

Planning Statement for Car Sales at C&L Country Club

Introduction

This Planning Statement has been submitted to support an application to use part of the C&L Country Club for the sale of cars, for a temporary period of two years.

This proposed meanwhile use has already commenced, and is only intended as a stopgap whilst long-term redevelopment options for the wider site are pursued. In this respect, the Arora Group have made submissions under the Council's 'Call for Sites' carried out in 2023 for long term alternative uses to both the existing lawful use of the site and the meanwhile use for the sale of cars.

This report will describe the existing site, the scope of the proposal and the potential impacts associated with the proposed temporary use, having regard to the development plan.

Site Description

The application site comprises part of the car park for the C&L Country Club, which has been vacant for 2-3 years. Within the application site (red line) is a small single-storey brick building, close to the site access from West End Road, which is used as a sales office, however no other permanent structures are included within this application.

Two structures have been assembled on site; a portacabin and a car cleaning facility. Both of these structures are single storey and would be removed from the site when the proposed use ends. The remainder of the site comprises areas of hardstanding.

The surrounding area has a mixed character, with the nearest buildings being a small grouping of houses to the south-east on Harvey Road, a community centre to the east on the opposite side of West End Road, and the commercial buildings on the northern side of the A40. To the south and west of the site is a large golf course (between Sharvel Lane and the A40) and beyond this are large open areas laid out as fields.

In terms of planning designations, the site falls within the Green Belt and is within the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) (for all land south of the A40). The site is also near to the southern boundary of the A40/South Ruislip Air Quality Focus Area (AQFA) which covers the Polish Air Force Memorial Roundabout and part of West End Road north of the A40.

Proposal

The application seeks planning permission for a temporary period of two years, to allow part of the C&L Country Club to be used for the sale of cars. This use has already commenced on site, as confirmed by a visit from a member of the Council's Planning Team. The area in question is not the whole of the C&L Country Club, but just one area of hardstanding south of the main access from West End Road. Ancillary buildings to support this change of use include the existing brick-built single-storey building near the east boundary, a portacabin, and a car cleaning facility. None of these buildings would be used independently from the main proposed use for the sale of cars.

Policy Background

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was most recently amended in 2023 and forms the overarching basis against which development plans should comply.

The NPPF outlines first and foremost that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development has three overarching objectives; economic growth, social wellbeing and environmental enhancement. All three of these objectives are intertwined and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing.

What this means for decision making is that developments which accord with an up-to-date development plan should be approved without delay in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The Development Plan for the London Borough of Hillingdon is the London Plan (2021), the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Policies (2012) and the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2: Development Management Policies (2020).

Discussion

- Principle of Development

Policies GG2 (Making the best use of land) and GG5 (Growing a good economy) of the London Plan encourage the re-use of vacant brownfield land to support economic development and regeneration. Policy E9 of the London Plan (Retail, markets and hot food takeaways) supports a successful, competitive and diverse retail sector, which promotes sustainable access to goods and services for all Londoners. The supporting text further explains that retailing is undergoing restructuring in response to recent trends and future forecasts for consumer expenditure, population growth, technological advances and changes in consumer behaviour, with increasing proportions of spending made via the internet. The impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated this trend.

Also of relevance, Policy G2 of the London Plan (London's Green Belt) sets out that the Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development and proposals that would harm the Green Belt should be refused except where very special circumstances exist.

At a borough level, Policy EM2 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1 (Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains) sets out the Council's intention to maintain the current extent, hierarchy and strategic functions of the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains.

Policy DMEI 4 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Development in the Green Belt or on Metropolitan Open Land) states that Inappropriate development in the Green Belt will not be allowed unless there are very special circumstances. Policy DMEI 4 further states that redevelopment on sites in the Green Belt will be allowed only where the proposal would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, having regard to the height and bulk of the existing buildings on the site, the proportion of the site that is already developed, the footprint, distribution and character of the existing buildings on the site, the relationship of the proposal with any development on the site that is to be retained, and the visual amenity and character of the Green Belt.

As set out above, the lawful use of the wider C&L site, as a sports facility, leisure centre and function room, ceased approximately two to three years ago, and the retained building is in a very poor state of repair which would require significant investment to bring back into viable use. In this regard, the

Arora Group have made representations on the Council's most recent 'Call for Sites' in 2023, setting out our long-term vision for the site which would include comprehensive redevelopment and a permanent change of use.

As an interim solution, it is proposed that part of the site be used for the sale of cars (*sui generis*), which would enable some form of continued employment from the site, in accordance with the general thrust of Policies GG2, GG5 and E9 of the London Plan which seek to boost economic output. Without this meanwhile use, the vacant site would provide no benefit to the local economy and would be an underutilised brownfield site. It is further worth mentioning that in its vacant state, the site attracted some criminal behaviour which included breaking and entering, arson, and theft, despite measures to prevent unlawful access by the current owner. In this regard, the impacts from the most recent break-in attempts at C&L were significantly reduced by allowing tenants to operate on part of the site, as the current occupiers were able to notify the emergency services and the owners very quickly which helped to mitigate the level of damage caused.

Also of relevance, Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for the 'Effective use of land' does make explicit mention of meanwhile uses. PPG sets out that temporary uses can help improve the physical appearance of vacant or partially-utilised land or buildings, and provide space for local services and businesses, until more permanent development is delivered. This national guidance is directly applicable to the proposal, which is seeking permission for a temporary period of two years only. There is no intention to use the site for the sale of cars for an extended period of time, and this could be controlled by way of a suitably worded condition to ensure the current use ceases and the land is returned to its former state after a period of two years.

Notwithstanding the general support for proposals which encourage economic growth (as discussed above), policies protecting the Green Belt (e.g. Policy G2 of the London Plan, Policy EM2 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1, and Policy DME1 4 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2) individually and cumulatively seek to prevent inappropriate development on the Green Belt. These policies generally reflect the requirements of the NPPF, which sets out that the construction of all new buildings will be inappropriate in the Green Belt, with a list of 'exceptions' to this rule listed under para. 154 (a)-(g), whilst para. 155 (a)-(f) sets out certain other forms of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. The Green Belt's key characteristic is its permanent openness, where openness has both a visual and spatial element.

The proposed use for the sale of cars would not be an appropriate Green Belt use, however para. 154, part (g) allows for "*limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development*".

Part (g) is the relevant exception for this proposal, as the application site forms a small part of the wider developed site, and seeks a temporary change of use alongside the introduction of two small structures to support the proposed use; a portacabin and an open-sided car cleaning facility. An existing building by the entrance serves as a site office which is also ancillary to the proposed use for the sale of cars, however no internal or external changes are proposed to this building and therefore this would have no impact on openness and would not be harmful.

The change of use would have no discernible impact on the Green Belt in and of itself, as the scheme relies on an existing extent of hardstanding (formerly a part of the car park for the leisure use), and no new hardstanding is proposed to support the temporary change of use. It is acknowledged that the introduction of a portacabin and car cleaning facility would have a very low adverse impact on openness, simply by introducing two structures which were not there previously on top of existing

hardstanding, however a visual assessment of the site reveals that neither of these structures can be readily seen from the public realm because of existing thick foliage along the eastern and southern boundaries. As such, whilst in spatial terms there is a modest increase in floorspace and volume, the proposal has no visual impacts on the Green Belt.

In any event, regardless of the level of harm to the Green Belt's openness identified by the London Borough of Hillingdon as part of this application, any harm arising from the development would be temporary in nature because of the proposed meanwhile use, as the site would be returned to its pre-existing state (i.e. removal of the cars, the portacabin and the car cleaning facility) once the temporary permission has lapsed and it is assumed that this would be controlled by way of a suitably worded condition. On this basis, whilst there may be some very minor level of harm to the Green Belt in terms of spatial impacts, the permanent nature of the Green Belt (one of its two key characteristics) would be unaffected by this proposal.

- Transport and Parking

Policy T4 of the London Plan (Assessing and mitigating transport impacts) sets out that proposals should reflect and be integrated with current and planned transport access, capacity and connectivity. Transport assessments should be submitted with proposals to ensure that impacts on the capacity of the transport network are considered. The cumulative impacts of development on public transport and the road network capacity including walking and cycling, as well as associated effects on public health, should be taken into account and mitigated, and proposals should not increase road danger.

Policy T7 of the London Plan (Deliveries, servicing and construction) sets out that proposals should facilitate sustainable freight movement by rail, waterways and road. In addition, proposals should facilitate safe, clean, and efficient deliveries and servicing.

These London plan policies should be read alongside Policy DMT 1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Managing Transport Impacts) and Policy DMT 2 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Highways Impacts), which set out that proposals will be required to meet the transport needs of the development and address its transport impacts in a sustainable manner, whilst ensuring that safe and efficient vehicular access to the highway network is provided and impacts on local amenity and congestion are minimised.

In terms of specific parking standards, Policy T6 of the London Plan (Car Parking) sets out that car parking should be restricted in line with levels of existing and future public transport accessibility and connectivity. Car-free development should be the starting point for all development proposals in places that are (or are planned to be) well-connected by public transport, with developments elsewhere designed to provide the minimum necessary parking ('car-lite'). Policy DMT 6 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Vehicle Parking) sets out that proposals must comply with the parking standards outlined in Appendix C, however it should be noted that there are no specified standards for the proposed *sui generis* use within either the London Plan or Hillingdon Local Plan.

The proposed use of the site, for the sale of cars, has the potential to impact local highway conditions, depending on how intensively it is used and the number of vehicle movements generated by the use in operation. Noting that the proposed use has already commenced, a survey was undertaken to count the number of vehicle movements into and out of the site on a Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday in January 2024. The results of this survey are included within the submitted Transport Assessment, along with a general assessment of Highways impacts.

The results of the survey showed that traffic generation from the site was extremely low on all three days, with a maximum daily trip generation of 26 one-way vehicular trips (or around one trip every 30 minutes). Whilst it is acknowledged that this trip rate could be higher in spring or summer than in winter, these surveys do show the very low traffic generation of the car sales use both in actual numbers and in comparison to the TRICS data for the extant use of the wider site as a sports facility and leisure centre (26 one-way vehicle trips compared to 918 one-way vehicle trips per day).

There are five members of staff on-site at any one time, and three of these employees car-share into work together. Consequently, vehicle movements as a result of staff is very low, and two to three parking spaces are needed to cater for staff. Staff parking takes place on a large area of hardstanding at the northern end of the application site (in a separate area to the storage of cars) which provides more than enough space for cars to park on site. There would be no overspill parking as a result of the proposed development continuing on-site.

For a full assessment and further details of transport impacts, please review the Transport Assessment (January 2024) prepared by The Cunningham Consultancy.

- Air Quality

Policy SI 1 of the London Plan (Improving air quality) sets out that proposals should not lead to further deterioration of existing poor air quality, create any new areas that exceed air quality limits, or delay the date at which compliance will be achieved in areas that are currently in exceedance of legal limits, and should further not create unacceptable risk of high levels of exposure to poor air quality. As such, proposals should at least Air Quality Neutral and this should be demonstrated.

Policy DMEI 14 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Air Quality) sets out that proposals should, as a minimum, be at least air quality neutral and ensure there is no unacceptable risk from air pollution to sensitive receptors caused by the proposal.

The application site falls within the borough's AQMA, but outside of any AQFAs. As such, the proposal would need to demonstrate that it is air quality neutral.

An Air Quality Assessment prepared by Greenavon (February 2024), has been submitted separately, and this concludes that existing and future concentrations of pollutants across the proposed development are predicted to be below the relevant air quality standards, and therefore the application site is considered suitable for its proposed end-use. The AQA concludes that during the operational phase, the proposed development would have no significant impact on local air quality and is Air Quality Neutral. Moreover, because of the proposed meanwhile use, any impacts would, in any event, be temporary.

- Impacts on Character and Appearance

Policy BE1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1 (Built Environment) requires all new development to improve and maintain the quality of the built environment in order to create successful and sustainable neighbourhoods, where people enjoy living and working and that serve the long-term needs of all residents.

Policy DMHB 11 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Design of New Development) states that all development, including extensions, alterations and new buildings will be required to be designed to the highest standards and incorporate principles of good design.

The site has a very functional appearance, consistent with the proposed use. The portacabin and car cleaning facility have a fairly neutral impact on the character of the area, and cannot be easily seen from outside the boundaries of the site. It is proposed that these structures would be removed from the site once the meanwhile use ceases, and so any very minor harm to the appearance of the area would be short-lived.

- Impacts on Neighbour Amenity

Policy D13 of the London Plan (Agent of Change) sets out that new noise and other nuisance-generating development proposed close to residential and other noise-sensitive uses should put in place measures to mitigate and manage any noise impacts for neighbouring residents and businesses. Policy D14 of the London Plan (Noise) states that developments should mitigate and minimise the existing and potential adverse impacts of noise on, from, within, as a result of, or in the vicinity of new development.

Policy EM8 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1 (Land, Water, Air and Noise) states that development should not cause a deterioration in local air quality levels and should ensure the protection of both existing and new sensitive receptors. Major developments within AQMAs or AQFAs should demonstrate air quality neutrality (no worsening of impacts).

Additionally, in respect of noise, the Council will seek to ensure that noise sensitive development and noise generating development are only permitted if noise impacts can be adequately controlled and mitigated.

Policy DMTC 4 of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 (Amenity and Town Centre Uses) sets out that proposals for 'Town Centre Uses' will not be supported if they would result in adverse cumulative impacts due to an unacceptable concentration of such uses in one area, or if they would cause an unacceptable disturbance or loss of amenity to nearby properties, or would detrimentally affect the character or function of an area.

The proposal would have no impact on neighbours amenity in terms of a loss of light, privacy or outlook, noting that the proposal relates largely to a change of use. The two additional structures on site (portacabin and car cleaning facility) are both single storey and positioned very far from the nearest resident.

As a commercial site, there is the potential for some noise to be generated on site as part of the usual day to day functions of the site. Having said that, no significant noise-generating activities would take place on site, with the most potential for noise coming from the washing of cars, although this is likely to be negligible given that the nearest property to the car cleaning facility is approximately 200 metres to the south-east.

Additionally, we are not aware of any complaints from members of the public in relation to undue noise or other amenity concerns as a result of the current tenants being on-site.

Conclusion

The proposed use of the site for the sale of cars is considered to generally comply with the NPPF, London Plan, and Hillingdon Local Plan (Parts 1 and 2) insofar as they encourage economic growth and the effective use of land. The Aroa Group has long-term intentions for the site involving comprehensive redevelopment and the proposed use of part of the site for the sale of cars is requested as a meanwhile use, for a temporary period of two years only.