

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Cheviot Suite, Holiday Inn, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 6BP on Tuesday, 8 June 2021 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
R Dodd
G Hill
J Lang
G Renner-Thompson
A Wallace

L Darwin
B Flux
JI Hutchinson
J Reid
G Stewart
A Watson

OFFICERS

M Bulman
G Halliday
L Little
H Marron
R Murfin
M. Payne

Solicitor
Consultant Planner
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Principal Planning Officer
Director of Planning
Consultant Engineer

Around 8 members of the press and public were present.

1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference, as agreed by Council at the meeting on 26 May, had been circulated for information. It was noted that Councillor M Swinbank had been appointed as the Green Party representative. The Chair welcomed new Members to their first Strategic Planning Committee.

The Director of Planning advised that all Members had undertaken the mandatory planning training required except one Member of the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council, who would complete the training before that Committee met for the first time.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Foster and Robinson.

Ch.'s Initials.....

3 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 2 March 2021, as circulated, be agreed as true record and signed by the Chair.

4 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

5 **21/00388/CCD**

**Construction of footbridge, works to public rights of way, construction of soft and hard landscaping, surface and subsurface drainage, utilities and other services, boundary treatment and other associated works.
Land South East Of Chase Meadows, Chase Farm Drive, Blyth,
Northumberland**

G. Halliday, Consultant Planner introduced the application to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. Updates were provided as follows:-

- The report had not included information on the planned construction time. The estimated construction of the bridge on site would be 10 – 12 weeks. If consent was received it would be hoped to start on site in late spring/early summer 2022 with restoration to take place in winter 2022/23.
- Subject to the committee granting permission the applicant was prepared to meet with the residents backing onto the scheme and to discuss the detailed planting and screening proposals which would then be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval.
- Condition 14 should include “Reason: In the interest of users of the Public Rights of Way.

As this was the first planning committee for some Members following induction training, the Director of Planning reinforced how the report identified the key material considerations and policies.

Mr G Thompson addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. His comments included the following:-

His house backed onto the railway line, not exactly where the footbridge was proposed but to the south east, but he did see what went on a daily basis. There were issues with the Public Right of Way (PROW), which he now felt was too

Ch.'s Initials.....

dangerous to access with a dog due to young people going across the line to gather and drink alcohol with the result of lots of broken glass and antisocial behaviour occurring. Reports were made on a regular basis to the Police on the antisocial behaviour with them attending and removing the offenders, with no further action taken. The footbridge would only make this situation worse. The public footpath on the other side of the rail line led across a farmers field and then to the A189 where a very difficult and dangerous crossing existed, however if you did manage to cross the A189 then it was impossible to access the PROW due to hedges and fences. The other route of the footpath was across the edge of the golf course. Neither the golf club or the farmer liked the PROW being used due to the amount of glass etc being left by the young people. The proposed bridge was a bridge to nowhere and it would be of more benefit for it to be provided over the spine road or if the footbridge actually went to the proposed station, but it did not. He advised that residents did not object to the return of the passenger service along the line, which was very much welcomed, they only objected to the provision of the proposed bridge and another solution could be sought such as automated gates.

He disputed the figure quoted of 89 people per day using the crossing, he had checked his CCTV and could not count 89 people unless they included 20 – 30 young people going in both directions. The planting talked about was not on the residential side and this was something that needed to be looked at. In conclusion he stated that the residents did not object to the line, but there must be a better way to cross the rail line.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- The PROW team had viewed the submission and had not queried the numbers included, they did not have the resources to know usage of PROW across the County, and in their opinion it was sufficiently well used to be retained as a PROW and they would object to its closure. Network Rail had assessed the existing crossing against the increased number of trains running on the rail line and after assessing options, including the use of gates, had proposed, as the safest option, that a bridge should be provided. Any antisocial behaviour was something that must be addressed by Community Policing.
- The data that had been submitted in support of the application included a level crossing count of 89 which had been undertaken in June 2019 which was why the public speaker mentioned the figure of 89, the figure had not however been mentioned in the report.
- There would be a significant intensification of use with the introduction of the passenger line, all 22 crossings had been surveyed and this was the only one which they had deemed to require a bridge. It was recognised that the proposed bridge would not provide disabled access however the PROW team had stated that there was no evidence that there was a demand for disabled access at this particular crossing and therefore it was not deemed necessary in this instance.
- The trees to be planted would be described in detail in the landscaping scheme to be submitted. The bridge would be of a metal construction and it was expected that the surface would be of a non-slip variety which would also provide a cushion effect. A slight amendment to the

Ch.'s Initials.....

condition 3 to include details of “acoustically appropriate materials” could be included if Members were minded to approve the application.

- The proposed height of the privacy screen was 1.8m to prevent people looking over and would be difficult to climb. If there had been no other access to the rail track or if it was a high speed line then the provision of a covered bridge might have been considered in order to prevent anyone attempting to self-harm, but it was not considered necessary in this instance.
- There were no proposals for the provision of CCTV or lighting and lighting in particular could be detrimental to the visual amenity.
- The PROW team had deemed the demand for the use of this particular PROW by wheelchair users or for pushchairs, given what was on the other side of the rail line, was not likely to be great. There were proposals coming forward approximately 600m north of this application as part of the Bebside Station application for a footbridge to cross the A189 which would provide disabled access. The PROW team, even after being advised of that proposed provision had still required the existing PROW to be retained and were happy with the stepped access for the bridge.
- A Transport and Construction Method Statement was required to be provided and approved by the Local Planning Authority which would provide details of how loads would be transported to and gain access to the site, including access for the crane.

Councillor Flux proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application in line with the report and with the amendment to Condition 3 as outlined above, which was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson.

During the debate Members highlighted that a number of PROW routes throughout the County were in very strange places and indeed led to nowhere or dead ends, however it was important that access to open space was retained and the proposed bridge was to ensure the public’s safety in using the route. Councillor Reid advised that he could not vote in support of the application as he thought it was an expensive solution for a path which was not well used. Councillor Flux in summing up stated that Network Rail would not look to provide the bridge if it was not required for safety reasons and he would be worried if the application was refused. Concerns regarding antisocial behaviour needed to be addressed through different measures such as the Town Council, the County Council and the Police.

A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application in line with the recommendation in the report and the amendment to Condition 3 to include “details of acoustically appropriate materials” as follows: FOR 12; AGAINST 2; ABSTENTIONS 0.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the Conditions as outlined in the report and amended as above.

Ch.’s Initials.....

**Full application for change of use from agricultural land to industrial site for the erection of manufacturing building with offices, show room, parking, for the re-location of existing business premises to a purpose-built new facility (revised description 17 05 2021
Land South West Of Bricksheds Junction B1342 Belford Station To Belford, Belford**

H. Marron, Senior Planning Officer introduced the application to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. She advised that an additional letter of objection had been received which was read to the Committee and highlighted concerns in respect of the staffing levels quoted in the report; the need for an updated traffic report due to the increased use of the junction as a result of tourism in the area and usage by heavy goods and agricultural vehicles; there were no policies to support the increased industrial/business capacity of Belford; and the extra noise and pollution that residents would suffer, especially the toxic smoke from the Company's biomass chimney which has had a serious effect on the health of residents.

As discussions were still ongoing with Highways England a revised recommendation was proposed as follows:-

"That this application be GRANTED permission subject to resolution of the objection by Highways England, the following conditions contained within the report, any additional conditions required by Highways England (with the wording of the same to be delegated to the Director of Planning) and a Unilateral Undertaking pursuant to s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to secure the following legal obligation: Treelocate Limited will cease all operations within the current site once they have taken occupancy of the new site."

The Director of Planning provided further information on how issues he had covered in the mandatory planning training for members were incorporated into the report and the differences between the previous application and this application. He highlighted the Highways England Holding Objection which ensured that highways issues were addressed prior to any approval of an application. He continued throughout the discussion of the application giving examples of how the training related to the differing aspects of the report and how these could be taken into consideration.

Mr J Wallace, Agent on behalf of the applicant Mr M Nesbitt, addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following information:

- Treelocate was a leading manufacturer and distributor of artificial trees, flowers and foliage across the UK and internationally. The business was established in Northumberland 25 years ago and had opened a further site in Dubai in 2019.
- Since 2019 the Company had exported to 34 countries and was looking to increase this to 25% of turnover, with clients such as Euro Disney, Disney and the Four Seasons Hotel Group plus other theme parks, hotels and shopping malls.
- The Company had been on its current site in Belford since 2005 but had

expanded and diversified over time with piecemeal development on the existing site to incorporate manufacturing, which was not sustainable as the business continued to grow. The Company had outgrown the existing site and had to rent storage space to fulfil larger orders.

- A suitable purpose built facility was required of a scale which would allow growth to the manufacturing side of the business. A lot of employees lived locally and either cycled or walked to work and as a family business it was important to relocate in Belford as close as possible to the existing site in order to retain these skilled workers which was the reason the business could not relocate to larger towns such as Berwick or Cramlington.
- He did not agree with the characterisation of the workforce which had been referenced by the Objector. During Covid many businesses had to fluctuate the levels of workforce, however these were now coming back to pre-pandemic levels and it was hoped numbers would continue to grow.
- The need for this expanded provision was not envisaged during the drafting of the Local Plan, however it was now required due to the success of the growing business which now employed 50 people in a rural location.
- The Company had agreed to all mitigation including the Unilateral Undertaking requested by Highways England.
- Mr Nesbitt had asked that the Committee be advised that Treelocate very much looked forward to working with officers over the next 12 months to deliver the scheme should it be approved.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:

- Public Protection had considered the construction and operational aspects of the site and had requested additional information on how the business worked and activities undertaken on site and had come to the conclusion that the proposal was acceptable in terms of noise.
- One of the issues with the existing site was that it was directly adjacent to the grain processing plant so it was difficult to differentiate the noise sources. The current site was cramped in and had an old fashioned site layout with lots of activities taking place outside, the new site showed that predominately activities would take place inside the new purpose built facilities. Having all facilities in one unit would allow better management and control of the site.
- Highways England would not accept a condition attached to any permission granted which required the closure of the business on the existing site once it had relocated onto the new site as planning conditions were able to be varied. Highways England required assurance that no slow moving vehicles would be crossing the A1 between the premises of one business operating on sites on either side of the A1 and therefore the use of a formal Legal Agreement was required to ensure that once the new premises were brought into operation, Treelocate would cease to operate any part of their business on the original site. The original site would remain as allocated for business/industrial use and could be used by another company. It had been a long process to get to the position where Highways England

Ch.'s Initials.....

were reassured that the Legal Agreement would be enforceable.

- Bunding was proposed to the front, along the B3649 but no elevational details had been provided. It was acknowledged that there was some identified harm to the landscape. There were reserved matters to deal with the landscaping which would also offer the most screening and ensure the biodiversity value of the planting.
- The majority of the proposed route for dualling the A1 was within the existing A1 corridor. Highways England had been consulted and were comfortable with the design of this. The final designs for the dualling had not been agreed, but they had looked at the footprint and are satisfied and the Planning Department was involved in the dualling process. The Director of Planning advised that if Members were minded to approve the application then in corresponding with Highways England it would be stated that *“it was assumed as per the public hearing into the dualling of the A1 that you are satisfied that your comments in relation to this scheme had been considered in any dualling proposals”*.
- The A1 was heavily vegetated and between the proposed application site and the AONB there was the grain processing plant which had more effect on the AONB. The existing hedgerow on the A1 was to be retained. The Director of Planning advised that if Members were minded to approve the application, then a visit could be undertaken to view the site from different angles to ensure that the landscaping to be provided was satisfactory with the Agent advising that if any amendments were required they would be happy for this. A tweak to Condition 21 was suggested that would state *“to reflect both short medium and longer views into the site from all logical viewpoints”*.
- The applicant would be happy for a condition to be added for a scheme to be agreed for the provision of electric vehicle charging points with the standard wording delegated to the Director of Planning and Chair.

Councillor Renner-Thompson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as set out in the revised recommendation above with the following amendments to conditions:

- Condition 21 – insert *“to reflect both short, medium and longer views into the site from all logical viewpoints”*
- Additional standard condition to be added in respect of Electric Vehicle Charging points with the wording delegated to the Director of Planning and Chair.

Assurance was provided by Officers on the work undertaken over a long period of time in respect of the Legal Agreement being used to address the concerns of Highways England in order to try to ensure that it could not be circumvented. Discussions were still ongoing and if Highways England did not agree to the Legal Agreement then the matter would be referred back to Committee.

Councillor Dodd seconded the motion to approve the application as detailed above.

In discussing the application Members recognised that this was a Company that had grown with a workforce that was rooted in the community and if the

Ch.'s Initials.....

application was not allowed then the business could be lost from Northumberland. It was suggested that when considering the landscaping scheme, that large trees species should not be planted next to very busy roads due to the potential for serious injuries in the event of any road traffic collisions. Councillor Hill advised that she could not support the application at this time as she thought there could be problems ahead. Councillor Renner-Thompson in summing up stressed that rural Northumberland could not rely on tourism and farming to sustain the economy it needed other businesses and the applicant had done a lot to allay any concerns.

A Vote was taken on the motion to approve the application as outlined above as follows: FOR 13; AGAINST 1; ABSTENTIONS 0.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** permission subject to resolution of the objection by Highways England, the conditions contained within the report, the amendment to condition 21 - to reflect both short, medium and longer views into the site from all logical viewpoints” the additional standard condition to be added in respect of Electric Vehicle Charging points with the wording delegated to the Director of Planning and Chair and any additional conditions required by Highways England (with the wording of the same to be delegated to the Director of Planning) and a Unilateral Undertaking pursuant to s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to secure the following legal obligation: Treelocate Limited will cease all operations within the current site once they have taken occupancy of the new site.”

7 **APPEALS UPDATE**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8 **S106 AGREEMENTS UPDATE REPORT**

Councillor Flux highlighted the £150,000 contributions received for sport from developments within the South West Sector in Cramlington and £0.5m which had been mentioned at Cabinet that morning. Significant sums were coming into the area and it would be good to have updates on how this was being spent. The Director of Planning advised that reporting of the s106 funding had been increased and he would be happy to provide a quarterly report to Cabinet as it was important to know where the money was being spent. He also advised that it was expected that once the Local Plan had been adopted then more funding would be received.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and a quarterly report be provided to Cabinet

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....