

Planning application P17/V1507/FUL

Introduction

The application under consideration (P17/V1507/FUL, as revised on 21.7.17) covers change of use of the Grant Thornton and Elms Court buildings and demolition of part of the Grant Thornton building and the Seacourt Hall. The changes of use are designed to provide temporary accommodation for two food shops and the pharmacy, and planned temporary accommodation for the Baptist Church and the community hall. The demolition of Seacourt Hall and part of Grant Thornton are necessary to provide a through-route for deliveries to the temporary units, and so will therefore have to be completed by the time the temporary buildings are ready for use.

On completion of the works under this application, the demolition of the remainder of the site would commence, and vehicle access to the remaining units would be only from West Way, the existing access points at Arthray Road and Westminster Way would be closed.

Although the application presents this work as a precursor to the new phase 1, it is, in effect, the first stage of the redevelopment of Botley West Way centre (covered by planning consent P16/V0246/FUL), and needs to be considered together with the consent and conditions of that planning application. We comment on some details of the interdependence of these two applications below.

Safety

Specific concerns raised in comments from the community relate to safety in and around the site, for cyclists and pedestrians.

Pedestrian crossing

The location for the pedestrian crossing has been shown in different locations at different times in the applicant's documentation and the proposal is that it would be a straight across path rather than the sheep-pen currently in place. The safest location and format for the crossing needs to be determined by OCC. The claim that the relocation of the pedestrian crossing is "already approved by the consent for the main application" (Covering letter 21.7.17) is multiply misleading, as OCC did not accept the original proposed location and the revised plans include locations not considered under the main application.

Construction vehicles

Proposals for access arrangements for construction vehicles for the redevelopment of the rest of the site have been raised within this application, and members of the public have commented on it, and are especially concerned about the use of Church Way. Left turning large vehicles are particularly hazardous for cyclists, and should this access route be approved, measures need to be taken to ensure safety at this junction. These are issues for the Construction Environmental Management Plan which is a requirement of the planning consent P16/V0246/FUL and we trust that these comments will be given full consideration when this is received in due course.

We look to the planning authorities to ensure that the site will operate as safely as reasonably practicable. Safety should be the primary concern and not be sacrificed in the interests of developer convenience or profit.

We will live with the construction and its impact for several years. There is a view that we should allow the developers to press on, since it is taking so long to get the development underway. The delays are not of the public's making. Proper process must be followed.

Continuity

The proposals are such that new units for two food stores will be open, before any work starts on West Way shopping centre. This requires that the demolition of Seacourt Hall and part of Grant Thornton is complete before the new units can open. Chapel Way from Westminster Way must remain open during the demolition for access to the Co-op car park, until the temporary units are open.

It is unfortunate that the majority of the shops in the West Way shopping centre have already closed. The proposal in the application P16/V2046/FUL was to provide as much continuity as possible, with new units in Block A being available before any shops in the WWSC needed to vacate. This fact was significant in reducing opposition to the application, and was also a consideration at the Planning Committee as mentioned in the report: *"The proposed phasing of development as set out in applicant's phasing plans is acceptable. It is anticipated the development can be delivered without detriment to the continued trading of local businesses. The phasing can also be controlled either by condition or within the S106 agreement by requiring the phasing strategy to be submitted and updated during the lifetime of the development."*

It was surprising, therefore, that the Vale took action to terminate leases in WWSC, even before the application for the changed phasing was submitted. This has undermined the community well-being and economy and we look to the Vale to prevent further loss of essential services.

Consultation

The lack of consultation with the public on the proposed changes to the development plans has been disappointing. The presentation at the public exhibition was confused, since it touched on the new phasing, the changes to the final plans (for which the Section 73 application has not yet been submitted) and construction management. As such, the public were not 100% sure as to what they were being asked to comment on, or indeed, whether they were being consulted, or just informed.

Local groups were not asked for their input, other than for the details of the community building. Issues of access and safety should have been discussed with local residents, and their concerns and ideas could have informed the plans. It was only after Councillor Hallett called in the application that any meaningful discussion took place, which resulted in amendments being submitted. A meeting was set up at a late date with the cycling community, but this only took place after the reports had been submitted to the planning authority, and hence have had little impact on the proposals. Instead, the outcome of the meeting has been for the applicant to understand the concerns and then to attempt to provide evidence against these concerns rather than to address them by changes to the plans.

Environmental impact

It is surprising that this application was not required to be supported by an environmental impact statement.

The application says nothing about how the works on the two buildings and the demolition would be carried out. A plan should be required as a condition of any consent.

Construction plan for P16/V0246/FUL

The application mentions some of the plans for construction for the redevelopment approved under P16/V0246/FUL. The change in phasing has significant implications for the movement of construction vehicles in the main development, as the southern section of Chapel Way, which was to have remained open in the old phase 1, will now be inside the Phase 1 site. Construction vehicles will now access the site from West Way and Church Way and exit to Westminster Way through the area currently occupied by Seacourt Hall. This changes the basis of Environmental Statement submitted with P16/V0246/FUL, e.g. para 5.9.2 *“Construction traffic will access/egress the Project Site from Westminster Way via Chapel Way, located on the eastern boundary of the Project Site, and Arthray Road to the south. During Phase 1, the access route-way from Arthray Road to West Way will be maintained.”*

Since this application is effectively the commencement of the redevelopment of the site, the whole of this advance phase will have to be subject to the pre-commencement conditions of application P16/V0246/FUL (including at least conditions 12, 14, 18, 19, 26-27, 34,36, 38), which have yet to be satisfied. It will also have to be subject to the payment of section 106 contributions due before commencement of development.

Potential conflict with consented application P16/V0246/FUL

Under the consented application, occasional use of a re-opened entrance to Chapel Way from West Way by delivery vehicles was agreed by Oxford County Council. All other vehicles were to use entrances/exits from West Way at Church Way, Arthray Road and Westminster Way.

This application seeks to use the access to Chapel Way to all vehicles. They seek to justify this by referring to the Botley Centre SPD which suggested this as a possible route (although the authors of the SPD did not have specific expertise in traffic and transport or local knowledge). It should be noted that the SPD also stated that deliveries should not be via this entrance, but should be from Westminster Way. It is the use of this entrance by both deliveries and users of the centre which is contrary to both the planning consent to P16/V0246/FUL and the SPD.

There are a number of areas where what is proposed in this application are contrary to the original application and this should give cause for concern. Approval of this application would contradict the conditions set out in the planning consent and risks creating precedents for arrangements which would not have been accepted if considered as part of the full development application. This would undermine the planning process and the public trust in the planning authority. In summary, this application should be considered together with the consented plans and all the conditions set out in that consent.

Dr Mary Gill
Co-chair West Way Community Concern

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