

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**RPC SUB-GROUP – STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS**

Date: 8 October 2007

Subject: Planning application consultation ref A/07/096

Site Address:	Land at Sandford Farm, Mohawk Way, Woodley, Berkshire
Proposal:	Proposed erection of 150 unit retirement village and 8 office buildings, 7 storage and distribution units, 5 light industrial units (to provide 23 small units), children's nursery, 29 ha countryside amenity space and visitor centre, with associated access and landscaping
Local Planning Authority:	Wokingham Borough Council
Applicant:	Sandford Farm Properties Ltd
Date consultation issued:	07 September 2007

Report of: **Regional Planner**

**Recommendation:**

The South East England Regional Assembly makes the following observations:-

- The borough council should be satisfied that there is sufficient local demand for the employment floorspace proposed in accordance with Policies RE2 of RPG9 and WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan; and
- The borough council should seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement unless it is satisfied that it is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan.

In addition to the above, members are requested to note that the following key policy directions from RPG9 and the draft South East Plan relevant to the application will be outlined in the response to assist the local authority in making a decision:-

- An appropriate package of transport infrastructure and other measures including an agreed travel plan to promote alternatives to the car in accordance with Policies T1, T10 and T13 (RPG9 as altered) and T1, T5 and T8 of the draft South East Plan;

- The phasing and delivery of community and other infrastructure appropriate to the scale of the development and to meet the needs of residents in accordance with Policy INF2 of RPG9 and Policies CC5 and NRM1 of the draft South East Plan;
- An appropriate level of car and cycle parking to comply with Policy T12 of RPG9 (as altered) and Policy T7 of the draft South East Plan;
- The adoption of key development principles for each phase of development to make good use of land and to secure a high quality of environment consistent with Policy Q2 of RPG9 and Policies CC12 and H5 of the draft South East Plan.
- The incorporation of water and energy efficiency measures and the promotion of renewable energy and sustainable construction in accordance with Policies INF2 and INF4 of RPG9 and Policies CC2, CC3, CC4, NRM1, EN1, EN2, W2 and M1 of the draft South East Plan.
- Mitigation measures in relation to flood risk, noise, air quality and impacts on groundwater, and measures to enhance biodiversity of the site in accordance with the objectives of Policies E1, E2, E7, INF1 and INF2 of RPG9 and Policies NRM1, NRM3, NRM4, NRM7 and NRM8 of the draft South East Plan.

## **I. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the recommended consultation response to the above application for consideration and agreement.

## **2. Site Description and Background**

- 2.1 The application site comprises over 49ha to the east of Woodley in Wokingham Borough. It is designated as countryside in the local plan.
- 2.2 The application site is bounded to the east by the river Loddon. To the west the site is bounded by Beggars Hill Road. To the south the site is bounded by a perimeter road, which will act as access to the site.
- 2.3 The site is a former sand and gravel extraction quarry which was later used to dispose of extensive land fill and was subsequently capped. The application site can be split into two distinct parts:
- i. land to the west of Old River, a tributary of the River Loddon. This is the part of the application site on which the built development is proposed
  - ii. land to the east of Old River, that extends in part to the River Loddon, that forms the eastern boundary of the site.

- 2.4 There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) approximately 1km from the site. This is the Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI that comprises two wet woodlands.
- 2.5 The site is allocated as a reserve housing site within the Wokingham Local Plan and as such, there is policy protection against the use of the site for other uses, in the event of there being a need for the site to be developed to satisfy the Council's housing obligations. However, a planning application was submitted for the site in April 1999 for a proposed training centre, hotel, health and leisure centre, car parking, public open space and landscaping (referred to as the Oracle Scheme). This scheme was approved by the council on 19 July 2002. This permission has subsequently been renewed and is valid until 2008.
- 2.6 It is important to note that a previous planning application for primarily residential use (250 dwellings) plus retail use, office use and community facilities on the site was refused in 1999 because of concerns over the suitability of the site for housing due to the issue of contaminated land. It is ultimately up to Wokingham Borough Council and the Environment Agency to determine the suitability of the site for the proposed development having regard to previous concerns over contaminated land.
- 2.7 A location map is included in Annex I.

### **3. Details of the proposal**

- 3.1 The application is an outline application which comprises:

Retirement Village of 150 dwellings	
Office Development with 8 buildings	9,290sqm
Storage and Distribution Facility of 7 units	
	18,580sqm
Five Light Industrial Buildings, subdivided into 23 units	9,290sqm
Data Centre and associated Energy Centre	
	9,290sqm
Countryside Amenity Area	29 ha.
Children's Nursery	395 sqm

- 3.2 Principle road access to the site for commercial traffic will be the Perimeter Road which runs along the boundary of the site to the south. The applicant states that a new roundabout at the junction of Mohawk Way and Perimeter Road would provide access for motorised traffic. A second access serving only the Retirement Village is proposed for trips to and from the north.

- 3.3 The application is in outline with all matters reserved except for means of access, layout and scale. External appearance and landscaping are to be considered at a later stage.
- 3.4 The planning application is accompanied by a Planning Statement, an Environmental Statement and non-technical summary, a Design and Access Statement, an energy and Sustainability report, an Office Market Report, a Public Consultation Statement, a Sequential Site Assessment, a Transport Assessment Report and a Travel Plan Framework.

#### **4. Main Issues and Relevant Policy Considerations**

- 4.1 The following are the main regional issues associated with the application, along with the relevant Regional Spatial Strategy policies that need to be considered:-
- The location of the proposal, with the following policies being relevant :-
    - Policy Q1 of RPG9 and Policies CC8a, H3 and H5 of the draft South East Plan – urban focus
    - Policy Q5 of RPG9 and TC2 and TC3 of the draft South East Plan – town centres

The level of employment proposed, with the following policies being relevant:

Policy RE2 of RPG9 and Policy WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan – employment land

- The level of housing proposed, with the following policies being relevant:-
  - Policies H1 and H2 of RPG9 and Policies H1, H4, and CC11 of the draft South East Plan – housing

## 5. Policy Assessment

### Location of Development

- 5.1 Policy Q1 and Policy H5 of RPG9 and Policy CC8a of the draft South East Plan seek to direct new development to existing urban areas and brownfield sites. Further, Policy H3 of the draft South East Plan seeks to provide at least 60% of additional housing on previously developed land. However, the site is an allocated housing site in the local plan, and has extant planning permission for commercial uses. The principle of housing and commercial development on this site has, therefore, been established.

### Employment

- 5.2 Policy Q5 of RPG9 seeks to make the region's larger town centres the focus for major retail, leisure and office developments. Policies TC2 and TC3 of the draft South East Plan look to the strategic network of town centres as the prime focus for major new office development to meet identified needs. The draft South East Plan sets out that the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley Sub-Region is one of the most economically successful parts of the South East. Regional and sub-regional economic policy objectives, in particular Policies RE2 of RPG9 and Policy WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan, seek to ensure that the economy is supported, to give priority to the retention and efficient use of existing employment land to meet employment land needs and that development follows sustainability principles.
- 5.3 The applicant states that the supporting market analysis undertaken by CB Richard Ellis concluded that the supply of offices is diminishing generally across the Thames Valley and that smaller units are particularly restricted. The applicant concludes, therefore, that the proposed office floorplace at Sandford Farm would fill a gap in the local market and respond to a growing demand that currently has very limited opportunity to be satisfied. The applicant states that the scheme will generate local employment on both full and part-time bases, with the nett employment being equivalent to 825 full time positions.
- 5.4 The applicant has submitted a sequential appraisal of sites with the application and this demonstrates a lack of suitable alternative sites within the catchment of the site that could provide attractive accommodation for the smaller business, in modern sustainable units. The applicant states that the package of proposed sustainable transport measures will reduce travel demand particularly by the private car, with improved bus facilities and services, footway and cycleways, whilst junction improvements will improve safety and local highway conditions.

- 5.5 The borough council must be satisfied that there the site is the most appropriate for the proposed development in terms of sustainability and that there is sufficient local demand for the employment floorspace proposed in accordance with Policy WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan.

### Housing

- 5.6 Policy H2 of RPG9 states that Berkshire should achieve 2,620 dwellings per annum. Policy H1 of the draft South East Plan states that Wokingham Borough should accommodate an additional 523 dwellings per annum. Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan states that the affordable housing target for the region is for 25% of all new housing to be social rented accommodation and 10% other forms of affordable housing.
- 5.7 The application is for approximately 150 new dwellings in the form of a retirement care village, which would contribute to the housing requirements as set out in RPG9 and the draft South East Plan. Additionally, Policy CCI I of the draft South East Plan is concerned with supporting an ageing population.
- 5.8 The borough council must be satisfied that the site is the most appropriate location for this use. The borough council should also seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement unless it is satisfied that it is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan.

### Other Matters

- 5.9 In addition to the above, there are a number of priorities arising out of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan which can be dealt with by way of condition or legal agreement if the borough council is minded to grant planning permission. These relate to the following policy areas:
- Transport;
  - Infrastructure;
  - Water;
  - Air and Noise;
  - Natural Environment;
  - Sustainable Construction and Energy Efficiency;
  - Built Environment.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 The site is designated as countryside in the local plan and is allocated as a reserve housing site. It does, however, have existing permission for commercial uses. The borough council must be satisfied that there is sufficient local demand for the employment floorspace proposed. The borough council should also seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement unless it is satisfied that it is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan.
- 6.2 If the borough council is minded to grant planning permission, it should address the detailed issues identified in this report through the imposition of appropriately worded conditions and/or legal agreements to comply with the objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG9 and Alterations) or the draft South East Plan.
- 6.3 Matters relating to external appearance and landscaping are reserved matters and will be the subject of future planning applications.

## **7. Recommendation**

- 7.1 Members are requested to agree the following recommendation to the local authority:-

The South East England Regional Assembly makes the following observations:-

- The borough council should be satisfied that there is sufficient local demand for the employment floorspace proposed in accordance with Policies RE2 of RPG9 and WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan; and
  - The borough council should seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement unless it is satisfied that it is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan.
- 7.2 In addition to the above, members are requested to note that the following key policy directions from RPG9 and the draft South East Plan relevant to the application will be outlined in the response to assist the local authority in making a decision:-
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Date: 8 October 2007

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