

Meeting: Planning and Development
Committee

Agenda Item:

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Date: 13 September 2016

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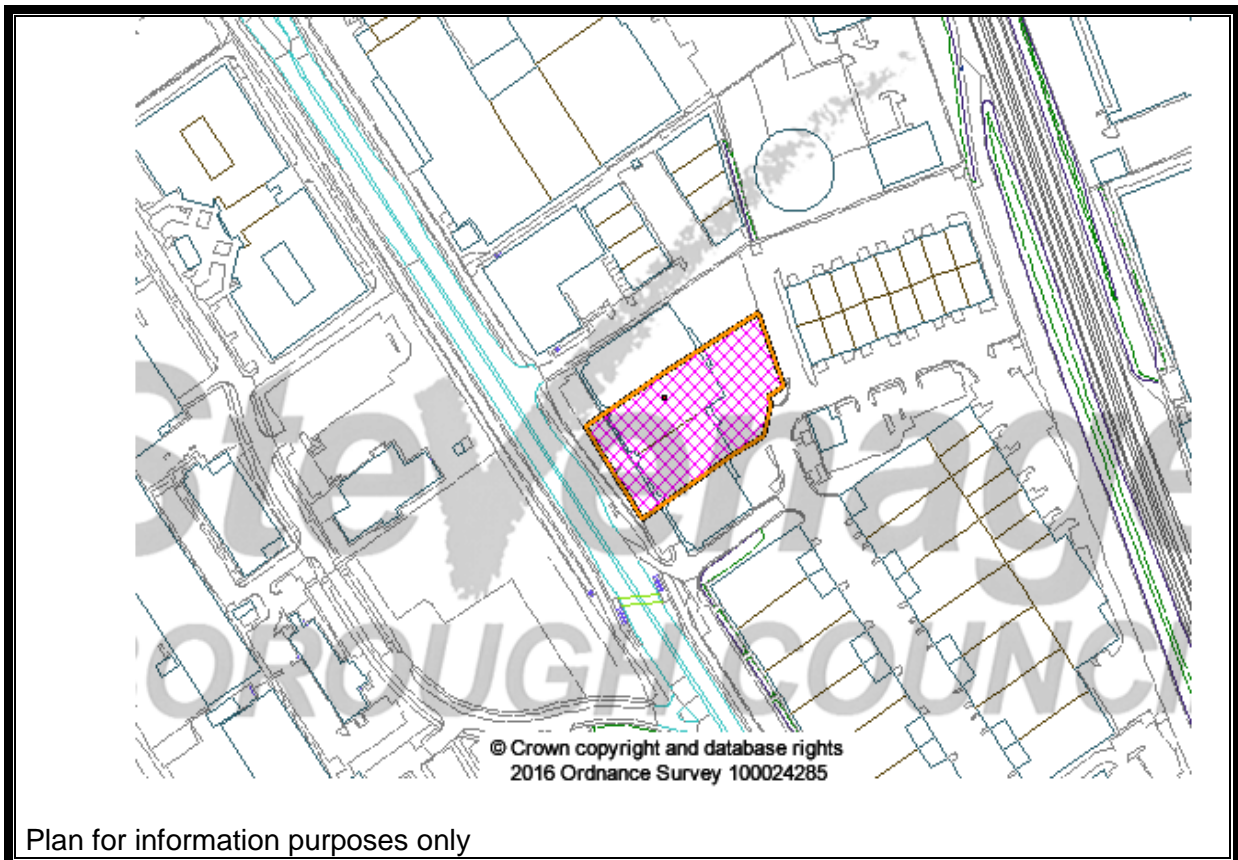
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Application No:	16/00469/FPM
Location:	Units 23 and 24 Gunnels Wood Park, Gunnels Wood Road, Stevenage
Proposal:	Change of use from B2 (Printers) to sui generis (Builders Merchants) and minor external alterations.
Drawing Nos.:	SGWP004C, SGWP002E and SGWP005
Applicant:	Saint Gobain Building Distribution
Date Valid:	11 July 2016
Recommendation:	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION



1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site comprises Units 23 and 24 Gunnels Wood Park which is an industrial estate on the eastern side of Gunnels Wood Road, approximately 900m to the south west of the town centre. The site is 5,157m² in size and comprises the above mentioned units, an area of parking to the front of the buildings and the service yard to the rear. The application site is bounded by Gunnels Wood Road to the west, Unit 22 and then the Access Business Park beyond to the north, and other units in the Gunnels Wood Park industrial estate to the east and south. The units were previously occupied by a printing firm which has now vacated the site and the units were empty at the time of the site visit.
- 1.2 The site has existing access and egress points on to Gunnels Wood Road.
- 1.3 Unit 23 is slightly larger than Unit 24 as it projects further to the rear. Cumulatively the units have a floor area of 2,441m². Each unit includes toilets, a kitchen area and Unit 24 has a meeting and mess room at the rear of the unit.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 2/0212/81 Conversion of factory into 21 Class IV industrial units with ancillary offices, conversion of offices into two office units, security and maintenance store, replace social block with 16 no. 2500 sq ft floor space Class IV industrial units, remodel car and lorry container parks, estate road, landscaping and modification to vehicular access. Planning permission granted 7 September 1981.
- 2.2 2/0013/97 Redevelopment of the site to provide 2 units for Class B1 or Class B2 use and 2 units for Class B1, B2 or B8 use with service yard, car parking and the relocation of the access to Gunnels Wood Road. Planning permission granted 4 March 1997.
- 2.3 12/00327/AD Erection of 1no. internally illuminated totem pole at entrance to the site. Advertisement consent granted 6 September 2012.
- 2.4 13/00200/FPM Change of use from Use Classes B1 (Business) and B2 (General Industry) to a mix of B1 (Business), B2 (General Industry) and B8 (Storage and Distribution). Planning permission granted 17 July 2013.
- 2.5 13/00261/AD Installation of 1no. non illuminated advertising totem. Advertisement consent granted 25 July 2013.

3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

- 3.1 The current application seeks planning permission to change the use of Units 23 and 24 Gunnels Wood Park from a B2 (General Industrial) use to a sui generis use (in a class of its own), and specifically for a builders merchants warehouse with a sales area. The application also proposes some minor changes to the external appearance which include a new 'up and over' warehouse door on the north-east elevation and a new customer entrance door to replace an existing door also on the

north-eastern elevation. On the Gunnels Wood Road (south-west) elevation the existing fire doors would be reinstated.

- 3.2 No changes are proposed to the existing access which remains as is from Gunnels Wood Road. The units would be amalgamated to form a builder's merchants and which would predominantly serve the trade. Most of the works would be internal and would predominantly comprise warehousing but with a sales counter area in Unit 24 and with a small bathroom and tile showroom at the front of the unit.
- 3.3 The total amount of floor space proposed to be changed is 2,441m².

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: There are no highway issues associated with this proposal and therefore the Highway Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of planning permission.
- 5.2 Hertfordshire County Council as Fire and Rescue Service: The access for fire appliances and provision of water supplies appear to be adequate.
- 5.3 Environmental Health: No comments to make.

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
TW9 Quality in Design
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, the impact on the character and appearance of the area 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." It also states that "proposals for employment generating uses that do not fall within the use classes order will be considered on their merits." The key issue is therefore if this particular sui generis employment generating use is appropriate in the designated employment area.

7.2.2 Firstly, it is considered that the proposed use has very similar characteristics to a pure employment use. The majority of the units would be given over to the storage of building materials and the warehousing element would comprise 1,748m² which is 71.6% of the total floorspace. The proposed sales counter area would comprise 412m² and the showroom areas 272m². These areas would then constitute only 28% of the total floor area. It is noted that it is only the inclusion of the ancillary sales area which means that the proposal is sui generis and thus requires planning permission. A builders merchants storage area (without a sales area) would fall to be a B8 use which would not require planning permission in this location as the units have a flexible B1, B2 and B8 lawful use.

7.2.3 Secondly, it is not considered that the retail element of the proposal would be inappropriate in this designated employment area. The business model of the proposed occupier is such that the proposed use would predominantly serve the trade as opposed to members of the public. In this regard, whilst goods could be purchased from the unit by the general public, it is not considered that this constitutes general, open A1 retail use and most business would be from trade who would hold accounts with the proposed occupier.

7.2.4 Thirdly, the storage and trade of building goods is the type of use that would be expected to be found in an industrial location. By their nature many of the materials would be large or bulky and thus require a large warehouse type building to house

them. These types of suitable buildings are generally found in the industrial areas of the town. Given this assessment it is considered that the proposed use would be an appropriate employment generating use in this location and would accord with policy E4 of the District Plan.

- 7.2.5 The two units are currently vacant following the closure of the former occupier. As such the proposal would bring two vacant units back into economic use, would create 20 new full-time jobs and would also 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 create new jobs, bring a new employer to the town and would bring currently vacant units back into economic use, it is considered that the proposal is fully supported by the NPPF.
- 7.2.6 In terms of the emerging Local Plan, whilst policy EC4 which relates to the 'Remainder of Gunnels Wood' does not have quite the same flexibility as policy E4 of the current Local Plan, it has been shown above that the proposal would have similar characteristics to a general warehouse in terms of its operation and impacts. Given this, it is not considered that proposal would be contrary to the aims of the emerging Local Plan which, similar to the current Local Plan, is seeking to protect the employment areas for appropriate employment uses.
- 7.2.7 It can be seen from this assessment that the proposal fully accords with both adopted land use policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

7.3 Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

- 7.3.1 As set out in paragraph 3.1 above, the proposal includes some minor changes to the external appearance of the building, predominantly in the shape of a new warehouse door and customer entrance door on the north-east elevation. The new openings would be in keeping with the appearance of the existing building and would have an appropriate design. As such it is considered that the minor external alterations would have an acceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area.

7.4 Parking Provision

- 7.4.1 The application documents show that there are 43 existing car parking spaces that serve these two units, which includes two disabled parking spaces. The application proposes to decrease this by one to 42 car parking spaces, again including two disabled car parking spaces.
- 7.4.2 Under the Council's Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) the gross floor area of both units (2,441m²) would be expected to provide 33 car parking spaces. Whilst more car parking is therefore provided than the maximum standard set out in the SPD, it is noted that this parking already exists and it is not considered to be reasonable or necessary for the applicant to reduce the amount of parking available any further. The application site is also able to accommodate heavy goods vehicles. Given this assessment appropriate parking provision is considered to be made in this instance.

7.4.3 No cycle parking for staff is shown in the current application and as such it is considered to be necessary to condition a scheme for the provision of secure cycle storage.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The proposed change of use of Units 23 and 24 Gunnels Wood Park to a builder's merchant including minor external alterations is considered to be in accordance with policy E4 of the District Plan given the similar characteristics of the proposal to a general warehouse use. Additionally, the proposal is in full compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework given the job creation and the return to economic use of an existing vacant building. The minor external alterations are considered to have an acceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area and finally, the level of parking provision is considered to be acceptable in this instance given that the parking is already there. Accordingly, it is recommended that planning permission is granted.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 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: SGWP004C, SGWP002E and SGWP005.

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).

3 Prior to the use of the building for a builder's merchant, details of secure cycle parking facilities for staff shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works, as agreed, shall be carried out prior to the first occupation of the building as a builder's merchant and permanently retained thereafter.

REASON: - To promote access to the development by cyclists.

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.

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.