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Memo

To: John Crawford

From: Stephen Thorne

Date: 28/05/2008

Subject/Ref: Office Project – Salisbury Sarum Centre, Old Sarum and the Sequential Test

Background

As requested I have given some preliminary thoughts to the possibility of re-locating the Bourne Hill project to the Salisbury Sarum Centre, Old Sarum.



Title: Salisbury Sarum Centre
Date: 17/07/2007
Scale: 1:2500
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Location Plan Salisbury Sarum Centre

Advice has also been taken from the Head of Forward Planning and Transportation. As always this opinion is given without prejudice to any decision that may be made as a result of a planning application being registered and determined by the local planning authority.

In general there are a number of policies that are generic and will apply to a proposal of this nature but with varying degrees of weight.

These are from the adopted Salisbury District local Plan 2003 and are as follows:

- G1 General to include sustainability
- G2 General
- E1 Mixed development allocation
- E16 Loss of employment
- D1/D2 design criteria for new development.
- CN 20 – 23 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeology
- TR1 Sustainability
- TR5 Commutation of Developer's car parking liability.
- PS1 Support for Community facilities
- G8 Groundwater Source Protection Areas
- D7 Site analysis
- H2D Mixed development allocation
- TR5 Commutation of parking requirements
- TR12 Comprehensive Development
- TR14 Cycle Parking

In addition the Government policy statements:

- PPS 1 General Principles
- **PPS 6 Planning for Town Centres**
- PPG16 Archaeology
- PPS25 Flooding
- PPG 13 transport and sustainability.
- Circular 5/2005 Planning Obligations, or by default a Memorandum of Understanding if the applicant is the unitary council

The key policies above are E1 and H2D that allocate land at Old Sarum for mixed development including, housing employment, retail, and educational, recreational and community facilities. Both of these policies pre-date PPS 6.

Sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning. The planning system has a key role in facilitating and promoting sustainable and inclusive patterns of development, including the creation of vital and viable town centres.

The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:

- *planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and*
- *promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and*
- *encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all and well-served by a choice of means of transport.*

The following extract from the Government's wider policy objectives is also relevant to the question at hand

- *to promote social inclusion, ensuring that communities have access to a range of main town centre uses, and that deficiencies in provision in areas with poor access to facilities are remedied.*

The main town centre uses to which this policy statement applies are defined and include:

- offices, both commercial and those of public bodies;

In order to deliver the Government's objective of promoting vital and viable town centres, development should be focused in existing centres in order to strengthen and where appropriate, regenerate them.

In selecting sites for development, local planning authorities should:

- a) assess the need for development ;*
- b) identify the appropriate scale of development ;*
- c) apply the sequential approach to site selection ;*
- d) assess the impact of development on existing centres; and*
- e) ensure that locations are accessible and well served by a choice of means of transport.*

Local planning authorities should focus primarily on the above considerations when making decisions to allocate sites and consider other relevant matters. Points C, d and e are of particular importance in the context of any proposal to re-locate council offices to Old Sarum I have been asked to consider the specific issue of the sequential test, which does not undermine the importance of the other material considerations either listed above, or that may become material as a result of statutory and non-statutory consultations that will need to be undertaken, if and when a planning application is received on the Salisbury Sarum Centre site.

Applying the Sequential Approach to Site Selection under c above

- first, locations in appropriate existing centres where suitable sites or buildings for conversion are, or are likely to become, available within the development plan document period, taking account of an appropriate scale of development in relation to the role and function of the centre; and then
- edge-of-centre locations, with preference given to sites that are or will be well-connected to the centre; and then
- out-of-centre sites, with preference given to sites which are or will be well served by a choice of means of transport and which are close to the centre and have a high likelihood of forming links with the centre.

Salisbury Sarum Centre

Salisbury Sarum Centre as defined by PPS 6 is an out of town location and therefore in the sequential sense the least preferred option in the context of sustainability.

The provision of a new office complex to serve the unitary authority out of centre will therefore need to pass the test and discount, where possible the availability of other suitable sites that are closer to the acknowledged city centre.

This will create a number of obstacles as there are a number of city centre sites that are available and within the ownership of Salisbury District Council, or the new successor unitary authority.

As brief examples that are not meant to represent a complete picture of the options available the following are cited:

- The Bourne Hill site itself that has the benefit of planning permission and listed building consent and where development has commenced.
- The Bourne Hill site potentially in conjunction with the demolished Swimming Pool and or the College Street car park
- The Brown Street car park
- The Central car park
- The Salt Lane car park.

PPS 6 indicates that both developers and local authorities (as part of the plan process), should be able to demonstrate that all potential town centre options have been thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered for development for key town centre uses.

The provision of a public building for Wiltshire Council is clearly a key city centre use and even with the provision of a front office facility within the centre, would not preclude the requirement for access to a back office location as not all the 'suite' of services could be provided within a limited customer facing facility.

Clearly if such an exercise is not been undertaken with sufficient rigour planning permission is unlikely to be granted.

General Comments

1. In general the requirement for additional office accommodation outside of the city, will influence the debate on net loss of employment opportunities within the context of E16 and needs to be explored. There is clearly a relationship between the office centralisation project, the decanting of employment from one part of the city to another and how this influences the provision of a similar number and range of job opportunities.
2. In addition in terms of vitality and viability the re-location of significant numbers of employees from the centre to out of centre, would have an affect upon the city centre, that will need to be assessed particularly since the current disposal strategy indicates that a proportion of the existing accommodation would be lost to employment use.
3. Sustainability, carbon footprint and the general emerging issue of climate change, will also require careful investigation.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding that, in principle policies E1 and H2D are supportive of an employment use the provision of public offices for Wiltshire Council at Old Sarum would constitute development of an out of town site. Therefore amongst other considerations, a sequential test will need to be undertaken to prove that there is no better site for this important city centre use, nearer to the city centre than this out of town site.

The existence of an extant consent on an acceptable site close to the city centre will be an obstacle in the evaluation that will need to be addressed.

This advice is intended only as initial guidance to the Implementation Executive. Any queries or questions of a more detailed nature that require further explanation should be the subject of further dialogue with the LPA.