

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

RPC SUB-GROUP – STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS

Date: 14 January 2008

Subject: Planning application consultation ref A/08/004

Site Address:	Land East of Knights Park Way, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent
Proposal:	Construction of park and ride facility with up to 400 Parking Spaces, bus lay-by, bus shelter and landscaping.
Local Planning Authority:	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Applicant:	Knight Frank LLP
Date consultation issued:	31 December 2007

Report of: **Regional Planner**

Recommendation:

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

- The local authority should ensure that the proposed development is in accordance with guidance in PPG2 (Green Belts) to comply with the objectives of Policy E3 of RPG9 and Policy CC10a of the draft South East Plan and does not conflict with the aim of conserving and enhancing the character and appearance of this part of the High Weald AONB in accordance with Policy E1 of RPG9 and Policy C2 of the draft South East Plan;
- It is important that the local authority is satisfied that the proposal will minimise the loss of any biodiversity on the site in accordance with Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policy NRM4 of the draft South East Plan. Further, the potential to achieve a net gain in biodiversity on the site should be advanced by the local authority in accordance with Policy E2 of the draft South East Plan;
- The local authority, working with the Environment Agency, should fully consider the flood implications of the proposal in accordance with Policy INFI of RPG9 and Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan.

I. Purpose of Report

- I.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 site is located close to the A21, 3km north-east of Tunbridge Wells town centre and is 1.865ha in size. It is currently a mix of scrubland and woodland. The Knights Park Leisure Complex is located opposite the site to the west, to the east is the A21, and to the north-west is a commercial / business area.
- 2.2 According to the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (2006) (as saved), the subject site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also within the Kent Special Landscape Area.
- 2.3 The subject site is located approximately 400m to the east of a site designated in the Local Plan for use as a park and ride facility. This site is now the subject of a planning application to be developed as a 'centre of clinical excellence' (CCE). The current application for the new park and ride site is part of a wider proposal to deliver the CCE and find an alternative site for the park and ride facility. It is noted that the proposed site for the park and ride is closer to the A21 than the currently designated site.
- 2.4 The subject site is also the subject of an existing planning approval for a touring caravan site.
- 2.5 A location map is included in Annex I.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1 The proposal seeks approval to create a park and ride site for up to 400 parking spaces, together with a bus turning area and layover space.

4. Main Issues and Relevant Policy Considerations

- 4.1 The principle of a park and ride facility in this locality is not considered to raise any regional or sub-regional issues on the basis that the proposed site is only 400m from a site already considered suitable for park and ride facilities, both sites seek to serve traffic from the A21, the application site does not involve any additional impact on sensitive uses such as housing, and the existing Local Plan and Structure Plan support a park and ride facility in this area. Further, detailed matters relating to changes/improvements to the road network to serve this site are of local significance only and for the local authority to consider in detail.
- 4.2 It is also noted that Tonbridge Wells is a proposed regional hub in accordance with Policy CC8c of the draft South East Plan. A park and ride facility would be seen as making a contribution to this, although whether the facility is on the originally allocated site or the application site is again of no consequence to delivering policies relating to Regional Hubs.

4.3 Given the above, the regional issues associated with this application relate solely to the implications of the proposal on the application site itself, particularly its landscape and Green Belt designations. The following policies are therefore considered to be relevant:-

- Policy E3 of RPG9 and Policy CCI0a of the draft South East Plan – Green Belts;
- Policy E1 of RPG9 and Policy C2 of the draft South East Plan – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Policy BE4 of the draft South East Plan – Managing the Urban Rural Fringe;
- Policy INF1 of RPG9 and Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan – Sustainable Flood Risk Management;
- Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policy NRM4 of the draft South East Plan – biodiversity.

5. Policy Assessment

Flood Risk

5.1 Policy INF1 of RPG9 and Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan seek to ensure that flood risk is managed in a sustainable way and that development is designed to be resilient to flooding. Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan also seeks to ensure that the sequential approach to flood risk areas is taken in accordance with national policy. It is also noted that the Environment Agency has objected to the proposal on the basis that a strategic flood risk assessment has not been undertaken.

5.2 The local authority, working with the Environment Agency, should fully consider the flood implications of the proposal in accordance with Policy INF1 of RPG9 and Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan.

Green Belt / AONB / Urban-Rural Fringe

5.3 The application site is on the edge of Tunbridge Wells and within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A number of policy areas contained within the draft South East Plan come together when assessing this proposal as follows:-

- Policy CCI0a of the draft South East Plan reiterates that the Green Belt will be retained and supported;
- Policy C2 of the draft South East Plan sets out that within AONB's priority should be given to conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, and that planning decisions should have regard to the sites setting; and

- Policy BE4 of the draft South East Plan seeks to encourage better management of the urban/rural fringe, and being proactive in identifying opportunities for sustainable developments in these areas.
- 5.4 The effect of the above policies is that a high level of protection is afforded to the site from a policy perspective. However, these policies must be considered having regard to the following:-
- The site context - the subject site is in close proximity to other development and is located between development and a major road (the A21);
 - The existence of a planning approval for the site for a touring caravan facility;
 - PPG2 (Green Belts), which explicitly outlines that park and ride facilities are not inappropriate in the Green Belt subject to certain criteria being met;
 - The limited scale of development proposed, which although involving 400 parking spaces, has limited other built development of any height, and the potential for the parking areas to be extensively landscaped.
- 5.5 The extent to which the proposal is balanced against the restraint policies which apply to the site is a matter for the local authority to consider in detail. However, were the Borough Council to decide that the proposal can be accommodated with the sites Green Belt and AONB designations, no material conflict with RPG9 or the draft South East Plan is envisaged. The need to mitigate the impact of the proposal if it is considered acceptable will be necessary however.

Biodiversity

- 5.6 Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policy NRM4 of the draft South East Plan seek the protection and enhancement of the region's biodiversity. The application is accompanied by a Phase I Habitat report which concludes that the site is surrounded by a mix of woodland habitats the impact on which, if the proposal is to proceed, should be mitigated through the removal of non-native vegetation, the use of native vegetation, the installation of bat and bird boxes, and the installation of green roofs on bus shelters.
- 6.7 It is important that the local authority is satisfied that the proposal will avoid the loss of biodiversity on the site in accordance with Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policy NRM4 of the draft South East Plan. Further, the potential to achieve a net gain in biodiversity on the site should be advanced by the local authority in accordance with Policy E2 of the draft South East Plan.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The principle of a park and ride facility in the general area of the application site is well established in local plans and policies. The proposed site is however subject to a number of policy constraints which will need to be considered by the local authority in determining if the park and ride facility is acceptable in its proposed location.

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 in relation to the application:-

- The local authority should ensure that the proposed development is in accordance with guidance in PPG2 (Green Belts) to comply with the objectives of Policy E3 of RPG9 and Policy CC10a of the draft South East Plan and does not conflict with the aim of conserving and enhancing the character and appearance of this part of the High Weald AONB in accordance with Policy E1 of RPG9 and Policy C2 of the draft South East Plan;
- It is important that the local authority is satisfied that the proposal will minimise the loss of any biodiversity on the site in accordance with Policy E2 of RPG9 and Policy NRM4 of the draft South East Plan. Further, the potential to achieve a net gain in biodiversity on the site should be advanced by the local authority in accordance with Policy E2 of the draft South East Plan;
- The local authority, working with the Environment Agency, should fully consider the flood implications of the proposal in accordance with Policy INF1 of RPG9 and Policy NRM3 of the draft South East Plan.

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Date: 14 January 2008

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