

HART District Council

Planning - Design And Landscape

LANDSCAPE / TREE OBSERVATIONS

SITE: Hartland Park, Pyestock North, Ively Road

CASE OFFICER

BACKGROUND ISSUES

Impact on strategic gap

OBSERVATION

DATE

25/08/2005

Apply Standard Conditions Nos

Sue

As you are aware, I have to date made no comments with regard to this application and this is due to the following.

So far I have had several meetings with Michael Sparks Associates, both internally and on site and stretching over a number of months. These have occurred due to my concerns about the application and various amendments, some significant, have been made to address these.

The application seeks to make use of a large previously developed, but now largely redundant site situated within the strategic gap between Fleet and Cove/Farnborough. The existing development comprises of a significant variety of buildings of different uses and scales linked by a road network. Prior to the development of Cody Park to the south and the sub-division of the site by the new Ively Road, the majority of the existing buildings were substantially screened by mature boundary planting in the form of woodland, some mature and some emerging. Since the new Ively Road however, glimpses into the site are now available from the public highway.

To the north and west of the site lies a large area of woodland and restored heathland which provides a considerable leisure facility to the residents of Fleet and most likely, visitors from further a field.

For instance, further to the north and immediately south of the main line railway to London, is the main public access to Fleet Pond Nature Reserve which is a SSSI. Within this area there is only one designated public bridleway but also a significant number of undesignated footpaths networking the entire woodland and heathland area. The bridleway however, comes into close contact with the site boundary in two key locations. These are the most western section of the northern boundary and the southern tip of the site where the bridleway crosses the new Ively Road via an underpass.

Currently, the entire northern boundary line is occupied by immature woodland, with scattered mature trees. This runs for an approx. depth into the site of 100m and due to this provides, during the summer at least almost, total screening of the existing site buildings. This is also true of the western boundary where there is a sharp but relatively low escarpment, also covered in woodland. Along the south western section of the boundary the woodland thins and existing buildings come much closer to the boundary and are prominent but to undesignated footpaths rather than the bridleway. Along the south eastern boundary with Ively Road most of the boundary is occupied by mature woodland of mixed species but predominantly Scots Pine. This varies in depth along the length of this section of the boundary largely due to the existing site layout and buildings. For instance, the very southern tip of the site has an existing but unused parking area which allows views into the site for a considerable distance whilst further east no activity is perceptible due to the depth of the woodland. The eastern boundary is formed by the new extension to Bramshot Road where there is currently no public access. East beyond this is more MoD land with again, no public access.

My main concern with this application relates to the vast increase in footprint area and how this conflicts with our own local plan strategic gap policies. The proposed units, which are intended as distribution facilities and seven in total, are better measured in hectares rather than square metres. For instance the two largest units A and C, are 6.16 hectares and 3.5 hectares respectively and 19m in height. I consider a commercial storey height to be approx. 3m (10ft) so that a comparable structure would be 6.3 storeys.

Unit A, was originally proposed as being approx. 42m from Ively Road, which in relative terms appears a reasonable distance. However, from north to south the site declines so that to achieve a level footprint along the 350m length of this structure requires the land to be made up at its southern end by approx. 7m. This increases the building height near Ively Road from 19 to 26m or equivalent 8.6 storeys. Similar principles also apply to Unit C or though to a lesser degree due to the lie of the land.

In the north of the site Unit E and F also come close to the boundary line and the public bridleway. These are lower in height however, being proposed at 11.5m but would require the substantial removal of the existing belt of woodland mentioned above. Unit E was proposed approx. 28m from the northern boundary and Unit F just 12m.

Through various discussions, the applicant has revised the locations of various units to mitigate the concerns I have expressed. For

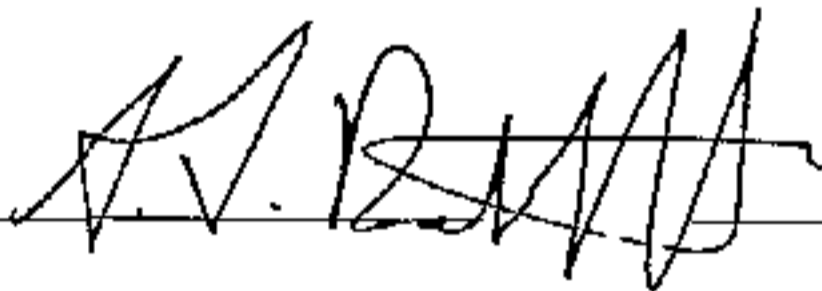
instance, Unit A has been moved back into the site by approx. 13m making the distance from Ively Road 55m. This has allowed for an additional depth of woodland planting proposals both below and above the required retaining feature. The landscape architect for this application has supplied some convincing information for how possible views from Ively Road can be mitigated.

Unit E and F has also been reduced in footprint size and/or moved further south away from the boundary. Again, extensive information has been supplied that seeks to demonstrate how any visual impact can be mitigated by additional woodland planting in these areas. It is worth noting at this point that full mitigation may not be realised for 15 years following development, allowing for plant establishment and growth etc.

As I have mentioned above, through discussion and various amendments to the original information supplied, mitigation in key areas appears to suggest that this proposal could be acceptable in visual terms. However, the local plan policy states that development of this site is acceptable as long as there is not a significant increase in footprint area. I think it is undeniable that this application seeks to greatly increase the footprint area within this site. Further and perhaps far harder to describe is the affect that the presence of this development will have on the strategic gap. These structures are vast and are likely to be far larger than any other structure within Hart District currently and perhaps the remainder of Hampshire.

In this sense and despite the convincing information supplied, I feel that the presence of a development in the strategic gap of this scale will always be discernable. On this basis, I believe the strategic gap will cease to function as a divide between the settlements of Fleet, Cove and Farnborough and this would be a direct contravention of our policies.

SIGNATURE



*END / CONTINUED