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PLANNING STATEMENT ADDENDUM FOR THE CAUSEWAY, DURRINGTON, WORTHING
APPLICATION REF: 08/0851/FULL

WORTHING BOROUGH COUNCIL
25 JUN 2010
CONSENT GRANTED
SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

Introduction

This addendum statement provides a comprehensive update on the planning position for the above site as previously detailed in the original planning statement (August 2008) and supplementary planning statement (December 2008). It is accompanied by a Retail Assessment and plans.

This application was initially submitted to Worthing Borough Council in August 2008. Following the receipt of comments from the consultation process, the client, Cantium Durrington Ltd, undertook to address the issues raised. Accordingly, a revised Retail Assessment was scoped with Worthing Borough Council, and completed by Rapleys LLP. In the interim, the application has been held in abeyance pending the submission of additional information.

As an aside, it is noteworthy that an outline application was submitted by the applicant in May 2008 (application ref: 08/0495/OUT) for the demolition of the existing building and the redevelopment of the site to provide new retail space at ground floor and 111 residential units above. Since that time there has been a change in the global economy and the country has fallen into recession, having a significant impact on the British housing market. Consequently it was considered very unlikely that the retail/residential scheme, if consented, would be capable of being realised in the short to medium term. On this basis, the application was withdrawn on 12 May 2009.

The building, the subject of this application, and the adjoining office tower are now completely vacant. The buildings have been substantially stripped out and the services have been decommissioned. Planning permission was granted (under application Ref: 07/01534/FUL) for alterations to the existing office tower to provide a self contained access and entrance foyer, alterations to improve the external façade, and the reconfiguration of the car parking.

The Proposal

The proposed development, for which planning permission is sought, comprises the change of use from Class B1 (office) to A1 (shops) for the entire ground floor and, for part of the ground floor, additional A3 (restaurants and cafes) and/or A5 (hot food takeaways). In addition, alterations and improvements to the external elevations are proposed including a new shop front and an independent entrance to the first floor office.

The proposal will provide 1175 sqm of retail floorspace immediately adjoining the existing neighbourhood centre of The Strand. This could either be occupied as a whole by a discount

food retailer or could be sub divided into two units, one of 995 sqm which it is anticipated will be occupied by a discount food retailer and a second unit of 180 sqm to be occupied by a restaurant or café and/or hot food takeaway (A3/A5) user.

The first floor office will be refurbished, together with repairs and upgrading to the fabric of the building and its services, to enable its re-use for employment purposes.

The existing car parking provision (within the decked structure adjacent to the site) and to the front of the building along The Causeway, is to be retained. This includes parking provision serving the Primary Care Trust offices and those spaces allocated to existing nearby residential accommodation, through existing arrangements with Worthing Borough Council.

The building was formerly occupied by Lloyds Bank (Lloyds Registrars), primarily as offices but included a purpose built banking hall (A2 use) on the ground floor and therefore the principle of A Class uses is already established, in part, in this location.

Planning Policy Update

As detailed in the original planning statement it is noted the development plan for the proposed site comprises the saved policies of the Worthing Local Plan (adopted September 2003), and also now the newly adopted policies contained in the South East Plan (May 2009), which has replaced the West Sussex Structure Plan.

Whilst discussion was given to the local plan policies in the previous planning statement, it is of note that the retail and employment policies, relevant to this site, contained in the Local Plan are no longer 'saved', as such the Council will assess the planning application based on - inter alia - national guidance and the policies contained in the South East Plan. In these terms, the South East Plan confirms that:

- Local Planning Authorities will ensure that Local Development Documents (LDD) will be sufficiently flexible to respond positively to changes in the global economy and the changing economic needs of the region (Policy RE1).
- Local Authorities, through LDD's, should enhance, develop and promote local assets that can facilitate the development of sectors and clusters (Policy RE2).
- Local Authorities will have regard to strategic and local business needs. In planning for the location, quantity and nature of employment land and premises they will facilitate a flexible supply of land to meet the varying needs of the economic sectors (Policy RE3).
- Competitiveness of the most economically successful parts of the region should be maintained and enhanced, and structural economic weakness should be addressed to release the economic potential of those areas which are under performing. Specifically in the 'Coastal Belt' (in which the site falls), consideration should be given to - inter alia - whether upgrading or improvement of existing sites is required (Policy RE6).

- Worthing is identified as a primary regional centre, which will be a focus for those town centre uses set out in PPS6 (Policy TC1).
- Plans and strategies prepared by Local Authorities should have regard to – inter alia – the need to assess the capacity to accommodate change and growth in town centres; the need to promote new investment of an appropriate scale, in particular in vulnerable centres in need of regeneration, and the potential impact on the vitality and viability of town centres (Policy TC2).
- Within the Sussex Coastal region, in which Worthing is located, Authorities should give increased priority to investment decisions for the region, specifically by targeting pockets of social and economic deprivation (Policy SCT2).
- Local Authorities should seek to deliver sufficient appropriate sites and premises for business and other uses that will help facilitate the regeneration of the local economy (policy SCT3).

Emerging policy

As acknowledged in the initial planning statement, the Worthing Core Strategy was withdrawn in 2008 following an exploratory meeting with an Inspector. However, since the application was submitted a revised Core Strategy document was released for consultation in June 2009. A further round of consultation is expected in March 2010 prior to submission to the Secretary of State and with an aim for adoption in December 2010.

The revised Core Strategy consultation document currently details the following points, of relevance to this site:

- One of the roles of the 'Areas of Change' (within which the site is located) is to deliver the regeneration of vacant office space at The Strand, supporting and enhancing the existing mix of uses, securing high quality office space.
- Ensuring sustainable economic growth by - inter alia - making more efficient use of existing and underused accessible sites (Policy 2).
- Changes of use of land or buildings currently or last used for employment purposes will only be permitted where it has been justified through a criteria based approach. Where it is demonstrated that it is not viable to maintain the existing use then alternative employment uses will be considered before allowing non-employment use (Policy 3).
- The Strand is designated as a medium scale neighbourhood centre, in which proposals will need to demonstrate that they meet local needs, are of a scale appropriate to the centre and will not adversely impact upon the vitality and viability of other nearby centres (Policy 5).

The Core Strategy is currently in its relative infancy and, as such, little weight can be afforded to the emerging policies in the determination of current planning applications. That said, the identification of 'The Strand' as a focus for regeneration clearly remains an objective of the Council.

Planning Considerations

Loss of Employment

As highlighted above, the existing building, and adjacent office tower are currently vacant. In these terms, the buildings in their current state fail to provide any contribution to the vitality and viability of The Strand centre and wider neighbourhood.

In addition, as confirmed previously, the existing building was formally operated by Lloyds Registrars and Banking Hall. The existing building is therefore bespoke to this use and was developed specifically to meet the requirements of Lloyds Bank.

The existing building has a large floorplate at ground floor level, restrictive floor to ceiling heights and poor natural light, which even with significant upgrade or alterations would fail to offer high quality modern office accommodation and consequently, would remain unattractive to alternative office occupiers.

As detailed in the initial planning statement (August 2008), Cluttons Tod Miller have provided an analysis of the physical and economic characteristics of the existing building as they relate to current market conditions. This concluded that the physical condition of the building, the configuration and inflexibility of the space, and the economics of the current market render the refurbishment and re-let wholly for office purposes totally uneconomic. Albeit with the upgrade of lighting, there is potential for the first floor to continue to form a viable component of local office supply in Worthing.

The site has been marketed prior to and substantially since Equiniti vacated, both locally and national via the use of property press, local press, marketing boards and agents generally. The complete lack of interest for office use, or office redevelopment, is perhaps of no surprise in the context of the availability of a wide range of office accommodation within the vicinity.

Having conducted a search on 'Focus' for vacant office space within Worthing, it is evident that there is significant availability in and around Worthing which includes new and refurbished office accommodation.

In light of the availability of office accommodation in the immediate area, it must be acknowledged the loss of this site to alternative uses will have minimal impact, if any.

Whilst the proposal would result in the loss of office space at ground floor level, the proposed alterations and improvements to the building will result in a viable and useable stand alone office at first floor level, with independent access from The Causeway. The office space proposed (at first floor level) is considered more appropriate to current market conditions.

Furthermore some employment will be generated from the A1 (and potentially A3/A5) retail use proposed, consequently providing viable units that, once occupied, will assist in contributing to vitality of The Strand centre.

It is therefore demonstrated that the redevelopment of this vacant, brownfield site, within close proximity to public transport and a range of local services and facilities, for a mix of alternative uses (retail and office) represents an appropriate and acceptable form of development, in principle, in accordance with planning policy.

In addition to the above, the Council's Economic Development department confirmed in their consultation response (29 September 2008) that the 'the change of use to A1 is acceptable, as this will retain an element of employment on the groundfloor, further supported by the retention of B1 use on the 1st floor. This may also uplift the area and safeguard the B1 use of the adjoining office tower'. There have been no significant alterations to the proposal that would alter this consultation response.

Retail

The Council's Strategic Housing and Planning department advised in their consultation response (dated 16 September 2008) that a sequential retail assessment was required.

Notwithstanding the above, the Council's Economic Development department confirmed in their consultation response (29 September 2008) that the 'proposed retail element would attract the required investment and would compliment the adjacent shopping parade, providing further amenities for the office employees in this area'.

A revised Retail Assessment has now been completed following detailed scoping with the Local Authority and is submitted with this statement. The Retail Assessment confirms that the proposal for a discount food retailer is acceptable in terms of the tests in PPS6 for Need, Scale, Sequential Assessment, Impact and Accessibility, subject to a restriction on occupier which is confirmed in the attached unilateral undertaking.

In addition to the A1 floorspace proposed, consent is also sought for the potential subdivision of the groundfloor to provide a unit of 180 sqm for A3 (restaurants and cafes) and/or A5 (hot food takeaways).

The A3/A5 use whilst not specifically addressed within the Retail Assessment, is considered appropriate in terms of scale and impact upon the adjacent Strand local centre. This unit would have a wider catchment than just local residents as would attract office workers from the nearby commercial premises, Worthing College and Leisure Centre users, as well as passing trade from the users of Durrington-on-Sea rail station.

As identified in PPS6 the sequential approach is only required for extensions where the gross floorspace of the proposed extension exceeds 200 sq m. The proposed A3/A5 floorspace

falls under this threshold and as such would not be subject to a separate sequential assessment.

In addition, PPS6 identifies that the material considerations to be taken into account in assessing planning applications may include: physical regeneration, employment, economic growth and social inclusion. The scale and nature of the proposed A3/A5 unit would be consistent with the Council's aspirations for the regeneration and economic improvement of The Strand local centre.

Highways

The County Council's Infrastructure department confirmed in their consultation (dated 26th January 2009) that '*the existing B1 uses would generate more vehicle movements than the proposed A1 (and A2/A3) use. Therefore, in traffic generation terms, the proposal is unlikely to have any detrimental consequences on the surrounding highway network. The proposed parking provision is also within the WSCC Parking Standard and no highway safety issues would be raised with the parking proposed*'.

The consultation response also confirms that the proposal is acceptable in terms of servicing and deliveries, and that no objection is raised to the proposal.

On the basis of the information submitted to date and above comments, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in highways terms.

Other development control considerations have been comprehensively addressed in the original planning statement and as such do not require further discussion as part of this addendum.

Conclusion

Overall, the redevelopment of a currently underutilised site would benefit the local centre (The Strand) encouraging inward investment and regeneration of this area.

Whilst there have been changes in planning policy since the application was submitted, the policies contained in the South East Plan, and to an extent, emerging policy in the draft Core Strategy Consultation Document, remain supportive of the application proposals.

In light of the consultation responses received, a full retail assessment has been completed, and demonstrates that the proposal for a discount food retailer are acceptable in retail terms.

The proposal is also supported in highway and economic terms, as detailed in the original planning statement and transport assessment. In addition, there has been no significant change in circumstances or alterations to the proposal to alter these consultation responses.

As outlined above, the proposal would also generate significant regeneration benefits for The Strand. It would bring investment; physical regeneration; improve vitality and viability and environmental improvements (as detailed further in the Retail Assessment).

In summary, the proposal is considered appropriate in terms of land use, scale and appearance, in this location and the Council is respectfully requested to grant planning permission.