

DELEGATED

**AGENDA NO
PLANNING COMMITTEE**

27th June 2007

**REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF
DEVELOPMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD
SERVICES**

05/1561/REV

**Corner Of Sadler Forster Way and Stockwell Avenue, Teesside Industrial
Estate, Thornaby
Erection of storage building associated car parking and landscaping.**

Expiry date: 21st July 2005

Summary

Consideration of this application was deferred at Committee on 31 May for a site visit.

Planning permission is sought for the erection of a storage building and associated carparking and landscaping at the corner of Sadler Forster Way and Stockwell Avenue, currently a pond and landscaping is present on the site. The site is owned by OneNortheast.

The application is a revision to application 04/1359/FUL, which sought to erect a similar proposal. The application was refused due to the loss of an area of open space and the lack of in-curtilage parking.

Following deferment the applicant was concerned that Committee had not got the full facts regarding a change in circumstances since the application was originally submitted. It has therefore provided a support statement explaining that a new contract has been awarded and more than 30 jobs will be created. Also that the existing pond is not a natural pond but was created by the estate operator for general amenity purposes and only has a piped water supply.

Letters of objection have been received from 6 local residents and businesses along with 4 separate petitions. The objections mainly relate to the loss of the wildlife habitat, loss of protected species and the inappropriate location of the building.

The proposed development is considered to achieve adequate spacing between existing units, which prevents significant undue loss of and amenity. It is considered that given the overall level of landscaping and open space provided within Teesside Industrial Estate a significant loss of amenity will not arise. It is also considered that the loss of habitat is compensated for by the provision of a replacement pond on adjacent land. Based on the comments of the Head of Technical Services, the access and parking provision of the site is considered acceptable

In view of the above, it is considered that the proposed development accords with the relevant adopted Local Plan policies and guidance, and it is recommended that planning permission be granted subject to the conditions identified below.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the application be approved subject to the following conditions:

- 01. *The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority
Drawing Numbers: - RTA1 Rev C, OL/A4/BT50/Admin/12, RTA2 Rev C,***

Reason: To define the consent.

- 02. *Construction of the external walls and roof shall not commence until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the structures hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.***

Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to control details of the proposed development

- 03. *Notwithstanding the submitted information a plan demonstrating the provision of 10no. covered and secure cycle parking spaces shall be submitted to and agreed in writing before the building hereby approved is occupied. The approved details shall be implemented before the building is occupied and shall be retained in perpetuity.***

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 04. *No development shall take place until a detailed scheme of landscaping has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such a scheme shall specify:***
- i. Hard and soft Landscaping***
 - ii. Detailed landscape specification for planting and maintenance***
 - iii. A plan identifying existing planting on the site which is to be retained***

The works shall be carried out during the first planting season following the substantial completion of the development, and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the date of planting, die or are removed or because seriously damaged shall be replaced with others of a similar size and species in the next planting season unless the Local planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity

- 05. No development shall commence until a detailed scheme has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority for the provision of a replacement pond as identified in Appendix 2 of the May 2005 Ecological Study. The approved scheme shall be implemented to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, before the existing pond is removed.***

Reasons: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area

- 06. Prior to commencement of development a scheme of working in regards to the transfer of pond life between the two ponds shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed scheme shall be implemented and adhered to unless other wise agreed with the Local Planning Authority***

Reason: To eliminate the risk of Signal Crayfish Escaping the vicinity of the development.

- 07. Notwithstanding details shown on the plans hereby approved, prior to any works commencing on site a scheme of existing and proposed ground levels, including those in adjacent land and finished floor levels for all buildings within the development, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with these approved details.***

Reason: To take into account the impact of the development on the surrounding development.

- 08. Full details of the proposed means of disposal of surface water and foul drainage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted and shall be provided in accordance with the approved details before the development is brought into use.***

Reason: To achieve a satisfactory form of development.

The proposed development has been considered against policy GP1, TR15, IN15, IN1 of the Stockton on Tees Local Plan. It is considered that the scheme accords with these polices, as a significant loss of and amenity will not arise for neighbouring land users, it will not lead to a loss of highway safety and the loss of habitat is compensated for by the provision of a replacement pond on adjacent land.

BACKGROUND

- 1. Planning permission is sought for the erection of a storage building and associated car parking and landscaping. The application site is located on the corner of Sadler Forster Way and Stockwell Avenue in the Teesway**

Industrial Estate within Stockton-on-Tees Borough. The site itself measures approximately 100m x 70m and currently a small pond and landscaping occupy the site. OneNortheast owns the land, whilst the applicants Orblux LTD own the adjacent site and adjacent unit.

2. This application is a resubmission of planning application 04/1359/FUL, which was refused for the following reasons: **"The proposal would result in the loss of a prominent area of open space that contributes significantly to the amenity of the locality, contrary to policy GP1 of the adopted Stockton on Tees Local Plan"** and **"The significant lack on incurtilage car parking provision will lead to on street parking to the detriment of road safety and the free flow of traffic contrary to policy GP1 of the adopted Stockton on Tees Local Plan."** This revised application has sought to address these reasons for refusal by increasing the number of parking spaces available and relocating the pond on an adjacent piece of land.
3. This revised application was originally submitted in 2005, however after objections raised by Natural England the applicant was requested to undertake a survey on the pond to identify if any protected species are present (specifically Great Crested Newts). Objectors have been re-consulted on the comments of Natural England as requested in submitted correspondence. This process has significantly delayed the determination of the application.

THE PROPOSAL

4. The applicant, Orblux Ltd seeks permission to extend their existing premises onto the proposed site and erect a warehouse for the storage of furniture materials. The building will be 70m in length x 53m in width x a maximum height of 8.6m. The structure will be steel clad and will provide the applicants with an increased warehousing space and a small ancillary office space.
5. There will be a distance of 2m from the adjacent building belonging to Orblux Ltd, which will be linked by an external walkway. A distance of 12m will remain to the boundary to Sadler Forster Way, to Stockwell Avenue car parking will be present, and to the north there will be a distance of approximately 36m to an adjacent unit owned by the Stanland Group.
6. Following deferment the applicant was concerned that Committee had not got the full facts regarding a change in circumstances since the application was originally submitted. It has therefore provided a support statement explaining that a new contract has been awarded and more than 30 jobs will be created. Also that the existing pond is not a natural pond but was created by the estate operator for general amenity purposes and only has a piped water supply.
7. The statement attached as an appendix to this report and its summary set out below.

Summary

- *FFL are a major manufacturing employer, established at Thornaby for 18 years and employing over 100 staff.*
- *FFL have committed multi-£million expenditure to creation at Thornaby of what is now one of the UK's best furniture factories.*
- *FFL have recently secured a £5-10m contract to manufacture a new range of products for MFI Retail. This contract will secure UK production (at Thornaby) which if not supported will be lost to overseas competition.*
- *The new contract cannot be supported without the proposed building extension, which is the subject of planning application no: 05/1561/REV.*
- *The planning application is for a warehouse extension, which in turn will permit expansion and reconfiguration of production facilities within the existing FFL factory.*
- *The proposed extension will engender 8 new jobs on the application site and a total of 30+ new jobs on the combined existing and application sites, together with security for the FFL Thornaby plant and its local suppliers going forward.*
- *The proposed extension is on land adjoining the existing factory.*
- *The extension site is within an established industrial estate, is not contentious in building terms and is in keeping with all existing and adjoining development on the estate.*
- *The proposed extension has been designed in full consultation with, and with the unqualified support of, One Northeast as estate owners.*
- *The application site presently accommodates a pond.*
- *The existing pond is not a natural pond but was voluntarily constructed by One Northeast who provide a water supply from the estate.*
- *Determination of the planning application has already been deferred by requirements to undertake wildlife surveys, these having concluded within strict constraints laid down by English Nature that no protected species are affected.*
- *Despite the ability of One Northeast to remove the pond at their discretion, and the fact that their own surveys indicate very infrequent public access, FFL have voluntarily submitted within their planning application full proposals to resite the pond to an immediately adjacent and equally visible and accessible location (diagonally opposite across Sadler Forster Way).*
- *It is an inevitable consequence that the refusal of planning consent will result in the loss to FFL of a £5-10m order and thereby the loss of 30+ new jobs at Thornaby with implications on future viability of the plant.*
- *Conversely, the grant of planning consent will ensure the creation of new jobs and maintain the security of the FFL factory and its local suppliers, without any detrimental affect upon the estate given the binding commitment (through planning conditionality) of FFL and One Northeast to resite the existing pond.*

- *FFL Thornaby has survived in a highly competitive UK market, while other Flat Pack Manufacturers have closed, and this is directly attributable to good business practice, and the local people employed; they and the company deserve this opportunity to further develop the business, enabling FFL to strengthen their position and to continue to compete with Imports.*
- *Additional attachment: The MFI Head Office statement of intent, to place the assembled kitchen business with FFL.*

PUBLICITY

8. Neighbouring land users have been notified individually, the consultation period expired on the 21.06.2005. Objectors were further re-consulted on the consultation response from English nature; the objections have been raised from the following addresses: -

C/O The Stanland Group, Sadler Forster Way
 Unit 63G Lord Avenue
 Maggie.taylor@renoir-shoes.co.uk
 16 Orchard Road, Thornaby
 7 Wolsingham Drive, Middlesbrough
 1 Spital Gate, Yarm
 Ashbank House, Sadler Forster Way
 2 Barkston Close, Wolviston
 25 Braemar Road, Billingham
 41 Barford Close, Norton
 35 Athol Street, Middlesbrough

In addition 4 separate petitions have been submitted.

The objections received are summarised as issues, set out below and addressed within the main report: -

Loss of the pond and amenity
 Inappropriate location of factory, should use previously developed land or vacant plots
 Loss of wildlife and protected species
 Loss of light

CONSULTATIONS

Natural England (Summarised)

9. Based on the information provided Natural England advises that the above proposal is unlikely to have an adverse affect in respect of species protected by law.
 However it is recommended that a condition be attached to any planning application requiring the applicant to submit and adhere to a scheme of working which will eliminate and risk of signal crayfish escaping the vicinity of the development.

Environmental Health Unit

10. I have no objections to this application

NEDL

11. No Objections

Northern Gas Networks

12. No Objections

Northumbrian water

13. New discharges of foul and surface water should be on separate systems surface water should be prevented from entering public surface water or combined sewers

Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

14. The Wildlife Trust Objects to this application as it will result in the damage to habitat features, which may support great crested newts

Urban Design Team (landscape)

15. I withdraw my objection to this application. This is based upon: - The ecological study prepared by INCA confirming that no species of ecological importance was found in the water body; no planting will have to be removed to facilitate the reconstruction of the pond on adjacent land and the full relocation proposals for the water body are to be prepared.

A landscape condition will have to be placed on any consent.

Urban Design Team (engineers)

16. No objections providing 10no. covered and secure cycle parking spaces are required

PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

17. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the relevant Development Plans is the adopted Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan

Policy GP1

Proposals for development will be assessed in relation to the policies of the Cleveland Structure Plan and the following criteria as appropriate:

- (i) The external appearance of the development and its relationship with the surrounding area;
- (ii) The effect on the amenities of the occupiers of nearby properties;
- (iii) The provision of satisfactory access and parking arrangements;
- (iv) The contribution of existing trees and landscape features;

- (v) The need for a high standard of landscaping;
- (vi) The desire to reduce opportunities for crime;
- (vii) The intention to make development as accessible as possible to everyone;
- (viii) The quality, character and sensitivity of existing landscapes and buildings;
- (ix) The effect upon wildlife habitats;
- (x) The effect upon the public rights of way network

Policy TR15

The design of highways required in connection with new development and changes of use will provide for all the traffic generated by the development, while the provision of off-street parking will normally be required to accord with the standards set out in the Stockton on Tees Borough Council Design Guide and Specification, Edition No 1.

Policy IN15

Detailed proposals for industrial development will be assessed accordingly to policy GP1 and also should provide screening to any outside storage.

Policy IN1

Land is allocated for business and general business uses (classes B1 and B2) at the Following Locations:

- b) Teesside Industrial Estate, Thornaby

18. In addition: Supplementary Planning Document 3 – Parking Provision for new development, Planning Circular 06/05 Biodiversity and geological Conservation – statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system and PPG9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation are considered relevant to this application.

MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of development

19. The proposed site is located within the defined limits of development, however the land is unallocated as set out in the adopted 1997 Local Plan. Policy IN1 identifies adjacent undeveloped land for industrial uses. Storage and distribution are prevalent within the estate.
20. Although the land is unallocated it is considered that the principle of storage use is acceptable in a mixed industrial and business area, in land use terms, and therefore the principle of development is acceptable providing the criteria set out in policy GP1 are met.

Character of the surrounding area.

21. The surrounding area is characterised by large industrial, storage and business units, to the north and east of the site. Landscaping lies to the south and east of the site, which were undertaken in the original

development of the estate. The landscaping which currently occupy the site contributes to the visual amenity of the surrounding area.

22. The proposed erection of the building will involve the removal of a pond and associated landscaping which formed one of the reasons for refusal in the previous application. To address this the applicant proposes to relocate the pond on an adjacent piece of land, although this does not form part of the application, details have been submitted on the design and location of the replacement pond, and a Grampian style condition is recommended to ensure this is achieved.
23. As further justification, the applicant points out the job creation potential, which may have not been fully understood. It is clear that circumstances have changed since the development was first proposed and that the application has a positive economic benefit in that 30 plus jobs would be created. Nevertheless, the impact on local amenity is a material consideration.
24. A number of objections have been received from local businesses over the loss of the pond and the landscaping area however after consulting the council's Landscape Architects and Natural England it is considered, on balance that the relocation of the pond adjacent the site would not significantly impact on the visual amenity of the area or impact on protected species. It is also considered that the relocated pond will be in a more prominent location within the estate than the original and also tie into an existing walkway in a landscaping belt, which should provide a more beneficial feature for the estate. The ecological aspect of the loss of the pond is detailed below
25. The site currently provides amenity space for the employees of surrounding businesses, a number of objections have been raised regarding the loss of this space. While it is appreciated that this area is valuable, it is considered that the overall level of landscaping and open space provided within Teesside Industrial is sufficient and a significant loss of amenity will not arise.
26. The site has not been identified in the recent open space audit or identified on the Local Plan proposals map and therefore is not subject to policy EN15 which relates to the protection of Urban Open Space.

The effect upon Wildlife life Habitats

27. The applicant has undertaken an amphibian assessment survey as requested by Natural England to test for the possible presence of Great Crested Newts. Based on the revised comments received from Natural England it is considered that there will be no impact on protected species, which could be present within the pond and surrounding area.
28. As stated above a condition will be detailed to ensure that the replacement pond has been constructed before any development commences. Any remaining pond life can therefore be transferred to the new pond to minimise any loss. It should be noted that Natural England

has requested a condition to identify a scheme of work to prevent any signal crayfish escaping from the vicinity of the development.

29. As requested a further 10 days consultation period was given to objectors to review comments made by Natural England over the possible presence of protected species. An objection letter was submitted by Planning Consultants England and Lyle on behalf of the Stanland Group questioning the quality and reliability of the survey undertaken by the applicant. However after further re-consultation with Natural England (The relevant body as set out in Circular 06/05 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system) it is considered that the survey was sufficient to detect Great Crested Newts.

Appearance of the development

30. It is considered that the appearance of the building will match that of surrounding units and proposed landscaping will screen the development to Sadler Forster Way and to Stockwell Avenue (full details of this landscaping will be required by condition). Overall it is considered that the development will have a minimal impact on the character of the area.

Amenity of neighbouring land users

31. A separation distance of 25m will be achieved from the proposed building and the adjacent property, no.1 Sadler Forster Way. Whilst a number of windows are present in this elevation, which supply light to office space it is considered due the separation distance and in view of the limited height of the buildings, a significant overbearing impact on adjacent buildings will not arise.
32. Overall it is considered that due to the nature of adjacent land uses, the erection of an additional storage building and car parking would have a minimal impact on the amenity of neighbouring land users. It is also considered that any increased levels of traffic will have a minimal impact on the amenity of neighbouring land users due to the nature of the site and existing uses.

Access and Parking

33. Supplementary Planning Document no.3 identifies that 40 spaces should be provided for a development of this nature. However the Head of Technical Services has no objection to 26 spaces being provided, due to the proposed use of the building, the number of additional employees and the existing parking provision. A condition will be attached to the application to ensure that 10 secure cycle parking spaces are provided as set out in SPD 3 and policy TR15.

Conclusion

34. The proposed development has been considered against the policies and documents identified above. It is considered that the scheme accords with these policies as the proposal is in keeping with the character of the area,

does not lead to a loss of privacy or amenity for neighbouring land users or impact on highway safety with the attached conditions. It has significant job creation potential. Whilst the loss of the pond/amenity is regrettable, it has been artificially created and is to be replaced. There are no material planning considerations, which indicate that a decision should be otherwise and therefore the application is recommended for approval.

Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services

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Financial Implications

As report.

Environmental Implications

As Report

Community Safety Implications

N/A

Human Rights Implications

The provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights 1950 have been taken into account in the preparation of this report.

Background Papers

Adopted Stockton-on-Tees Adopted Local Plan (June 1997)

04/1359/FUL

Circular 06/05 Biodiversity and geological Conservation – statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system

Ward Stainsby Hill

Ward Councillors Councillor E Craggs
Councillor S Walmsley

STATEMENT

In Support of

PLANNING APPLICATION
NO: 05/1561/REV

For the Construction of a

WAREHOUSE EXTENSION

On land at the corner of

STOCKWELL AVENUE AND SADLER FORSTER WAY
TEESSIDE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
THORNABY

To service new manufacturing capacity at

FURNITURE FACTORY LTD
BT50/12
TEESSIDE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
THORNABY

Background

This Statement is presented by the Furniture Factory Ltd in support of planning application number 05/1561/REV.

Furniture Factory Ltd (FFL) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Meristem Furniture Group which operates major manufacturing plants throughout the UK and overseas. In Thornaby the company has been established on the Teesside Industrial Estate since 1988, trading as RTA Furniture, and the company provides substantial local employment through the production of ready-to-assemble flat-pack furniture.

The subject planning application was submitted by Arrun Construction on behalf of the Group's holding company Orblux Ltd, and its purpose is to provide additional warehousing floorspace adjacent to and interconnecting with the existing factory. This in turn will facilitate the expansion of production facilities and thereby the creation of some 30+ new jobs.

Without the proposed warehouse the company will be unable to service a major new contract from Thornaby, which would then be expected to be lost to overseas competition, with considerable implications for the future security of the Thornaby plant. Other than on the subject site, the company does not have any viable alternative to provide the required facilities at the Thornaby plant within the necessary timeframe.

History

The Thornaby Factory

The existing Furniture Factory Ltd manufacturing complex at Thornaby comprises some 8,128 m² (87,600 sq ft) of factory, warehouse and ancillary offices, fronting Dukesway and Stockwell Avenue and adjoining the subject (planning application) site which fronts Stockwell Avenue and Sadler Forster Way.

The configuration of the site breaks down into three readily identifiable sections, these being the former Appleyards factory acquired in 1988; the adjoining site developed in the early 1990s to

approximately double the size of the premises; and the “pond” site which FFL have always understood would provide for the further expansion of the plant - an understanding shared with One Northeast, the Estate owners, with whom FFL have worked very closely throughout the entire period of operation and development of the Thornaby facility.

Since the Thornaby plant was established, FFL have committed very substantial investment expenditure in the form of new building construction, existing building improvements, and the installation of modern production equipment. Over the past eight years, the company has doubled production from this location - a great compliment to the local people employed - and has spent £5m on new equipment alone. It is estimated that, accounting for investment expenditure together with wages, materials and additional work to local suppliers, the plant can account for some £50m injected into the local economy over the 19 years that it has been operational.

The result of this history of commitment to Thornaby is that FFL currently employ some 100 staff and are a crucial support to many more local jobs through their numerous supply contracts.

The Subject Site

The site of the current planning application is located immediately adjacent to the FFL factory and is presently undeveloped. Within the site there is an artificial pond and a pathway, which it should be noted is not designated as a public right of way.

The pond did not exist before 1987, when it was constructed entirely of their own volition by English Estates, predecessor of One Northeast, as part of a programme of general estate improvements and landscaping.

The pond is not naturally fed but subsists by virtue of a piped water supply provided by One Northeast from their own infrastructure within the estate.

As substantiated by meticulous survey within the constraints required by English Nature, the pond does not provide a habitat for any protected species. It has through most of the period of FFL’s adjacent

occupation, been relatively unkempt and in fact gave rise to a number of complaints regarding vandalism and littering.

Only since the current planning application was submitted, and coincidental with re-occupation of the nearby former Sanyo premises, which had been vacant for a long period, was the pond considerably tidied and improved by One Northeast to the standard now pertaining. It is worthy of note that the present occupiers of the former Sanyo premises were very clearly made aware by OneNortheast at the outset that the “pond” site was earmarked for the proposed FFL extension.

Despite the fact that there is no known obligation for OneNortheast to maintain the facility (and in fact it could presumably at their discretion be removed at any time), FFL as a responsible local employer chose to incorporate into the subject planning application proposals to provide a replacement pond facility. This is intended to be located directly opposite on the other side of Sadler Forster Way. It would therefore be visible from and literally across the road from the existing pond. The funding of this relocation, and associated landscaping, has voluntarily been arranged by FFL, working throughout in close consultation with OneNortheast who would undertake the actual excavation and construction works as part of the proposed extension project.

Proposal

The subject planning application is for the construction of a detached warehouse building of approx. 3,700 m² (40,000 sq ft).

The proposed new building would not only provide the stockholding accommodation necessary to expand the overall capacity of the FFL Thornaby site, but would also facilitate the reconfiguration of existing manufacturing capacity within the original buildings necessary to accommodate substantial new business as referred to below. It is the latter aspect, which primarily facilitates the new job opportunities, which this project engenders. This is referred to in more detail within the project Justification outlined overleaf.

The layout, configuration and appearance of the proposed new building follows extensive consultation with planning officers and OneNortheast, and as a result is understood not to be contentious.

In addition to compliance with all necessary statutory or other requirements, as part of a very thorough review FFL have reached agreement with OneNortheast to provide additional car parking facilities on land to the north of the existing factory. This contingency measure will ensure that should there be any additional car parking requirements arising from the creation of new jobs within the existing factory, these can be accommodated. Sufficient car parking for the proposed extension and the jobs thereby created on the “pond” site are already designed in, as is properly configured hgv access and hardstanding.

FFL wish to reiterate in the clearest possible terms that the overall proposal voluntarily includes the replacement in very close proximity of the existing pond, regardless of the ability of the estate owners to remove the pond.

Justification

The overall justification for the proposed FFL extension is concise, in that it creates new employment within the application site, even more substantial new employment within the existing factory, and secures the future of the entire FFL Thornaby operation going forward.

The number of new jobs identified on the planning application is 8 - a modest figure but only because it is necessary for submission purposes to refer to the employment levels within the application site, on which requirements for building services, facilities and car parking are consequential.

The total number of new jobs directly attributable to the development is however 30+, by virtue of the resultant manufacturing expansion across the entire (existing and extension) site. This expansion is conditional upon the ability of FFL to provide sufficient floorspace to service a major new order as outlined below - in short, without the extension this order cannot be serviced and there will be no expansion, no job creation, and future production at Thornaby will be severely jeopardised.

The new order which FFL have recently secured is from MFI Retail, and has a minimum value of £5m and potentially projected £10m consisting of 330,000 cabinets/year. It is a new venture for FFL, in that it will produce assembled kitchen unit carcasses rather than flat-pack

components. Of necessity this requires not only increased production capacity but also a large stockholding facility for bulky product, hence the proposed extension.

Furniture manufacture within the UK faces intense and increasing competition from overseas, and it is a tribute to the efficiency and stability of the Thornaby factory that FFL have been able to secure substantial new business. It is in fact the past investment in and resultant success of RTA at Thornaby as outlined in the History above, coupled with its distribution advantage due to proximity to product destination, which makes it an economic and practical “best fit” for the new contract. It is also clear from analysis that relocation within one of FFL’s other UK plants would result in withdrawal of this new business - a further £15m contract has already been lost to overseas competition.

Justification for the proposed extension is not however limited to overriding production and employment criteria. The subject site is on an established industrial estate which has a clear and established zoning for the proposed use, and the proposed building is neither contentious nor in any way a departure from the norm of all adjoining development. Nevertheless, FFL have undertaken a very thorough review in order to ensure that development is responsibly undertaken, and in particular that the existing pond is to be replaced nearby rather than be simply lost to the estate. It is also understood that a larger scheme of new estate landscaping and water features is being prepared by OneNortheast.

Summary

- FFL are a major manufacturing employer, established at Thornaby for 18 years and employing over 100 staff.
- FFL have committed multi-£million expenditure to creation at Thornaby of what is now one of the UK’s best furniture factories.
- FFL have recently secured a £5-10m contract to manufacture a new range of products for MFI Retail. This contract will secure UK production (at Thornaby) which if not supported will be lost to overseas competition.
- The new contract cannot be supported without the proposed building extension, which is the subject of planning application no: 05/1561/REV.

- The planning application is for a warehouse extension, which in turn will permit expansion and reconfiguration of production facilities within the existing FFL factory.
- The proposed extension will engender 8 new jobs on the application site and a total of 30+ new jobs on the combined existing and application sites, together with security for the FFL Thornaby plant and its local suppliers going forward.
- The proposed extension is on land adjoining the existing factory.
- The extension site is within an established industrial estate, is not contentious in building terms and is in keeping with all existing and adjoining development on the estate.
- The proposed extension has been designed in full consultation with, and with the unqualified support of, OneNortheast as estate owners.
- The application site presently accommodates a pond.
- The existing pond is not a natural pond but was voluntarily constructed by OneNortheast who provide a water supply from the estate.
- Determination of the planning application has already been deferred by requirements to undertake wildlife surveys, these having concluded within strict constraints laid down by English Nature that no protected species are affected.
- Despite the ability of OneNortheast to remove the pond at their discretion, and the fact that their own surveys indicate very infrequent public access, FFL have voluntarily submitted within their planning application full proposals to resite the pond to an immediately adjacent and equally visible and accessible location (diagonally opposite across Sadler Forster Way).
- It is an inevitable consequence that the refusal of planning consent will result in the loss to FFL of a £5-10m order and thereby the loss of 30+ new jobs at Thornaby with implications on future viability of the plant.
- Conversely, the grant of planning consent will ensure the creation of new jobs and maintain the security of the FFL factory and it's local suppliers, without any detrimental affect upon the estate given the binding commitment

(through planning conditionality) of FFL and OneNortheast to resite the existing pond.

- FFL Thornaby has survived in a highly competitive UK market, while other Flat Pack Manufacturers have closed, and this is directly attributable to good business practice, and the local people employed; they and the company deserve this opportunity to further develop the business, enabling FFL to strengthen their position and to continue to compete with Imports.
- Additional attachment: The MFI Head Office statement of intent, to place the assembled kitchen business with FFL.

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