

ARQIVA LTD

**PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING ANCILLARY
OFFICE ACCOMMODATION TO CONTINUED USE FOR
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS PURPOSES OR B1
OFFICE USE**

**ARQIVA TRANSMITTING STATION, BROOKMANS
PARK, GREAT NORTH ROAD, BROOKMANS PARK,
HATFIELD, AL9 6NE**

PLANNING STATEMENT

FEBRUARY 2017

**PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING ANCILLARY OFFICE ACCOMMODATION TO
B1 OFFICE USE**

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PLANNING STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement is submitted on behalf of Arqiva Ltd in support of a full planning application for a change of use of existing ancillary office accommodation to continued use for electronic communications purposes or B1 office use.
- 1.2 It sets out background information in respect of Arqiva Ltd, Brookmans Park (the application site), the nature of the proposed use and development proposals and assesses the planning policy framework to support the grant of planning permission.
- 1.3 Arqiva is an electronic communications company with its headquarters in Hampshire and other major UK offices currently in London, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Yorkshire. Amongst other things, Arqiva owns and operates the terrestrial television broadcast network across the UK and a large part of the radio broadcasting networks. Arqiva now has 7 international satellite teleports (6 in the UK), over 70 other manned locations, and around 8000 shared radio sites throughout the UK and Ireland including masts, towers and rooftops from under 30 to over 300 metres tall.
- 1.4 Major customers include the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, BSkyB, Classic FM, the UK mobile operators, Globecast, Viacom, Turner Broadcasting, Central and Local Government, the Metropolitan Police and RNLI.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 Arqiva owns the Brookmans Park Transmitting Station, which is situated on the north eastern edge of Brookmans Park Village. The site is accessed from the A1000 (Great North Road).
- 2.2 The overall site comprises approximately 20 hectares and since 1995, development proposals have been guided in part by the Brookmans Park Masterplan. The site is characterised by a Central Control Zone (CCZ) of approximately 3 hectares where buildings and apparatus are concentrated. The application site and overall ownership are edged red and blue respectively on Plan ref 140237-00-010-ML008Rev8 Sheet 17 submitted with this planning application.
- 2.3 The CCZ includes the main building, which is a large two storey building with a frontage to the access road. The building provides the transmitter hall, ancillary office space, plant rooms and staff facilities. There is some rooftop apparatus and a large oil store to the rear. It is part of this ancillary office space that is the subject of the planning application.
- 2.4 There are 3 further large buildings to the rear of the site, along with other smaller buildings, a tennis court, hardstanding for vehicle circulation and storage and car parking facilities. Within the CCZ is also a 45 metre high lattice tower that supports a range of operators, including the Mobile Network Operators. The CCZ has a security fence around it, with some security lighting.
- 2.5 The extent of development at the site goes beyond the CCZ. In the outlying fields are a number of guyed masts that are used for radio broadcast purposes, i.e. one at 153 metres, one at 79 metres, four at 61 metres and two at 45 metres. In addition there are fields used by the teleport, where a number of large earth satellite dishes are located, together with associated apparatus. The teleport is used by Globecast and other satellite operators and these operations are located in the areas agreed within the Masterplan.
- 2.6 The site benefits from natural screening, including mature trees, which has been strengthened by structural landscaping and bunds.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The site was originally developed in the 1920's for radio broadcast purposes, although it has evolved since then to host other operations, most notably the satellite teleport.
- 3.2 The main building was originally built to house large transmitter halls that contained vast amounts of radio equipment, but changes in technology greatly reduced this requirement. A

large part of the main building was converted to office use with associated car parking in the 1980's by the BBC who originally developed and operated the site.

- 3.3 Since then that space has been occupied by the BBC and the successor companies that took over the running of its physical broadcast infrastructure, i.e. Castle Transmission, Crown Castle, National Grid Wireless and now Arqiva. At its peak the site probably supported about 250 full time employees, although there are now only around 20 Arqiva employees based at the site, with a significant volume of vacant floorspace.
- 3.4 Arqiva has for some time been exploring the options for alternative uses and on 8 February 2012, obtained a Certificate of Lawfulness (LPA Ref: S6/2011/2770/LUP). This certified that the lawful use of the site was electronic communications, which is a *sui generis* use. At that time, we were considering using the site for data centre purposes, but whilst the radio broadcast operations continue, there are issues associated with the adequate supply of power.
- 3.5 As the site is within the Green Belt it has proved an unattractive option for Arqiva to invest in and so we have focussed on other locations. As a consequence, the site remains greatly under-utilised and is currently therefore a lost opportunity for wider employment purposes that would benefit the local area.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Arqiva is accordingly looking to let some of the surplus ancillary office accommodation to other employment purposes. Although in office use, this space is ancillary to the primary electronic communications use of the site and so general office use requires planning permission for a change of use
- 4.2 Specifically we propose the following:

1. The change of use of 895 square metres of the ancillary office accommodation at the site to:

“Continued use for electronic communications purposes or a change of use to Class B1”

The proposal is confined to the main building and comprises 482 square metres of existing office space on the ground floor and 413 square metres on the first floor as shown on Plan Refs 140237-00-010-ML008Rev8 Sheets 15, 18 & 19 submitted with this application.

4.3 No external alterations are proposed to the buildings.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Prior to coming forward with this planning application we sought to undertake pre-application dialogue with your Authority. In mid-November 2016 we submitted a formal pre-application request for Category 1(b) of your pre-application advice service to include a site meeting.

5.2 An acknowledgement letter was received from your Authority confirming that our request has been allocated to a case officer. Despite numerous attempts to speak with the allocated officer and the sending of multiple emails over several months (which were read but not replied to) a decision was made in mid January 2017 that there was no option but to proceed with the planning application.

5.3 In light of the above, we will seek to liaise with your officers at an early stage of the application determination process and offer a site meeting if you consider that it would be beneficial.

5.4 A community engagement exercise was undertaken comprising a letter providing details of the proposal being sent on 16 January 2017 to community stakeholders including the Ward Councillors for Brookmans Park & Little Heath Ward, the clerk of North Mymms Parish Council and local residents (comprising 97 properties).

5.5 A single response was received from a local resident raising no objections to the proposals. An acknowledgement letter was also received from the Parish Council.

6. PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

6.1.1 The main thrust of the NPPF is that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 14 advises that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay and where the development plan is silent or out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF or specific policies in the NPPF that indicate development should be restricted.

6.1.2 In this case Policy RA8 – Brookmans Park Transmitting Station of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted 2005) addresses the planning application site in terms of telecommunications and associated uses. It is considered that this policy is out of date and given the changing nature of telecommunications operations at the site, is unduly restrictive. We have made

representations to this effect to the emerging replacement Local Plan and it is noted that this policy is not being carried forward within the emerging Local Plan.

- 6.1.3 In accordance with NPPF we consider that there should be a presumption in favour of the proposal which comprises a highly sustainable form of development which will make a contribution to the economy of the Borough.
- 6.1.4 As described in the NPPF in paragraph 7 there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The application proposal meets all three of these. Firstly, it has an **economic role** by contributing to the local economy through the provision of office space for small or medium businesses and by generating a demand for local goods and services. It also has a **social role** by supporting the local community and local services. An **environmental role** will also be achieved by the proposed development in reusing an existing building and thereby contributing to meeting the office requirement in the Borough whilst reducing the requirement for new buildings elsewhere.
- 6.1.5 As described in paragraph 8 of the NPPF these roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent. As described, economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards, and the reuse of existing buildings for economic purposes can improve the lives of people and communities. Therefore to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly through the planning system. This is achieved through the reuse of the application site which is brownfield site in a sustainable location.
- 6.1.6 Section 1 – Building a strong competitive economy, is particularly pertinent to the application proposal. Paragraph 19 states that:

“The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.”

Green Belt

- 6.1.7 The application site is located in the Green Belt. The application proposal is considered not inappropriate development as defined in the NPPF for the following reasons:
1. The construction of new buildings does not form part of the proposal
 2. The re-use of a building of permanent and substantial construction is proposed.

- 6.1.8 The re-use of buildings is identified at Paragraph 90 of the NPPF as one of the developments which are not inappropriate provided that the openness of the Green Belt is preserved and they do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
- 6.1.9 The openness of the Green Belt will be preserved as the application site is already developed and an existing building and associated car parking will be utilised. As no building works are proposed there will be no material change in the level of openness of the Green Belt at this location.
- 6.1.10 The development proposed will not offend any of the five purposes behind including land within the Green Belt as identified at paragraph 80 of the NPPF. To the contrary, the utilisation of an existing building to provide general office accommodation will contribute to reducing the pressure on green belt land for the provision new office buildings elsewhere in the Borough and therefore will if anything help support those purposes. The proposal, therefore, accords with Green Belt planning policy

6.2 Development Plan

- 6.2.1 The development plan comprises the saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted 2005) and the policies of the emerging Local Plan which is currently at the proposed submission stage.

The Adopted Local Plan

- 6.2.2 As addressed at paragraph 6.1.2 above the application site is covered by Policy RA8 – Brookmans Park Transmitting Station. This policy does not address alternative uses at the site and is considered out of date.
- 6.2.3 Other saved policies of relevance are as follows:

Policy EMP8 – Employment Sites outside Employment Areas

Although the application site is an employment site outside of the designated employment areas, this policy relates to physical development involving proposals for new employment development or redevelopment on existing employment sites rather than a change of use of an existing building. That said, the current proposal meets the relevant criteria of the policy in that:

- (i) The activities proposed by the change of use will be similar to existing activities at the site.
- (ii) The proposal will not have any adverse effects on the residential amenities of any nearby properties.

- (iii) The proposal will have adequate parking, servicing and access arrangements and will therefore will not have an adverse impact on the highway network, including highway safety.

Emerging Local Plan

- 6.2.4 The emerging local plan should be given considerable weight as is at an advanced stage of preparation although it has yet to be independently assessed by a Planning Inspector. The following policies are of relevance:

Policy SP8 – The Local Economy

The application proposal fully accords with this Policy as your Authority intends to support economic prosperity, encourage inward investment and create a range of jobs so that the Borough reaches its full economic potential. The policy supports the provision of a range of opportunities, in terms of sites and premises, to allow new and emerging sectors to be accommodated.

It is of vital importance that a range of types of business premises are provided to meet the needs of small and medium sized enterprises as well as larger business. As recognised by your Economic Development Strategy 2015/16, one of the Borough's strengths is the diverse range of businesses it has. The strategy set out in the policy acknowledges that, to function effectively, the local economy needs a range of businesses to be able to trade, not just in high value sectors, and that a range of types and levels of skill need to be provided for.

In addition, the policy justification also recognises that since 2013, substantial amounts of Class B employment floorspace have been lost through the permitted development right enabling offices to be converted to residential without planning permission and it is acknowledged that there will be continued losses of this type throughout the plan period.

The application proposal will buck this trend and contribute to the meeting the needs of small and medium sized enterprises by providing appropriately sized office space which is available now.

Policy SADM34 – Development in the Green Belt

The application site will no longer have a site specific policy in the Local Plan. The general Policy SADM24 – Development in the Green Belt will apply which, as a general policy, addresses all types of development in the Green Belt.

In respect of change of use in the Green Belt the policy requirements are met as follows:

- (1) The proposal is consistent with the strategy for Brookmans Park and will contribute to the settlement through providing office space for small companies whose employees are likely to use the local services thus contributing to the local economy and community.
- (2) The proposal is consistent with the principles of sustainable development set out in the Local Plan as an existing building on previously developed land is being utilised at a site on the edge of Brookmans Park, a village which your plan identifies has access to a wide range of services, facilities and public transport. Future office occupiers could provide some employment for local residents of Brookmans Park, which reduces their need to travel and thereby contributes to the aims of sustainable development.
- (3) The building is of permanent and substantial construction. Indeed, it is in very good condition and does not require any external alteration.

6.2.5 We have undertaken dialogue with the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, representatives of which attend a site visit and were quick to realise the wider potential of the site for other business users and were encouraging of that.

6.2.6 Having regard to the above, it is considered that proposal fully accords with the development plan.

7. OTHER CONSIDERATION

7.1 Highways and Car Parking

7.1.1 The existing site access is to be used and traffic generation will be in line with the existing use of the site and will not be increased. It will therefore be acceptable in environmental and highways terms.

7.1.2 Policy M14 – Parking Standards for New Development and associated Welwyn Hatfield Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Guidance (2004) detail the parking requirements for new development. The subsequent Interim Policy for Car Parking Standards and Garage Sizes (2014) indicated that the requirements within the policy and guidance are guidelines rather than maximum levels.

7.1.3 For new B1 office developments, a car parking space is required for each 30 square metres of office space. Although the application proposal does not constitute a new development per se, the existing car parking provision at the site can accommodate the requirement for the 30 car parking spaces that a comparable new office development (of the size of the proposed change of use) would generate.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The proposal adheres to the NPPF and the relevant policies of the adopted and emerging Local Plans to support sustainable development and to promote economic growth.
- 8.2 The change of use will diversify the office accommodation available in the area and increase the use of a currently under-utilised employment resource.
- 8.3 It is considered that the benefits of the proposal will have a wholly positive impact on the local area and the wider Borough and loss of these positive contributions would represent a missed opportunity. It is therefore requested that planning permission is granted.

**ARQIVA LTD
FEBRUARY 2017**