Application Number : S/2016/0791/MAF
Parish : Evenley
Application expiry date : 30 June 2016

Case Officer : Wayne Campbell

Applicant : Secretary of State for Defence

Location : RAF Croughton Brackley

Description : Erection of operational buildings and associated development including access road, car parking area, external plant, hard and soft landscaping, hardstanding areas and infiltration basin

RECOMMENDATION – GRANT PERMISSION, SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS SET OUT AT THE END OF THIS REPORT

S/2016/0791/MAF

WARD : Little Brook
WARD MEMBER : Cllr John Townsend
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE:
Major application;

1. APPLICATION SITE

1.1 RAF Croughton comprises a former airbase which is currently used as a communications facility. Although the site is owned by the MOD, it is currently occupied by the USAF.

1.2 The base is located approximately 1.2km east / south-east of the village of Croughton and is adjacent to the north-bound carriageway of the A43 which forms the south-eastern boundary of the site. The northern part of the base contains the vast majority of the existing buildings. These have a wide range of uses, including accommodation, amenity, offices, workshops and storage, with a mixture of single, two storey and three storey heights.

1.3 The southern part of the base functions as a high frequency antennae field and comprises mainly of pasture land which is surrounded by an arterial road. Within this part of the base are a variety of facilities including the current main SATCOM buildings, geodesic domes and operation antennae along with associated access roads.

1.4 The current facilities at RAF Croughton provide key support to the US Department of Defence, UK MoD, US Department of State and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The existing buildings are 1950s constructed facilities that do not meet present day or future requirements. Electrical and mechanical systems are outdated, inefficient and provide no possibility of potential expansion.

1.5 Administrative and functional support areas have both space and configuration limitations and recreation and welfare facilities are deemed inadequate. Energy and
annual maintenance costs for the building systems that support these facilities are considered excessive. All facilities are beyond economical repair due to their age, physical deterioration and the presence of asbestos based materials.

1.6 The application site is readily visible from both carriageways of the A43 which runs parallel to the southeast boundary of the site, there is some screening present in the form of scattered trees and hedging which separate the site from the A43.

1.7 The application site is located immediately adjacent to the existing SATCOM buildings. The existing facility is isolated from the other buildings of the main base to the north and has an access from the perimeter road around the base.

2. CONSTRAINTS

2.1 Outside village confines;
2.2 Potential archaeological asset – RAF Croughton - Modern military site;
2.3 Potential wildlife site;
2.4 Within 2km buffer zone of local wildlife sites: The Moors; Old Astwick Village Moat; Slade Covert; Croughton Spinney; and Croughton Spring Copse.

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 The proposed development will enable the relocation of employees from the existing SATCOM buildings to the new facility. All employees at the new facility will be existing employees already in residence at the base, therefore the proposed development does not involve an increase in staff at the base. Once the new facilities are operational, the existing SATCOM buildings and associated infrastructure will be demolished.

3.2 The new facilities are required to replace these inadequate and inefficient communications facilities and to provide additional, purpose-built space in order to meet the current and future operational requirements of the USAF.

3.3 The proposed SATCOM facility will be sited to the west of the existing SATCOM facility. The proposed development includes a number of new buildings, a surface car park (temporary), hard standing for new equipment and new footpath and vehicular access.

3.4 In detail the proposed development comprises the following components;

- New PL1 Building within fenced compound; (approx. 2800sqm) and associated plant;
- New administrative facility (referred to as Admin Building herein); (approx. 2000sqm) and associated plant;
- Infrastructure including hardstanding for six satellite terminals, four of which will accommodate domes (to be installed at a later date under separate planning application). The area extending up to 30.5m around each satellite terminal foundation will also be a hardstand area linked by a service track as illustrated on the drawing proposals. The approximate area of the antenna
field (hardstand and proposed grasscrete area) will be 7805m²;

- Entry Control Facility for PL1 Building;
- Main access road, building perimeter roads, plant hardstand area, temporary car park and footpaths (approx. 12,585sqm);
- Fencing, Lighting and Landscaping; and
- Provision of associated services (power, water, gas, communications).

3.5 Access to the application site will be provided by way of a spur off the current internal access road used for the existing SATCOM facility, and the two new buildings will be connected to the Base road network via the new access road.

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There have been numerous planning applications over the years however the one relevant to this current application is, S/2011/1416/LDP - Building 180 RAF Croughton Certificate of lawful development for the construction of two concrete pads and erection of two satellite dishes - Approved

5. PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

5.1 Pre-application advice provided through a series of discussions and meeting regarding the submission details and type of development proposed.

6. KEY ISSUES

6.1 The main issues to consider are:
   - the principle of development
   - visual impact on the area and the character of the open countryside;
   - impact upon neighbour amenity;
   - impact historic assets;
   - highway implications;
   - flood risk; and
   - impact upon biodiversity and protected species.

7. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

7.1 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

   The Development Plan

7.2 SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN (SNLP): G3, EV1, EV2, and EV24.
7.3 WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT CORE STRATEGY (JCS): Policies SA, S1,
S2, S7, S8, C2, E1, BN2, and BN5

The JCS was adopted on 15 December 2014 and so full weight can be afforded to the policies in the JCS, which is now part of the Development Plan.

Material Considerations

7.4 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF): Section 7 ‘Requiring good design’, Section 10 ‘Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change’ and Section 11 ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’

7.5 PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE (PPG): Sections covering Crown Development; and Design.

7.6 COUNCIL CORPORATE PRIORITIES: The Council’s 2014/15 Business Plan states that it will show strong leadership across South Northamptonshire through its corporate priorities to; (1) preserve what’s special; (2) protect our quality of life; (3) secure a prosperous and sustainable future; and (4) enhance the Council’s performance.

7.7 The corporate priority of most significance to the determination of planning applications and appeals is to preserve what’s special. It seeks to do this via the key objectives of; (1) ensuring the character of the district is preserved and that all new development is of a high quality; (2) protecting the built heritage of the district through effective planning enforcement and conservation; (3) working to preserve and enhance the natural landscape character and environmental quality of the district; and (4) working with rural communities and villages to help develop and sustain access to local services.

7.8 The remaining corporate priorities are of significance to the determination of planning applications and appeals via the key objectives of implementing the Brackley and Towcester masterplans, providing safe and secure environments, securing investment at Silverstone, promoting economic growth and tourism, delivering high quality affordable housing and delivering a high quality service.

7.9 The above corporate priorities are considered to be fully compliant with the policy and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 CROUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL: Supports the application.

8.2 EVENLEY PARISH COUNCIL: Comment. As a large building and a high profile site adjacent to the busy A43, its module and functional appearance makes it an inelegant structure. Parish urge the architects to look at a design which is less intrusive in the English countryside.

8.3 THAMES WATER: No objection subject to conditions.

8.4 HIGHWAYS ENGLAND: No objections.

8.5 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY: No objections subject to conditions.

8.6 NCC HIGHWAY ENGINEER: No objections subject to conditions.

8.7 NCC LEAD LOCAL FLOOD AUTHORITY: No objections subject to conditions.
8.8 SNC HEALTH PROTECTION OFFICER: No comments to make.

8.9 No comments received from: NORTHANTS AND BEDS WILDLIFE TRUST; CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL; DEFENCE INFRASTRUCTURE; ANGLIAN WATER.

8.10 SNC BUSINESS SUPPORT UNIT – No comments received.

Officer comment: Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that a local planning authority must have regard to a local finance consideration as far as it is material. Section 70(4) of the 1990 Act (as amended) defines a local finance consideration as a grant or other financial assistance that has been, that will or that could be provided to a relevant authority by a Minister of the Crown (such as New Homes Bonus payments), or sums that a relevant authority has received, or will or could receive, in payment of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

As this is a Military base owned by the Crown and operated by the USAF there is no payment to be made as part of this application.

9. REPRESENTATIONS

9.1 None.

10. OFFICER’S REPORT

10.1 THE PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT: The application site is located outside of any village or town confines as denoted by the Local Plan and as such the site is technically allocated as an area of open countryside. In considering this aspect Policy EV2 of the Local Plan states that, subject to exceptions, permission will not be granted for development in the open countryside. These exceptions include:

- the conversion of an existing building in accordance with policies EV16 and EV17;
- development necessary for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, tourism or recreation;
- in the Special Landscape Areas, appropriate development essential for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, tourism or recreation; or
- development in accordance with the special Policies that apply to the particular sites dealt with in Chapter 13

10.2 The proposed new buildings on the site will replace the existing and dated building reference 180 and is clearly not included as a development covered under the list of exceptions under Policy EV2. Although technically located in the open countryside the building is located within the operational military base and positioned adjacent to the building the proposed development will replace.

10.3 The applicant’s site and use / operations contained therein have been established over a number of years. The applicant provides an important service which requires the provision of necessary equipment and buildings. Over the years the existing buildings and equipment have aged and now require replacing. For these reasons it
is considered that the principle of the development is acceptable.

10.4 VISUAL IMPACT UPON THE AREA AND THE CHARACTER OF THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE: Although in the open countryside the development is well accommodated within the confines of the base. The base has a very distinct character and is already well developed with a range of on-site facilities including housing, schools, personnel facilities, sports facilities and buildings and structures for the purpose of the military operations undertaken on site.

10.5 This application seeks permission for two buildings on the site which form the SATCOM development. Although both buildings will use similar materials in their build and construction the character and appearance of each will be different. Both buildings will be constructed from a buff coloured brick and both will be on a rectangular footprint. Both buildings are single storey in height and both will appear as flat roof structures but will have shallow pitched roofs hidden behind a parapet wall. This however is where the similarities end. The administration building to be located to the north east of the existing building 180 and essentially provides an area of office accommodation and the rooms of which will be provided with windows which break up the external brick appearance of the building. This building also maintains a taller section at the western end which will be constructed using polycarbonate translucent panels which will allow a change in material and will also increase the level of light into the building and hence reduce the amount of artificial lights. In comparison the second building known as PL1 will be located to the immediate west of the existing building 180 and provides accommodation for technical equipment, plant room as well as some office accommodation. This building does not require windows as per the administration building, and as such will appear more of a brick structure than a traditional building.

10.6 In terms of appearance and design it is accepted that these buildings are designed to be functional rather than for their architectural merits / style. The comments from Evenley Parish Council are noted however as both building are located within the confines of this military base and only visible as glimpse views from passing traffic along the A43 the design of the buildings is not considered an issue to warrant a refusal on this occasion.

10.7 One key aspect which is not shown on the plans is the detail of the 4 No. new antenna which are to be located to the south of the PL1 building. The details as submitted show that position of the foundations for these antenna, however as the applicant has not agreed / determined the final design of these structures no information is provided other than location. For this reason it is accepted by the applicant that this current application only considers the position of these structures and that the final design will be the subject of a further planning application.

10.8 IMPACT UPON NEIGHBOUR AMENITY: The nearest dwelling known as Lilybird House approximately 340m to the north and at one point was included within the confines of the base. Given the distances between the proposed development and the nearest dwelling together with the nature and use of the proposed buildings it is not considered that there will be any detrimental impact upon residential amenity in terms of light, noise, pollution or being overbearing.

10.9 IMPACT UPON ANY HISTORIC ASSETS: The site lies within an ‘archaeological asset’ that covers the whole airbase which also includes grade II listed structures in the north section of the site in the form of 3 brick built World War II fighter pens. The
application is supported by a detailed heritage statement which acknowledges the historical background of the site as a military base in terms of the archaeology but as much of the site has been the subject to various developments over the years it is considered that the proposal will not impact on any asset relates to the site’s historic use as a military airbase. Furthermore this heritage statement also acknowledges that the original cluster of buildings to the north of the perimeter taxiway has expanded into the landing ground during the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century, including a new medical and dental centre, along with the aerials, geodetic domes and associated support buildings.

10.10 With regards to the fighter pens themselves, the heritage statement notes that the proposed SATCOM facility will have a slight impact on the historic setting of both the World War II airfield and the Grade II listed type C fighter pens. The proposed buildings will be located within the landing ground, an area where historically there were few structures due to its use. It is accepted that the flat open nature of the landing ground will remain the dominant character and that the historic function, use and relationship between the landing ground and the World War II structures and defences will still be apparent. Although it is accepted that the buildings proposed as part of this application will interrupt the long views to the fighter pens and across landing ground, this impact will not be to the extent that the historic setting or ability to understand function and use of RAF Croughton during World War II would be lost. For these reasons it is considered that the proposed development will not result in any significant or substantial harm to the setting of the historic assets on the site.

10.11 TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS: The site is located well within the confines of the military base and the development will be served by a mix of the existing internal road network along with a new access road which will be positioned to the south of the old 180 building. Both Highways England and the NCC Highways and Transport have been consulted on this application and no objections to the scheme have been received.

10.12 The comments of the NCC Highways Engineer however have suggested that 2 conditions should be attached to any planning permission granted. These include the requirement for a construction management plan while the other condition requires that no employees shall be reinstated to the existing vacant buildings without a new full planning application. In considering the two suggested conditions the provision of a construction management plan is appropriate for this development to ensure that any construction traffic which will no doubt access the site from the A43 does not obstruct the flow of traffic along this trunk road. The second condition however is considered less necessary for the development. The application site is a large open former airfield and as such any use of the old building together without the new is not considered to result in any adverse impact on the highway network. The applicant has indicated that the two buildings would not both be used as the proposal is to replace the older building on the site, although it is accepted that there would be a phased transitional period as the operations are transferred from one building to the next. Furthermore it is also considered that any increase in traffic due to the operations on the site can and would be self-contained within the site. For this reason the second condition is not considered necessary.

10.13 FLOOD RISK: The application is supported by a detailed drainage master plan and a flood risk assessment. In considering the details the Environment Agency has
confirmed that they have no objection to the proposed development subject to the attachment of conditions to any permission granted. In addition to this the NCC Lead Local Flood Authority officer has also confirmed that, following the receipt of additional information, the proposed development is acceptable and that subject to conditions there is no objection to the proposal.

10.14 For these reasons it is considered that the proposed development will have no adverse impact in terms of a flood risk. Although the area of the application site is currently laid to grass the development will result in a reduction in the level of grassland however it is accepted that the remainder of the site will remain as grass and so surface water run off should not increase exponentially. It is therefore considered that the proposal complies with the Local Plan policies relating to flood risk and section 10 of the NPPF which relates to climate change and flooding.

10.15 IMPACT UPON BIODIVERSITY AND PROTECTED SPECIES: Section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) addresses issues regarding ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’. When determining applications local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by following a number of principles. Firstly, if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts) or adequately mitigated or compensated for then planning permission should be refused. Opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged.

10.16 In addition to this paragraph 99 of Circular 06/05 states that “it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision”. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC 2006) states that “every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard … to the purpose of conserving (including restoring / enhancing) biodiversity”.

10.17 Strict statutory provisions apply where European Protected Species (EPS) are affected, as prescribed in Regulation 9(5) of Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. When determining a planning application that affects an EPS, local planning authorities must have regard to the requirements of the EC Habitats Directive which states that “a competent authority, in exercising any of their functions, must have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive so far as they may be affected by the exercise of those functions". In this application the Council has to have regard to EPS when exercising their statutory functions, of which Planning Permission applications are one.

10.18 To support this application the applicant has provided a preliminary ecological appraisal of the site. Within this assessment the applicant acknowledges that the southern part of the military base within the area of the proposed the SATCOM building, is a Potential Wildlife Site and part of that habitat will be lost as part of the works. This designation is for sites which have not been surveyed to confirm their status as a Local Wildlife Site. The areas of the proposed work for the proposed buildings comprise the following habitat types: improved grassland, amenity grassland, bare ground, species-poor hedgerows. Adjacent habitats are buildings and hard standing. Although it is accepted that the habitats within and adjacent to the works area have potential to support breeding birds, over wintering birds and
bats, the risk of adversely impacting other protected and notable species such as newts, badgers, otters, amphibians and other reptiles was assessed as low. The recommendation in the ecological assessment is that with respect to the loss of part of the Potential Wildlife Site, enhancement measures would be provided to increase the nature conservation value of the site, which would include the installation of bird and bat boxes and management of grassland to promote biodiversity.

10.19 Given the above, it is considered that Art.12(1) of the EC Habitats Directive has been duly considered in that the welfare of any EPS found to be present at the site and surrounding land will continue and be safeguarded notwithstanding the proposed development.

11. CONCLUSIONS

11.1 This application seeks planning permission for a replacement SATCOM facility on this established military base. It is accepted that in terms of Policy the proposal is not strictly in accordance with Policy EV2 which restricts development in the open countryside subject to assessments. However, there is a special and justified need for the replacement SATCOM facility and given the location of the facility within the base confines the principle of the development is considered acceptable. Furthermore it is also considered that the development is acceptable in terms of design, neighbour amenity, biodiversity and protected species, flood risk and the visual impact upon the open countryside and surrounding area.

12. CONDITIONS

TIME LIMITS AND GENERAL IMPLEMENTATION CONDITIONS

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in complete accordance with the approved plans MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9001 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9002 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9003 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9004 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9007 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9008 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9010 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9011 Rev P3; MMD-354717-C-DR-00-XX-9021 Rev P1; 12155/L(90)001 Rev P4; 12155/L(90)002 Rev P4; 12155/L(04)003 Rev P1; 12155/L(04)004 Rev P3; 12155/L(04)005 Rev P2; 12155/L(04)006 Rev P1; and 12155/L(04)007 Rev P1; received 22/03/16 and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated August 2015; Heritage Statement dated July 2015; Contaminated Land Assessment dated February 2016; External Lighting Assessment Report dated March 2016; Lighting Plan / Assessment dated 26.01.16; and Acoustic Planning Report dated March 2016 unless a non-material amendment is approved by the Local Planning Authority under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.
Reason: To clarify the permission and for the avoidance of doubt.

CONDITIONS REQUIRING LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY WRITTEN APPROVAL OR TO BE COMPLIED WITH BEFORE ANY DEVELOPMENT COMMENCES

3. No development shall take place until a schedule of materials and finishes to be used in the external walls and roof(s) of the building(s) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be completed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the materials are appropriate to the appearance of the locality and to ensure the satisfactory appearance of the completed development in accordance with Policy G3 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan.

4. No development shall take place, including any works of demolition, until a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The approved Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The Statement shall provide for:

   i) the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors
   ii) loading and unloading of plant and materials
   iii) storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development
   iv) the erection and maintenance of security hoarding including decorative displays and facilities for public viewing, where appropriate
   v) wheel washing facilities
   vi) measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction
   vii) a scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works

Reason: In order to safeguard the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policy G3 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan.

5. Notwithstanding the details of the lighting assessment submitted with this application no development shall take place until details of the external lighting columns / security lighting including the design, position, orientation and any screening of the lighting has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The lighting shall be installed and operated in accordance with the approved scheme at all times thereafter.

Reason: In order to safeguard the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policy G3 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan.

6. No development shall take place until a scheme that includes the following components to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site shall each be submitted to and approved, in writing, by the local planning authority:

   1) A site investigation scheme, based on the previously submitted site investigation report to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off site.
   2) The results of the site investigation and detailed risk assessment referred to in (1)
and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken.

3) A verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (2) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action. Any changes to these components require the express written consent of the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reasons: The site as a former airfield and military base has had the potential to adversely impact groundwater quality in a principal aquifer.

7. No development shall take place until a detailed design of surface water drainage scheme for the site based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the hydrological and hydro geological context of the development should be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed. The scheme should include the following:

   a) Full WinDES modelling or similar with the details on Proposed discharge rates, simulating storms through the whole drainage system, with results of critical storms, demonstrating that there is no surcharge in the system for the 1 in 1 year, no above ground flooding for the 1 in 30 year, and that any above-ground flooding for 1 in 100 year storm is limited to areas designated and safe to flood, away from sensitive infrastructure or buildings. These storms should also include an allowance for climate change.

   Reason: To reduce the risk of flooding both on and off site in accordance with the NPPF by ensuring the satisfactory means of surface water attenuation and discharge from the site.

CONDITIONS REQUIRING LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY WRITTEN APPROVAL OR TO BE COMPLIED WITH BY DEVELOPER BEFORE SPECIFIC CONSTRUCTION WORKS TAKE PLACE

8. No infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground is permitted other than with the express written consent of the local planning authority, which may be given for those parts of the site where it has been demonstrated that there is no resultant unacceptable risk to controlled waters. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approval details.

   Reason: Drainage into contaminated soils has the potential to mobilise pollution into a Principal aquifer.

INFORMATIVES

1. Your attention is drawn to the fact that this planning permission does not approve the details of the geodetic domes to house the satellite antennas which will require approval under a separate application prior to installation on the site.