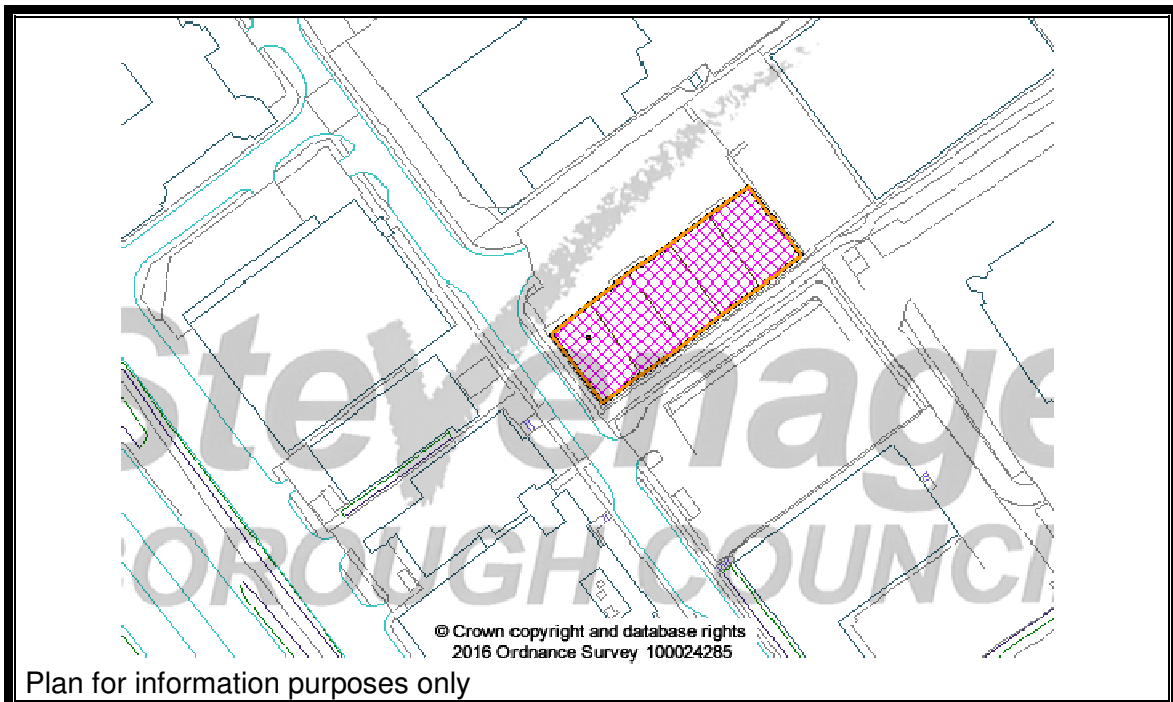


<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>PLANNING &amp; DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>19 July 2016</b>		
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Clive Inwards</b>	01438 242837	
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Application No:	16/00301/FPM
Location:	Units 1-5 Caxton Gate, Caxton Way, Stevenage
Proposal:	Change of use of units from Use Class B2 (Industrial Laundry) to a flexible B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage and Distribution) Use and conversion of one existing unit into 5no. units as per original construction.
Drawing Nos.:	Proposed site plan 221.03.
Applicant:	Sedgecombe Properties Ltd
Date Valid:	6 May 2016
Recommendation:	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION



## 1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site comprises Units 1-5 Caxton Gate which is on the east side of Caxton Way in the Gunnels Wood Industrial Area, approximately 850m to the south west of the town centre. The site is 3,960m<sup>2</sup> in size and comprises the above mentioned units which have previously been combined into a single unit and formerly operated as an industrial laundry primarily for the aviation industry. The application site is bounded by Caxton Way to

the west, the Mercedes-Benz car dealership to the north, Zeus Transport to the east and the Stevenage Waste and Recycling centre to the south. The previous occupier has now vacated the site and the units were empty at the time of the site visit.

- 1.2 The site has an existing access point off of Caxton Way, which is in the north-west of the application site.
- 1.3 The units are all the same size and comprise a ground floor area of 328m<sup>2</sup> and have small offices at first floor level which are approximately 49m<sup>2</sup> in area (including the stairs). No changes are proposed to the scale of the units or to the external elevations of any of the units.

## **2. RECENT AND RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 2.1 02/00335/FP Variation of Condition 1 of planning permission reference 2/0279/97/FP for erection of two 3 storey office buildings and storage building with associated car parking. Planning permission granted 22.05.2003.
- 2.2 02/00122/RM 3 detached units and 6 terraced units for B1, B2 and B use, with additional access from Bessemer Drive. Reserved matters approval granted on appeal 20.04.2006.
- 2.3 02/00312/AD Letting Board. Advertisement consent granted 21.08.2002.

## **3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION**

- 3.1 The current application seeks planning permission to change the use of Units 1-5 Caxton Gate from a B2 (General Industrial) use to a flexible B1, B2 and B8 use and the conversion of the one existing unit into five separate units as per its original construction. The amounts of each specific use are not proposed to be limited and this type of permission is stated as being required to provide greater flexibility to meet the needs of a range of occupiers and secure the future viability of the units.
- 3.2 No changes are proposed to the external elevations of the Units and no changes are proposed to the existing access which will remain as is from Caxton Way. Finally, no changes are proposed to the scale of the units which are each approximately 377m<sup>2</sup> in area (ground and first floors).
- 3.3 The total amount of floor space proposed to be changed is 1,906m<sup>2</sup>.

## **4. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1 As a major planning application the proposal has been publicised by way of letters to adjoining premises, a site notice and a press notice. At the time of drafting this report no responses have been received.

## **5. CONSULTATIONS**

- 5.1 Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority: Consider that the proposal would not significantly increase the traffic generation to the area and would not have an unreasonable impact on the safety and operation of the adjoining highway. Therefore they would have no objections on highway grounds.

## **6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

### **6.1 Background to the Development Plan**

6.1.1 In the determination of planning applications development must be in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Stevenage the statutory development plan comprises:

- Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework 2012 and Hertfordshire Waste Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 2012 and 2014);
- Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan 2002 – 2016 (adopted 2007); and
- The Stevenage District Plan Second Review 2004.

The Council has now commenced work on the new Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031. The draft version of the Plan was published in January 2016 and will be used as a material consideration in the determination of all planning applications registered on or after Wednesday 6 January 2016. The Site Specific Policies DPD, the draft Gunnels Wood Area Action Plan (AAP), the draft Old Town AAP, the Pond Close Development SPG, Stevenage West Masterplanning Principles SPG, the Gunnels Wood Supplementary Planning Document and the Interim Planning Policy Statement for Stevenage are no longer material considerations in the determination of all planning applications registered on or after Wednesday 6 January 2016.

6.1.2 Where a Development Plan Document has been submitted for examination but no representations have been made in respect of relevant policies, then considerable weight may be attached to those policies because of the strong possibility that they will be adopted. The converse may apply if there have been representations which oppose the policy. However, much will depend on the nature of those representations and whether there are representations in support of particular policies.

6.1.3 In considering the policy implications of any development proposal the Local Planning Authority will assess each case on its individual merits, however where there may be a conflict between policies in the existing Development Plan and policies in any emerging Development Plan Document, the adopted Development Plan policies currently continue to have greater weight.

### **6.2 Central Government Advice**

6.2.1 In March 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published and in doing so it replaced many documents including all Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Planning Policy Statements. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Annex 1 of the NPPF provides guidance on how existing local plan policies which have been prepared prior to the publication of the NPPF should be treated. Paragraph 215 of the NPPF applies which states that only due weight should be afforded to the relevant policies in the adopted local plan according to their degree of consistency with it.

6.2.2 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is itself a material consideration. Given that the advice that the weight to be given to relevant policies in the local plan will depend on their degree of consistency with the NPPF, it will be necessary in the determination of this application to assess the consistency of the relevant local plan policies with the NPPF. The NPPF applies a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

6.2.3 In addition to the NPPF advice in the National Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014) also needs to be taken into account. It states that, where the development plan is absent,

silent or the relevant policies are out of date, paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires the application to be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development unless otherwise specified.

### **6.3 Adopted Local Plan**

TW1 Sustainable Development  
E2 Employment Areas  
E4 Acceptable Uses in Employment Areas  
T15 Car Parking Strategy

### **6.4 Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Draft (Emerging Local Plan)**

Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport  
Policy EC2: Gunnels Wood Employment Area and Edge-of-Centre Zone  
Policy EC4: Remainder of Gunnels Wood  
Policy IT5: Parking and Access

### **6.5 Supplementary Planning Documents**

Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document January 2012.

## **7. APPRAISAL**

7.1 The main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are its acceptability in land use policy terms and the adequacy of parking provision.

### **7.2 Land Use Policy Considerations**

7.2.1 The application site is designated within the Gunnels Wood Employment Area where policies E2 and E4 of the Stevenage District Plan Second Review 1991-2011 adopted 2004 apply. Policy E2 seeks to protect the Gunnels Wood area for employment uses and policy E4 sets out the acceptable uses in employment areas and specifically states "in the employment areas already designated a range of employment uses within the B1, B2 and B8 use classes will be encouraged. A mix of uses within a development site will also be encouraged." The proposal to provide a further mix of uses within Units 1-5 Caxton Gate is thus fully in accordance with policy E4 of the District Plan.

7.2.2 The units are currently vacant following the relocation of the former occupier. As such the proposal has been designed to meet the needs of a range of occupiers, provide greater flexibility and thus seeks to secure the future viability of the site. The National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 (NPPF) requires that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth and that there should be significant weight placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system. As the proposal would assist in bringing a number of vacant units back into economic use by providing greater flexibility, it is considered that the proposal is fully supported by the NPPF.

7.2.3 Providing a greater mix of B use classes on these units is also considered to accord with the emerging Local Plan and specifically policy EC4. This states that planning permission will be granted in the Gunnels Wood Employment Area where development is for use classes B1 (b) research and development, B1 (c) light industry, B2 general industry and/or B8 storage and distribution.

7.2.4 Although the applicant is seeking a flexible use which would include B1 (a) offices, it is not considered that the units lend themselves to a B1 (a) office use given their layout and

configuration. It is not therefore considered necessary to exclude B1 (a) from that applied for given that the units would be physically unsuitable for this specific use. Specific B1 (a) office uses are more suited to more sustainable locations closer to the town centre and transport hubs. Given this it is considered that the proposal is also fully in accordance with the emerging Local Plan.

- 7.2.5 It can be seen from this assessment that the proposal fully accords with both adopted and emerging land use policies and is also supported by the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **7.3. Parking Provision**

- 7.3.1 The application document states that there are 46 car parking spaces at this site and that these would all be retained for the proposed flexible use.

- 7.3.2 Under the Council's Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) the gross floor area of all the units (1,906m<sup>2</sup>) would be expected to provide 48 parking spaces (1,906 divided by 40). Whilst the site is in a Zone 2 location where parking provision can be reduced to 25-50% of the usual maximum provision allowed, the flexible nature of the uses that could operate at the site means that there should also be flexibility in the amount of parking provision that is provided. The provision of 46 spaces would only leave 9 spaces per unit which is considered to be sufficient provision for the proposed flexible use and it should also be noted that the parking spaces are existing and would not need to be created. Additionally, the site is able to accommodate heavy good vehicles. Given this assessment appropriate parking provision is considered to be made in this instance and which would not be greater than the maximum standard set out in the Parking Provision SPD.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The proposed change of use of Units 1-5 Caxton Gate to a flexible B use class and its subdivision is considered to be in full compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework and policy E4 of the District Plan. Additionally, the proposal complies with the emerging Local Plan policy EC4 which identifies this area for a range of B use classes other than B1 (a) office use. Finally, the level of parking provision is considered to be acceptable in this instance and in accordance with the Council's Parking Provision SPD. Accordingly, it is recommended that planning permission be granted.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That, subject to no further material representations being received by 27<sup>th</sup> July 2016, planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in general accordance with the following approved plans: Proposed Site Plan 221.03.

**REASON:** - For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

**REASON:** - To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

## **Pro-active Statement**

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted pro-actively in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 186 and 187) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2012.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.
2. Stevenage District Plan Second Review 1991-2011.
3. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Parking Provision adopted January 2012.
4. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Draft.
5. Responses to consultations with statutory undertakers and other interested parties referred to in this report.
6. Central Government advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 and National Planning Policy Guidance March 2014.