

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

RPC SUB-GROUP – STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS

Date: 10 January 2008

Subject: Planning application consultation ref A/07/129 & A/07/128

Site Address:	Crowthorne Business Estate, Old Wokingham Road, Crowthorne
Proposal:	<p><u>A/07/129</u></p> <p>Outline application for the redevelopment of the Crowthorne Business Estate for a business park comprising up to 109,500 sq m (gross) of B1 office floorspace, up to 1,500 sq m of ancillary leisure, retail and amenity uses, decked car parking, internal vehicular circulation routes, landscaping and surface water drainage.</p> <p><u>A/07/128</u></p> <p>Outline application for the redevelopment of the site for a mixed use development comprising up to 975 dwellings with associated local neighbourhood centre comprising shops (use class A1), financial and professional services (use class A2), restaurants/cafes (use class A3), primary school/nursery, community hall, health and fitness centre and healthcare centre and small scale office and business units (use class B1); a business park comprising 92,903 square metres of office floorspace (use class B1) with ancillary parking and food and drink uses, an 80 room hotel and a combined heat and power plant together with open space, semi-natural green space, surface water attenuation areas, landscaping, associated new roads, accesses and parking.</p>
Local Planning Authority:	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Applicant:	Legal & General Assurance Society Ltd
Date consultation issued:	10 December 2007

Report of: **Regional Planner**

Recommendation:

Employment Led Application (A/07/129)

That the observations made by the Assembly as part of the previous application (A/07/089) be resubmitted to the local authority on the basis that the revised application does not materially alter the merits of the proposal or the Assembly's response.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128)

The South East England Regional Assembly makes the following observations in relation to the application:-

- The local authority will need to satisfy itself that there is a need for the additional employment floor space proposed as part of this development, and that the application site represents a sustainable location for this development. It may also be appropriate to consider the availability of other, more sustainable locations, on a sub-regional basis.
- The local authority will need to carefully consider the principle of residential development on the application site, having regard to existing plans and proposals to meet housing need in other locations which may be sequentially preferable sites (particularly in relation to sustainable transport) and the need for residential uses on the site to be considered in detail as part of the local development framework (i.e. the emerging site allocations development plan document).
- The local authority will need to determine whether this proposal will compromise the integrity of the strategic gap, having regard to Policy CC10b of the draft South East Plan, and should only grant planning permission if the proposal would not compromise, individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development, the fundamental integrity and purpose of the gap.
- When considering the impact on the Thames Basin Heaths, the local authority should only grant planning permission if it is satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the adjoining and nearby Special Protection Areas in accordance with Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan.
- If the local authority is minded to grant planning permission, it will be necessary for the proposed SANGS to form part of a wider package of measures to avoid and mitigate impacts on the Special Protection Area and that the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed are to the satisfaction of the local authority and Natural England as required by the Habitats Regulations and Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan.

- The local authority will need to consider the extent to which the proposal appropriately contributes to the rebalancing of the transport system in favour of non-car modes as sought by Policies T1 and T5 of RPG9 and Policies T1 and T5 of the draft South East Plan.

If the local authority is minded to grant permission, it will be important that it considers the following prior to a decision being made:-

- The local authority should seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement and must not grant planning permission unless satisfied that the provision of affordable housing would threaten the viability of the whole scheme or is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment, in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan.
- The need to secure firm commitments, through conditions and/or legal agreements, to any proposals deemed necessary to deliver sustainable transport options for the development as required by Policy WCBV6 of the draft South East Plan;
- The need to consider the role of a broader range of mobility management tools as set out in Policy T5 of the draft South East Plan, including the scale of car parking proposed, the potential role of charging and incentives for car sharing;
- The contribution that smart economic growth can play in reducing the need to travel associated with the development (as set out in Policy WCBV5 of the draft South East Plan);
- The need to consider a full draft travel plan that sets out arrangements to promote genuine alternatives to the car as required by Policy 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;
- The adoption of key development principles to make good use of land and to secure a high quality of environment consistent with Policy Q2 of RPG9 and Policy CC12 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 EI, E2, E7, INF1 and INF2 of RPG9 and Policies NRM1, NRM3, NRM4, NRM7 and NRM8 of the draft South East Plan.

1. Purpose of Report

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

2. Site Description and Background

- 2.1 The subject site is located between the towns of Crowthorne to the south west and Bracknell to the north east. The site is currently known as the Crowthorne Business Estate, although the applicant has advised that 80% of the estate is currently vacant. Within the subject site is the headquarters of the Transport Research Laboratory Ltd, which includes offices, a road testing facility and other associated infrastructure.
- 2.2 To the immediate west is open land, beyond which are residential areas forming part of Crowthorne. To the north of the site is an area of largely undeveloped land comprising small land holdings, some used for agricultural purposes and some for other activities.
- 2.3 To the south and east is open land, comprising part of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (located approximately 400 metres from the subject site). This area is also a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and contains various Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- 2.4 A location map is included in Annex I.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1 There are two applications which are the subject of this report.

Employment Led Application (A/07/129)

- 3.2 The employment led proposal seeks outline planning permission (all matters reserved except for access) for the development of the site as follows:-

- Office uses (B1) providing up to 109,500sq.m of floorspace;
- Ancillary space of 1,500sq.m, comprising a café / restaurant, conference facilities, crèche and gym;
- 3,129 parking spaces;
- A new internal road layout and access from both Nine Mile Ride and Old Wokingham Road.

- 3.3 Development in this application is focused on redeveloping the existing office uses on the north-western part of the site, with the TRL offices being retained in the central portion of the site.
- 3.4 The employment proposal is the same as a previous application considered by the Assembly (A/07/089) except it provides 571 less parking spaces.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128)

- 3.5 The mixed use proposal seeks outline planning permission (all matters reserved except for access) for the development of the site as follows:-
- Development of 975 dwellings, with ancillary local shops and offices, food and drink uses, a primary school / nursery, community hall, health and fitness centre, and health care centre.
 - Development of a business park (92,903sq.m of office uses (BI)), with 1,500sq.m of ancillary food and drink uses, an 80 room hotel and gym, active and passive open space, and parking for 2,655 cars.
 - Supporting infrastructure, including roads and a combined heat and power plant.
 - Open space being classified as 'suitable alternative natural green space' (SANGS) for the purposes of the nearby Thames Heath Basin Special Protection Area.
- 3.6 Development in this application for residential uses is focused on the north-western part of the site, the TRL offices being retained in the central portion of the site, and business uses being developed in the north-eastern part of the site. The southern part of the site would be utilised for open space purposes.

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 strategic basis and location of the proposed employment elements of the development, with the following policies being relevant:-
 - Policy Q1 of RPG9 and Policies CC8a and WCBV2 of the draft South East Plan – urban focus;
 - Policy Q5 of RPG9 and Policies TC2 and TC3 of the draft South East Plan – town centres;
 - Policies RE1, RE3, RE4 and RE5 of RPG9 and Policies RE2, WCBV4 and WCBV5 of the draft South East Plan – economic development / employment and land provision / smart economic growth.

- The strategic basis and location of the proposed residential elements of the development, with the following policies being relevant:-
 - Policy Q1 of RPG9 and Policies CC8a, WCBV2 and WCBV2 of the draft South East Plan – urban focus and scale of housing;
 - Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan – Affordable Housing.

- The impact on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, with the following policies being relevant:-
 - Policy WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan - Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

- The transport impact of the proposal, with the following policies being relevant:-
 - Policies T1, T9, T10, T12 and T13 of RPG 9 – traffic, transport and public transport;
 - Policies T1, T5, T7 and T8 of the Draft South East Plan – Transport, Parking, Travel Plans and Investment;
 - Policy CC5 of the draft South East Plan - Infrastructure & Implementation.

5. Policy Assessment

Employment Led Application (A/07/129)

- 5.1 The employment led application is substantially the same as the previous application considered by the Regional Assembly (see A/07/089), with the proposed reduction of parking by 571 spaces being welcome. However, this change does not alter the Assembly's previous comments, which highlighted the need for the local authority to be satisfied that the site is a sustainable location for the increase in floor space proposed and that the additional floor space is required to meet the need for office space in the sub-region.
- 5.2 This report recommends that the Assembly reiterates the same comments which were made in relation to the previous application. On this basis, this report does not further discuss the merits of the employment led application and refers members to the earlier report in relation to A/07/089 for a full discussion of the employment led application against RPG9 and draft South East Plan policies.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128)

Strategic Basis and Location of the Proposal – Employment Element

- 5.3 Policy Q1 of RPG9 and Policies CC8a and WCB2 of the draft South East Plan seek to locate new development and redevelopment in urban areas, primarily to promote more sustainable patterns of development, to make the best use of land, and to take advantage of existing infrastructure. Policy Q5 of RPG9 and Policy TC2 of the draft South East Plan seek to focus major office development (above 10,000sq.m) within the strategic network of town centres. The application site is located outside of the strategic network of town centres and outside an urban area and is therefore inconsistent with these policy directions.
- 5.4 However, the site is designated as a major employment site in the Bracknell Forest Local Plan which creates a basis for on-going (and redeveloped) employment uses on the site. This is reiterated in Policy WCBV4 of the draft South East Plan which seeks the retention of existing employment areas. As such, the principle of continued employment uses of the site is acceptable subject to the other policy considerations, including the impacts of the increase in intensity of the site.
- 5.5 The proposal seeks to provide 92,903sq.m of gross floor space, of which approximately 45,000sq.m is additional employment floorspace over and above what currently exists. 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 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 (Policy WCBC4 of the draft South East Plan) and that development follows sustainability principles. 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 employment development to meet identified needs, which would include developments of 45,000sq.m (i.e. the increased proposed in this application).
- 5.6 The local authority will need to satisfy itself that there is a need for the additional employment floor space proposed as part of this development, and that the application site represents a sustainable location for this development. It may also be appropriate to consider the availability of other, more sustainable locations, on a sub-regional basis.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128)

Strategic Basis and Location of the Proposal – Housing Element

- 5.7 In relation to the residential element of the proposal, Policy H1 and WCBV3 of the draft South East Plan set out a housing requirement of 539 new homes per year in Bracknell Forest. The Bracknell Forest Core Strategy has recently been found sound, and this document commits to the delivery of the housing figures contained in the draft South East Plan. The recent Panel report into the South East Plan recommended an increase in this annual requirement by 100 homes per year. The Proposed Changes have not been published by the Government Office as yet.
- 5.8 Policy H3 of the draft South East Plan sets out general locational requirements for new housing, which includes urban areas and other sustainable locations. Policy WCBV2 reiterates the focus of new development in the Blackwater Valley Sub-Region as being within the existing built up areas. Policy CC8a of the draft South East Plan reiterates that across the region the prime focus for development should be urban areas.
- 5.9 The applicant has submitted that the site can make a contribution to housing delivering in Bracknell Forest, particularly if housing targets are increased as a result of the final South East Plan. This would, however, seem to be somewhat premature given the current uncertainty associated with the emerging South East Plan, the very recent finding that the Bracknell Forest Core Strategy is sound and the reality that the Core Strategy does not advance residential uses on the application site. Further, the application site is not contained within an existing built up area and is therefore a less preferred location for new development.
- 5.10 It will be necessary for the local authority to carefully consider the principle of residential development on the application site, having regard to existing plans and proposals to meet housing need in other locations which are sequentially preferable sites (particularly in relation to sustainable transport) and the need for residential uses on the site to be considered in detail as part of the local development framework (i.e. the emerging site allocations development plan document).

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128) - Strategic Gap

- 5.11 The Bracknell Forest Core Strategy identifies a strategic gap to the north of the subject site. The purpose of this gap is to stop the merging of the settlements of Bracknell and Crowthorne into a single contiguous urban area. Policy CC10b of the draft South East Plan outlines that development should only be permitted where it would not compromise, individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development, the fundamental integrity and purpose of the gap. The local authority will need to determine whether this proposal will compromise the integrity of the gap, having regard to its core purpose.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128) - Transport

- 5.12 Policies T1 and T5 of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan seek to achieve a rebalancing of the transport system in favour of non-car modes as a means of access to services and facilities. Policy T10 of RPG9 and Policy T5 of the draft South East Plan indicate that this should be achieved through an integrated package of measures. Policy T13 of RPG9 and Policy T8 of the draft South East Plan relate to travel plans and advice and seek to ensure that all major travel generating developments have a travel plan agreed by 2011. Policy T12 of RPG9 and Policy T7 of the draft South East Plan relate to parking and support maximum parking standards and the provision of sufficient cycle parking at new developments.
- 5.13 Public transport to the site is currently poor and largely comprises bus services near the site that primarily serve the nearby residential areas. However, the site is not currently accessible at all on the weekend. The nearest train stations are Crowthorne station at 3.5km from the site and Bracknell station at 5.25km from the site. Public transport proposals involve diverting an existing bus route through the residential area of the site, and the introduction of a shuttle bus service running through the site providing a link to Bracknell Town Centre and railway station and Crowthorne High Street and railway station.
- 5.14 A range of proposals are set out in relation to road up-grades, cycle facilities and pedestrian arrangements and these will be considered in detail by the local authority. In relation to parking, the proposal seeks to provide 2,655 parking spaces associated with the employment element of the proposal. Policy T7 of the draft South East Plan outlines that Local Development Frameworks should set out maximum parking rates for B1 uses at between 1 : 30sq.m and 1 : 100sq.m. The proposed provision of parking is therefore towards the lower end of the draft South East Plan range.
- 5.15 Based on the information submitted, it is considered that the proposal does not adequately demonstrate how the proposal will contribute to the rebalancing of the transport system in favour of non-car modes as sought by Policies T1 and T5 of RPG9 and Policies T1 and T5 of the draft South East Plan.
- 5.16 If the local authority is minded to grant permission, it will be important that it considers the following prior to a decision being made:-
- The need to secure firm commitments, through conditions and/or legal agreements, to any proposals deemed necessary to deliver sustainable transport options for the development as required by Policy WCBV6 of the draft South East Plan;

- The need to consider the role of a broader range of mobility management tools as set out in Policy T5 of the draft South East Plan, including the scale of car parking proposed, the potential role of charging and incentives for car sharing;
- The contribution that smart economic growth can play in reducing the need to travel associated with the development (as set out in Policy WCBV5 of the draft South East Plan);
- The need to consider a full draft travel plan that sets out arrangements to promote genuine alternatives to the car as required by Policy T8 of the draft South East Plan.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128) - Thames Basin Heaths

- 5.17 Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policies NRM4 and NRM5 of the draft South East Plan seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and advance nature conservation interests. The subject site is located close to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan seek to ensure that practical management solutions are in place to manage the likely impact of new development on these areas. It is mostly considered that residential uses have the most potential to impact on the Thames Basin Heaths, although the employment uses proposed also need to be considered.
- 5.18 The application includes an avoidance and mitigation strategy for protecting the Thames Basin Heaths located near to the site. This includes designating and opening up part of the site for open space so as to attract residents away from areas designated as Special Protection Areas, as well as signage and the development of circular walking routes through the site. This open space will also serve the needs of those people using the employment parts of the proposal. This open space, where provided to mitigate impacts on designated Special Protection Areas, is commonly referred to as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS).
- 5.19 When considering the impact on the Thames Basin Heaths, the local authority should only grant planning permission if it is satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the adjoining and nearby Special Protection Area in accordance with Policy WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan.
- 5.20 If the local authority is minded to grant planning permission, it will be necessary for the SANGS to form part of a wider package of measures to avoid and mitigate impacts on the Special Protection Area. This may include the need for off-site works as well as financial contributions to the management of the Special Protection Area in a wider (i.e. sub-regional) context.

- 5.21 It is further essential that the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed are to the satisfaction of the local authority and Natural England and that they avoid any negative impact from the proposal on the Special Protection Area as required by the Habitats Regulations and Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan. Regard should also be had to the emerging Draft Interim Strategic Development Plan for the Thames Basin Heaths.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128) - Affordable Housing

- 5.22 Policy H4 of RPG9 and Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan seek to ensure that affordable housing is provided to meet local needs. Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan seeks to ensure that across the region 25% of all new housing is social rented and 10% of all new housing being intermediate housing. The application does not address the extent of affordable housing provision proposed beyond a commitment to 'work with the local authority to determine the most appropriate and deliverable provision of affordable housing'. Given the importance of affordable housing to meeting overall housing need in the South East, it is essential that if the local authority is minded to grant planning permission for residential uses on the site that a suitable contribution to affordable housing is made, having regard to the targets set out in Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128) – Other Matters

- 5.23 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 local authority is minded to grant planning permission. These relate to the following policy areas:

- Infrastructure;
- Water;
- Air and Noise;
- Natural Environment;
- Sustainable Construction and Energy Efficiency;
- Built Environment.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Both applications highlight issues in terms of RPG9 and the draft South East Plan. For the employment-led application, these relate to the proposed increase in employment floorspace and the overall suitability of the site for an increase in intensity of use. These matters were addressed in detail as part of the report on application A/07/089 and the same comments continue to be applicable.

- 6.2 The mixed-use application, with the proposed introduction of residential uses on the site, raises a number of additional issues beyond the suitability of the site for additional employment uses. These include the impact on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area, the suitability of the site for residential uses, the transport impacts of the proposal, the impact on the strategic gap, and the need for affordable housing (if the local authority is minded to grant planning permission).

7. Recommendation

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

Employment Led Application (A/07/129)

That the observations made by the Assembly as part of the previous application (A/07/089) be resubmitted to the local authority on the basis that the revised application does not materially alter the merits of the proposal or the Assembly's response.

Mixed Use Application (A/07/128)

The South East England Regional Assembly makes the following observations in relation to the application:-

- The local authority will need to satisfy itself that there is a need for the additional employment floor space proposed as part of this development, and that the application site represents a sustainable location for this development. It may also be appropriate to consider the availability of other, more sustainable locations, on a sub-regional basis.
- The local authority will need to carefully consider the principle of residential development on the application site, having regard to existing plans and proposals to meet housing need in other locations which may be sequentially preferable sites (particularly in relation to sustainable transport) and the need for residential uses on the site to be considered in detail as part of the local development framework (i.e. the emerging site allocations development plan document).
- The local authority will need to determine whether this proposal will compromise the integrity of the strategic gap, having regard to Policy CC10b of the draft South East Plan, and should only grant planning permission if the proposal would not compromise, individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development, the fundamental integrity and purpose of the gap.

- When considering the impact on the Thames Basin Heaths, the local authority should only grant planning permission if it is satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the adjoining and nearby Special Protection Areas in accordance with Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan.
- If the local authority is minded to grant planning permission, it will be necessary for the proposed SANGS to form part of a wider package of measures to avoid and mitigate impacts on the Special Protection Area and that the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed are to the satisfaction of the local authority and Natural England as required by the Habitats Regulations and Policies NRM4 and WCBV9 of the draft South East Plan.
- The local authority will need to consider the extent to which the proposal appropriately contributes to the rebalancing of the transport system in favour of non-car modes as sought by Policies T1 and T5 of RPG9 and Policies T1 and T5 of the draft South East Plan.

If the local authority is minded to grant permission, it will be important that it considers the following prior to a decision being made:-

- The local authority should seek to secure an appropriate level of affordable housing through a legal agreement and must not grant planning permission unless satisfied that the provision of affordable housing would threaten the viability of the whole scheme or is not required on the basis of a local housing needs assessment, in line with Policy H4 of RPG9 and Policy H4 of the draft South East Plan.
- The need to secure firm commitments, through conditions and/or legal agreements, to any proposals deemed necessary to deliver sustainable transport options for the development as required by Policy WCBV6 of the draft South East Plan;
- The need to consider the role of a broader range of mobility management tools as set out in Policy T5 of the draft South East Plan, including the scale of car parking proposed, the potential role of charging and incentives for car sharing;
- The contribution that smart economic growth can play in reducing the need to travel associated with the development (as set out in Policy WCBV5 of the draft South East Plan);
- The need to consider a full draft travel plan that sets out arrangements to promote genuine alternatives to the car as required by Policy 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;
- The adoption of key development principles to make good use of land and to secure a high quality of environment consistent with Policy Q2 of RPG9 and Policy CC12 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.

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