

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION No: N6/2014/1503/FP

SITE ADDRESS: 29 Burrowfield, Welwyn Garden City

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT: Retention of existing sui generis use as a coach depot with additional provision for MOT testing bay

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

1. SITE AND APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:

The site is located off Burrowfield stretching to the end of the cul-de-sac at East Burrowfield. Access can be gained from both Burrowfield to the north and East Burrowfield south west of the site. The site is 0.02ha measuring 102m x 19m with playing fields bordering the southern boundary of the site and industrial/commercial properties located to the east and west and a recessed access off Burrowfield to the north.

The site currently benefits from a sui generis use as a coach depot and features a narrow rectangular building. The proposal seeks to retain the current sui generis use as a coach depot with additional provision for a MOT testing bay.

Testing would be limited to the vehicles relating to the existing company and the equipment/bay and testing activities would take place within the existing building, occupying approximately 12% of its existing internal area.

2. SITE DESIGNATION:

The site is located within an Employment Area within Welwyn Garden City as designated by the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

N6/2007/0126/FP – Proposed change of use to coach depot, to include part demolition of existing building – Approved 24/04/2007

4. CONSULTATIONS:

No objections have been received in principle from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Environmental Health.

5. NEIGHBOUR REPRESENTATIONS:

No representations have been received from the public.

7. MAIN PLANNING ISSUES AND RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES:

The main planning issues with this application are:

- a) principle of development (EMP1, EMP2, D1, D2, R19 M14, SPG, NPPF)

a) The application site is located within the EA2 Burrowfields Employment Site as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan and outlined in its proposals map and policy EMP1.

Chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasises the importance of good design in context. Policy EMP2 says that in the designated employment areas, proposals for development within Use Classes B1, B2 and B8 will be permitted, subject to the following criteria;

- (i) The proposal would not, due to the scale of employment generated, have an unacceptable impact on the demand for housing the travel to work area;
- (ii) The proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on the local and/or strategic transport infrastructure;
- (iii) The proposal would not harm the amenities of any nearby residential properties;
- (iv) The development would provide adequate parking, servicing and access;
- (v) Any retail element of the development would clearly be ancillary to the main business use

Policy EMP2 says that any other uses in the designated employment areas, such as that proposed (*sui generis*), will only be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that the existing land or premises are no longer required to meet future employment requirements and business and community needs. It states that all such proposals will also be required to satisfy criteria (i) to (v) of policy EMP2 and other relevant policies of the District Plan relating to the proposed use.

The existing lawful *sui generis* use as a coach depot was granted permission under application ref. N6/2007/0126/FP in 2007 under the same District Plan policy framework as existing where its use and impacts were considered to accord with the above criteria.

The MOT testing bay, comprising a testing pit and equipment, would take place within the existing building, with no change to the main external elements/construction, materials, or size of the building. The proposed MOT testing is sought to MOT the vehicles of the existing company operating at the site, with no additional changes to vehicle numbers coming to and from the site arising from its use. However the application form does note that the number of full time employees at the site would increase from 20 to 24.

Given the above, with regard to criterion (i), given the existing lawful use as a coach depot employing 20 full time people, an additional 4 employees at the existing site is not considered sufficient in scale to cause an unacceptable impact on the demand for housing in the travel to work area.

For the same reasons, with regard to (ii) and (iv), whilst it is noted that an increase in 4 full time employees would result in the likelihood of some additional parking pressures for staff, this is not considered to place an unacceptable impact on the

local and/or strategic transport infrastructure and would continue to provide adequate parking, servicing and access. In coming to this view, regard is made to the officer report for application N6/2007/0126/FP which notes the acceptability of the existing lawful use in highway safety terms (including access and servicing, noting that all coaches could be accommodated on-site), which would remain as existing in terms of coaches given that the MOT testing bay is for the company's own coaches.

In terms of parking provision regard is made to this existing lawful use, and the availability of unrestricted on-street parking in this area, and the nature of the business where additional on-site parking for staff is likely to arise at different times depending on the amount of coaches off-site on business trips. Accordingly, the servicing, access and level of parking demand from 4 additional spaces and the use of the MOT testing bay is not considered sufficient to warrant refusal on the grounds of criterion (ii) or (iv).

For the same reasons the proposal is considered to satisfy the aims of policy M14 of the District Plan with regard to staff parking provision. Officers note that the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on Parking Standards (SPG) does not have specific parking standards for staff for sui generis uses, and for B2 uses which the proposal would constitute on its own, its maximum standards for non user-specific parking provision only apply based on 1 space per 50m² gross floor area. The approximate 500m² floor area of the existing building would therefore require approximately 10 spaces, and given the size of the site, existing lawful use which was considered acceptable in this regard under the same SPG and District Plan policy framework, and availability of on-street parking, the proposal is considered to accord with the SPG criteria in this regard.

With regard to criterion (iii), it is noted that the application site lies in an employment area surrounded on all sides by similar uses in the same designated area. The nearest residential properties lie approximately 130m away to the east beyond other sites and activities. The existing coach depot has a lawful use and was considered acceptable in this regard. Given that MOT testing would be limited to the company's vehicles and take place within the existing building which is sealed on all sides, with a door on the front, and given this distance from the nearest residential property, the proposal is not considered to harm the amenities of any nearby residential properties, nor the amenities of adjacent employment land sites, to a degree sufficient to warrant refusal of the proposal in terms of the aims of criterion (iii) of policy EMP2, the noise pollution considerations of policy R19, or the general high quality design aspirations of policy D1 of the District Plan.

No retail element is proposed and as such the proposal satisfies criterion (v).

Finally, in terms of the requirement for any other uses such as sui generis in employment land to adhere to any other relevant policies of the District Plan relating to the proposed use, in terms of design and impact on the character and appearance of the area, the proposal is considered to remain sufficiently high quality and respectful of the existing character and context of the site as required respectively by policies D1 and D2. In coming to this view, regard is paid to the fact that the proposed MOT testing bay would take place internally within the existing main

workshop building set back from its boundaries, and would not alter its main external appearance, materials, or footprint/size.

Accordingly the proposal is considered to accord with policies EMP2, D1, D2, R19, and M14 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005, the Council's Supplementary Design Guidance on Parking Standards, 2004 and the broadly consistent design aspirations of the NPPF.

9. CONCLUSION:

The proposed sui generis use is considered acceptable in this employment area location. The proposal would sufficiently maintain the character and appearance of the site and surrounding employment area. It would not impact on the amenities of neighbouring residential properties and other neighbouring buildings and sites and would not result in a harm to highway safety or capacity.

10. CONDITIONS:

1. C.2.1 - Time limit for commencement of development
2. C.13.1 - Development in accordance with approved plans and details: planning application form & supporting statement & site plan & drawing number 2 received and dated 14/07/2014 & drawing

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 inspected at these offices).

INFORMATIVES:

None

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