

ETRURIA VALLEY PHASE 2A. FORGE LANE, ETRURIA, STOKE-ON-TRENT.
STOKE-ON-TRENT REGENERATION LTD. 348/187 (SOT /52732)

The Borough Council has again been consulted by the City Council on an outline application by Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration Ltd to construct a business park containing a mix of B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial) and B8 (Storage and Distribution) uses on 6.3 ha of land at Etruria Valley Phase 2A, following receipt of further supporting information in response to the objection of this Council. All matters have been reserved for consideration at the reserved matters stage although an indicative Masterplan has been submitted with the application.

The Committee first considered this application at its meeting on 24 January (Agenda Item No.4).

For any comments that the Borough Council may have on this proposal to be taken into account, they have to be received by the City Council by no later than 22 August.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council be informed that the Borough Council wishes to maintain its objection to the proposal. The proposal involves large scale Class B1(a) office floorspace, a main town centre use as identified in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in this out of centre location. Furthermore the application has not demonstrated, through the sequential assessment, that the proposed office development cannot be located within or on the edge of Newcastle Town Centre.

Reason for Recommendation

The proposal involves Class B1(a) office floorspace, a main town centre use as identified in the NPPF, in this out of centre location. Furthermore the application has not demonstrated, through the sequential assessment, that the proposed office development cannot be located within Newcastle Town Centre.

Policies and Proposals in the Development Plan Relevant to This Recommendation

West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy 2008 (WMRSS)

Policy UR1: Implementing Urban Renaissance – the MUA
Policy UR3: Enhancing the Role of City, Town and District Centres
Policy PA1: Prosperity for All
Policy PA2: Urban Regeneration Zones
Policy PA5: Employment Areas in Need of Modernisation and Renewal
Policy PA6: Portfolio of Employment Land
Policy PA11: The Network of Town and City Centres
Policy T2: Reducing the Need to Travel

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011(SSSP)

Policy TC1: Ensuring the Future of Town Centres.
Policy T1A: Sustainable Development

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 (CSS)

Policy SP1: Spatial Principles of Targeted Regeneration
Policy SP2: Spatial Principles of Economic Development
Policy ASP1: City Centre of Stoke-on-Trent Area Spatial Policy
Policy ASP2: Stoke-on-Trent Inner Urban Core Area Spatial Policy
Policy ASP4: Newcastle Town Centre Area Spatial Policy

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

Planning for Town Centres: Practice guidance on need, impact and the sequential approach (2009)

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Employment Land Review (July 2011)

Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (January 2009)

Although the Government intend to abolish Regional Strategies, the RSS is, for the time being, still relevant policy that should be taken into account in the development management decision making process. However the intention to abolish Regional Strategies is a 'material consideration' which can be considered by local planning authorities when making decisions. The weight that should be afforded to the RSS policies and the intention to abolish is to be determined by the decision maker and will depend on the significance of the RSS policies to the application.

Relevant Planning History

The application site is located in the southern half of the former Shelton Iron and Steel Works. The majority of the works was closed in 1979 and redeveloped as part of the National Garden Festival in 1986. The Festival Heights section of the site was later reclaimed and redeveloped as a residential, retail and leisure site in the period 1994 to 2000. The Etruria Valley Phase 1 site was then redeveloped for Employment uses (B1, B2 and B8) in the period 1999 to 2007.

An outline planning application for B1, B2 and B8 development on the whole of the Phase 2A site was submitted in May 2003 and withdrawn in January 2008.

Permission has subsequently been granted for the following developments on the Phase 2A site:

- NuLBC Ref. 348/170 (SOT/48426) Trade Park 4 and Wade Ceramics: Erection of four buildings, two for Use Class B2/B8, one for Use Class B1 and one for Use Class B2, was granted planning permission in September 2008. The consent has been implemented and Wade Ceramics has been completed. The Borough did not object to this application.
- NuLBC Ref. 348/171 (SOT/48428) Festival Court: Erection of four office buildings (Use Classes B1 and A2), granted planning permission September 2008. The consent has been implemented and the Hanley Economics building has been completed. The Borough objected to this application.
- NuLBC Ref. 348/165 (SOT/47948) Vodafone Ltd: New office building granted planning permission September 2008 and has been completed. The Borough objected to this application.

Applicant's Submission

Two letters have been received following the Borough Council's previous consideration of the application. The main points of these letters are summarised as follows:

- There are no genuinely available and suitable sites within or on the edge of the City Centre, or any other centre in North Staffordshire, which could be developed for footloose companies looking for office buildings in a Business location in the absence of outline consent at Etruria.
- The Employment Land Review makes clear that Etruria is not competing with occupiers who would wish a City Centre location, and that the outline site should be treated as a strategic location to ensure office occupiers are not lost to the area.
- The applicant will accept conditions so that the consent is implemented as a functional Business Park as an extension to the existing Festival Park and Etruria Valley development.
- A Business Park is an area of mixed uses, primarily offices, light industrial and small to medium warehouses. The buildings are individual, self-contained buildings with appropriate dedicated car parking to meet the occupiers and visitors needs. Good, easy access to the national road network is also a defining factor.
- The Business Park is an agglomeration of similar uses that occupiers find beneficial and has the potential for greater sustainability by being able to make better use of public transport, potential cross company car sharing, etc.

In addition a comprehensive suite of documents accompany this application.

All these documents are available to view on Stoke City Council's website www.stoke.gov.uk using the City

Council reference SOT /52732

Key Issues

The Borough Council was consulted, earlier this year, by the City Council on an application for outline planning permission to construct a business park containing B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial) and B8 (Storage and Distribution) uses on 6.3ha of Phase 2A of the Etruria Valley site in Stoke-on-Trent. All matters have been reserved for consideration at the reserved matters application stage. The proposal was considered at the Planning Committee meeting of 24 January 2012 and at that meeting it was resolved to object to the proposal for the following reason:-

The proposal involves large scale Class B1(a) office floorspace, a main town centre use as identified in PPS4, in this out of centre location. Furthermore the application has not demonstrated, through the sequential assessment, that the proposed office development cannot be met within Newcastle Town Centre.

It was also resolved that the City Council be advised that the Borough Council were of the view that given the scale and nature of the development which is not considered to accord with the Development Plan it will be necessary for the application to be referred to the Secretary of State under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 if the City Council were minded to permit the application.

The City Council have yet to consider the application.

Since the application was initially considered in January PPS4 has been replaced by the NPPF. This report will focus on the proposed B1 (a) office uses - it being considered that the Borough Council has no particular interest in the proposed B2 or B8 uses on the site.

The main points to consider are:-

- (i) The interpretation of Core Spatial Strategy policy in regards to the location of office development
 - (ii) The sequential analysis of alternative sites as required by the NPPF
- (i) Interpretation of Core Spatial Strategy policy

There are Core Spatial Strategy policies relevant to this application:

Policy SP2 (Spatial Principles of Economic Development): Section 2 of this policy, together with its supporting text, outline that the identified strategic centres (the City Centre of Stoke-on-Trent (as defined by the Potteries Way Ring Road) and Newcastle Town Centre) should act as the main focus for large scale office development within the conurbation. Section 6 of Policy SP1 similarly indicates that office development will be focussed towards the City Centre and Newcastle Town Centre, and that development in other centres should be of a nature and scale appropriate to their respective position and role within the hierarchy of centres. Etruria Valley is not even one of these "other centres".

Policy ASP2 (Stoke-on-Trent Inner Urban Core Area Spatial Policy): Section 13 of this policy, together with its supporting text, identifies the south of Etruria Valley as being a major mixed use area for employment. Although office uses are not expressly excluded from this policy, the document does state that the Etruria Road Corridor and Festival Park/Heights will continue to complement the City Centre core.

The applicant considers that the application is in accordance with the Core Spatial Strategy as a mixed use employment scheme within Etruria Valley.

Neither Policy SP2 nor Policy ASP2 support the proposed office development as they clearly identify the strategic centres as the main focus for large scale office development within the conurbation. Although Policy ASP2 identifies the south of Etruria Valley as being suitable for employment uses, the definition of employment generating uses makes it clear that office development should be considered separately from the other employment uses in the context of the "town centre first" policies.

An office development of this large scale (an indicative floorspace of 5,574 square metres is given) should be located within a strategic centre in accordance with the Core Spatial Strategy.

(ii) The sequential analysis of alternative sites as required by the NPPF

The NPPF, at paragraph 24, states that LPAs should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. It goes on to state that LPAs should require applications for main town centre uses to be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations and only if suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered. When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre.

When considering the proposal earlier this year it was reported that a number of sites within and on the edge of Newcastle Town Centre had been identified by the Regeneration and Economic Development Business Unit who have commissioned a piece of work to provide potential layouts for office development on four town centre or edge of centre sites in Newcastle. These layouts are largely three-storey in scale and all provide generous levels of on-site car parking. These relate to the following sites:

- Blackfriars (option 1) : 5,286 sq. m of office space (potentially separable into two blocks) with 157 parking spaces
- Land adjacent to Sainsburys: 3,117 sq. m of office space with 72 parking spaces
- Former Georgia Pacific site and land adjacent to Maxims: three blocks of 1,259, 1,050 and 1,347 sq. m of office space with 106 parking spaces.
- Former Zanzibar, George Street: 2,638 sq. m of office space with 74 parking spaces

At that time it was considered by this Council that the site layouts proved that office development including car parking can be accommodated on each site and that all of the sites are considered to be available, suitable and viable for office development.

The further response from the applicant's agent, which prompted this further consultation from the City Council, makes reference to the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Employment Land Review. The review considers that the site at Etruria would not be competing with occupiers who would wish an in-centre location and that to restrict development to one location to encourage occupiers to move to another risk the loss of investment to competing centres.

Whilst this review was undertaken recently, and can be considered to be up to date, it does not have the same weight and status as adopted planning policy. The NPPF maintains a town centre first approach and as outlined above adopted policy within the CSS does not support the location of offices in this out of centre location. The applicant does not appear to have provided any further evidence that the sites identified within and on the edge of Newcastle Town Centre are not suitable or available for office development but has reasserted the argument that the provision of offices in this Business Park location would be attractive to a different type of office development. This is not considered to be reasons or evidence to prove that the office development could not be successfully operated from a town centre site or that a business park would not be viable without office development.

It is therefore still considered that the application should be refused as the applicant has not demonstrated compliance with the requirements of the sequential approach as it is considered that there are sequentially preferable sites available within or on the edge of Newcastle Town Centre.

Overall considerations

It is considered that the proposed office development, in an out of centre location, is not supported by Core Spatial Strategy policy which seeks to focus office development in the strategic centres of the City Centre and Newcastle. Although Policy ASP2 supports the development of the Etruria Valley site for employment uses, the definition of employment generating uses within the CSS clearly removes office development from the B1 Business Use Class so that office uses are considered in the context of the appropriate "town centre first" policies.

The conditions that are suggested by the applicant which seek to restrict class B1 uses to no more than 50% of the overall development and that office buildings will be between 50m² and 5,000m² would not help the Borough Council to achieve its ambition to create a vibrant healthy town centre.

In terms of the sequential assessment of town centre and edge of centre sites it is considered that there are

suitable and available sites located within or on the edge of Newcastle Town Centre which could accommodate the proposed office development.

Background Papers

Planning Policy documents referred to

Planning files referred to

Date Report Prepared

8 August 2012.