

**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE (CENTRAL AND EAST)**

At a Meeting of **Area Planning Committee (Central and East)** held in **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Tuesday 12 January 2016** at **1.00 pm**

**Present:**

**Councillor P Taylor (Chairman)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Clark, P Conway, M Davinson, D Freeman, S Iveson, C Kay, A Laing (Vice-Chairman), J Lethbridge, B Moir and K Shaw

**Also Present:**

Councillor E Huntington

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bell, G Bleasdale and K Dearden.

**2 Substitute Members**

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

**3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held 8 December 2015 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

**4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**5 Applications to be determined by the Area Planning Committee (Central & East Durham)**

**a DM/15/03324/FPA - 2 Pease Road, North West Industrial Estate, Peterlee, SR8 2RD**

The Planning Officer, Laura Eden gave a detailed presentation on the report relating to the abovementioned planning application, copies of which had been circulated (for copy see file of minutes). Members noted that the written report was supplemented by a visual presentation which included photographs of the site. The Officer advised that Members of the Committee had visited the site that day and were familiar with the location and setting. The application was for a change of use from Class B1 (Light Industry) to Class D2 (Assembly and Leisure) and was recommended for approval subject to conditions.

The Planning Officer informed Members that the report included reference at paragraph 34 to “occupancy rates” and this should have read “vacancy rates”.

The Chairman asked the Local Member for Shotton and South Hetton, Councillor E Huntington to speak in relation to the Application.

Councillor E Huntington addressed the Committee noting that as a former Portfolio Holder for Health she held a deep interest in health and wellbeing and accordingly, was generally in support of gymnasia. Councillor E Huntington noted concern however as regards the sustainability of the application, given the number of similar facilities within the industrial estate area. Councillor E Huntington noted that the unit had a large footprint and use as a gymnasium, would provide fewer jobs than if the unit were occupied for industrial use.

The Chairman thanked the Local Member and introduced Mr B Johnson, owner of the Fitness Factory gymnasium who was speaking on behalf of several local gymnasium owners in objection to the application, having 5 minutes to address the Committee.

Mr B Johnson noted that he and the other gymnasium owners and operators passionately supported the health and wellbeing of the local community, however, they felt that there was a question as regards the sustainability of the new facility proposed in the change of use application. Mr B Johnson added that while the report noted the Applicant cited a “sustainable and well thought out layout” he asked whether the Applicant had carried out any feasibility study in terms of sustainability and, given that there were already 4 large gymnasia with floor spaces in the region of 6,000-7,000 square foot, he asked whether the Council felt that the market was saturated. Mr B Johnson added that the loss of B2 industrial class units could be of detriment to the industrial estate. Mr B Johnson concluded by noting that another gymnasium would prevent existing facilities from growing and expanding and the application offered no unique services that further promote the health and wellbeing of the community. Mr B Johnson thanked the Committee for their time and consideration.

The Planning Officer noted that no impact assessment was required for an application of this size and that the Applicant had satisfied planning in terms of the sequential test.

The Chairman thanked the Speaker and introduced Mr B Jewitt, the Applicant and Mr S Pickering in support of the application, they having 5 minutes to address the Committee between them.

Mr B Jewitt thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak in respect of the application and noted that he had a passion for fitness, playing rugby for Durham and studying Sports Science at university, having received the Professor Leni Oglesby Prize for Achievement. Mr B Jewitt explained he had lived at Peterlee his whole life and understood the needs of the local community. Mr B Jewitt noted he believed that the proposed gymnasium would be sustainable and to that end he had secured a 5 year lease on the property and made a capital investment of £140,000 to obtain gymnasium equipment that was not available in County Durham, the nearest comparable equipment being 70 miles away in York. Mr B Jewitt noted several benefits from the proposed gymnasium, including: 7 jobs; market leading equipment not available in the area; supporting enterprise, innovation and economic development, all elements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Mr B Jewitt noted that customer choice was key and that in this respect no material weight could be attached to competition in terms of the application, with the NPPF actually supporting competitiveness. Mr B Jewitt concluded by noting he had submitted the application ensuring it was in line with the NPPF and saved Local Plan and that the relevant internal and statutory consultees had returned no objections.

Mr S Pickering noted that Mr B Jewitt was a young entrepreneur who had made a significant investment to bring forward a facility that would benefit the community and bring much needed local jobs. Mr S Pickering added that the building, and those in the vicinity, would be more secure with the unit being occupied and that NPPF was clear in its support of enterprise. Mr S Pickering concluded by noting that the development was sustainable, close to local transport links, and he believed that the application was of merit.

The Chairman thanked the Speakers and asked Members of the Committee for their questions and comments on the application.

Members debated the issues raised by the Local Member, Speakers and Officers and Councillor A Laing noted that health was an important issue, especially in the North East and that the Planning Officer had highlighted the high vacancy rate in this particular industrial estate. Members noted that the Applicant had chosen this particular unit as it had a large flat floor to accommodate equipment and there were benefits in terms of job creation and to the health and wellbeing of the local community.

Councillor A Laing moved that the application be approved; she was seconded by Councillor B Moir.

**RESOLVED**

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions detailed in the Officer's report to the Committee.

**b DM/15/02384/FPA - Land opposite St Pauls Church, Commercial Street, Trimdon Station**

The Senior Planning Officer, Barry Gavillet gave a detailed presentation on the report relating to the abovementioned planning application, copies of which had been circulated (for copy see file of minutes). Members noted that the written report was supplemented by a visual presentation which included photographs of the site. The application was for a construction of 12 no. dwellings with associated parking, access and alteration to a bus shelter and was recommended for approval subject to conditions.

The Senior Planning Officer informed Members that the report included reference to Trimdon Parish Council and should have stated Trimdon Foundry Parish Council.

The Chairman noted there were no registered Speakers and asked Members of the Committee for their questions and comments on the application.

Councillor P Conway noted that the application appeared to be straightforward and presented a "win-win" in terms of providing additional housing and bringing a derelict site back into use.

Councillor P Conway moved that the application be approved; he was seconded by Councillor A Laing.

**RESOLVED**

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions detailed in the Officer's report to the Committee.

**c DM/15/03039/OUT - Plants R Ross, South Hetton Road, Easington Village**

The Senior Planning Officer, Barry Gavillet gave a detailed presentation on the report relating to the abovementioned planning application, copies of which had been circulated (for copy see file of minutes). Members noted that the written report was supplemented by a visual presentation which included photographs of the site. The application was for extension of an existing garden centre.

The Chairman introduced Mrs P Stubbs, the Applicant and owner of the garden centre, having 5 minutes to address the Committee.

Mrs P Stubbs thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak in respect of the application and noted that her company owned 9 garden centres across the country, however, the company was a family company and not a corporate chain.

Mrs P Stubbs noted that their company had taken on their first garden centre in 1990 and built up their company to a business with a turnover of approximately £4.5 million and with 84 full-time equivalent employees. Mrs P Stubbs noted that their company had previously brought run-down garden centres up to a high quality and would invest to ensure the centre was operational as soon as possible, then to bring additional features over time. Mrs P Stubbs explained that her company had never once made anyone redundant and that the company would work hard to improve the centre to make it the heart of the community. Mrs P Stubbs reiterated that her company was a family firm and would utilise local firms in the refurbishment, and that there was potential for up to 50 jobs with various positions including customer service staff, a chef, administrative staff, an accountant and a manager, helping to develop various skill in the local area.

The Chairman thanked the Speaker and asked Members of the Committee for their questions and comments on the application.

Members debated the issues raised by the Speaker and Officers and Councillor A Laing noted she supported the application. Councillor J Clark asked whether there were opportunities for apprentices or trainees at the refurbished garden centre. Mrs P Stubbs noted that her company worked with industry agencies and there were opportunities to train on-site and, with there being a shift system in operation, there was flexibility to suit different potential employees. Councillor B Moir asked whether the site was accessible by young people and those without access to a motor vehicle. It was confirmed that the application site was on a regular bus route.

Councillor A Laing moved that the application be approved; she was seconded by Councillor B Moir.

## **RESOLVED**

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions detailed in the Officer's report to the Committee.