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# Grovefield Way

Proof of Evidence

Summary

Prepared on behalf of Hinton Properties (Grovefield Way) Ltd

LPA Ref: 16/02208/FUL

PINS Ref: APP/B1605/W/18/3214761

December 2018



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## 1.0 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 I am an Urban Designer and a Chartered Town Planner. I hold a BA(hons) and a Master's Degree in Urban Design. I am a member of the Urban Design Group. I have over 20 years' experience in masterplanning, town planning and townscape design and assessment.
- 1.2 I am a Partner with Barton Willmore, the UK's largest multi-disciplinary planning and design practice.
- 1.3 The evidence I have prepared, and which I provide for this appeal, is true and has been prepared in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 2.0 SUMMARY

### The Proposed Development

- 2.1 Although the Appeal Scheme is a hybrid application with certain aspects reserved for future consideration, considerable thought has gone in to creating a scheme that acknowledges the importance of the site and its setting.
- 2.2 The LPA Committee Report which is appended to the Council's Statement of Case (ref 16/02208) sets out in some detail the proactive approach that the Appellant has taken to try to resolve the Council's concerns.
- 2.3 Notwithstanding the Officer's observations, the scheme was refused.

### Urban Design Effects

- 2.4 The applicant and the local authority spent many months working together to improve the design to a point where both parties were content with both the layout and the architecture. This was informed by presentations and discussion at the Architectural Panel and a series of in house consultations at Cheltenham Borough Council. This fact is reflected in the considered view (one presumes of the urban design officer and case officer) contained in Paragraph 6.5.15 of the December 2017 Committee Report.

*'Officers therefore are satisfied that the proposal is acceptable in terms of layout, the design of buildings and their size and height.'*

- 2.5 I now respond to the particular criticisms cited in the Reason for Refusal that emerged from debate at Committee under the following headings.

**The predominance of hardstanding and retaining structures would result a poor appearance and do not create an attractive streetscape or strong sense of place.**

- 2.6 The attractiveness or not of streetscape and/or the evaluation of a strong (or otherwise) sense of place, has to be seen in the context of a developments' location and function.
- 2.7 The site and/or the permission had no specific design guidance/design brief and/or design policy applied, over and above the standards normally expected for these types of land uses. Policy CP7 is a relatively high level design policy and is the only design policy referenced in the Committee Paper. No specific design conditions on either streetscape or sense of place were attached to the earlier extant permission, except for a reference to the indicative masterplan.
- 2.8 Streetscape was improved with the inclusion of public realm works and improvements to green spaces running parallel to the spine road, the extent of landscape and public realm around key

buildings was increased, as were landscape buffers where appropriate. The orientation and design of buildings was also considered further to alleviate officer concerns.

- 2.9 This approach has resulted in a well-designed scheme relative to its location and purpose. Comparable recently approved nearby developments and others along this stretch of the A40, tend to have a less sophisticated approach to layout, the extent of hard standing and its visual impact and/or place making qualities. I would strongly advocate that the scheme subject to this appeal would seem to offer much more consideration in terms of landscape strategy, visual impact, mix of uses, public realm and building design than many comparable projects.
- 2.10 As Mr Davies explains in his evidence, the urban design approach is consistent and inspired by the landscape vision for the site. A strong high quality landscape edge along Grovefield Road provides the setting and introduction for a series of buildings of different scale on this western edge. The gateway through this attractive edge treatment sits at the entry point to the main internal access road. But as can be seen from the various CGI's and sections from this viewpoint (see landscape proof Appendix 4 and section drawings), the main internal access road (and the gables of the buildings aligned to it) affords views of the longer distance woodland to the west of the site and along the A40.
- 2.11 Furthermore, the landscape strategy creates a clearly defined structure that utilises hard and soft landscape materials to unify the Appeal Scheme. The further breaks in level throughout the site as it runs west, enable the use of retention and planting to further reduce the visual impact of car parking throughout.
- 2.12 In my professional opinion and in the context of regularly masterplanning and reviewing other commercial and business schemes, this is not a commercial development that ignores design or visual impact.

**The position of buildings including the 'Drive thru' coffee shop and supermarket, close to the edges of the site give the layout a cramped and contrived appearance exacerbated by exterior features such as the 'drive thru' lane and external yards.**

- 2.13 I would again refer to the Council Committee Paper and specifically Paragraph 6.6.11:

*Whilst the distribution of the uses on the site has not significantly altered, the overall quality of the scheme in terms of how the buildings address the street, the spaces between them and the landscape approach has improved since the submission of the proposal (this will be discussed further below). This helps to ensure that the business park has an 'identity' which is apparent from the entrance to the site to its furthest extent. As such whilst the non- B1 uses still occupy the eastern-most part of the site it is now considered that they will not appear as a separate parcel of commercial uses but will be integrated into the language of the site.'*

- 2.14 The location and orientation of all three non-B1 uses that can be seen from Grovefield Road has been given significant thought. Sections H-H No. 178-98 and J-J No. 178-99, show this very clearly. When one fully takes into account the relative platform levels and building heights of both the supermarket and the Costa Coffee and the levels of planting proposed around these buildings, I would contend that far from being 'cramped', the frontage is in fact relatively open and rich.
- 2.15 The largest single building on this frontage is of course, the BMW dealership which already exists. I would further suggest that the revised approach helps enable the landscape strategy by encouraging strong views west through the site terminating in the woodland that sits at its western edge. The CGIs do not in my opinion show a congested frontage to Grovefield Road in any way.
- 2.16 I would then turn my attention to the matter of 'exterior features' and specifically the drive thru lane and the external yards. Both these aspects were the focus of significant alteration and improvement on the back of earlier LPA consultation responses. The rear yard of the supermarket was relocated to enable a larger landscape buffer to the rear. Similarly, the visual impact of the drive thru lane was lessened by the relocation of car parking spaces to facilitate an increased landscape buffer.
- 2.17 Taking all these factors into account, and when one considers how development will actually look with the higher level planting above the drive thru lane fully matured (see Appendix 4 of landscape proof), then given the openness of that edge I do not see a ground level element on the scale of the drive thru lane exacerbating that vista to any significant extent.
- 2.18 I would also argue that the coffee shop is in the optimum location from both an urban design and a sustainability perspective. It provides a counter balance to the prominent BMW dealership. It's a small and visible gateway building that sits at the gateway to the site. For external road users its location and its drive thru function, allow access without necessitating visitors entering into the business park beyond.

**Supermarket and coffee shop are of a relatively standardised design.**

- 2.19 Policy CP7 of the Local Plan states that Development will only be permitted where it: (a) is of a high standard of architectural design; and (b) adequately reflects principles of urban design; and (c) complements and respects neighbouring development and the character of the locality and/or landscape (note 3). It goes on say that the fact that a particular form or location of development is the most cost-effective option is not justification for an exception to CP7.
- 2.20 Taking each of these in turn I would comment as follows.



- 2.21 It is clear from the illustrative material that has been submitted with the hybrid application that the Appeal Scheme adopts a palette of high quality, contemporary materials that will unify the scheme and provide an attractive environment. This is not standard fair.
- 2.22 There is a clear structure to the development, which is based upon the linear development facing on to the internal access road. This provides legibility to the scheme and serves to largely conceal the parking associated with the Appeal Scheme. In the early part of the proof I have described in detail the nature and scale of neighbouring development and how this has influenced the disposition of development within the site.
- 2.23 The non-B1 uses, the Aldi supermarket, the coffee outlet and the nursery are of a contemporary design. They are not of standardised design. This approach is entirely consistent with the approach to the design of the business park as a whole and specifically to the design of the BMW building to the north.
- 2.24 Without dwelling on this aspect further the Committee Paper clearly reflects the Officer's views at the time, that the:
- 'standard of design of the individual buildings is acceptable and appropriate for a modern business park'.*
- 2.25 Indeed, their conclusion goes on to say that 'the buildings will appear as a family of buildings which is important in giving the site an identity as a high quality business park'. It is notable that there are no design issues with appeal B. The architectural style is to a significant extent set/or at least very heavily influenced by the extant permission. Indeed, this consistent architectural style further underpins my view that the Appeal scheme goes some way to helping create a strong sense of place. The materials deployed for the buildings will only help unify the development.

**And finally - The proposal is therefore harmful to the surrounding area by reason of its visual impact and also fails to create a high quality business environment in this edge of town location.**

- 2.26 This aspect is more fully considered in the evidence of Mr Davies however, from an urban design perspective, I have already noted that a comprehensive series of public and private viewpoints were considered. The Appeal Site is located adjacent to the existing settlement edge and views of the Appeal Site are therefore relatively localised. The existing BMW dealership to the immediate north east of the site is readily visible from the surrounding area.
- 2.27 In considering the impact of the proposed retail building on the neighbouring area it should be noted that the maximum storey height would not exceed 2 storeys. This is entirely appropriate given the heights of neighbouring properties to the south of North Road West and has been informed by our site assessment.

## Visual Effects

- 2.28 The impact on local views are dealt with more fully in the evidence of Mr Davies. I have already noted that a comprehensive series of public and private viewpoints were considered in the evolution of the masterplan approach.

## Policy CP7 of the Cheltenham Borough Council Local Plan Second Review (Adopted 2006)

- 2.29 Policy CP7 of the Local Plan states that Development will only be permitted where it: (a) is of a high standard of architectural design; and (b) adequately reflects principles of urban design; and (c) complements and respects neighbouring development and the character of the locality and/or landscape (note 3).
- 2.30 It goes on say that the fact that a particular form or location of development is the most cost-effective option is not justification for an exception to CP7.
- 2.31 Taking each of these in turn I would add to my earlier comments as follows:

### High standard of architectural design

- 2.32 It is clear from the illustrative material that has been submitted with the hybrid application that the Appeal Scheme adopts a palette of high quality, contemporary materials that will unify the scheme and provide an attractive environment. I would contend that this approach address policy CP7 in three ways.
- 2.33 Firstly, the standard of design is appropriate for a modern business park. Secondly, while the architecture is bespoke to this particular development the unified architectural approach and materials palette results in a 'family of buildings'. This is not a standardised approach. Thirdly, there is a strong interaction between the architectural approach and the broader urban design and landscape strategy.
- 2.34 Moreover, I struggle to understand how the extant permission and Appeal B can be said to be acceptable in design terms, whereas Appeal A is not. Indeed, given the relatively minor differences in the various proposals, it is difficult to see how one form of development can be considered contrary to the development plan whereas another is not.

### Reflects the principles of Urban Design

- 2.35 On this last point there is a clear structure to the development, which is based upon a strong frontage onto Grovefield Road and then linear development facing on to the internal access road. I have described the former in detail earlier in this section as it was the focus of the RFR.

2.36 Regarding the latter point. The spine of development and public realm that then runs west through the scheme toward the existing planting on the A40, provides a particularly high quality street feel at the heart of the development. The separation of the pedestrian and vehicular traffic along that street only add to the sense that a pedestrian could use and enjoy this environment. The street provides a legibility to the scheme and the long distance views of woodland bring a key aspect of the landscape strategy to life. The breaks in level and linear nature of the buildings further serve to help conceal the parking associated with the Appeal Scheme.

### Conclusion

2.37 My overall conclusion is that the Appeal scheme is a well-considered scheme and that considerable thought has gone into creating a high-quality development which responds sensitively to its site and setting. I therefore see no reason why planning permission should not be granted on design grounds.