

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A DEVELOPMENT CONTROL FORUM

16 November 2005

10.05am – 11.10am

APPLICATION: 05/1085/FUL Car Park adjoining Unex House, 132 Hills Road, Cambridge

Present:

For Applicant

Stephen Walsh, Applicant

For Petitioners

Michael Chisholm, Brooklands Avenue Residents Association

Geoffrey Newton, Brooklands Avenue Residents Association

Members of Planning Committee: Councillors Bailey, Baker, Blencowe and Reid

Apologies had been received from Councillors Dixon, Dryden, and Slatter.

Officers: John Summers, Head of Development Services (Chair), Peter Carter, Principal Development Control Manager, Neville Doe, Case Officer

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared by councillors.

Applicant's case

Mr Walsh presented the applicant's case. He put the current position into context by explaining the history of an previous application (which itself was the subject of a Development Control Forum) for development on the site, which is scheduled for an appeal, a Public Inquiry to be heard by the a Planning Inspector next spring. The appeal is against the non-determination of that application by the Council. The officer recommendation for this application had it been put to Planning Committee for determination was one of refusal.

The applicant recognised the delay before the appeal would be heard as an opportunity to discuss development of the site with the Director of Environment & Planning and Principal Development Control Manager and a meeting was held in May 2005. The applicant established with the officers that there were three areas of concern with the application subject to appeal: i) the application was for outline permission only, without any clarification as to occupiers and thus contrary to policy; ii) the proposed footprint was too close to boundaries of the site; iii) lack of amenity space. Re. i), the applicant at the time was negotiating with the County Council its requirements for the Guided Bus project and until that had been completed it was impractical to proceed to a full application. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in the summer, which has enabled the applicant to apply now for full planning permission; the matter of the occupiers being local and thus according with the local plan can be dealt with by a condition or legal agreement. Re. ii) To the East there had been no objections previously; to the South, the land is earmarked (by Compulsory Purchase Order?) to provide turning space for the Guided Bus. To the West, the application now proposes a

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'stepped back' elevation, by one structural bay, which would make the new building (above the parking decks) as far from the boundary with the neighbour to the west as the existing car park/office building. It is stepped back further at third floor level to reduce the impact of the top floor. Re iii) an atrium in the centre of the building would create an amenity space. The applicant, therefore, is of the view that the officer concerns about the first application have been addressed by this application. The applicant has had expressions of interest from two potential clients for the 30,000sq ft development.

With reference to the traffic implications, the proposal would provide 25 additional parking spaces; with 3 accesses to the site, this could mean no more than 8 or 9 arriving from each access point. A transport assessment undertaken by Mott McDonald looked at all modes of travel but the applicant was not aware whether the County Council had yet 'signed it off' as part of its assessment of the application. The applicant stated that any s106 agreement could include contributions for signalised traffic improvements. The application had made an additional two areas available for cycle parking compared to the previous application.

The applicant concluded by stating that the application was in line with Government and Regional Planning Guidance covering development near transport hubs and maximising use of existing land.

Petitioner's case

Mr Chisholm spoke on behalf of the petitioners. He began by stating that the previous application, had it been processed by the Council in time, would have been recommended for refusal, with policies cited to explain this. It would be worth exploring what changes had been made to those policies within a year which would now warrant a change in officer view, noting also that the application now proposed a larger floor area.

Local residents took the view that the current building was an over-development. Any more building on the site would only compound an existing problem, irrespective of any improvement to the design.

With reference to traffic issues and the additional trips in and out of the site, estimated as 238 trips, Mr Chisholm noted that the applicants said that of these 25 would be by car, and 73 by bicycle. This left 140 trips in and 140 movements out by foot (included in this are those traveling by train and bus the final part of whose journey would be made on foot). Noting that consultation was currently being carried out by the County Council on improving Hills Road bridge, the County Council figures for the western pavement for 2004 (the application site side) were 150 pedestrian movements 8-9am and 90 movements 5-6pm. Therefore, the estimated additional trips resulting from the development would lead to a near 100% increase on the western pavement of the bridge.

The Hills Road/Brooklands Avenue traffic junction was already at capacity during peak times. Despite the developments recently completed or near completion, no phased junction improvements were in place. Accommodating the additional pedestrians at a phased junction would have a significant impact on the vehicular traffic during peak times.

The impact of the developments 'on stream', but not fully implemented, should be taken into account. These developments included the Brooklands Avenue Government offices site the triangle site (Laings), the Belvedere development and whatever would come forward from the Station Area redevelopment.

In conclusion Mr Chisholm questioned the need for further development of this site.

Planning Officer

The Council had received responses to the application from the County Council, Environment Agency, Environmental Health and five letters from residents.

Questions from Councillors

Councillor Baker asked how the two applications compared in terms of office space and car parking. The Head of Development Services asked for clarification about the difference in number of traffic movements.

The Applicant stated:

	Previous application	Current application
Office space	3,553m sq. gross	4,005m sq. gross
Additional car parking	25 spaces	25 spaces
Additional traffic movements	210	238

Councillor Reid asked how the applicant's proposed car parking requirement compared to other developments. The Principal Development Control Manager stated that the additional number of car spaces included in the application was lower than could be applied for, if the maximum provision allowable was made. However, the number of car parking spaces already included on the existing site, is higher than the Council would now agree, but had, in part been approved on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate. Councillor Baker asked what changes to policy had occurred since the consideration of the previous application and whether Planning Committee is able to take into account whether there is sufficient provision of office space in the City or on that site. Officers stated that PPG1 had been replaced with PPS1; in addition the Structure Plan and the emerging Local Plan are generally less restrictive about new commercial floorspace in such locations.

Councillors Reid and Baker asked about the County Council's view of the traffic assessment, noting that no adverse comments had been made in its submission. The Principal Development Control Manager stated that he would discuss with the County Council the issues that had been raised by the petitioners at the DCF, particularly concerning traffic movements other than by car. He undertook to ensure that the planning officer's report to Committee included reference and an assessment of the issues raised.

In response to a question from members, Mr Chisholm stated that the pedestrian movements on the eastern pavement of the Hills Road bridge were 550 8am-9am and 130 5pm-6pm.

Applicant summing up

In response to some of the issues, the applicant stated that the current users of City House/UNEX had a staggered timescale because of the nature of the employment eg. from early morning until late at night. There was a gym on site which also influenced when the building was being used. He also believed that the pavements were not over capacity at peak periods. There was a need for this development based on the current interest of two clients for the full site. There was the potential for a guided bus stop near to the site.

Petitioner summing up

It was hypothetical to mention a guided bus stop when there was no decision yet on the guided bus project. Improvements to the traffic junction at Hills Road/Brooklands Avenue were included in the Accordia site approval (and for Brooklands Avenue and Trumpington Road), Cambridge University Press site and now for this application. Was this a 'fig leaf' ie. justification of the planning applications if traffic mitigation measures were put in place. He also thought that the County Council's comments on traffic were not binding -, the City Council could choose to disagree with any view expressed by the County about likely traffic impact.