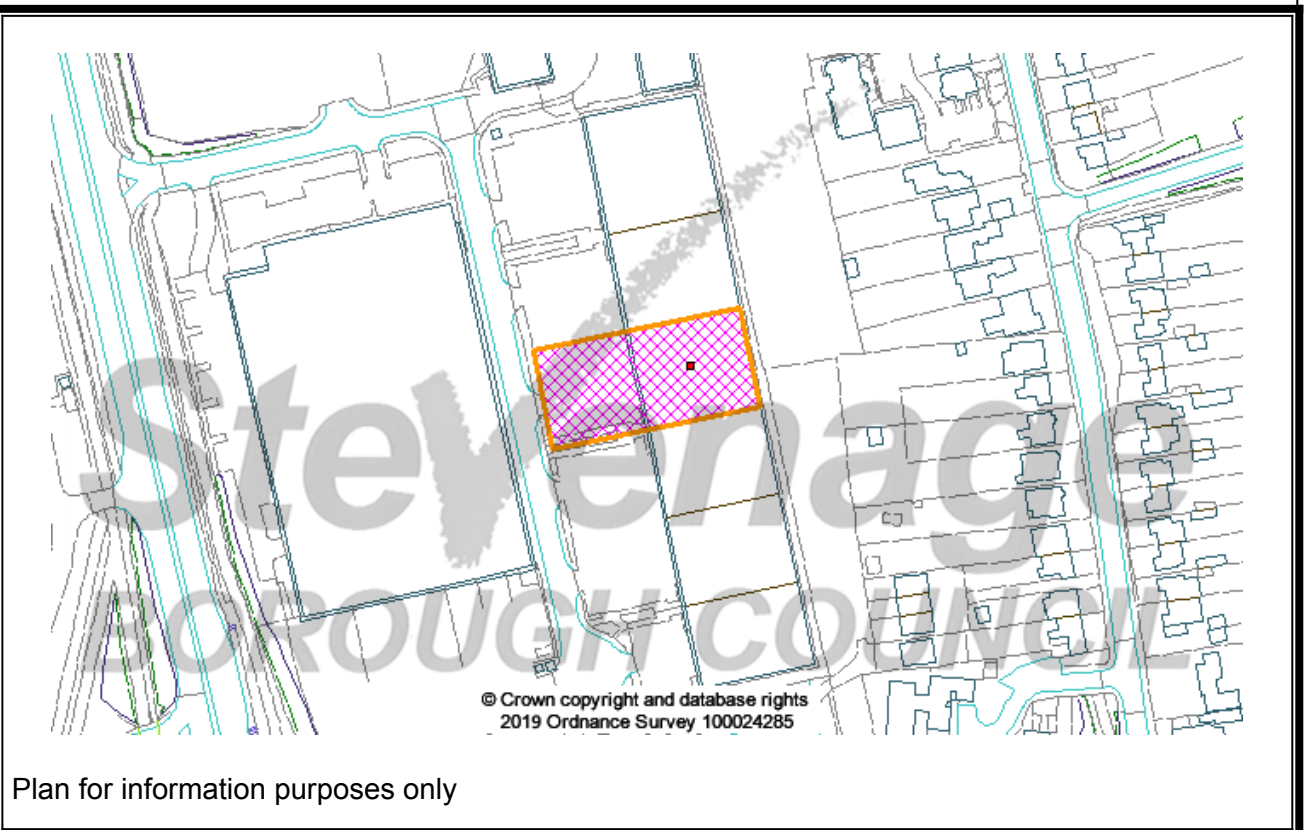


Meeting:	Planning and Development Committee	Agenda Item:
Date:	8 December 2020	
Author:	Linda Sparrow	01438 242837
Lead Officer:	Zayd Al-Jawad	01438 242257
Contact Officer:	Linda Sparrow	01438 242837

Application No:	20/00548/FPM
Location:	Unit B3, Cockerell Close, Stevenage, Herts
Proposal:	Installation of a mezzanine floor and enclosed external compound
Drawing Nos.:	1980-01A; 1980-02; 1980-03A; 1980-04A; 1980-05A; 1980-06A; 1980-07; 1980-08; 1980-09; 1980-10; 1980-11; 1980-12; 1980-13; 1980-14; 1980-15; 1980-16; 1980-17; 1980-18; 1980-Location; 1980 Block 500;
Applicant:	Element FIRA International Ltd
Date Valid:	06 October 2020
Recommendation:	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION.



1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site is an industrial warehouse unit within a terrace of 6 units on the eastern side of Cockerell Close. Cockerell Close is located on the eastern side of Gunnels Wood Road between the junctions for Angotts Mead and Maxwell Road.

- 1.2 To the north of this terrace is a smaller industrial complex of 10 units known as The Orbital Centre. To the north-west is the large compound occupied by Elmes Buildbase, and to the west of the site is an extensive unit occupied by Flamingo Produce.
- 1.3 The unit is constructed with grey metal coated profiled walls with lighter grey flat composite feature panelling. The entrance to the building on the southern end of the unit comprises double glazed windows at ground and first floor. There are no other fenestrations on the front or rear of the building.
- 1.4 A large concrete compound to the front of the building comprises the car parking area and is bounded on the western front boundary with low level hedging. There are also small patches of hedging/shrubs along the northern and southern boundaries.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 Prior to the redevelopment of the site in 2004-2005, the site comprised a number of buildings since the 1960's for Taylor Instruments, latterly known as ABB Industrial Systems.

03/00425/OP. Outline application for re-development for light industrial (Class B1 (c)), general industrial (Class B2) and storage and distribution (Class B8) uses with ancillary offices comprising 28,600m gross floor space, access, car parking, service yards and landscaping. Permission granted 9 March 2004.

04/00400/RM. Erection of 10 units for class B1 and class B8 use, internal access and parking. Reserved matters application pursuant to outline planning permission reference 03/00425/OP. Permission granted on 17 Nov 2004.

04/00421/FP. Re-development of north-west part of the site (Plot A) for use by builders' merchant (a sui generis use) with ancillary retail and involving erection of building, with floorspace of 2,950 square metres, external storage, car parking and landscaping. Permission granted 22 Dec 04.

04/00422/RM. Erection on part of site of building, with floorspace of 10,100 square metres, for use for the packaging and distribution of vegetables with ancillary offices. Reserved matters application pursuant to outline planning permission reference 03/00425/OP, granted 4 March 2004. Permission granted on 17 Nov 2004.

05/00027/RM. Development of 6 units for B1 (c) and B8 use. Reserved Matters application pursuant to Outline Permission 03/00425/OP. Permission granted 13 April 2005.

3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission for a new mezzanine floor to increase the internal floorspace by 975sqm, from 1,173sqm to 2,148sqm. Additionally, a new external storage compound measuring 196sqm would be erected to the front of the building.
- 3.2 A new passenger lift will be installed to facilitate disabled access to the first floor and an additional accessible toilet will be installed adjacent to the lift. A second stairwell will be required internally at the rear of the building and will utilise the existing fire

exit door at the rear. In order to access the existing stairwell at the front of the building, the existing stairwell will be extended with an additional staircase to link the main first floor landing area with the mezzanine.

- 3.3 The testing equipment located on the ground floor is primarily operated by compressed air which is provided by an air compressor and backup compressor although only one will be in operation at any given time.
- 3.4 Operational hours for staff are intended to be between the hours of 08:00 and 20:00, although some testing equipment will be operational 24 hours a day. Call centre staff would be on site between 08:00 and 20:00 Monday through Saturday whilst testing staff will be on site between 08:00 and 17:00 Monday through Friday. There are a total of 40 members of full time staff operating in shifts.
- 3.5 Two areas of the ground floor require extract ducting which will discharge via the roof. One other item of equipment on the ground floor requires extraction facilities and this will be at high level on the rear elevation. Further clarification from the agent was sought in regards to this equipment and it has been confirmed that this relates to an air conditioning unit which regulates air moisture and the only product extracted out the rear elevation is moist air, similar to that from a domestic bathroom extraction fan.
- 3.6 It has been clarified that there is no intention to alter the number of, or location of, existing CCTV cameras on the building.
- 3.7 An external compound is proposed to the front of the building which would be enclosed with 2.6m high galvanised palisade fencing. It would measure 9.3m wide and 21m long and be located on the northern section of the front curtilage. The compound will house two shipping containers which in turn will house the air compressor and back up compressor. An air handling unit for heating and ventilation and air conditioning units will also be located within this compound.
- 3.8 The shipping containers will each measure 6m by 2m and a further skip will measure 4m by 2m. The height of the palisade fencing will exceed the height of the shipping containers to shield them from view in the street scene.
- 3.9 The existing car parking provision is laid out on the southern side of the front curtilage of the site and will not be altered as a result of the proposed development.
- 3.10 There is no change of use proposed as the building, although vacant, is currently under Use Class B1(c) (Light Industrial) and the applicant's business operates under the same Use Class.

4. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

- 4.1 This planning application has been publicised by way of a site notice and neighbour notification letter as well as a press notice in the local paper. Objections were received from Nos. 180 and 182 Fairview Road and their comments are summarised below:
 - Testing 24 hours a day
 - Associated noise, smells or gasses
 - Burning of flammable materials
 - Venting of air to rear of building
 - Additional CCTV cameras overlooking gardens
 - Possibility of additional windows at first floor in the future
 - Can regularly smell cooking smells from Costco and this site is closer

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Thames Water

- 5.1.1 With regard to the waste water network and sewage treatment works infrastructure capacity, we would not have any objection to the planning application, based on the information provided.

5.2 Lead Local Flood Authority

- 5.2.1 The site is at low risk of surface water flooding, is in Flood Zone 1 and there are no recorded flood incidents in the vicinity of the site. We understand the majority of the works are proposed inside the existing Unit B3 to construct a mezzanine floor. Externally, we acknowledge some equipment will be housed in shipping containers in the compound. There is to be no changes to the existing car parking area on site. As we understand there is to be no increase in impermeable area on the site and considering the scope of the proposals, we would have no objections in principle to this application.

5.3 Hertfordshire County Council as Highways Authority

- 5.3.1 Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority has considered that the proposal would not significantly increase the traffic generation or the vehicle movement to the development; this has been considered not to have a considerable effect on the safety and operation of the adjoining highways and consequently would have no objections on highway grounds.

5.4 Stevenage Borough Council's Engineering Services Department

- 5.4.1 I note the existing lack of cycle parking, and that it is intended to increase the unit's floor area. I believe the applicant should be asked to provide cycle parking in line with the recently adopted Parking Standards and Sustainable Transport SPD - this does not require a large number or significant expense/loss of space on the part of the applicant and would ensure employees have the opportunity to travel to work in a healthy and sustainable manner.

5.5 Stevenage Borough Council's Environmental Health Department

- 5.5.1 No comments to make.

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

6.1 Background to the development plan

- 6.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that the decision on the planning application should be in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Stevenage the statutory development plan comprises:

- The Stevenage Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2031
- Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework 2012 and Hertfordshire Waste Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 2012 and 2014); and
- Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan 2002 – 2016 (adopted 2007).

6.2 Central Government Advice

- 6.2.1 A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in February 2019. This largely reordered the policy substance of the earlier 2012 version of the NPPF albeit with some revisions to policy. The Council are content that the policies in the Local Plan are in conformity with the revised NPPF and that the Local Plan should be considered up to date for the purpose of determining planning applications. The NPPF provides that proposals which accord with an up to date development plan should be approved without delay (para.11) and that where a planning application conflicts with an up to date development plan, permission should not usually be granted (para.12). This indicates the weight which should be given to an up to date development plan, reflecting the requirements of section 38(6) of the 2004 Act. The NPPF and the PPG, with which Members are fully familiar, are both material considerations to be taken into account in determining this application.

6.3 Adopted Local Plan

SP1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development;
SP2: Sustainable development in Stevenage;
SP3: A Strong, Competitive Economy;
SP6: Sustainable Transport;
SP8: Good Design;
SP11: Climate Change, Flooding and Pollution;
EC2a: Gunnels Wood Employment Area and Edge-of-Centre Zone;
GD1: High Quality Design;
IT4: Transport Assessments and Travel Plans;
IT5: Parking and access;
FP2: Flood Risk in Flood Zone 1;
FP7: Pollution.

6.4 Supplementary Planning Documents

Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document
October 2020.

6.5 Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule

- 6.5.1 Stevenage Borough Council adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule in 2020. This allows the Council to collect a levy to fund infrastructure projects based on the type, location and floorspace of a development.

7. APPRAISAL

- 7.1 The main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are the acceptability in land use policy terms, the impact on the character and appearance of the area, impact upon neighbouring amenities, parking provision and highway implications of the mezzanine floor and storage compound only.

7.2 Acceptability in Land Use Policy Terms

- 7.2.1 The application site is within the designated Gunnels Wood Employment Area, and forms a site allocated for employment purposes under Policy EC2a of the adopted Local Plan. Added to this, policy EC4 of the adopted Local Plan encourages a range of employment uses within the B1, B2 and B8 use classes. On this basis, the

proposal would facilitate the existing industrial use of unit under the proposed occupiers FIRA for light industrial purposes within the use class B1(c) which is in policy compliant.

7.3 Visual Amenity

- 7.3.1 The application site forms part of a larger terrace of units within Cockerell Close. Units 1 and 2 are occupied by Euro-Victaulic; Unit 4 is occupied by Smiths News; unit 5 is occupied by Screwfix; and unit 6 is occupied by RH Logistics.
- 7.3.2 In terms of the building itself, the only proposed external changes on the main building are the installation of a small extraction vent on the rear elevation and roofscape, which will not unduly impact the appearance of this industrial unit. Elsewhere, the proposal includes the installation of the fenced compound to the front of the building.
- 7.3.3 In regards to the palisade fencing, a number of units in the area have tall palisade fencing around the entire curtilage of the site, including unit 6 at the end of the row of buildings. It is not considered that the use of palisade fencing around a portion of the site would therefore be out of keeping with the surrounding area.
- 7.3.4 The area is industrial in nature and this type of compound and fencing is generally expected for this business type. The compound has been designed to be no larger than is necessary to accommodate the various containers and plant and machinery to safely operate the business.
- 7.3.5 Further, the external storage compound would be sited approximately 11m from the back edge of the public highway which is considered an appropriate distance such that it would not appear dominating in the street scene. It is acknowledged that the site is relatively open in terms of boundary treatments, however the area is an industrial complex and the compound is not considered out of keeping with this type of business use.
- 7.3.6 Accordingly, the external storage compound is considered acceptable and would not harm the visual amenities of the area.

7.4 Impact upon Neighbouring Amenity

- 7.4.1 The use of the premises by the applicant's business is not part of the assessment of this planning application because the Use Class is not being altered. Only the impact of the internal mezzanine floor and storage compound to the front of the building are to be assessed in respect of the impact on neighbour amenity.
- 7.4.2 In this regard, the internal mezzanine floor by its very nature will have no impact on the surrounding residential dwellings or the neighbouring businesses.
- 7.4.3 The siting of the storage compound to the front of the building means it cannot be seen by the residential dwellings in Fairview Road which are located to the rear of the site. As the site forms part of a larger business and industrial site, it is not considered that the storage compound, located against the front elevation would have a detrimental impact on the amenities of neighbouring industrial units.

- 7.4.4 Comments received from residents of Fairview Road regarding the use of the building are noted. However as stated in 7.3.1 above, the use of the building is not part of the assessment of this application.
- 7.4.5 For the purposes of fullness of this report, the agent has confirmed that the extraction duct on the rear of the building will only be venting moist air, similar to a domestic bathroom extraction fan. The equipment that requires extraction via the roof has been assessed by the Council's Environmental Health Officers and no concerns have been raised. The comment that cooking smells can often be smelt from Costco is noted, however the existing FIRA premises in Maxwell Road are closer to the residential dwellings than Costco and no concerns have been raised about the existing business premises and their operations.
- 7.4.6 It is not intended to alter the existing provision of, or location of, existing CCTV cameras. Further, the boundary between the site and Fairview Road is heavily landscaped with mature trees. Therefore it is not considered that any privacy issues would arise as a result of the use of the building.
- 7.4.7 Some of the machinery within the premises will be operational 24 hours a day although staff will not be on site after 20:00. Concern has been raised from neighbouring residential properties regarding this issue. The Council's Environmental Health Officer has raised no concerns over the use. Given the location of the premises within an established industrial complex with other premises which operate 24 hours a day with large HGV deliveries, it is not expected that the internal testing machinery enclosed within sealed rooms would result in external noise issues.
- 7.4.8 In conclusion, it is not considered that the installation of a mezzanine floor and storage compound would harm the amenities of surrounding properties or businesses.

7.5 Highways Impacts and Parking Provision

- 7.5.1 Policy IT5 of the adopted Local Plan (2019) states that planning permission will be granted where proposals comply with the parking standards set out in the plan. The Council's Car Parking Standards SPD (2020) requires the proposed development to provide 1 car parking space per 35sqm gross floor area.
- 7.5.2 Given the total floor area of the main building will be 2,148sqm, this would generate a requirement for 62 car parking spaces. The site currently only has 10 spaces with no ability to expand this provision due to site constraints.
- 7.5.3 The site is located within a non-residential Accessibility Zone 2 of the Parking Provision SPD (2020), allowing for a provision of between 25% and 50% of the required car parking provision. This would reduce the requirements to 16 spaces which leaves a shortfall of 6 spaces.
- 7.5.4 It is acknowledged that the proposed development falls short on the required car parking provision. However the site is in a highly sustainable location with a cycle network running along Gunnels Wood Road and several bus stops in very close proximity to the site. In this regard, the site offers employees excellent opportunities for non-car modes of transport. Further, there would only be 40 full time staff who work in shift patterns so the existing provision is likely to be adequate to serve each shift.

- 7.5.5 The proposed occupier, FIRA Elements, is seeking alternative premises in the town following redevelopment of their current location and it would prove beneficial to the vitality of the Gunnels Wood employment area for their retention within the town.
- 7.5.6 On balance, whilst the car parking provision is not in accordance with the adopted Local Plan policies, the under-provision of 5 car parking spaces, as well as the economic and vitality benefits of their retention in the town outweigh the parking issue. On balance therefore, it is considered acceptable in this instance to allow the reduction in car parking provision.

Cycle parking

- 7.5.7 The provision of well-located, safe and secure cycle parking is a key factor in encouraging people to cycle as an alternative to using the private car. The recently adopted Car Parking Provision SPD (2020) states that for this type of operational business, 1 cycle space per 500sqm of floorspace should be provided. Based on the gross internal floorspace of 2,148sqm, this would equate to 4.3 spaces, rounded up to 5 spaces.
- 7.5.8 No details of cycle storage has been provided so it is considered acceptable to impose a condition on any decision issued requesting details of cycle storage prior to the first occupation of the premises.
- 7.5.9 HCC as Highways Authority considers the development to be in accordance with both the National and Local Policies. Therefore, the Highways Authority's formal recommendation is to grant approval.

7.6 Other Matters

Refuse and recycling

- 7.6.1 The existing arrangements for the storage and collection of waste and recycling as per the previous use will remain and therefore the proposal is acceptable in this regard.

Community Infrastructure Levy

- 7.6.2 The Council adopted CIL on 1 April 2020 and the CIL Charging Schedule specifies a payment for new floor space in line with the following rates (plus appropriate indexation):

Development Type	CIL Rate (£ per square meter)	
	Zone 1: Stevenage Central, Stevenage West Urban Extension and North of Stevenage Extension	Zone 2: Everywhere else
Residential		
Market housing	£40/m ²	£100/m ²
Sheltered housing	£100/m ²	
Extra care housing	£40/m ²	
Retail development	£60/m ²	
All other development	£0/m ²	

- 7.6.3 The proposed development falls within “all other development” and therefore whilst it is CIL liable, there would be no CIL payments required as per the table above.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 In summary, the use of the premises by FIRA Elements is considered acceptable in land use policy terms and the installation of the mezzanine floor and external storage compound are not considered to harm the visual amenities of the area or the amenities of neighbouring residential dwellings and businesses. It is accepted that the car parking provision is below the recommended standard as laid out in the Car Parking Provision SPD (2020), however the site is in a highly sustainable location and offers excellent opportunities of non-car modes of transport and so, on balance, it is considered acceptable in this instance to allow a shortfall in car parking provision.
- 8.2 The proposed development is considered acceptable for the reasons laid out in the report and it is recommended to grant planning permission.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-
1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
1980-01A; 1980-02; 1980-03A; 1980-04A; 1980-05A; 1980-06A; 1980-07; 1980-08; 1980-09; 1980-10; 1980-11; 1980-12; 1980-13; 1980-14; 1980-15; 1980-16; 1980-17; 1980-18; 1980-Location; 1980 Block 500;
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. No demolition or construction work relating to this permission shall be carried out on any Sunday, Public or Bank Holiday nor at any other time, except between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00 on Mondays to Fridays and between the hours of 09:00 and 13:00 on Saturdays.
REASON:- To safeguard the amenities of the occupiers of neighbouring properties.
 4. Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, details of secure cycle parking provision shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The secure cycle parking facility shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
REASON:- To ensure there is sufficient secure cycle parking provision in order to encourage a mode shift from the private car.
 5. The external storage compound hereby approved shall be constructed in accordance with the approved plans.
REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory standard of development in the interests of amenity and that it has an acceptable appearance.

6. There shall be no open storage of refuse, goods or materials other than in compounds or areas specifically set aside for this purpose and shown on a plan submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing.
REASON:- To safeguard the appearance of the site in the interests of visual amenity.

Informative

1. Community Infrastructure Levy

Stevenage Borough Council adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule at Full Council on 27 January 2020 and started implementing CIL on 01 April 2020.

This application may be liable for CIL payments and you are advised to contact the CIL Team for clarification with regard to this. If your development is CIL liable, even if you are granted an exemption from the levy, please be advised that it is a requirement under Regulation 67 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) that CIL Form 6 (Commencement Notice) must be completed, returned and acknowledged by Stevenage Borough Council before building works start. Failure to do so will mean you risk losing the right to payment by instalments and a surcharge will be imposed. NB, please note that a Commencement Notice is not required for residential extensions if relief has been granted.

Stevenage's adopted CIL Charging Schedule and further details of CIL can be found on the Council's webpages at www.stevenage.gov.uk/CIL or by contacting the Council's CIL Team at CIL@Stevenage.gov.uk.

Pro-active statement

1. 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 (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.
2. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport adopted October 2020
3. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 adopted 2019.
4. Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4 adopted May 2018.
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 February 2019 and Planning Policy Guidance March 2014.