

AGENDA ITEM

COMMITTEE: DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

DATE: 2ND FEBRUARY 2005

SUBJECT: LAND AT BUTTERFIELD, HITCHIN ROAD.
PROPOSED MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT - APPROVAL
OF RESERVED MATTERS (SITING, DESIGN,
EXTERNAL APPEARANCE, MEANS OF ACCESS) FOR
PARK CENTRE AND OFFICE VILLAGE (PHASE 1).
(APPLICANT: EASTER DEVELOPMENTS LTD)
(APPLICATION NO. 04/01417/REM).

REPORT BY: DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MANAGER

CONTACT OFFICER: PORTIA FOOTE 546317

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	COMMUNITY SAFETY
EQUALITIES	ENVIRONMENT
FINANCIAL	CONSULTATIONS
STAFFING	OTHER

WARDS AFFECTED: STOPSLEY

PURPOSE

1. To advise Members of the submitted application and to seek their decision.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. Development Control Committee is recommended to approve the reserved matters pursuant to Permission 00/00573/OUT insofar as they relate to the siting, means of access, design and external appearance for Phase 1 of the Butterfield development.

REPORT

Site Description and Proposed Development

3. This application for approval of reserved matters, which is accompanied by a Design Statement, has been submitted on behalf of Easter Properties Ltd. It relates to Phase 1 of the Butterfield site, located on the North East edge of Luton on the A505 Hitchin Road. The site is on the edge of the urban area and has, until recently, been used as agricultural land. It is relatively flat and featureless. Outline planning consent for development of the Butterfield land was granted in March 2001. The development will eventually comprise a park and ride facility, B1 accommodation, an Innovation Centre and a University campus.

4. This application seeks approval for the siting, means of access, design and external appearance of that part of the site which is to be occupied by the Park Centre and Office Village, located immediately behind what is to be the Innovation Centre which fronts the A505. This site is bound by the new main access road to the east and west with mature hedgerows to the north and west.

5. The submitted plans show an intention to construct 5 two-storey buildings containing a total of 6780 square metres of floorspace to the north west of the “inner” roundabout on the Butterfield land (the roundabout is currently under construction pursuant to an earlier permission). The buildings will run north-south and will be set behind a landscaped strip. Car parking (168 spaces) is shown located to the rear of the buildings and, unusually, the main entrance to the main Park Centre building will also be to the rear, from the car park, rather than direct from the road. However, there will be footpaths on the site that will link into the footpath network that will serve the whole development and will link to the main A505.

6. The buildings will have concrete frames and floors and the architects have stressed the Modern elements of their design. In particular, an innovative ventilation system, incorporating air ducts set into the ground, will obviate the need for conventional air conditioning. The system has been designed in Germany and this will be the first commercial building in the UK to have the system. The concrete frames will be faced in an off-white “STO” render, being the highest quality render to be found in the industry at present. Curtain walling and fenestration will be in aluminium and there will be a large area of glazing with internal blinds, manually operated opening lights and “bris soleils” to provide solar control. The main entrance, within the “elbow” of the Park Centre building is shown constructed to a greater height than the rest of the buildings, to emphasise its location as the entrance and focal point of the development. An open area for users of the building to congregate and possibly for open-air events, will be located between the main entrance and the car park.

7. The buildings are intended to be constructed in accordance with sustainability principles. In addition to the aspects mentioned above, it is interesting to note that the drainage system will be designed to ensure that no water drains from the site, that the roofs will incorporate sedum mats and the parking areas constructed with interlocking concrete blocks to allow percolation of water into the ground.

8. Cycle stands and showers will be provided to encourage people to cycle to work.

Relevant Planning Policy

9. The development now proposed accords with the policies of the local plan and is fully compatible with the outline consent granted for the whole Butterfield development

Consultations and Statutory Publicity

10. The proposal was advertised in the local press, public notices were posted in the vicinity and individual letters of notification were sent to the occupiers of those properties adjacent to the land or on the opposite side of Hitchin Road. No letters of objection were received from local residents.

11. The following technical responses have been received:

- Strategic Planning: No objection. Notes the scheme is broadly consistent with the Policies in the adopted and draft local plan.
- Chilterns Conservation Board: No comments.
- Police Architectural Liaison Officer: Considers layout could encourage crime. In the absence of any details of a scheme for CCTV, strongly objects to the application.
- Bedfordshire County Council: No objection on archaeological grounds.
- Environment Agency: No comments.
- EEDA: Application consistent in principle with the current Regional Economic Strategy. Has concerns as to the possible environmental impacts associated with the development and asks for consideration to be given to reducing the level of car parking, requests a green travel plan and sustainable measures for the disposal of wastes.
- North Hertfordshire District Council: Strong objections. Consider that the proposal indicates an unimaginative design. Lacks architectural features and has a monotonous appearance.
- Thames Water: No comments.
- Highways Development Manager: Details are satisfactory.
- South Bedfordshire District Council: No objections to the development.
- Environment and Regeneration: Strong objection. Overall design is bland and provides no focus or feature to the main building on the site. Need to provide pedestrian focus for the main entrance is important. Mentions that there is scope for additional sustainable design.

Main Planning Considerations

Siting and Means of Access

12. The buildings are sited at the front of the application site with car parking at the rear. The corner building is made up of a central triangular section for the Park Centre office with 2 main wings to the side for offices or possible retail units. Access is from the rear via one central entrance. Outside this is public space with associated landscaping and a performance stage with weather-protected canopy. To the north are 4 more separate buildings, 2 larger buildings located parallel to the estate road with 2 smaller buildings behind.

13. The consultation response from the Council's Environment & Heritage Team has strongly criticised the site layout and indicated that more could be done to improve the "sustainability credentials" of the scheme. The applicants were requested to consider altering the design to present a site frontage that would be directly accessible to pedestrians, but they are strongly committed to their design approach which concentrates activity to the rear of the building. To assist Members, a copy of their Design Statement justifying their approach is shown as Appendix 'A' pages to .

14. With reference to access, the proposal meets latest accessibility standards. Disabled car parking spaces, passenger lifts and wheelchair accessible toilets are all provided. As mentioned earlier, there is provision for cyclists. The access to and layout of the car parking area for the development has been designed to minimise impact on the existing hedgerow that bounds part of the site. These aspects of the development are considered to be acceptable.

Design and External Appearance

15. The original outline permission was approved with a condition restricting the buildings to no higher than 2 storeys. The development complies with this requirement. There have been criticisms of the buildings' design; that they are too "bland" and that they "fail to make a statement". However, the materials to be used are modern and of high quality. A restriction on building height has meant that the building mass is not, in itself, going to make a bold statement but the blocks will have clean straight lines with a light render with aluminium and tinted glazing. Whether or not the buildings will be bland is a matter of personal judgement and taste and, having regard to the constraints imposed on the developer and to their strong emphasis on form and landscaping, Members may consider that the scheme will in fact provide a suitable form of development for this site.

16. Having regard to the concerns about the design, the agent was requested to submit samples of the materials and these will be available at the Meeting.

17. Important to the architect's overall design approach is the landscaping, which they consider will help the buildings to integrate into their surroundings. The landscaping is to be a variety of ornamental grasses, formal hedging and taller fruit trees. Along with the natural hedgerow in the background, the buildings (by keeping to a low level of only 2 storeys) will not dominate the site.

Car Parking

18. The application plans show the provision of 168 parking spaces to meet the needs of the buildings. Although their Design Statement says that this will be a ratio of 1 space per 35 square metres, it actually works out at 1 space per 40 square metres. The consultation response from EEDA questions the “high level” of parking provision and asks that a Green Travel Plan be prepared for the site.

19. However, having regard to the fact that the parking provision is well within the parameters set by both Government advice in PPG13 and the Council’s own emerging Local Plan, it is considered that the parking provision is both sustainable and appropriate for this site. Members will note that the scheme makes provision for cyclists and that the overall Butterfield development is to provide a Park and Ride facility.

20. In addition, one of the conditions attached to the outline planning permission requires the preparation of a Green Travel Plan for each of the sites on Butterfield.

Other Considerations

21. Although there is strong objection from the Police Architectural Liaison Officer, there is a condition on the original outline permission stating a CCTV scheme is to be submitted for approval prior to commencement of the development. The applicant has confirmed that a CCTV system will be installed on a phased basis and managed from the Park Central Security.

CONCLUSIONS

22. Notwithstanding the criticisms of the scheme received from some of the consultees, it is considered that, in this instance, the simple low-key approach to the design, complemented by the use of high quality materials and an extensive landscaping scheme, will be in keeping with the Council’s aims to achieve a high quality environment. The sustainable aspects of the proposal suggest that it will complement its setting and provide a good example for future development proposals on the remainder of the Butterfield land.

23. It is therefore concluded that planning permission may be granted in this instance.

APPENDIX

24. Appendix ‘A’ - Butterfield Luton – Park Centre and Office Village. Planning Application Design Statement: December 2004.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

25. The Borough of Luton Local Plan 1997.

26. Supplementary Planning Guidance – Designing for Sustainability 2004.

