

REPORT UPDATE

Application No: BE/23/14/PL

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Location: Adjacent Warehouse site to McDonalds Oldlands Way, Bersted

Description: Change of use from Class B8 (Storage or Distribution) to Class A1 (Shops) including partial demolition

UPDATE DETAILS

Reason for Update/Changes:

Firstly, with regard to the WSCC Highways objection, the applicant has submitted a Draft Travel Plan and also an amended site plan, the latter which identifies pedestrian routes, cycle parking spaces, staff parking spaces and disabled parking spaces. The applicant has also confirmed to WSCC Highways that food retail is not part of the proposal. As a result, WSCC Highways have stated that parts (a) and (c) of the refusal reason no longer apply. However, WSCC Highways still require the submission of a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit and Designer Response. They have stated that this cannot be made the subject of a planning condition. Therefore part (b) of the refusal reason must remain.

Secondly, in the first paragraph of the Conclusions Section under "PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT & LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT LAND", it is stated that Policy EMP DM1 "Employment Land: Development Management" has not yet been approved by Full Council. However, since writing the report, this policy has now been approved for development management purposes. Therefore, it is recommended that the first refusal reason be modified to include reference to the policy.

Thirdly, the applicant has asked that the following text be brought to the attention of members:

"So let me deal with the outstanding matters. The Highways matters have all been resolved with the exception of an audit of the entrance that has moved ten metres to the right. I would suggest that this remaining point could be dealt with by a condition. You can understand our reluctance to undertake an audit now when the retail planning has been objected to. However, if necessary, we would retain the existing entrances in the same position so as to avoid the issue.

So the essence of the objection is the retention of the site for its current use. Economic Regeneration's point seems to be that the analysis of enquiries shows things are picking up and the future is likely to show there is a requirement for these units and their audit of available stock showed only the "Oldlands Terrace" available. Hence the unit's current use must be retained. Whilst we can share the desire that this will be the case, there is no current evidence that this is the case. It is just a hope that the future will be bright. There has been no actual evidence produced of the list of enquiries and more importantly whether these applicants would really want a 36,000 sq ft warehouse.

Our agents, who we again contacted yesterday, stated that there was still no interest and we are in touch with Stiles, Colliers, Flude and Knight Frank. The size of the warehouse means it has to

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be occupied by a substantial national company. I don't suspect that there is a local Bognor company that would have the financial wherewithal to afford the rent and business rates. In fact, I believe Economic Regeneration's examples were for a take up of smaller units of 1-2,000 sq ft. The report on planning for Rolls Royce site highlighted the fact that enquiries for large units drop off more or less completely once the unit size goes over 10,000 sq ft.

Our position is based on fact for the last three years. There has been no demand and we have tried hard to occupy the site beneficially. Full stop...EMPTY! There has not even been an enquiry we could negotiate on. So why it is that Oldlands way is still empty? The whole Oldlands terrace has been empty more or less since Wileys moved out. The three landlords speak from time to time and no-one has had an industrial contact. As you know, our immediate neighbour recently let his units. But these were not let for industrial use. The recent lettings were to a skate park and a garage there. So there has been no demand for B8 use. I understand that a national exhaust company has looked at the end units.

I suspect part of the reason is that the units are 35 years old. They are tired and old with poor roofing and insulation. Any newer development would be preferred. So rather than retain the old, policy should support the development of other sites with new units. It is my understanding that there are proposals for new units in Oldlands Farm and possibly other places. Forgive me if this is incorrect but you will know better what units are planned or have been built. This pipeline was not really mentioned at our meeting, but you will know what applications, enquiries and consents have been given for new units.

National Planning Policy is clear. If you can't beneficially use the unit and you have tried for a period of time then look at other uses. So we found there is some demand from retailers partly due to the prominence. The road has changed; Sainsbury's, McDonalds, Skate Park, Garage. I would urge you to consider an independent review of the objection. That is what members did for the skate park. No-one can predict the future and in this case the historical evidence is not in doubt.

And why keep old units? As we stated at our meeting, our understanding is that a substantial retailer would employ 45 people. 45 jobs at Bognor. Why turn that down? A new and brighter use. A higher business rates take for Bognor. Our proposal brings life to the old parade and should be supported. The alternative could be nothing and whilst we take security seriously there is always the potential for anti-social behaviour and regular incursion by Travellers."

Officers Comment:

The changes to the 1st and 3rd reasons for refusal are shown on the attached sheet. Please note that the 3rd reason previously had 3 parts to it and that the remaining part (b) has now been amalgamated into a single reason (i.e. there is no longer any references to (a), (b) or (c)).