

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Planning Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 2 January 2018 at 1.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Robinson (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Bell, H Bennett, J Clare, I Jewell, C Kay, H Nicholson, G Richardson, A Shield, P Taylor, M Wilkes and S Wilson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hicks, Laing and Tinsley.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor H Bennett as substitute Member for Councillor Laing.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Robinson referred to Agenda Item 5 (b) – Land to the East of Fire Station, Green Lane, Bishop Auckland and advised Members of the Combined Fire Authority that there was no need for them to declare an interest in the item because the land was not in the ownership of the Fire Authority.

4 Minutes

The minutes of meeting held on 5 December 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Applications to be determined

a DM/17/03433/RM - Mount Oswald, South Road, Durham

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding a reserved matters application for the approval of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale for the erection of two 500 bed colleges with associated student facilities and university hub building, pursuant to outline planning permission CMA/4/83, as amended by DM/15/03555/VOC, at Mount Oswald, South Road, Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

C Harding, Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation of the application which included a site location plan, site photographs, proposed layout and

streetscene. Members of the Committee had visited the site and were familiar with the location and setting.

Councillor L Brown, Local Member, addressed the Committee. Councillor Brown informed the Committee that she was asked to bring this before Committee by one of her residents who, unfortunately, was not able to attend the meeting. However, Councillor Brown added that she was unwilling to allow the application to be dealt with under delegated powers.

The original application for outline permission had been approved by Committee, and in many ways this application was more relevant, as within it Members got to see what form the colleges would take and the design, landscaping and look of the site became visible to Members and the general public. Anyone referring back to the original outline planning application which had been given the reference number 8/CMA/4/83, would be faced with 111 documents with the title “added to DMS load from strategic” which was not an encouragement to browse.

As one of the Local Members in whose division it was sited, this application had been a great disappointment. Councillor Brown was sure that many of Members had looked at the building site that Durham had become, with the plethora of PBSAs under construction, and thought that Durham University could do a better job if they had control of commissioning. Unfortunately, the answer to this was no, with this application proposing more of the same, that was modular building, brick effect cladding and cheap fast construction. Councillor Brown referred to policy Q8 of the Durham City Saved Policies and all the paragraphs under NPPF heading no 7 “Requiring Good Design”.

Councillor Brown asked the University to look back at colleges they had previously commissioned. St Aidan’s was designed by Sir Basil Spence, Trevelyan College won a Civic Trust award as did Van Mildert and St Aidan’s and Collingwood won a RIBA award. Although the new Palatine Centre and the Ogden Centre had polarised opinion, at least the University did not go for a bland option. It seemed that in these colleges there was a wasted opportunity. John Snow and the new 17th College could have been jewels in Durham University’s crown. Instead of getting something individual this application was proposing something that could be seen in any university town in the country.

Councillor Brown was not asking that the application be rejected, however she was throwing down a gauntlet. This was among the first of many applications that would be coming forward from the university as they sought to provide teaching space and further colleges for the influx of students that Durham was expecting in the next ten years. Councillor Brown referred the University commissioning bodies to paragraph 58 of the NPPF, which stated that developments “should respond to local character and history” and “appropriate innovation” should be encouraged. They should also be “visually attractive, as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping”. As a World Heritage site Durham City and its residents deserved better.

The Senior Planning Officer apologised for the difficulty experienced when referring to the previous application, which had been caused by the migration from one computer system to another.

Mr O Adams of Durham University addressed the Committee. Durham was a world class university which was of benefit to both Durham City and the region as a whole.

Academic programmes and colleges would be relocated from the Queen's Campus in Stockton to Durham City as part of the University Masterplan, with student numbers growing to a maximum of 21,500 by 2027 and 50% of students living in collegiate accommodation. The student experience at Durham University was considered to be one of the best in the country because of the collegiate experience.

This application would create an enormous opportunity with the proposed Hub being able to provide opportunities for events and, together with a separate application for a Multi-Use Games Area, would be available for community use.

The proposed development was sustainably located within the urban area of Durham, close to existing University facilities and accommodation. The proposal was car-free and included improvements to pedestrian access through and around the site, to encourage sustainable modes of travel.

The design process for the application had taken three years and the University would be working in partnership with Interserve and Campus Living Villages to construct and operate the accommodation. The development would use local suppliers where possible and provide direct and indirect construction jobs and apprenticeships.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the difficulty of finding documents on the Council's website relating to the original application in outline, which included a travel plan. Councillor Wilkes sought a reassurance that all details in the previously approved travel plan had been carried through with no changes, as any changes could impact on the safety of students accessing the City centre.

The Senior Planning Officer replied that the planning history of the Mount Oswald site was complex. The travel plan had been submitted and approved in the original planning application for the site and any subsequent development of the site would be in accordance with these details.

Councillor Wilkes referred to a University proposal for a pedestrian superhighway but he was not sure whether this had been contained in the original travel plan.

The Senior Planning Officer replied that a pedestrian superhighway was a University intention but was not contained in the original travel plan. The original application brought with it a s106 contribution towards sustainable travel of just over £1m and this was considered acceptable at the time of approval.

Councillor Richardson informed the Committee that he had attended the site visit and had appreciated being able to see examples of the materials to be used in the construction/finishing of the buildings. While he appreciated the concerns of the local Member, Councillor Richardson **moved** approval of the application.

Councillor Jewell informed the Committee that there was little or no objection to the application, with the local Member also not objecting, and **seconded** approval of the application.

Upon a vote being taken it was

Resolved:

That the application be approved, subject to the conditions contained in the report.

b DM/17/03466/FPA - Land to the east of Fire Station, Green Lane, Bishop Auckland

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding an application for the construction and operation of a Reserve Power Plant and associated infrastructure on land to the east of the Fire Station, Green Lane, Bishop Auckland (for copy see file of Minutes).

C Shields, Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation on the application which included a site location plan, photographs of the site, site layout and example of a gas generator.

The Senior Planning Officer informed the Committee that an additional Condition was proposed that if the site was not used for a period of 6 months then the equipment would be removed from the site and the site restored.

Mr J Cook, applicant, addressed the Committee. The National Grid experienced large fluctuations of electricity demand throughout the day and throughout different times of the year. During periods of high demand, the National Grid aimed to increase supply to maintain a margin which was essential in seeking to eliminate, as far as possible, the risk of power shortages and blackouts. Historically, conventional power stations could be operated with some certainty. However, as the UK moved towards a more environmentally sustainable energy supply system, with an increase in renewable energy sources, there was an increased risk of electricity supply fluctuations, depending on prevailing weather conditions, and therefore an increased need for Reserve Power Plants (RPP).

RPPs were a simple and reliable way of providing relatively large amounts of electricity to the distribution network in a very short space of time. The proposed development would be part of a network to ensure there was sufficient electricity available on the Grid as the UK increased its renewable energy generation and made the transition to a lower carbon energy supply system.

The proposed site was located next to an existing substation, into which the RPP would connect. The proposed development would operate for approximately 3,500

hours per year, which was 40% of the total hours in a year. The generators would operate whenever called upon by National Grid.

The proposed facility would take 4 months to construct during which time there would be 4 HGV journeys per day. However, once constructed, traffic generation would be minimal as the facility was autonomously operated, requiring only weekly maintenance visits.

Environmental assessments which had been undertaken, especially noise and air quality, demonstrated that the proposed facility, with mitigation, would not have adverse effects on identified receptors. Additionally, key landscape features would be retained and managed and enhanced as part of the proposal such as boundary trees and hedgerows. The proposal would increase biodiversity of the site from the existing conditions through the provision of a low maintenance grassland and additional tree and scrub planting.

Councillor Richardson informed the Committee that he was aware of the site. He considered the application to be a good idea in the right place and **moved** approval of the application.

Councillor Kay welcomed the application, which would address the real possibility of power cuts. Councillor Kay asked who the applicant was and added that inverting DC to AC was an inefficient method of conversion. Councillor Kay also asked whether the batteries would be recharged from the National Grid.

Mr Cook replied that the applicant was Sirius Renewable Energy, a local company. If the facility was constructed it would go to an auction operated by the National Grid, and if successful, would then become part of the National Grid. The batteries were only recharged by the gas generator sets and were recharged during periods of no demand.

Councillor Wilkes expressed concern about air pollution caused by the proposed development. Nitrous Oxide would be produced when the gas burners were in operation and the facility was near to houses and workspaces. Any air pollution caused by the facility must be damaging to health and therefore the balance was the risk of no electricity against negative health impacts. The site was 60 metres from the nearest residential properties and less than 60 metres from workspaces.

Councillor Wilkes referred to Paragraph 33 of the report which stated that landscaping would include 16 heavy standard trees to strengthen the northern boundary of the site to mitigate the nitrous oxide, yet Paragraph 57 stated that tree planting would be increased from 7 to 16, which was only an additional 9 trees and the applicants document stated 5 trees would be introduced to the northern boundary, which was a woeful amount of mitigation.

The Senior Planning Officer replied that an air quality assessment had been carried out which had concluded that while there would be an impact on air pollution, this would be insignificant and the development would have an acceptable impact. Landscape officers had requested increased tree planting to screen the site, not to

absorb pollution, and the Senior Planning Officer confirmed that an additional 16 trees would be planted on the site, together with increased hedging.

Councillor Wilkes considered that the proposals to mitigate the pollution impacts of the development to be inadequate and contrary to Policy GD1 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan.

Councillor Clare informed the Committee that the proposed tree planting was for landscaping purposes and not to compensate for emissions from the site. Paragraphs 32 and 66 of the report referred to the air quality assessment carried out which had concluded that the emissions would be insignificant. Sustainable energy sources were unreliable and there was a need for facilities such as this. To approve the application would allow for the move to low carbon energy production.

Councillor Kay informed the Committee that trees did not absorb nitrous oxide but did absorb carbon dioxide, which was a major gas produced by gas generators.

Councillor Nicholson **seconded** approval of the application.

Upon a vote being taken it was

Resolved:

That the application be approved subject to the Conditions contained in the report and the additional condition proposed by the Senior Planning Officer.