

Our Ref: 0158/2024

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The Planning Bureau

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Dear Chris

FAIRWAYS LODGE, GEORGE STREET, PRESTWICH EMPLOYMENT REPORT SUMMARY

As instructed, I write to provide an Employment Report in respect of the above site.

Proposal

The proposed development comprises 52 (30 one bedroom and 22 two bedroom) Retirement Living apartments for sale to older people following the demolition of the existing building.

Relevant Planning Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

The current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) states that planning policies should “be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices ... and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances” (Paragraph. 86d) and should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors (Paragraph 87).

The NPPF states within the Chapter 2: Achieving sustainable development identifies the overarching economic objective “to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure” (Paragraph 8a).

The Chapter further identifies that the economic objective, as well as social and environmental objectives “should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area” (Paragraph 9).

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Chapter 11: Making effective use of land, of NPPF continues to guide local authorities to adopt a flexible approach to the allocation, monitoring and review of employment sites:

“Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land (Paragraph 123).

Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans, where this would help to meet identified development needs (Paragraph 127).

This approach was firmly reinforced last week by the Government Statement concerning brownfield land. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities led press release stated that every council in England will need to prioritise brownfield developments and will be instructed to be less bureaucratic and more flexible in applying policies that halt housebuilding on brownfield land.

Bury Unitary Development Plan (August 1997).

In order to achieve the broad aims for the economy policies set out the Council’s Strategy, a number of more detailed objectives and targets have been identified. Of relevance to this application are the following:

Objective 1: To maintain and protect existing firms and jobs in the Borough.

- The identification and protection of sites suitable for expansion or re-location of existing firms.

Objective 4: To meet the needs of small and growing businesses.

- Increasing the provision of premises for new and growing firms.

Objective 7: To minimise conflicts with the surrounding environment and to ensure satisfactory standards of design.

- Minimising the environmental impact on surrounding land uses.
- Ensuring the separation of certain industrial uses from sensitive land uses, such as schools and housing

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These objectives have informed the following UDP policies.

EC1 - Employment Land Provision

The Council will endeavour to ensure that a comprehensive range of employment sites is identified to meet the future needs of manufacturing and service employers.

This policy seeks to *“strengthen and diversify the local economy”* and *“allow existing employers to modernise and expand their operations in the Borough”*.

EC2 – Existing Industrial Areas and Premises

The Council will seek to retain existing industrial areas and premises in employment uses, where appropriate.

This supporting narration to this policy is clear that its primary purpose is to protect industrial areas and premises, where their continued use is environmentally acceptable.

Therefore, the key planning policy ‘tests’ to be applied to the assessment of this application are:

- Is the site suitable to meet the future needs of manufacturing and service employers.
- Is it appropriate to retain the existing employment use?
- Are there any environment issues which would make the continuation of the existing use or other employment / industrial uses unacceptable?

The site, existing uses and context

The property comprises an existing 40 bed hotel on a site of 1.53 acres. The hotel has conference & banqueting facilities, a restaurant, leisure centre and bar. The building is constructed over two storeys with brick elevations beneath a part pitched and tiled, and part flat roof.

It is understood that the current occupier, who is operating a hotel business from the property, is due to vacate this Autumn.

The site has been actively marketed for 6 months by local and well establish agent, WT Gunson for its existing hotel use and potential alternative uses. WT Gunson received no interest in the retention of the hotel use or for ‘traditional’ (B and E use class) employment uses. All interest received in the site came from residential developers, apart from interest briefly shown from a local private school.

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The existing hotel use is class C1 use. Whilst this is an existing employment generating use, it is not a 'traditional employment' use - B2, B8, E(i), (ii) or (iii). The primary purpose of Policy EC2 is to protect industrial areas and premises, where their continued use is environmentally acceptable.

The nature of the area and site context has changed significant in recent years with the development of the surrounding 140 unit residential scheme on the former Mountheath Industrial Estate (Ref: PP-04807562). The Council's consideration of the redevelopment of the Mountheath Industrial Estate in 2017 accepted the conclusions of applicant's Employment Land Report and in particular:

- The site is no longer suitable or viable for continued employment uses.
- The development for new industrial / warehouse accommodation fails to provide an adequate developer's profit / return unless cross funded and subsidised by a substantial residential development.
- No demand or likely future demand for the industrial accommodation.
- New employment floorspace is unviable in this location.
- Amongst other issues related to the quality and condition of the existing floorspace, the site has poor access and is distant from the motorway network.
- There is significant over supply of industrial accommodation in the market.

In terms of the site's situation, it is bounded to the north, south and east by residential development and a golf course to the west. It is now isolated as a commercial use from the industrial units on Ardent Way and the Gateway Centre.

It is considered that the site's situation, accessibility and immediate surroundings are not conducive to accommodate the requirements of potential alternative employment uses.

Alternative employment uses could include notwithstanding potential viability issues on what is a tertiary employment site, light industrial / storage and distribution units, trade counter / quasi retail units or open storage using the hardstanding and existing buildings. Typical building requirements for modern industrial, warehouse and trade counter units within a mixed commercial and industrial space in the area would include:

- Minimum clear eaves height of 6.5m
- Generous service and storage yards and car parking provisions
- 1 full height loading door per unit

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In addition, to the above trade counter uses would normally have the following locational requirements:

- Busy trade / industrial estates
- Retail park locations, mixed use schemes
- Prominent site with roadside profile

The retention of the site for employment uses is likely to raise residential amenity uses, related to visual amenity, access, noise, odour and hours of operation. Moreover, planning conditions which seek to managed and mitigate any potential amenity issues emanating from any new commercial uses will affect the ability of any occupier to manage their operations efficiently and effectively.

Conclusion

In the context of Policies EC1 and EC2 it is considered that the site is not well placed to meet the need of manufacturing and service employers, due the following factors:

- An active marketing campaign has concluded that there is no demand for the current hotel use or employment uses
- New Employment development is unlikely to be viable in the location
- The site's situation, accessibility and immediate surroundings are not conducive to accommodate the requirements of potential alternative employment uses.
- The retention of the site for employment uses is likely to raise potential residential amenity uses, related to visual amenity, access, noise, odour and hours of operation.

Please do let me know if you or the Council have any queries regarding the foregoing.

Yours sincerely



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