

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

23/1100/FFU

Watchmoore Park, Watchmoor Road, Camberley

Hybrid planning application comprising: Full planning application for the erection of one industrial and logistics unit within Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2, and B8 together with access, parking and landscaping and Outline application (all matters reserved) for the erection of up to 19,000 sqm of flexible industrial and logistics floorspace within Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2, and B8 following demolition of existing buildings on land at Watchmoor Park

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy background

- National Design Guide (2019)
- Surrey Heath Western Urban Area Character SPD
- DM9

The National Design Guide (2019) emphasises the importance of any development to integrate well with existing built and green context in terms of scale, character, height, massing, materials, and landscaping. It also highlights the duty to seek to retain existing natural elements and vegetation to the highest extent from a sustainability and character point of view.

The application site is situated within the Parkland Commercial Character Area, an area of good architectural quality which is subject to adopted design guidelines, the Surrey Heath Western Urban Area Character (WUAC) SPD. Parkland commercial estates are typical for the Blackwater Valley corridor and are found in York Town and Frimley. Their distinctiveness derives from spaciouly arranged buildings, set in extensive, parklike formally landscaped open spaces.

The design guidelines by Western Urban Area Character SPD can be summarized as:

- Situated in the Parkland Commercial Character Area, part of Mixed and Commercial Character Area WUAC SPD
- Characterised by extensive formally landscaped open space, spaciouly set buildings in parklike settings with specimen trees
- Pavements and green verges aligning roads/streets creating generous green frontages
- Next to a biodiversity opportunity area
- 2-4 storey building heights acceptable in principle, subject to high quality design
- Articulated buildings with large footprints and distinct, steep rooflines. distinct entrances
- Large landscaped parking areas
- Vegetation a key element, strong, formal landscaping incorporated; layered with low level vegetation and higher specimen trees

Proposed development

The application seeks to replace existing vacant office buildings of small to medium scale with new industrial and logistics units of up to 29,500 sqm (GIA) in total within Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2 and B8, with surface car parking, landscaping, and associated works within an existing commercial estate, situated to the east of the A331. The application areas currently entail seven office buildings with ground level car parking, accesses, and landscaping. The area is accessed from Riverside Way, which runs through the site from the A331 through to Watchmoor Road, providing access to the existing office buildings.

The hybrid application seeks full permission for the redevelopment of the area North of Riverside Way, including the demolition of the existing two office buildings and the development of a new, large scale industrial building of two storey height. The new building would have a floorspace of 10,358sqm with warehouse/manufacturing space and first floor offices. The offices will front onto Riverside Way. Vehicle access will be from the western roundabout on Riverside Way. Access for commercial vehicles HGV will be via the eastern roundabout on Riverside Way with a new, small gatehouse introduced. The service yard will be on the northern side of the building, with 9 dock-levellers provided. The existing access from Riverside Way would be removed and the pavement reinstated in front of the building.

The existing avenue of London Plane trees along the northern side of Riverside Way, which is an important feature, will be retained, apart from the removal of two trees to enable the closing of the central access as mentioned above. A further tree will also be removed within the area. The proposal introduces compensatory and additional landscaping, including vertical greening as advised by the Council.

Existing context

The built context has a corporate, medium-large scale character. Immediately to the north of the site is Camberley Sewage Treatment Works (STW) and industrial units off Watchmoor Road. To the north is the new Stihl HQ, a large manufacturing and distribution centre currently under construction. Outside the boundary to the east are three existing office buildings which share the access from Riverside Way.

Sustainable design

The ambition to minimise the carbon footprint in the construction phase and in-use through modular construction, incorporating sustainable passive designs and efficient/renewable onsite power generation are supported from an urban design point of view. The scheme demonstrates flexibility in terms of operational spaces and yards to meet the needs of a variety of occupiers over time. The proposal offers external amenity space for staff in line with the Council's initial pre-application advice. The project has been revised to comply with the Council's requirement to retain important existing natural features intact such as the natural lake area, in line with previous urban design advice, omitting previously proposed development along the lake shores. This is particularly important in the light of the strong increase in footprint, scale and massing that the development represents, which retains almost no open landscape setting within the red line to offset the built form.

Proposed scale, footprint, massing and built form

The proposed development represents a substantial increase in terms of scale, footprint, massing and built form compared to the existing two individual units. The development is set in a commercial/industrial built context and the development proposes efficient use of land.

The revised building design including the relocation of offices to the front elevation is positive, as it animates the street scene and increases direct and perceived safety. The position of the building very close to the street scene, combined with the extensive footprint which spans almost the entire width of the site, does not retain the spacious openness which is part of the local distinctiveness and which the adopted design guidelines SPD seeks to safeguard. The proposed building will be very prominent in the street scene given its position close to the street scene and because of the large scale.

Building design, elevational design, materiality and colour scheme

The proposed building design includes a glass fronted double height core office entrance at the south-west corner of the unit in Riverside Way. The glazed element, which turns the corner, will provide outlook over the adjacent lake area for the benefit of staff. The glazing will sit behind brise soleil under a canopy of timber soffit. Sustainably sourced natural timber or a proven, durable high quality engineered timber product would be considered acceptable in principle. The long term maintenance aspect and durability of natural timber should however be considered. The warehouse elevations component of the building has a commercial character with anthracite composite panels, green trapezoidal wall profiles, light, and dark grey wall cladding with an element of translucent polycarbonate cladding panels. Photovoltaic panels and rooflights will be integrated in the roof structure.

Although there are no objections to the proposed external materials in principle, the colour palette is considered to be too dark and is not in keeping with the established appearance of the character area as clearly demonstrated in the 3D illustrations, appearance, p. 33, Design and Access Statement. The detailed elevational design would also benefit from further articulation and refinement. The proposed wall cladding facing the street scene will be a combination of vertical, profiled metal cladding in green, anthracite (charcoal) and silver in combination with an open jointed, treated hardwood timber rainscreen cladding. All aluminium curtain walling, window frames, feature canopies, curtain wall spandrels and metal columns are proposed to be anthracite (off black/charcoal). The proposed anthracite and dark green fail to integrate with the existing built character in the area. It also creates a jarring effect to the profiled metal roof, proposed in light grey, as illustrations demonstrates. Fully detailed schedule of all external materials as well as samples should be provided to the LPA to address this important matter, which has to be approved in writing prior to the commencement of construction. A much lighter, more neutral, elegant, and well-coordinated colour palette is required, including whites, light greys, and silver. The management aspect of natural timber must be seriously considered. Therefore, an alternative to timber can be proposed. The scheme must demonstrate high quality design, materiality and detailing in keeping with the context, adding new qualities. This is particularly important as the scale of the development is increasing considerably, impacting the character and appearance of the built environment long term.

Outline planning consent element of the application

Outline planning consent is sought for the area South of Riverside Way with all matters reserved for consideration at the reserved matters stage (access, layout, scale and landscaping). The application seeks to agree parameters for 19,000 sqm of floorspace and a maximum building height of 19 metres. The indicative layout plan illustrates new employment floorspace within use classes Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2, and B8 in accordance with the maximum parameters. A maximum floorspace per

unit must be identified as part of this application, to not exceed the scale of Unit 1, 10,358 sqm. Location for vehicle access as well as street sections showing how pedestrian and cycle paths will service phase 2 will also be regulated in this outland consent as well as extent of structural landscaping. The design approach in the forthcoming design process must integrate well with the existing built context in terms of overall character, materiality, colour scheme and landscaping. Connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists within this phase and to adjoining neighbourhoods is a priority. Robust tree planting in the street scene is imperative from a sustainability aspect, to improve legibility and way finding as well as enhancing the visual character of the area. External staff break out areas for staff should be integrated. Roads should have pavement and verges. Formal landscaping is required around buildings and through the road networks.

M. Gustafsson MSc MA
Urban Design Consultant
29th November 2023

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE 2 (TWO) - ADDENDUM

23/1100/FFU

Hybrid planning application comprising: Full planning application for the erection of one industrial and logistics unit within Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2, and B8 together with access, parking and landscaping and Outline application (all matters reserved) for the erection of up to 19,000 sqm of flexible industrial and logistics floorspace within Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2, and B8 following demolition of existing buildings on land at Watchmoor Park.

Watchmoor Park, Watchmoor Road Camberley Surrey

Recommendations

This additional consultation response should be read in conjunction with the initial consultation response dated 29th of November 2023.

The application site is situated in the Western Urban Area Character Area of Surrey Heath, which is covered by the design guidelines of the WUAC SPD (2012). The National Design Guide (2021) as well as DM9, which both underlines the importance of the existing built context, are also applicable.

High quality design is inseparable from sustainable development. During the consultation in November 2023 the applicant was advised that the proposed colour scheme and design details of the elevational design required revisions. Given the considerable increase in scale and massing for the proposed development, a neutral colour scheme which is fully aligned with the design ethos and integrates well with the character of the existing context is imperative.

A meeting was consequently held with the applicant and their design team on December the 14th. It is considered that the required changes in colour scheme/materiality and the amendment to the feature canopy design on the front elevation as per that discussion can be covered by condition.

M. Gustafsson MSc MA
Urban Design Consultant
18th of January 2024