SAMANTHA CARR

rdc
Robert Doughty
Consultancy

32 High Street, Helpringham,
Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 0RA
Tel: 01529 421646
Email: admin@rdc-landplan.co.uk
Web: www.rdc-landplan.co.uk

Planning, Design and Access Statement
Demolition of Existing Garden Centre/Nursery and Erection of 8 Industrial Units (Use Class E g) i), ii) and iii), Access Road and Associated Infrastructure

Former Fleet Road Garden Centre, Fleet Road, Fleet, Holbeach, PE12 8LD.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by the Robert Doughty Consultancy Limited on behalf of Samantha Carr to accompany a Full Planning Application for the erection of 8 industrial units and associated infrastructure to include the demolition of the former garden centre buildings.

1.2. The planning application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy and the proposal has been the subject of positive pre-application discussions with the local planning authority resulting in alterations to the scheme.

1.3. Having regard to the relevant planning history of the site, the positive preapplication comments provided by the local planning authority, the technical reports that accompany the application, there are no planning reasons why consent should not be forthcoming when exercising the planning balance.

2. PLANNING HISTORY

2.1. In recent years, the site has been the subject of a number of planning applications for residential redevelopment, the most recent of which having been dismissed on appeal in 2018 (LPA ref: H05-0849-18). In reaching a decision on the proposed residential use of the site, the Planning Inspector helpfully concludes that the site has the characteristics of previously developed land, rather than as a horticultural use. We have reproduced the relevant extract from the Inspector's decision below.

> "There was some debate at the Appeal Hearing as to whether the whole of the appeal site could be classed as previously developed land (PDL). The Council considers that part of the site was used as a nursery which as an agricultural use would not fall within the definition of PDL. However, the appellant stated that glasshouses on the site were used for the display of plants for sale which were not propagated on site. The appellant also provided evidence with regards to the rateable value of the property which does not refer to a reduction for horticultural use. I also saw that the glasshouses were of a form and arrangement which are typical of those at a garden centre. On the basis of what I have seen and read, I consider that the whole of the appeal site has the characteristics of PDL and I have considered this appeal on that basis."

2.2. Whilst this is not a definitive decision in relation to the lawful use of the site, there would seem to be little evidence to indicate why any other conclusion should be reached.

2.3. In addition to the status of the site as PDL, the Inspector also helpfully set out that the continued use of the site for employment purposes would be of benefit to the local economy. We have again set out below the relevant paragraph from the Inspector's decision letter.

> "With regards to economic benefits, the owner of the site has referred to a lack of financial viability of the garden centre. Whilst I have no reason to doubt the issues raised by the owner, there is no detailed evidence before me to demonstrate that the business is not viable, such as audited accounts. Moreover, the site may be attractive to other commercial uses which would generate employment and investment. There is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate that the site cannot continue to be used for commercial purposes, such as evidence in respect of interest from potential occupiers on the basis of a suitable marketing exercise. Based on the evidence before me, the loss of this commercial premises may therefore lead to harm to the economy of the area."

2.4. The continued operation of the site is no longer commercially viable for our client and she is, therefore, looking at the potential to redevelop the

site for commercial use in the form of a number of smaller commercial units, likely to fall within use class E (g) i, ii and iii.

2.5. Our client already has a number of potential tenants interested in the site, reflecting the need for smaller commercial workspace in the Holbeach area.

3. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

3.1. The application site is located to the south of Fleet Road, east of the junction with Haycroft Lane; Holbeach lies some 750m to the west.



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Location Plan showing the extent of the application site.

3.2. The application consists of a number of brick and block buildings, outdoor display areas and car parking which make up the garden centre use. There is an existing gated entrance off Fleet Road and a tall conifer screen along the southern boundary and along part of the western boundary. The eastern boundary is formed by a wooden close boarded fence and there is a detached bungalow set within an expansive curtilage and large domestic garage that resembles a commercial building.

3.3. To the south of the site beyond the tall conifer hedge, there is a green plastic coated agricultural building, which runs parallel to the boundary.

3.4. On the Fleet Road frontage immediately to the west of the garden centre, there is a detached dwelling whose rear garden shares an eastern and southern boundary with the application site. It is presumed that historically this dwelling had some association with the garden centre.

3.5. We have included a selection of photographs below which highlight the character of the site and surroundings.



Looking east along the southern boundary of the site with existing buildings on the left and the eastern site boundary in the distance.



Looking north east across the car park and storage areas towards Fleet Road and the wooden close boarded fence with the adjacent dwelling beyond.



Looking south at the site boundary and conifers hedge with the agricultural building on third party land beyond.



Examples of some of the buildings currently on site.



Further examples of buildings on site.

3.6. A search of Lincolnshire Historic Environment Records indicates that there are no heritage assets in or near the site which would be impacted upon by the proposal.

4. PLANNING POLICY

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

4.1. The NPPF sets out Central Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

4.2. Paragraphs 7 and 8 of the NPPF confirm the commitment to sustainable development based on three dimensions:

"**an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible local services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' the community's health, social and cultural well-being; and

an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy."

4.3. This is followed by a commitment to a presumption in favour of sustainable development and at paragraph 11,

"For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or,

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i) The application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, or

ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

4.4. Paragraph 12 confirms that applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan and that, in such cases, Local Authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable

development. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date Development Plan, permission should not normally be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date Development Plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

Development Plan

4.5. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that, "If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

4.6. The Development Plan for the purposes of this application comprises the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (Local Plan) adopted in March 2019.

4.7. Although in open countryside, the application site is an existing employment site occupied by permanent buildings within a well-defined curtilage and represents an ideal opportunity for redevelopment to support the economic activity in the area.

4.8. Policy 2 of the Local Plan is a Development Management policy and sets out the considerations that need to be met and, amongst other matters, these include size, scale, layout, density, impact on amenity, sustainable drainage and flood risk.

4.9. Policy 3 refers specifically to the design of new development to create distinctive places through the use of high quality and distinctive design.

4.10. Policy 4 refers to the risk of flooding and the application is supported by an up-to-date Flood Risk Assessment, which concludes that the site is safe from flooding. A Surface Water Drainage Strategy is also presented as part of the application which demonstrates that the surface water can be dealt with in accordance with sustainable drainage principles.

4.11. Policy 4: Approach to Flood Risk, requires applications be accompanied by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment covering all sources of flooding and include the impacts of climate change.

4.12. Policy 7: Improving South East Lincolnshire's Employment Land Portfolio, the local authorities will assist in supporting proposals, which assist in delivering economic prosperity. The application site falls to be considered under the "Other Employment Sites" as set out in Policy 7,

which states that new employment activities will be supported where they involve the re-use of previously developed land and subject to compliance with criteria a-g.

5. DESIGN

USE

5.1. The site is an existing employment site (albeit presently vacant) and, therefore, the re-use of the site as previously developed land is in accordance with Local Plan policy 7. The matter was effectively settled through the consideration of the previous planning appeal on site and this is set out in Section 2 of this statement.

5.2. It is proposed that the new units will be used by businesses that fall into the new use class E g) which is essentially the old B1 commercial use. With particular regard to Use Class E g) iii, this use relates to industrial uses which can be carried out in any residential area without causing detriment to the amenity of the area.

5.3. The 8 proposed units will either be 130sqm or 200sqm (gross floor area) and it is intended that they will provide start-up floorspace for new business and those looking to move out of older and probably less modern premises.

5.4. The number and orientation of the units has been altered following pre-application advice with the Council.

5.5. The units have been designed following advice from commercial professionals and contact with the Council's Economic Development Team.

Amount and Layout

5.6. The proposed development is for 8 units arranged as a pair of 'semi-detached buildings either side of the access into the site and a 'terrace' of 4 units along the southern boundary. The amount of parking spaces complies with the standards set out in Appendix 6 of the local plan The site plan also identifies space for cycle parking, and it is also proposed to provide an electric vehicle charging point for each unit in accordance with Local Plan policy 36, which sets out that "adequate charging points should be provided to help promote more sustainable transport solutions"

5.7. The eastern side of 86 Fleet Road, which is the dwelling closest to the application site, is dominated by the existing buildings on the application site. The nearest proposed industrial unit will be 5.5m at the closest point to the site boundary and, accordingly, the proposal represents an

improvement in terms of improved sunlight for that property, together with the removal of the overbearing buildings.

5.8. To the rear (south) of 86 Fleet Road, there is the outdoor retail area associated with the garden centre use. The proposed redevelopment will see parking along the eastern boundary and an acoustic fence installed at 2m high to reduce any impact arising from vehicles manoeuvring between the proposed industrial units.

5.9. The southern boundary of the site is characterised by an existing mature conifer hedge and there is an agricultural building beyond this. The proposed buildings back onto the boundary and there is no detrimental impact arising from this relationship.

5.10. Along the eastern boundary of the site the proposed buildings are approximately 8m from the site boundary and the single storey dwelling to the east is 11.6m from its boundary with the application site. Although there is an existing 1.8m close boarded fence along this boundary, it is also proposed to erect a 2m acoustic fence along this boundary, together with a row of trees. Once again the fence will serve to reduce any noise from vehicles manoeuvring between the buildings, and the trees will in time screen the development.



Proposed Site Layout Plan

Scale

5.11. The proposed units are either 130 sqm or 200sqm (gross) and each has a small office, toilet, and kitchenette. To the front of each unit, there is a window, personnel door and roller shutter door. Each unit has a modern mono-pitch roof, which measures 6.6m at the front of the unit and 4.9m at the rear.

5.12. The proposed buildings are no higher than the existing buildings on site and lower than the ridge of 86 Fleet Road. The eastern boundary of the site is 55m long and the gable ends of the proposed buildings represents 28.6m of this total. The side elevation of the proposed building is smaller in scale than that of a two-storey dwelling and only slightly larger than a standard single storey dwelling.

5.13. The proposal offers flexible commercial floorspace based on known local needs and the applicant already has expressions of interest from several potential tenants.

Landscaping

5.14. There is presently no landscaping within site other than for some boundary planting which is to remain. It is proposed to provide screening to the presently open eastern boundary in the form of tree planting.

Appearance

5.15. The design of the units has had a number of iterations before the current design was settled on. The monopitch roof design and modern materials will result in a contemporary appearance of high quality in accordance with Local Plan policy 3. Each facade incorporates a dedicated space for modest individual business advertising thus avoiding ad-hoc signage which would spoil the overall appearance of each building and the overall site.

Access

5.16. The application site is located off the Fleet Road and the proposed access point is largely in the same location as that which serves the existing garden centre. The access will be constructed in accordance with Lincolnshire County Council's standards and there is good visibility in both directions. There is an existing footway on the Fleet Road and the nearest bus stop is some 480m to the east.

5.17. As mentioned earlier, the layout of the site provides for parking levels in accordance with the standards set out in the Local Plan and there are also provisions made for cycle storage and electric vehicle charging.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. The application site has, until November 2021, been used as a garden centre but has had to close and efforts concentrated elsewhere. Notwithstanding the vacant nature of the site, it represents previously developed land and, therefore, the redevelopment and retention of an employment opportunity accords with the provisions of Local Plan policy 7.

6.2. Following helpful advice from the local planning authority, the layout has been amended and the resultant design makes best use of the site whilst resulting in little detrimental impact on the two dwellings to the east and west of the site. The layout will actually improve the immediate environment of 86 Fleet Road following the removal of unsightly buildings which currently form the eastern boundary to their garden

6.3. The Flood Risk Assessment indicates that the site is safe from flooding and the proposed Surface Water Drainage Strategy indicates how this will be managed, notwithstanding the fact that the site is currently almost entirely impermeable and has no sustainable drainage system.

6.4. The provision of employment opportunities is wholly compliant with the Local Plan policy objectives and wider development management requirements, is in accordance with up-to-date Government guidance in the NPPF and is acceptable in all other respects.

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Robert Doughty
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