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Ditton

Proposal: Car park extension
Location: East Malling Research Station New Road East Malling West
Malling Kent ME19 6DD
Applicant: East Malling Research Station

1. Description:

- 1.1 This proposal is for the extension of the existing car park serving the Conference Centre at the East Malling Research Station. The proposed car park extension will provide 90 parking spaces to the south of the existing car park.
- 1.2 The applicant has submitted a supporting statement setting out the circumstances surrounding the perceived need for the car park extension, including:
- existing problems of cars parking on the grass verges to meet current demand;
 - possible alternative site for additional car parking;
 - the intended expansion in the LDF of the employment designation at East Malling Research Station (compared to that in the TMBLP) to include additional land, including the current application;
 - the important role the conference centre plays in underpinning the viability of the East Malling Research Station, and the scientific and economic significance of the work they undertake.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The application site lies outside the employment confines of the East Malling Research Station and within a rural area and the Green Wedge under the adopted Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998. The site lies adjacent and to the south of the existing conference centre and car park and is bordered on the west and east by mature tree belts. To the south of the application site lies a small triangular parcel of grass land, leading up to the railway embankment of the Maidstone to West Malling railway line.
- 2.2 Members should also be aware that as part of the Local Development Framework process the Borough Council is proposing that the employment land allocation around East Malling Research Station has been extended (through the Development Land Allocations Development Plan Document) and that it would include the application site area for the car park extension.

3. Planning History (most relevant):

- 3.1 TM/01/01375/FL Approved 31.08.2001
New library and conference centre, comprising library, lecture hall, exhibition space, offices and ancillary facilities.

4. Consultees:

- 4.1 Ditton PC: No objection. This Council wondered if it would be possible to incorporate a scheme to recycle rainwater when the drainage system for the car park is built.
- 4.2 East Malling & Larkfield PC: Views awaited.
- 4.3 DHH: No objection.
- 4.4 KCC (Highways): This application shows proposals to double the size of the existing car park. Applicant states that there is currently insufficient parking for the existing use and proposes to enlarge the car park by 90 spaces. The layout follows current standards, although I would suggest that if the end bays are to be confined, then they should be widened to 2.7m. I raise no objections to this application.
- 4.5 Private Reps: No response.
- 4.6 Press Notice: No response.
- 4.7 A8 Site Notice: No response.

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 The main issues to be considered are whether the proposal is appropriate, whether it detracts from the visual amenity of the locality, whether it results in hazardous highway conditions and whether it is consistent with the objective of securing sustainable patterns of development.
- 5.2 The site currently lies outside the defined confines of employment area (Policy P5/15 of the TMBLP) of the East Malling Research Station on the Proposals Map of the adopted TMBLP. Therefore, the proposed car park extension is technically a departure from the TMBLP, as this type of development is not normally considered an appropriate form of development in a rural area, being contrary to policies P2/16 of the TMBLP 1998 and SS8 of the KMSP 2006.
- 5.3 The applicant has submitted a supporting statement to justify this development, which principally relates to the need for additional parking spaces to service the conference centre. When planning permission was granted for the conference centre back in 2001, the applicant indicated that they would implement a green travel plan as part of the scheme, which resulted in less than the normal level of

parking provision being provided. Whilst reference to the Green Travel Plan was made on the original application, there was no condition imposed requiring this to be carried out. Following the conference centre opening, the approved car park has not been able to accommodate the levels of persons (venue holds up to 200 persons) attending the new facility. Experience has shown that this has resulted in extensive parking on the grassed areas adjacent to the internal service roads, which the applicant considers to be visually obtrusive to the setting of the Research Station. The existing approved car park provides 102 parking spaces, whilst the current application seeks to provide 90 parking spaces, but will result in the loss of a handful of the existing parking spaces in order to accommodate the access road through to the new parking area.

- 5.4 Whilst it may not seem sustainable to extend a car park in a rural area, there are clearly other important factors to bear in mind with this application. The Green Travel Plan has not achieved its desired results, which may well be due to the remote and rural location of the Research Station and the lack of public transport links to the Conference Centre. This has led to a greater number of car borne trips than originally envisaged, which has led to the pressing need for additional parking spaces to serve the Conference Centre. There is clearly a real problem that needs to be addressed, and I accept that extending the car park is an appropriate response, in the particular circumstances of this case. However, there is also an opportunity to ask the applicant, via an informative, to revamp the existing Green Travel Plan to acknowledge the more remote nature of the site.
- 5.5 Members will also be aware that the Conference Centre forms an important part in underpinning the viability of the East Malling Research Station, which is both scientifically and economically significant at a local and national level.
- 5.6 The applicant has investigated an alternative site within the Research Station complex for a car park, adjacent to the internal access roads to the east of the main buildings. However, this site would be far more prominent and visually intrusive to the rural amenities of the locality, as well as detracting from the setting of the Research Station. Clearly there is need to accommodate the cars visiting the conference centre in a less visually harmful manner.
- 5.7 Members will also be aware that the as part of the LDF process, the Development Land Allocations Development Plan Document was adopted as a material consideration for DC purposes on the 11 July 2006. Policy E1 of this document proposes extending the employment confines of East Malling Research Station to incorporate the site of the car park extension. Therefore, the car park extension under the Development Land Allocations Development Plan Document would not constitute a departure. However, this document is still at a very early stage and is only a material consideration for DC purposes and currently holds little weight, as the TMBLP is still the principal element of the Development Plan.

- 5.8 The site is very well screened by the mature alder trees to the east, mature orchards to the west, the existing buildings to the north and trees and shrubs up to the railway line. The proposal will not significantly detract from the visual amenity of the locality due to the extensive screens, however, the appearance of the site could be softened by additional landscaping and tree planting within the car park to help break up the resultant enlarged car park. Landscaping and the surfacing of the car park are matters which can be adequately dealt with by condition.
- 5.9 The provision of an extended car park will not materially impact on the functioning of the Green Wedge, as it does not significantly extend the built confines of the employment area of the TMBLP 1998, itself subject to change under the LDF.
- 5.10 Therefore, given the very limited visual impact, the clear need for additional parking spaces to meet existing need and the likely changing planning status of this site, I consider that these circumstances hold sufficient weight to override the adopted policies of the TMBLP 1998.
- 5.11 In highway terms, the proposal lies some distance from the public highway and the KCC Highways raise no objection as the main Research Station complex is more than capable of accommodating additional parking spaces without any harm to the public highway. The KCC Highways does suggest the end parking spaces be extended from 2.4m to 2.7m if the end bays are confined, however, the parking spaces are not to be confined, i.e., against walls or fences. It should be noted that the proposed development will not be generating any additional traffic movements, but just accommodating existing movements in a less visually harmful manner.
- 5.12 I note Ditton PC's comments regarding surface water drainage and this matter can be covered by condition.
- 5.13 In light of the above considerations, I am satisfied that there are special circumstances to support this proposal and given the Borough Council's current position on the LDF, I do not consider it necessary to refer this technical departure from the TMBLP to GOSE, therefore I support this proposal.

6. Recommendation:

- 6.1 **Grant Planning Permission** as detailed by letters dated the 30 June 2006 and the 17 May 2006, Planning Statement received on the 5 July 2006 and by plans dated March 2006 subject to the following conditions:

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

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- 2 No development shall take place until details of surfacing of the car park have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, and the work shall be carried out in strict accordance with those details.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the character and appearance of the existing building or visual amenity of the locality.

- 3 No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping and boundary treatment. All planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved scheme of landscaping shall be implemented during the first planting season following occupation of the car park or the completion of the development, whichever is the earlier. Any trees or shrubs removed, dying, being seriously damaged or diseased within 10 years of planting shall be replaced in the next planting season with trees or shrubs of similar size and species, unless the Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: Pursuant to Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and to protect and enhance the appearance and character of the site and locality.

- 4 No development shall take place until details of surface water drainage have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, and the work shall be carried out in strict accordance with those details.

Reason: In the interests of pollution prevention.

Informatives:

- 1 The applicant is invited to revisit their Green Transport plan from 2001 for the Conference Centre and revise the objectives and adopt practical measures with a view to minimising car borne visits to the site.
- 2 The applicant is requested to examine the possibility of recycling the surface water run off from the car park.

Contact: Aaron Hill