

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION No: N6/2014/2149/FP

SITE ADDRESS: Hertfordshire Constabulary, Stanborough Road, Welwyn Garden City

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT: Proposed enlargement of existing police firearms training range including enlarged replacement bullet catcher and backstop, erection of single storey support building and associated landscaping.

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

1. SITE AND APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:

The application site is located to the rear of the Police Station Headquarters located on Stanborough Road to the south east of the town centre of Welwyn Garden City. The site consists of a large piece of open land with an existing firearms training range located along the southern boundary of the site. The site is bordered by the railway to the east and Stanborough Road is to the west with Stanborough Park to the south of the site.

The applicant seeks planning permission for the enlargement of the existing police firearms training range including an enlarged replacement bullet catcher and backstop and the erection of a single storey support building. In addition a vehicular access route is proposed to the firearms training range.

Associated landscaping together with a bund along the north-western end of the proposed range.

2. SITE DESIGNATION:

The site lies within the settlement of Welwyn Garden City and on Urban Open Land as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

N6/2012/0854/MA - Formation of new firearms training range, replacement bullet catcher and backstop structure with associated landscaping – Approved

N6/2011/0952/FP: Replacement bullet proof catcher and backstop structure. Approved.

N6/2003/0949/FP: Phased redevelopment of existing police authority headquarters involving partial demolition and construction of up to a total of 20,000 square metres of b1 office floor space, creation of new emergency access, extension and reconfiguration of existing car parking, relocation of existing telecommunications mast and aerials and comprehensive landscaping. Approved.

N6/2000/0561/FP: Alterations to elevations. Approved.

N6/1994/0724/FP: Change of use of 3 No. hostel blocks to offices for police use, and an additional 57 No. car parking spaces. Approved.

N6/1998/0066/FP: Insertion of 5 No. windows in north east elevation of stores building. Approved.

N6/1998/0065/FP: Erection of 2.1 metre high weld mesh fence around site perimeter. Approved.

N6/1977/0250/CC – Open Firearms Range – 27th June 1977

4. CONSULTATIONS:

WHBC Environmental Health- I understand the planning permission was granted a couple of years ago for a similar use/activity on the site and no objections or conditions was requested by EH then.

The new proposal is for a slightly largely footprint but that the activity remains the same. Based on this information I have no adverse comments to make.

Thames Water: Thames Water would advise that with regard to sewerage infrastructure capacity, we would not have any objection to the above planning application. But surface water drainage is the responsibility of a developer to make proper provision.

Hertfordshire Constabulary: I have no concerns regarding safety or security and am able to fully support the application.

Hertfordshire County Council Highways: The proposal would not have an unreasonable impact on the safety and operation of the adjoining highway and the current proposal represents an amended scheme to that approved.

Rights of Way Officer – No comments received and consultation expired.

Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust - No comments received and consultation expired.

Herts Biological Records Centre - No comments received and consultation expired

Sport England - No comments received and consultation expired.

Network Rail - No objection in principle.

Environment Agency - No comments received and consultation expired

5. NEIGHBOUR REPRESENTATIONS:

No representations have been received from the public.

6. TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIONS

No representations have been received from the Town/Parish Council.

7. MAIN PLANNING ISSUES AND RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES:

The main planning issues with this application are:

- a) The impact of the proposal on the character of the surrounding area (D2, D1 of the Local Plan, NPPF);
- b) The impact of the proposal on the land designation of urban open land (OS1);
- c) Residential Amenity (D1 & D2 of the Local Plan, NPPF)
- d) Parking and highway safety (M14, SDG, Interim Parking Standards 2014);

8. ANALYSIS:

1. The impact of the proposal on the character of the surrounding area

Policy D1 of the Local Plan requires the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality. Policy D2 requires all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible, should enhance or improve the character of the existing area.

The site already has an existing bullet proof firing range which is set below ground level screened by earth moundings, trees and shrublands which form the southern boundary. The viewpoint of the existing bullet proof catcher from within the Police HQ itself and Stanborough Park to the south is therefore limited.

It is noted that the current application follows a previously approved application (N6/2012/0854/MA) and was for the '*Formation of new firearms training range, replacement bullet catcher and backstop structure with associated landscaping*'. This application entailed the repositioning of the range approximately 13m North West, further away from the Stanborough Park boundary and extending it to 100m in length. Furthermore an increase in width of the firing range was required and a new briefing hut and improved vehicles access to link back to the main facility. In addition, further earth mounds were proposed along the eastern boundary of the site.

However the 2012 permission has not been implemented and the existing 'Sand Trap' firing range has been retained. The current application seeks a firing range that is similar to the 2012 application, however there are some differences.

The current application proposes to maintain the target end in approximately the same location as the existing and extending the range to the north-west onto the lower grassed field reducing the amount of excavation works required and subsequently cost saving. The range would be 100m in length and as per the current approval the lengthening of the range is accompanied by a small increase in width to satisfy range safety requirements.

The area of the range would be excavated to provide a sloping sunken range floor that begins 2m below the level of the existing range target end and reduces the height of the ballistic safety structures behind the firing line to minimise the visual

impact of the proposal. The proposed bullet catcher would be located within the excavated area in front of the backstop and would comprise of a galvanised steel frame and roof canopy structure and would not protrude above the excavated area. The proposed backstop would be located behind the bullet catcher and whilst it would have a height of approximately 11.6m approximately only 8m of this would be visible above the ground. Given the site's location within the Police HQ where there are a number of large buildings in close proximity to the proposed development, it is considered that the proposed bullet catcher and backstop would not cause a substantial detrimental impact on the character of the area to warrant a refusal. With regards to the materials, the backstop would be constructed from galvanised steel to the frame and the back stop wall would be clad in black rubber tiles, these materials are considered to be acceptable and can be conditioned accordingly. In addition, whilst landscaping does not make any development acceptable, the existing vegetation around the boundaries of the site, together with the proposed landscaping, would minimise the whole visual impact.

It is also noted that lighting columns and floodlights are proposed to the side of the firing range and would be contained within the mounds of earth and due to the location of the range in relation to residential properties the lighting is not considered to impact adversely on residential dwellings.

The proposed earth mounds would surround the proposed firing range and are intended to strengthen the existing screening of the site to further reduce the acoustic and visual impact of the facility on the locality. Similar earthworks were permitted under the approved application and the existing trees and vegetation around the site would screen a large proportion of the proposed mounds from the adjoining sites. Therefore, they would mainly be visible only from within the application site. However, given that they would be grassed, where the existing trees would be visible over the tops they are not considered to detract unduly from the area to warrant the refusal of the application. In this instance, given the site's location, which is not visible from outside the site, it is considered that it would not unduly impact on the character of the area and therefore, no objections are raised in this regard.

The design and access statement stipulates that the application does not seek to alter the nature or extent of activities and the hours of operation will remain unchanged.

The proposal also seeks to construct a support building for the range and would be located approximately 50m from the range itself but would be located close to the existing service road seen within the site and close to the existing envelop of Police HQ buildings. It is noted that new concrete steps/ footpath will connect the support building to the firing range. The purpose of the support building is to provide key accommodation and facilities to enable activities essential to effective firearms training to be carried out. The new building would replace the existing range stores providing increased capacity and maintenance facilities. The building would be approximately 10m in width and approximately 19m in depth reaching an overall height of approximately 5m. An amended plan has been submitted with regard to the support building showing slight alterations to the fenestration and photovoltaic panels are to be placed on both roof planes. The appearance of the building is not

considered to be objectionable. The proposed building would be visible within the site, however as it is located close to existing buildings the proposal is not considered to impact the character of the surrounding area adversely.

Additionally a new access road will be provided connecting the firing range to the existing internal road, leading to control gates into the firing range. These gates would be situated in between earth mounds and as such would not be clearly visible. Whilst the access road would be sited over the existing grassed area and it could be argued that it adds to the urbanisation of this land as it is located close to the existing Police HQ buildings and would not be clearly visible within the public realm. The proposed access road and gates are not considered to be objectionable and would not unduly urbanise this part of the landscape to warrant the refusal of the application, furthermore Highways have not raised any issues. Additionally gates would be seen to the southern side of the firearms area providing access to the existing substation located close to the southern boundary, it is considered that details of these gates should be agreed.

The alterations to the existing bullet proof catcher and backstop structure together with the proposed development is therefore considered to comply with policy D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005 and the NPPF.

2. The impact of the proposal on the land designation of urban open land

The application site is designated in an area of Urban Open Land, therefore Policy OS1 to the Local plan would apply. This Policy specifically relates to Urban Open Land and states that,

'Planning permission for development within these areas will not be granted unless it would:

- (i) Assist in the maintenance or reinforcement of their function as essential open areas;
- (ii) Be of a scale which did not compromise the value of the Urban Open Land or use of the open space as defined in terms of its criteria; and
- (iii) Not result in the loss or reduction in size of any playing pitches, if the open land is used for formal recreation purposes, subject to the consideration set out in Policy OS2.

The Council's Open Space Survey defines this site, UOL127, as part of the green edge to Welwyn Garden City, helping to soften the urban edge at its boundary with the Green Belt. The host site is not open or accessible to members of the public for security reasons and solely used by the employees of Hertfordshire Constabulary or associated partners who have authority to do so. Therefore the designation has limited value in terms of creating or preserving recreation space and amenity areas for the public.

Therefore in this instance the Council's primary consideration is the visual impact of the proposed replacement bullet catcher and backstop structure on the surrounding area and its designation as an important open area on the edge of Welwyn Garden City.

As discussed above, the proposal is not considered to substantially increase or cause a detrimental impact on the character of the area to warrant a refusal taking into consideration the screening which exists to the south of the site.

In addition, whilst the land is shown on the plans as a grassed training field, the design and access statement states that the area has been found to be unsuitable for use as playing fields and receives only occasional use for external training exercises. Whilst the area would be reduced in size a good proportion of this area would remain. Therefore the proposed development would maintain the existing sports field.

Notwithstanding the above and that no objections are raised, the applicant has submitted a supporting statement which refers to the development providing a facility for Police firearms training. It outlines the requirement for upgrading the existing range at the Police HQ to enhance their training capability in order to meet current recommendations for firearms training and deliver effective policing that responded to both current and future needs. It continues to say that the application site provides vital firearms training in a key location within the borough which is used by Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire Policies for the delivery of crucial firearms training. Limited use is also granted to other associated agencies on an occasional basis. The statement outlines that the shooting range and its location align with and support government objectives and policy on gun related crime. Providing a regular training venue for the Firearms Operations Unit and Armoury on the site is an essential part of the Police ability to continue to deliver first class firearms response services to the City and Borough. The statement submitted by the applicant outlines the requirements from the Government about a duty on the police to respond to and investigate reports of gun crime to maintain public safety and ensure that officers are trained to the highest standards to provide this service. In addition, it is outlined that there has been an increase by 17.5% of gun related crime over the previous year. When this is taken into account, it is imperative that Police authorities maintain appropriate levels of suitably trained armed officers.

It is considered that the proposed development would not compromise the value of the Urban Open lane and the submitted justification outlines that the proposal is necessary and justified within this urban open land. Therefore, no objections are raised on this basis.

3. Residential Amenity

With regard to neighbour impact the main concerns are with regard to noise. The proposed development is sited away from neighbouring properties and therefore any noise or disturbance raised from the proposed fire range, is not considered to unduly impact on their residential amenity. In addition, the site is already used as a fire range where noise already occurs. However, the proposed development would be sited below ground where bunding is proposed helping to reduce any noise.

The proposed mounds around the boundaries of the site, are not considered to impinge on the amenity of neighbouring properties and is in accordance with policy D1.

4. Highway Impact

The proposed development would not impact the existing parking arrangement. The proposal will involve people visiting the site to use the fire range, however this already occurs. The site has a large area designated for the parking of vehicles and there are parking restrictions along Stanborough Road, therefore if more people visit the site as a result of the proposed development, it is not considered to unduly impact on highway safety.

5. Trees

The area of the site that is under consideration is largely open in character, however several small trees can be seen on an existing bund and would be removed as a result of the proposed development. The Council's landscaping department have been consulted in regard to this and have not raised any objections to the proposal and are not concerned regarding the impact of the development on such trees- however a large tree can be seen close to the siting of the support building and is described by the Council's Arboriculturalist as a '*significant tree with high amenity value*'. However it is a sufficient distance away not to be directly affected by the proposal but care should be taken not to store building equipment or plant around it. Therefore a condition is to be imposed requiring that no building materials or plant be storey within 10m of the base of the tree.

9. CONCLUSION:

The proposed replacement bullet proof catcher and backstop structure is of a size and scale not to detrimentally impact on the character of the area or compromise the value of the Urban Open Land. Furthermore the support building would not detrimentally impact upon the character of the area. In addition, no concerns are raised with regard to the impact on neighbouring properties, highway safety and parking provision.

10. CONDITIONS:

1. C.2.1 - Time limit for commencement of development
2. C.13.1 - Development in accordance with approved plans and details:
AL(2)P01 & AL(2)P02 Rev A & AL(2)P03 Rev A & AL(2)P04 Rev A &
AL(2)P05 Rev B & AL(2)P06 Rev A & AL(2)P07 & AL(2) P09 & M4283(63)-
001 received and dated 29th October 2014 & AL2-P08 Rev C received and
dated 20th November 2014

Pre-Development

3. No development shall take place until samples of materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the building and structures hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented using the approved materials. Subsequently, the approved materials shall not be changed without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory standard of development in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005

4. No development shall commence until a Method Statement for the construction of the grass mounds and details of the landscaping scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Subsequently the development shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the approved details and shall not be changed unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure that the railway line is protected and to enhance biodiversity in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy D1 & R11 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

5. Prior to the commencement of development details of the storage of any building materials, plant and machinery shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To protect the health and wellbeing of trees within and surrounding the site in accordance with Policy D8 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan

6. No development shall take place until details of the proposed gates have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Subsequently the development shall not take place other than in accordance with the approved details and shall not be changed unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: The submitted plans do not show sufficient details of the gates and these are required to ensure an acceptable impact on the appearance of the area in accordance with Policy D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005.

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION:

The decision has been made taking into account, where practicable and appropriate the requirements of paragraphs 186-187 of the National Planning Policy Framework and material planning considerations do not justify a decision contrary to the development plan (see Officer's report which can be viewed on the Council's website or inspected at these offices).

INFORMATIVES:

1. All surface and foul water arising from the proposed works must be collected and diverted away from Network Rail property. In the absence of detailed plans all soakaways must be located so as to discharge away from the railway infrastructure.
2. All operations, including the use of cranes or other mechanical plant working adjacent to Network Rail's property, must at all times be carried out in a "fail safe" manner such that in the event of mishandling, collapse or failure, no materials or plant are capable of falling within 3.0m of the nearest rail of the adjacent railway line,

or where the railway is electrified, within 3.0m of overhead electrical equipment or supports.

3. All excavations/ earthworks carried out in the vicinity of Network Rail property/ structures must be designed and executed such that no interference with the integrity of that property/ structure can occur. If temporary works compounds are to be located adjacent to the operational railway, these should be included in a method statement for approval by Network Rail. Prior to commencement of works, full details of excavations and earthworks to be carried out near the railway undertaker's boundary fence should be submitted for the approval of the Local Planning Authority acting in consultation with the railway undertaker and the works shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details. Where development may affect the railway, consultation with the Asset Protection Project Manager should be undertaken.

4. Security of the railway boundary will need to be maintained at all times. If the works require temporary or permanent alterations to the mutual boundary the applicant must contact Network Rail's Asset Protection Project Manager.

5. All roads, paths or ways providing access to any part of the railway undertaker's land shall be kept open at all times during and after the development.

Signature of author..... Date.....