

EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 NOVEMBER 2005 AT THE CALCOT CENTRE, CALCOT

Committee: Brian Bedwell (*Chairman* (P)), Peter Argyle (P), Keith Chopping (AP), John Farrin (P), Manohar Gopal (SP), Royce Longton (P), Alan Macro (P), Tim Metcalfe (*Vice-Chairman*) (P), Joe Mooney (P), Irene Neill (P), Graham Pask (AP), Terry Port (P), Paul Pritchard (P), Quentin Webb (SP)

Also present: David Pearson, Katherine Goodchild, Gary Lugg, Sarah Clarke, Gareth Dowding, Linda Pye

PART I

84. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for the inability to attend the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Keith Chopping and Graham Pask.

Councillor Manohar Gopal substituted for Councillor Keith Chopping and Councillor Quentin Webb substituted for Councillor Graham Pask.

85. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2005 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Councillor John Farrin declared an interest in Agenda Item 4(1), but reported that, as his interest was personal and not prejudicial, he was permitted to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

87. APPLICATION NO. 05/02003/RESMAJ - MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AWE, ALDERMASTON, READING.

(Councillor John Farrin declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4(1) by virtue of the fact that his wife received a pension from AWE. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial, he was permitted to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.)

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 05/02003/RESMAJ in respect of Notification of Proposed Development submitted under Circular 18/84 for a Replacement Laser Research Facility (ORION).

The Chairman stated that in 2004, AWE had submitted an 'outline' notification for a proposed new laser facility at their site near Aldermaston. Given that the operations of AWE were well established there and that the proposal was made in order that they could continue with their existing business in line with policies contained in the Local Plan; West Berkshire Council raised no objections.

AWE had now submitted a 'reserved matters' notification giving details of the proposed new building. With outline notification already in existence, the task of the Committee now was to look at the specific details of the design, external

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appearance and landscaping of the building and consider if those elements were acceptable. That was all.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Committee agreed that Evelyn Parker from the Nuclear Awareness Group and Mrs. J. McBride from Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp, would each have 5 minutes to address the Committee and that the remainder of the objectors would have 10 minutes between them to make their representations.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Evelyn Parker (Nuclear Awareness Group), Mrs. J. McBride (Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp), Mr. M. Waugh, Ms. N. Lambert, Myra Garrett and Peter Burt, objectors, addressed the Committee on this application.

Evelyn Parker in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- Evelyn Parker raised concerns about the environmental impact of the proposed building;
- She felt that the absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment had to be a matter of concern;
- The 1998 Strategic Defence Review stated that there was potential for a cumulative impact to occur at various sites throughout the country as a result of a series of applications and Aldermaston was one of the locations listed. In such circumstances an environmental impact assessment may be required.
- An Environmental Impact Assessment had not been provided either because the impact on the site was not known or the information was not able to be revealed;
- Evelyn Parker felt that if the environmental impact was not relevant then what was?
- She raised concerns about the safety of living in the vicinity of AWE, not only because of what was produced inside, but also in respect of the site being a terrorist target;
- She felt that the building should be located further inside the site;
- The development should not be allowed as this country was trying to prevent Iran from doing exactly what was happening at AWE.

Mrs. McBride in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- Mrs. McBride was concerned about the image projected by the building;
- She felt that the Committee were being misused and that Parliament should be making such a decision;
- Mrs. McBride felt that the matter should be referred to the Secretary of State so that it could be considered democratically;
- She urged the Committee not to be pushed into making a decision.

Myra Garrett in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- The application should not be seen in isolation as it was part of a bigger development which was proposed for the site;
- This was not an existing operation as stated in the papers but was in fact a new facility;

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- An Environmental Impact Assessment should be undertaken on the site.

Mr. Waugh in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- Mr. Waugh stated that he had worked in road transport for a long time and had concerns about the roads in respect of this application;
- Not all the roads in the area were up to 'A' road standard;
- The A340 had a narrow bridge which was unsuitable for large vehicles;
- The local road network would have to accommodate the construction vehicles which would need to access the site;
- There were already more cars in the area using inadequate roads because of new developments which had taken place in Tadley;
- Mr. Waugh questioned whether this was the right location for such an activity.

Peter Burt in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- Mr. Burt felt that this was not just a local issue but was also a national one;
- A considerable amount of correspondence had been received by the local authority on this issue;
- Mr. Burt felt that it was interesting to note that another local authority, Slough, were opposed to the development;
- A number of people were interested in the proposed development but they had not had sight of the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal or Site Development Context Plan and therefore had no idea of what was contained within those documents;
- Information had been requested over eight months' ago and he questioned why it had only been made available to certain individuals over the last few days;
- The lack of information put the objectors in a difficult position;
- Mr. Burt had been pleased that the objectors had been allowed to make representations and that the time had been extended and asked the Committee to defer the decision in order that all parties could look at the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal and Site Development Context Plan in detail and make comments thereon;
- He felt that it was not up to this Committee to make a decision in respect of Nuclear Weapons and that it should be referred up to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to decide.

Ms. Lambert in addressing the Committee raised the following points:

- The proposed building was hideous and abhorrent and would be located in the wrong place;
- This was a residential area and the risk of terrorism would be increased;
- Ms. Lambert supported a delay in making a decision.

In considering the above application Members sought clarification from Mrs. Garrett in that she had stated that this was not an existing operation but the report stated that it was. Mrs. Garrett responded that there might already be a laser facility on the site but that it could be compared to replacing a bus stop

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with an airport. The objectors who had spoken were asked where they currently lived and it was noted that two came from Southampton, one from London and one from Reading.

Councillor Irene Neill, as Ward Member, stated that the objectors had made several references in respect of the Committee making a decision. However, she had thought that the Committee were being asked to either object or raise no objections and that they were in fact only consultees on the matter. Councillor Neill admitted that the impact of the building was great but that the size was necessary to carry out the operations on the site. She also had concerns in respect of the traffic but noted that AWE were working on a Transport Plan which would hopefully address a lot of those issues. Councillor supported the representations made by Tadley Parish Council in respect that work should only be carried out during standard working hours as applied to any major construction works.

The Planning Officer reported that he had listened carefully to all the representations made but stated that the proposal had been considered at length in June 2004 where the principle was agreed and no objections raised. He confirmed that where Crown Land was concerned the authority could not insist on an Environmental Impact Assessment and that it should have been requested at the outline stage. An assessment of the long term development plan for the whole of the site had been requested and had been provided. The proposal was not a Schedule 2 development and did not therefore fall into the category where an Environmental Impact Assessment was required. There was an issue in respect of cumulative development but again this should have been raised when the outline application was considered. The Legal Officer clarified that as this was not a planning application as such any environmental information put before the Committee would be considered as an environmental assessment in respect of this application.

The Chairman noted that a number of comments had been made in respect of traffic and he asked Officers' for their views on this issue. The Planning Officer confirmed that traffic impact was considered at the outline stage but that the Highways Service had not raised any objections and neither had Hampshire County Council.

Members raised concerns about the difficulty of supporting an application where information had been requested in respect of an assessment of all the proposed developments on the site, but some Members of the Committee who had not been able to attend the meeting last week had not had sight of the documents. It was therefore proposed to defer the application until all Members had been given an opportunity to consider the information contained within the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal and Site Development Context Plan.

The Planning Officer responded that he felt that Members had sufficient information before them in order to make a decision but if they felt that this was not the case then they could defer the decision. However, he stated that AWE could proceed with the development without the Committee's approval although he hoped that they would wait for the application to be resubmitted if it were to be deferred. Members asked for clarification on whether adjacent Parish Councils would have received a copy of the documents. Councillor Irene Neill responded that all members of the Liaison Committee had had sight of the documents and representatives from the Parish Councils did sit on that Committee although it was recognised that they might not have had time to respond to the contents of those documents.

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The Planning Officer confirmed that he understood Members concerns that the information provided by AWE had not been shared with all Members. He felt that it would be difficult for any developer to give the Council an Environmental Impact Assessment which was open ended and looked into the future indefinitely. AWE had tried to provide the Council with a feel for the scale of development which would arise in the next few years and felt that Members who had attended the meeting would have been assured that AWE were attempting to minimise the environmental impact. If Members required more time to consider the information provided then deferment might be the best solution and he hoped that AWE would be considerate and wait for a decision.

Members asked whether the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal or Site Development Context Plan had the potential to control emissions from the development. The Planning Officer confirmed that this was a legitimate planning consideration but that Officers had to take into account consultations received from the experts in that field and that there would be limits to what AWE could divulge in any event. Emissions would be controlled and monitored to set standards as it was a highly regulated and inspected site, more so than any other in the area. This aspect should also have been considered out the outline planning stage.

RESOLVED that the Head of Planning and Transport Strategy be authorised to defer this application until all Members had had an opportunity to consider the information contained within the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal and Site Development Context Plan.

88. APPEAL DECISIONS REALTING TO EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE.

Members noted the outcome of appeal decisions relating to the Eastern Area. The Chairman asked if Officers could ensure in future that appeal decisions could be provided on one piece of paper.

89. SITE VISIT.

It was agreed that a site visit would take place on Tuesday 6th December 2005 at 9.30a.m for Planning Application No. 05/02307/HOUSE, Silchester Soke, Soke Road, Silchester.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.38pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature: