

Steeple Aston Parish Council

Hatch End 20/01127/F: Questions **& RESPONSES**

CONSTRUCTION TRAFFIC:

The recommended route for the large vehicles that will be needed for the construction phase is through Steeple Aston, using South Side and Paines Hill, or possibly Fenway and North Side. Operational hours are stated as between 08.00 and 17.00, Monday to Saturday, with construction expected to last for about 45 weeks – likely in reality to be more than a year.

All this construction traffic passing through Steeple Aston will have to negotiate narrow residential streets with parked cars, two difficult road junctions, 80 dwellings fronting the streets concerned, and – most importantly, close to the construction site - Dr Radcliffe’s School, children and parents crossing the road, and an already highly-congested period of drop-off and collection at the start and finish of the school day. We are concerned that as a result there will be a significant safety and congestion risk, together with disturbance to many residents.

- 1. Would you agree that an enforceable traffic management plan is required to avoid dangerous congestion outside the primary school between 0800 and 0900, and between 1445 and 1600?**

Agreed. It’s also worth mentioning that our proposed contractor, Hawkins Construction <https://www.hawkinsconstruction.co.uk/>, are a Banbury based company who directly employ their tradesman making construction traffic controllable.

For reference I attach Hawkins’ response to the question raised:

Yes, we can avoid 08.00 to 9.00 and 14.45 – 16.00hr. To ensure this traffic management procedure is enforced, we will obviously collate it in all of the documentation and carry out ad hoc monitoring.

- Added to traffic management document*
- Added to the construction health and safety phase plan document*
- Added to all purchase orders*
- Added to all site induction processes*
- Appropriate signage installed on the site*

- 2. Would you agree to investigate whether construction traffic can be routed on a one-way system so that vehicles approach the site from one direction and depart in the other?**

Yes we agree to this proposal. For reference I attach Hawkins’ response to the question raised:

Yes I believe a one way system can be introduced into the traffic management plan. Once again we will collate the plan and place it in all the documentation and carry out ad hoc monitoring.

- f. Added to traffic management document*
- g. Added to the construction health and safety phase plan document*
- h. Added to all purchase orders*
- i. Added to all site induction processes*
- j. Appropriate signage installed on the site*

OPERATIONAL TRAFFIC:

The Transport Statement starts by defining the baseline traffic movements in relation to the five remaining users of the existing partly-vacant premises (table 2.1). To compensate for the vacancies, the level of traffic movement has been factored up in relation to the proposed floor area (table 4.1). However, if it had been factored up instead in relation to the number of proposed businesses – ie 30, it would result in six times the measured level rather than just over twice the level. The baseline of vehicle journeys would then be around 400 instead of 136.

- 3. Do you agree that the number of businesses is a better indicator of likely vehicle movements than overall floor area, and that as a result the baseline figure may be much too low?**

I passed this question by Mode, our Transport Consultants, and I attach their response:

Allowing for the number of businesses is a fair point and one that has been allowed for to a certain extent. The approach adopted in the submitted Transport Statement applies survey data from similar sites elsewhere through review of the industry standard 'TRICS' traffic survey database. The sites chosen are similar in nature in terms of scale and number of units (or businesses). As OCC would accept, the number of trips the total site will be expected to generate is calculated by relative floor area of the TRICS sites. This is a standard approach accepted by OCC and all highway authorities in the UK.

- 4. What measures are envisaged to avoid peak time journeys past the primary school by employees between 0800 and 0900?**

I passed this question by Mode, our Transport Consultants, and I attach their response:

Planning permission is very rarely contingent on avoiding peak hour trips completely, especially for employment land uses. However, it does require peak hour impacts to be acceptable and moreover, for this scale of development, a Framework Travel Plan submitted that will reduce reliance on car travel.

The number of additional peak hour vehicles in comparison with the existing site use is outlined in the Transport Statement. There is currently 1 vehicle every 62 seconds on Fir Lane south of the site in the AM (08:00-09:00) time period. It is predicted this may change to 1 vehicle every 51 seconds.

The Framework Travel Plan puts forward a number of measures aimed at encouraging increased uptake of sustainable travel, as well as management and monitoring procedures for ensuring this happens.

There is also no allowance for customer or delivery traffic, which is stated to be negligible. The comparison with other business parks in Appendix D does not identify such traffic, but it cannot be negligible in those examples. 30 thriving businesses does not remotely compare with the existing situation on which the negligible numbers of deliveries etc. are based.

5. Would you consider reducing the number of businesses which the site is capable of accommodating to a lower figure in order to reduce the total number of vehicle movements?

Provided the approximate floor area is maintained then we'd consider reducing the number of units. We envisage building the main structures to capped off services, fitting out one terrace of units to full spec., thereby allowing the space to be marketed. We can then create tailored sized units within the remaining terraces dependant on market requirements, so we see 29 units accommodating 29 businesses as being very much the maximum. That said we'd aim to keep the units generally small to discourage larger, possibly heavier uses.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL:

The application assumes that some employees will walk or cycle to work, but given the lack of cycle ways and footways, that seems unrealistic. Local bus services are also cited as a benefit, with little relationship to the reality. At the very least there should be some local improvements to encourage sustainable travel. There is no indication as to what kinds of employment might be available and therefore it is hard to assess to what extent the development will provide local (meaning Steeple Aston and Middle Aston) employment thereby making utilisation of the 50 cycle spaces plausible.

6. Can you provide us with information about the types of business that you expect to be based at the site?

We envisage a range of occupiers and would actively encourage a diverse mix of businesses. It's impossible to know but quite possibly IT companies, designers, small independent businesses providing local services requiring a mix of office, storage and even possibly clean assembly of goods. Ideally with collaboration between occupiers. It would seem the economy is facing a recession and a rise in unemployment, which will probably lead to a greater number of new small businesses being created and requiring space.

Historically the site has been associated with heavy users: car repairs, drain clearance and guttering are examples of recent businesses and our intention with the design and size of units is to move from an Industrial estate to smaller, cleaner occupiers. We'd like to see it as a local seed bed for new businesses.

7. **Would you agree to construct a footpath between the school and the site to facilitate future employees having a safe walking route from the bus stop to their workplace, and to enhance off-road pedestrian safety for children attending school from Middle Aston?**

Yes we would consider a footpath, possibly combining with the existing footpath and then accessing through to the site. We obviously do not own the strip of land required.

8. **Can any reassurance be given that the overwhelming number of employees will not travel to work by car?**

*Yes, a lot of thought and work has already gone into this and I refer you to our **Travel Framework Plan** – attached and which forms an integral part of the application. As you will see the Framework sets out a strategy for encouraging non-private car journeys and a system for monitoring the success of the scheme.*

I think its possibly very easy for people to be cynical of these reports and targets but its increasingly clear that we are all and especially the younger generations becoming much more aware of our responsibilities to the environment and habits are changing fast, even more so since the Covid 19 Crisis.

DESIGN:

The existing sheds are low single storey structures with timber cladding that are appropriate to their original agricultural role. The proposed replacement buildings are much taller, designed to have mezzanines, and are to be constructed of materials that are much less sympathetic to their rural setting, despite a stated aim to keep the agricultural ethos. Site section drawing PL104 shows the dramatic increase in bulk and height of the buildings compared to the existing ones. The proposed building at the entrance to the site (“the Hub”), although symmetrically placed, is itself strangely asymmetrical and unattractive.

9. **Could the design of the frontage buildings be reviewed to make them more sympathetic to their rural setting?**

We are reluctant to lose floor space but we would be willing to consider design amendments I think it sensible we wait to receive all consultees feedback before deciding what these should be.

10. **Could the hub building’s frontage be made symmetrical; and why not replace the existing clocktower on the new building as a connection to the original history of the site?**

We’d certainly be willing to consider a symmetrical form for the Hub building but again request we wait to hear all consultees feedback.

AMENITIES:

The intention, mentioned at a 2019 meeting, to incorporate a coffee shop or possibly a more substantial café, on the site, would bring a welcome community amenity, and mitigate to an extent some of the negative aspects of the development. There is no evidence of that in these plans – simply a “lunch space”, without kitchen facilities, in which staff can take their break. A café would however require a significantly larger hub building. This omission is disappointing and a missed opportunity.

11. Would you commit to provide a community café?

Yes we'd very much like to see a café open to all, but its planning application would have to follow and be independent of this current application.

SUMMARY: When Steeple Aston Parish Council saw the preliminary scheme in September 2019, we expressed our in-principle support for this sort of scheme, aiming to provide local employment as it does. However, it has become clear that the traffic issues in particular are of great concern. We believe that the scheme will generate “a volume of traffic that would have a significantly harmful effect on road safety or congestion or cause unacceptable noise and disturbance for local residents or to the rural environment”, and consequently may fail to meet one of the key criteria of Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan policy PC1 (which would otherwise lend support to the scheme). Concerns about the visual effect of the development on the environment may fail to meet another of the criteria.

We would therefore be keen to hear of ways in which the impact of the proposed scheme can be reduced, so that we might be able to consider supporting the application.

We trust the above answers your questions and we'd be happy to clarify any points further if required.

Steeple Aston Parish Council

May 2020