAN POLICIES:

RECOMMENDATION AND CONDITIONS/REASONS AGREED: _____
(Development Control Manager)

Date: _____

RECORD OF SITE VISIT

SITE ADDRESS: Car Park Denmark Street Wokingham.

APPLICATION NUMBER: F/2001/3171

OFFICER: Mrs B Polnik

DATE OF SITE VISIT: 2.2.01

1 SITE/STATUTORY NOTICE DISPLAYED ? ✓

2. DESCRIPTION OF SURROUNDINGS

Town Centre location. Commercial uses to north and residential to south

3. DESCRIPTION OF SITE/BUILDING

Public car park r/o of office building

4. RELATIONSHIP TO ADJOINING PROPERTIES

Sale cottages single storey except for corner which is 2 storey

5. SITE CONSTRAINTS

TREES	none effected
ACCESS/PARKING	refer to plan
LEVELS	no change
BOUNDARY TREATMENT	
OTHERS	