

Our Ref SGB/AB

Mr G Archer  
Major Projects Officer  
Stockton on Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton on Tees  
TS18 1LD

16<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Dear Greg

**Re: Allens West, 11/2842/EIS**

I refer to the recent decision by Stockton Planning Committee to defer consideration of the above application. The purpose of this letter is to try to address the concerns expressed by Members in their recent consideration of this application.

I understand that the reasons for the deferral were as follows:-

1. Loss of employment land;
2. Impact of the proposals on the highway network;
3. Impact on local schools;
4. Concern over the form and nature of the care home;
5. Concerns over policing.

I deal with each of these issues in turn:-

**Loss of Employment Land**

The site, as it presently exists, is not a viable employment site. The businesses that remain on site are, in effect, being subsidised by the administrators on a temporary basis and are not paying a full market rent. This cannot be sustained.

Evidence has been put to the Council relating to the costs of upgrading the site to modern and acceptable standards. The cost of doing this is estimated to be around £7.8m, excluding asbestos treatment. An approximate cost of £10,000,000 is considered reasonable for the totality of the works required to the estate. These figures have been examined by officers and accepted as realistic. The cost of the works far exceeds the realistic income from the site and no financial lending body would lend that amount of money on this site. This position is confirmed by the Administrator and again has not been challenged. This site is unviable and there is no realistic prospect of it being turned into a viable proposition.

Despite the statements made by one of the existing tenants, the accommodation on the site is not unique or of such a special character that alternative accommodation is not available elsewhere in

the Tees Valley. There is ample alternative accommodation available and any genuine sustainable business will be able to relocate to alternative accommodation. It is understood that the regeneration section of the Council can confirm this point.

Moreover, I can confirm that the developer is committed to working with any business that believes it has a positive future and wishes to stay in the area in helping find alternative accommodation.

### **Impact of the Proposals on the Highway Network**

Any development of this size and nature will inevitably have an impact upon the local highway network and it would be disingenuous to suggest otherwise. Equally, it is acknowledged that Yarm is a town that has substantial issues associated with the through movement of people and goods.

The impacts of this scheme have been the subject of thorough and robust assessment by four sets of highway engineers – our own consultants, the Council's own engineers, the consultants appointed by the Highways Agency as well as the Highways Agency itself. The position that has been arrived at is that the impact of the development can be mitigated to an acceptable level by the package of measures set out in the report. There is a substantial financial commitment to helping improve the local road network, improve the railway station and improve bus connectivity. In combination these measures will work to reduce the traffic impacts to an acceptable level. This is not to say that we are claiming there will be no impacts.

It must be remembered that there is already a scheme for 500 dwellings + HGV movements from retained industrial uses as a base line. This current application is, in effect, exchanging 345 dwellings for all the HGV movement to/from the site. The removal of HGV traffic from Yarm should be a considerable improvement over the current situation.

Furthermore, refusal of this application will still result in the same levels of traffic coming onto the network. Stockton will still have to accommodate the traffic from this number of dwellings onto the network and the location may not be of the Council's choosing. For example, it is understood that an alternative housing scheme to the west of Yarm is being promoted.

It is our considered view that the current proposals will have a limited impact upon the network and this view is shared by all the informed expert scrutiny that has been brought to bear on this application.

### **Impact on Local Schools**

The impact of the development on the local schools has been carefully considered and assessed by the local highway authority. The need to fully fund any necessary extensions to local schools is of course accepted. This principle has already been accepted by Members of the Planning Committee when they approved 500 dwellings on the site just a few years ago. The current scheme simply continues this principle forward and increases the proportion of funding.

The LEA has said that they do not want or need a school on the site and the contribution that has been agreed is based upon funding formulae that the Council has already used on many previous occasions.

We are fully committed to making sure that this scheme does not pose any unacceptable burden on local schools and believe that the sum of money offered is sufficient to make all necessary improvements.

### **Concern over the Form and Nature of the Care Home**

The applicants are well aware of the increasing pressures on accommodating the elderly as our population ages. There is a well recognised 'demographic time bomb' affecting all of society as we live longer. The proposed care home was to be built in the later phases of the development and it is unlikely that it would be built within the next 5 years and possibly not until after 10 years. It is likely that needs at that time will be different to the needs we face now.

Both a care home and an extra care home lie within the same Use Class and in planning terms are treated as the same type of development. We appreciate the references that have been made to the award winning Aspen Garden development and understand from further discussions with the Council special housing needs advisors that at the present time this is where the greatest current needs exist. We are therefore pleased to advise that we would propose to substitute an extra care facility in lieu of the care facility currently indicated on the master plan. The details of such a facility would be the subject of further discussions with the Planning Authority as part of any reserved matters submission.

### **Concerns over Policing**

Cleveland Police were consulted on the development and have **not** objected to the scheme. They have however offered advice on helping to ensure that the detailed layout and final design acknowledges 'Secured by Design' principles. Whilst we are some way from detailed design for the site as a whole, we are happy to confirm our support for working with the Architectural Liaison Officer as the scheme progresses. As Members will know, the principles of Secured by Design are embedded within the Code for Sustainable Homes against which the residential parts of the scheme will be assessed.

In terms of resources, Members will appreciate the operational policing matters are not material considerations and should play no part in the decision making process. However, Members may be interested to know that assuming an average Band C property range, the development would, at today's levies, contribute an additional **£146,370** annually to the Police Authority. There has been no suggestion from the Police that this sum will not be sufficient to address the proper policing needs associated with the development.

In addition to the above concerns, we would wish to draw member's attention to the following issues:-

### **Local Labour Agreement (LLA)**

Members also discussed the possibility of a local labour agreement relating to the development. The supporting EIA at para 17.7.20 makes it clear that the developers are happy to enter into a LLA via the proposed S106 agreement. It is clear that the construction of this development should deliver significant numbers of construction jobs. Based on current estimates, the number of direct

jobs created should exceed 3,000 over the life of the development. For many workers this will be equivalent to a job for life.

### **Housing Distribution**

The Council are shortly to consider how to accommodate their housing shortfall of around 3,000 homes over the Local Plan period. There is an assumption that this site, as the only strategic deliverable brownfield site, will help with meeting identified needs. If Members reject this site, consideration will have to be given to where else the additional homes might go. It is likely that an additional site of similar size to Allens West will have to be found, in addition to the 3,000 or so homes already being looked at. This will put significant pressure on other less sustainable Greenfield areas.

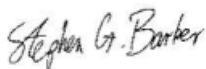
Moreover, the choice of just how and where to allocate such sites might no longer fall to the Council. Where LPA's are in recognised deficit with their allocations, the new National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that local preferences should be set aside in favour of simply addressing the shortfall. This could result in permission being granted at appeal for other less favourable sites.

### **Overall Viability**

Some objectors have suggested that the previous scheme for 500 homes and employment uses should be resurrected and go forward. This is quite simply not a viable situation. Not only does the scheme have to accommodate all the financial contributions sought by the Council previously but it also requires the site's purchaser to plough around £10million into the employment side of the site.

The net effect of these two financial burdens is to render the scheme wholly incapable of implementation.

Yours sincerely



**Steve Barker BSc (Hons) MRTPI DMS**  
**Managing Director**  
**Prism Planning**