

BN/57/19/RES – Land East of Fontwell Avenue, Fontwell

Application for the approval of reserved matters for light industrial floorspace

Design Considerations

General

A larger site area benefits from outline planning permission granted on 13th July 2017 under planning application reference WA/22/15/OUT for a mixed use including residential and business generating uses.

In this instance, the subject application only relates to part of the larger area for which outline planning permission was granted. It is contained by the A29 to the west and Arundel Road to the North which converge at the A27 roundabout. The Site is bounded by mature trees to the northern and western and southern boundaries. The eastern boundary is shared with a dwellings house and its associated garden with the remainder being a field which also includes planting with scattered trees along its length.

The site itself falls from east to west with the highest point being some 30m AOD falling to a height of 24m AOD, a topography that appears to have been partly influenced by the construction of the A27 and its major roundabout junction. Although the land parcel is a field used for pasture, due to nature of the road network and the extent of housing present, the site has acquired a more suburban setting. The A27 and its junction with the A29 and Arundel Road has had a major impact on the landscape. As a result, the typical service uses and buildings are present to the north side of the Arundel Road, east of the A27. This area includes a Fuel Station, a Burger King Fast Food establishment and a Travel Lodge. These read as having large footprints when compared to the suburban residential dwellings that stretches to the east West of the A29 and south of the A27 is a Travelodge and buildings associated with Fontwell Park Race Course. In addition the complex includes a three-storey grandstand with multi-use ground floor space, restaurant and private 'boxes' approved under reference AL/86/08. It replaced a smaller stand and was considered to be acceptable in terms of its scale, mass, form and appearance. Apart from the use of brick it does not instil a sense of local distinctiveness. However, it is a building design that was informed by functional requirements.

Therefore and understandably, in this location and landscape, the typology of buildings is varied. It is also typically an area where one would expect to see buildings with a larger span and B1(a), (b) and (c) uses. Although there are limited buildings to reference in the immediate vicinity one only has to travel to the west to reach the outskirts of Chichester where buildings of this prevalent and are visually more exposed to the north and west quadrants.

Summary of the proposal

The Scheme comprises the construction of a new GTR factory to be accommodated in two portal framed buildings of predominantly rectangular forms. The two proposed buildings stand some 7.4m in height and would have a generally north-south axis and would be sited well back from the boundaries with the Arundel Road and the A29.

The site access would be off the Arundel Road to the north and would lead into the main parking area which is shown to be along the eastern side of the site. Two other pockets of car parking are shown to the west of the buildings with a substantial areas of open space and an attenuation pond between.

Due to the levels of the land, the buildings would be set into the existing landform using cut and fill techniques. The proposed Site layout would consist of a 5m vegetated landscape buffer to form the east and southern boundaries.

The two buildings portal framed buildings would be clad largely in multi-stock facing bricks of a variety that includes plum and purple hues and architectural wall panel sheets (Longspan Range) in medium grey. The roof would be covered in box-profiled steel sheets colours anthracite grey or colour to be agreed. Windows and door frames including wider access and slide over doors would have dark grey aluminium frames and a medium grey to the actual door.

The design now incorporates a distinctive canopy of themed on a Formula 1 Rear Spoiler. This would provide a recognisable key-note to assist in emphasising and wayfinding. This addition is a design uplift often seen on traditional establishments who subtly advertise their wares and services such as the pawnbroker, barber or chemist but on a different scale.

Local Distinctiveness

It is acknowledged that local plan policies seek to promote good design and design that respects local distinctiveness. However National Guidance, the Framework and 2018 Local Plan Policies D SP1 and D DM1 are general and not specific to portal framed industrial

buildings. The same principles and criteria cannot be applied to dwellings houses and expect that they can be applied to the same degree to larger span buildings such as those proposed.

As this typology of building is more modern and functional, it cannot be compared to the 'traditional' farm building of earlier eras. The only building type that would have a degree of comparison would be the larger threshing barns, typically of 3 to 5 bays with the central bay being the midstrete with full height doors for wagons to enter. Although timber framed, these were the predecessors to the modern portal framed clad buildings that we see today.

Portal framed buildings were first developed during the Second World War and became popular in the farming industry from the 1950s onwards. Their wide span enclosures made them attractive where a clear space was required and for structural efficiency. The ability to erect the framing in short time scales, meeting the changing patterns and methods of farming saw the decline of the traditional farm buildings and a new 'distinctiveness'.

These buildings were typically clad in corrugated sheeting but over time and as they gained popularity for other uses – B1a, b and c, and B2 uses as well as large out-of-town retail stores, the use of prefabricated composite metal panels incorporating insulation started to emerge as well as brickwork to the base. In certain locations they have been 'dressed' up but are still recognisable as being essential prefabricated portal frames.

When considering the more 'familiar' traditional buildings and materials in the area, these tend to include, flint and brick as facing materials, plain clay tiles and modern concrete tiles for roofs. Whilst these materials can be incorporated into the fabric of the buildings and their elevational treatment but care is needed when the subject matter is a large portal framed building which is a substantially greater 'canvas' when compared to typical farm buildings, Travelodge's, Burger Kings etc or dwellings. In this case it was considered that the use of flint and brickwork with plain tiling would not be appropriate and would appear confused and contrived. Merely throwing a few flints on a building does not make it local distinct. The issue of distinctiveness in this case is considered to involve the intrinsic qualities of the site and its immediate surroundings including development pattern, building types, landform, views to and from.

Assessment

As stated above the typology is varied but not atypical of such locations. A conscious decision was made to provide muted finishes to the elevations and the roofs to ensure that they read well in their own right within the site, but also when and where seen in glimpses through the boundary vegetation. Therefore, the revisions have now sought to include brickwork up to the top of the standard door height and lower eaves but increase its

coverage up to the higher eaves levels. The use of brick also 'grounds' the buildings and instils a sense of a more human scale. The interplay between the facing brickwork, use of cladding, the variation of eaves heights along with the window choices and positions and larger glazed areas assists in breaking up the forms. The fact that the buildings are also set into the existing landform and grounded through the use of facing brickwork, they will not appear as stark forms in the landscape. The elevations are also enriched through the use of appropriately positioned signage.

Therefore a simple palette is considered to be appropriate. It is intended that the brickwork would be a multi-stock with plum/purple flashes which is typical of the area. Simple flush quoining can be provided around openings and at the corners to enliven the brickwork but no more than that should be provided. The Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) tend to advise that muted grey tones are generally preferred for buildings of this nature. In general, trees when not in leaf appear grey to dark grey. By choosing muted colours the buildings tend to fade and recede in views and are not so apparent against the greyer skies that we tend to experience. Whilst indicating that metal cladding would be medium grey to the walls and anthracite grey to the roofs, this can be reviewed and the exact colour agreed with the LPA. The low sloping roof of the two units would be covered in PV Panels. They would not be angled but flush. To avoid glare, these can be of a non-reflective dark grey tone to blend in with the overall form and roof cladding colour.

It should be noted that these are functional buildings designed to provide for the specific functional needs of the future occupant, GTR who specialise in producing high quality products for the motoring sport, aerospace, defence, medical and marine industries. The scale of the buildings and their internal arrangements are specific to their needs which includes design, pattern making, accommodating autoclaves, assembly, manufacturing and inspection. More details can be found www.gtrcomposites.com

Conclusion

It is clear that the applicant has sought to engage with the LPA on matters of siting, design and external appearance. Those engagements have been positive and delivered improvements to the scheme. Therefore and without producing a bedazzling confusion of materials and finishes, it is considered that the simple palette proposed is visually acceptable, particularly when taking account of the immediate context of the site and how the two buildings will be experienced in views within and from beyond the site.

It is therefore considered that the proposed buildings accord with the intention of delivering high quality development in an appropriate form, scale, mass, external appearance, using appropriate material for the locality.

The requirement to provide for industrial use on the site has been established by the outline planning permission. Therefore design and aesthetics should be considered and assessed objectively. The floor plate of the buildings is large and the gross internal floor area provision seek to accord with the requirement to provide a certain amount of square meterage on site. Therefore it is not surprising that this form is proposed. With that there are limitations as to how one can 'dress' buildings of this nature without appearing like Disney Dickens in disguise. In that regard, it is considered that a balance has been struck between the functional needs of GTR, the future occupant and its external appearance. In this particular instance, form is influenced by function and it is considered that the result forms, for the reasons set out above, are policy compliant.

It is therefore considered that the proposals accord with the national policy intent of Chapter 12 of the NPPF (2019) which supports high quality buildings and places, seeing good design as being a key aspect of sustainable development. The requirements of Chapter 15 are met in that the two buildings would not detract from its immediate suburban context or the South Downs National Park, the southern boundary of which lies approximately 330 metres to the north. The proposals have been cognisant of the Inspector's finding in respect of WA/22/15/OUT and have sought to further reduce and mitigate perceptions of visual impact on the character and appearance of the area. It should be noted that the SoS at the time (APP/C3810/V/16/3143095) agreed with the Inspector that whilst residents would experience a change to the character and appearance of the area, the landscape and visual impact of the application would not be materially adverse and would conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the South Downs National Park. As the site is contained by existing vegetation, it respect the general characteristics of LCA 16 (Fontwell to Eastergate Mosaic Character).

For buildings of this nature, it is considered that the advice contained in the National Design Guide has been appropriately applied. In terms of the Development Plan, it is considered that the proposals accord with the objectives of the Fontwell Strategic Site Allocation identified in the Arun Local Plan 2011-2031 and the outline permission. The proposals are considered to accord with Adopted Arun Local Plan (July 2018) in respect of policies SD SP1, SD SP1a, LAN DM, EMP SP3 and EMP DM1 (3) and (6). In terms of design and where appropriate for this type of building, the proposals accord with Policies D SP1 and D DM1

The scheme will provide a quality place to work and allow GTR to remain in the local area, supporting the local economy and safeguarding local employment at a time when the current pandemic is having far reaching impacts on economic recovery (Chapter 10). Therefore and when assessing this Reserved Matters case, it is considered that that a balance needs to be struck between the design attributes of the scheme, the perceived harms and the fact that the economic and employment benefits would carry significant weight in the decision-making process.