

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 21<sup>st</sup> JULY 2008**

### **REPORT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MANAGER**

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### **SNETTERTON: PROPOSED BUSINESS PARK & ALTERATIONS TO MOTOR RACING CIRCUIT, HARLING ROAD**

**Applicant: MOTORSPORT VISION LIMITED**

**Reference: 3PL/2008/0600/0**

**Summary** – This report concerns a planning application a new business park and alterations to the existing motor racing circuit at Snetterton. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report concerns a hybrid planning permission for development at the Snetterton Motor Racing Circuit. Full permission is sought for alterations to the existing track layout. These alterations include a new infield loop and alterations to two corners at the western end of the circuit. Outline planning permission is sought for a new business park that would include a 50 bedroom hotel, conference centre (1,950m<sup>2</sup>), retail showrooms (10,500m<sup>2</sup>), offices (2,050m<sup>2</sup>), light industrial/engineering units (8,100m<sup>2</sup>), racing team units (6,070m<sup>2</sup>) and a racing school (1,200m<sup>2</sup>).

The application is supported by a number of technical reports, including a Design & Access Statement, Flood Risk Assessment, Transport Assessment, Noise Assessment, Sustainability Report, Ecological Assessment, Reptile Survey and a Contamination Desk Study Report.

The application site is located to the south of the A11 Snetterton Interchange and forms part of the established Snetterton Heath employment area. The site of the business park extends to 12.5 hectares and comprises mainly undeveloped grassland. The site is adjoined by the Sunday Market, the Motor Racing Circuit and other industrial/warehousing uses.

#### **2. KEY DECISION**

This is not a key decision.

#### **3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

The following Council priorities are relevant to this report:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well planned place to live and work

#### **4. CONSULTATIONS**

Snetterton Parish Council has raised no objection to the application. Comments have been made about the mix of proposed uses, traffic generation and employment creation.

Quidenham Parish Council has raised no objection to the application. Comments have been made about noise, traffic and power supply issues.

The Highway Authority has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions requiring off-site highway improvements and the implementation of travel plan initiatives.

The Highways Agency has requested additional information in relation to traffic generation and sustainable transport options. Further comments are awaited in response to the additional information provided by the applicant.

The Environment Agency has raised no objection subject to conditions relating to drainage, pollution control, landscape management and wildlife protection.

Natural England has requested information about wildlife mitigation proposals.

Comments are awaited from the East of England Regional Assembly.

The Council's Environmental Health Officer has requested that further information in respect of noise be provided.

At the time of writing, one letter of objection had been received from a local resident, raising concerns about noise problems associated with the racing circuit.

Prior to the submission of the application, consultation with local residents was undertaken by the applicant through a series of public meetings and exhibitions.

## **5. POLICY**

Relevant national planning policies are set out in PPS 1 *Delivering Sustainable Development*, PPS 6 *Planning for Town Centres*, PPS 7 *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, PPS 9 *Biodiversity & Geological Conservation*, PPG 4 *Industrial, commercial development and small firms*, PPG 13 *Transport*, and PPG 24 *Planning and Noise*.

At a regional level, the recently adopted East of England Plan (RSS) sets an employment growth target to 2021 for Breckland of 6,000 new jobs. Thetford and Norwich are identified as key centres for change, and the importance of the motor sport cluster focussed on Hethel is acknowledged.

Saved Local Plan Policy ECO.2 is directly relevant to the proposed development. Policy ECO.2 allocates land at Snetterton Heath for B1 light industrial, B2 business and B8 storage/distribution uses subject to criteria relating to landscape impact, access and traffic. The application site falls within the Snetterton Heath Employment Area, as defined in the Local Plan. Emerging policy in the draft Core Strategy identifies Snetterton as a strategic location for employment development.

## **6. ASSESSMENT**

The principal issues raised by the application concern: i) the extent to which the proposals would accord with relevant local and national planning policy, ii) noise, iii) traffic generation, and iv) the likely impact of the development on the rural landscape and local ecology.

### **Policy**

The proposed development would be generally consistent with RSS, saved Local Plan and emerging LDF policies relating to employment development at Snetterton Heath. The development would represent a significant investment in economic development in the area, and would create an estimated 500 new jobs. The

application site is the last significant area of underdeveloped land with the current employment allocation.

The proposed light industrial/engineering units, offices, motor racing team bases and racing school would accord with saved Local Plan Policy ECO.2, which allocates land at Snetterton for such business uses. The proposed hotel/conference centre and retail showrooms fall outside the remit of Policy ECO.2 and need to be considered in the context of national planning policy, principally as set out in PPS 6. National policy requires justification to be provided where 'town centre' uses, like hotels and retailing, are proposed outside established centres.

In support of the proposed hotel reference is made to the need for additional hotel accommodation in the locality, particularly for those attending race meetings at the adjacent circuit. It is considered that the proposed hotel would better meet this specific need than a similar facility located in any nearby centre, and would complement the enhanced circuit facilities and business park. Accordingly it is considered that the proposal is justified on the grounds of need and that the requirements of policy would be met.

The proposed retail showrooms are intended to be occupied by a range of specialist car and motorcycle dealerships from the high performance and motor sport related sectors. The intention is to offer an experience not available elsewhere in the UK by concentrating such uses in one place and by providing opportunities for potential customers to test drive vehicles on the adjacent motor racing circuit. Whilst retailing in this location would normally conflict with planning policy, given the specialist nature of the proposal and the synergy with the motor racing circuit and associated racing school and advanced engineering units, it is considered that a case can be made for the proposed showrooms, provided that adequate controls can be attached to the planning permission to regulate their use. Discussions with the applicant on this last point are on-going.

### **Noise**

Noise from racing and testing activities at Snetterton Circuit have given rise to significant local concerns in recent times. In response to a Noise Abatement Notice served by the Council in 2007, a Best Practical Means (BPM) statement was drawn up in order to control noise emissions to reasonable levels. This statement includes a number of controls on the hours and frequency of activities involving unsilenced vehicles and requires liaison with local residents. A further Abatement Notice served in January 2008 requires adherence to the BPM statement and the construction of noise bund at the eastern end of the circuit (for which planning permission was granted in May). Following further discussions with Environmental Health Officers, a draft Noise Management Plan for the Circuit has been produced by the applicant. The Plan proposes various measures to control noise from the Circuit.

A Noise Assessment submitted in support of the planning application considers the likely impact of the proposed circuit alterations on noise. The report concludes that, provided the current limit on the number of vehicles permitted to use the circuit at any one time is maintained, the proposals would not result in additional disturbance to local residents and may result in some beneficial effects. Following consultation with Environmental Health Officers, additional information about anticipated noise emissions has been requested. At the time of writing, this information was still awaited.

### **Highway safety**

Access to the proposed development would be gained off the A11 via the Snetterton Interchange and the Harling Road. A new roundabout access into the site is proposed onto Harling Road. The Transport Assessment submitted in support of the application concludes that the surrounding road network is adequate to cater for the traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development. Due to the relatively remote location of the site, opportunities for travel other by car are limited. However, it is considered that the potential for sustainable transport options should be explored further through the preparation of travel plans for the various elements of the proposal. Norfolk County Council, as local highway authority, has raised no objection to the application subject to conditions requiring the proposed junction improvements and the preparation/implementation of travel plans. Further comments are awaited from the Highways Agency.

### **Landscape impact/local ecology**

The application site, which is located within a gently undulating rural landscape, has many of the characteristics associated with former airfields, being flat, open and rather windswept. The site is not generally prominent in long or medium distance views, and it is not anticipated that the proposed development will have a significant visual impact on the wider landscape. Much of the development would be low and linear in form, echoing the character of the landscape, with only the hotel rising above two storeys to create a landmark building close to the site entrance. New landscaping around the perimeter of the site would further help to assimilate the development into its landscape setting. Although only in outline form the application is supported by indicative designs which demonstrate a commitment to high quality design.

Wildlife surveys undertaken have identified a population of common lizards within part of the area proposed for commercial developments. In order to mitigate the impact of the development it is proposed to translocate the lizard population to another part of the site which would be managed for its wildlife value. In response to concerns raised by the Environment Agency, additional information has been submitted to elaborate the proposed mitigation measures and to identify opportunities for further enhancement of biodiversity.

### **Other issues**

Information submitted in support of the application identifies a number of opportunities to incorporate sustainable construction measures, including on-site renewables, passive solar design, green building materials and sustainable drainage options. For developments of this sort, Policy ENG.1 of the East of England Plan requires 10 per cent of energy needs to be met on site. Discussions are on-going to establish how the applicant's stated aspirations may be translated into measurable environmental performance standards, such as BREEAM ratings.

### **Conclusions**

The proposed development would represent a significant investment into the local economy and would be consistent with the general policy objective of promoting Snetterton as a strategic location for employment growth. The proposed business park would not result in any material harm to the character of the area or to local amenity. Adequate measures can be incorporated into the development to mitigate its likely impact on wildlife. Subject to further comments from the Highways Agency, it is considered that the development would be adequately served by the existing road network, whilst measures to improve the site entrance and to promote sustainable transport could be required by condition. The impact of noise from the existing motor racing circuit remains an issue of concern and further information is

currently awaited in order to enable the impact of the proposed business park and circuit alterations. It is currently anticipated that these matters are capable of satisfactory resolution subject to appropriate controls and restrictions being agreed.

#### **7. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions (to include matters relating to detailed design, noise, landscaping, wildlife mitigation, phasing, access/parking, travel plans, drainage, and sustainable construction).