

From: Stephen Brooker [stephen.brooker@walsingplan.co.uk]

Sent: 08 December 2010 09:56

To: Caroline Roche

Cc: John Hoad; Bob Duxbury

Subject: Land at Kraft, Southam Road, Banbury

Caroline, as promised we have got some additional information on Crown House, plus some further observations.

We remain hopeful that officers will wish to make a favourable recommendation to Committee on 6/1/11.

I note that your own policy section raised no objection to the proposal in their consultation response dated 13/9/10, if there were difficulties with the Sequential Test one would have expected this to be identified at that stage.

I take the chance to direct your attention to para 6.2 of the Practice Guide which accompanies PPS4 in relation to the sites that you appear to suggest are more suitable than the Kraft site, this sets out the intentions of Sequential approach:

1 **Encouraging use of most readily accessible locations**

- The Cultural Quarter site is more than 500m walk from the railway station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage, close to the bus station
- Crown House is more than 350m from the railway station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage, close to the bus station
- Bolton Road site is more than 500m from the railway station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage, over 350m to the bus station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage
- Kraft site is over 1500m from the railway station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage, over 1250m to the bus station therefore too far for most guests to walk with luggage

- However, once it is too far to walk it makes no real difference whether the distance is 500m or 1500m
- Accordingly, it is only proximity to the bus station for 2 of the sites that distinguish them from Kraft – it seems improbable that many Premier Inn guests will arrive by bus and this should therefore be of limited weight.

- By comparison, the hotel site identified in the Local Plan, now developed as Holiday Inn Express, is over 2km from either the railway or bus stations.

2 **Encouragement of linked trips to reinforce vitality & viability, improve competition and choice**

- Many of the restaurants, pubs etc that might be an attraction for overnight hotel guests and which can form a major part of an hotel contributing toward the vitality and viability of a town are based in Horsefair and North Bar.
- The distance from the Kraft site to the North Bar/Castle Street junction is only 50m more than the distance from the Cultural Quarter site – an immaterial difference comparing 550m to 600m as a walking distance.

A re-look at the Core Strategy from earlier this year shows the Bolton Road site intended as a retail led redevelopment and the Cultural Quarter as civic, arts and cultural uses together with supporting car parking. Neither mention or appear to have much scope for hotel proposals of any substance.

I also note the email exchange between yourself and David Marriott regarding the Bolton Road and Cultural Quart sites. I note that DM:

- Advises that the future of the Bolton Road site is not prejudiced by the proposal – I therefore assume that you will not wish to rely upon this site in defence of any refusal
- Professes no expertise in hotel development
- The comments re the Cultural Quarter site are hardly a ringing endorsement of your colleague's apparent belief that this is an alternative site to be given account in our Seq Test exercise, it is acknowledged only that some of the submitted schemes included hotel (- obviously then, others did not include hotel so there is no indication of whether an hotel will ever come forward), that plans for the site and surroundings will change (- bearing in mind that the Council did not have hotel as a preferred use for the site at the outset and do not identify this in the Core Strategy, there is therefore no indication that hotel will be acceptable in principle), an "increase in the possibility" of a hotel coming forward on site is not a strong basis for you to refuse our application and defend on appeal (going from 1% to 2% chance is an increase but that does not make it reasonably likely to happen), there is no mention of any support from an hotel operator for a scheme in the Cultural Quarter.
- Advises that the Cultural Quarter site may accommodate a "small" boutique or budget hotel (again, no suggestion that this is the case or that any operator is at all interested) – ie a very different type of proposal to the current application, those more experienced in the hotel sector recognize that there are very different markets, a small boutique hotel will attract different custom to the proposed Premier Inn.

It is set out in my Seq Test statement that Whitbread have developed in town centres and that some Premier Inn's have very little or even no on-site car parking, but that this is in generally larger towns or cities. Nonetheless we tested for small sites in Banbury that would have minimal parking.

However, you miss the point if you consider that Cultural Quarter & Crown House have been rejected simply because there is limited scope for parking:

- Crown House is not large enough to accommodate Whitbread's business model even without car parking unless you are willing to contemplate a very much taller building. It is estimated that the upper floors of the existing building might accommodate c60 hotel bedrooms - too small.
- In practice, the existing Crown House building is not viable for conversion, development costs for the site will be increased particularly as site and footprint are small enough to require multiple storeys, again affecting viability.
- Whitbread's instructed agent has made full enquiries about the Crown House site, it is not currently available though we are aware of previous ideas for a retail scheme with hotel above – however, those have come to nothing – perhaps emphasizing that the scheme was not viable.
- It is also understood that Crown House was previously an hotel – I do not know the circumstances of its closure but the poor location with no decent frontage and lack of prominence in a position between a petrol filling station and service yard would be very major detractors that certainly render the site unsuitable as far as Whitbread and likely most other hotel operators are concerned.
- There is every indication from DM that even if an hotel were to be accepted as part of a Cultural Quarter scheme it would only be “small”, hence outside of the Whitbread business model

PPS4 makes it plain that it is not up to a local planning authority to seek to revise an applicant's business model, the Whitbread business model for Banbury requires 100 bedrooms and a standalone restaurant.

I make the point again, the alternative sites suggested are not at all convincing, do not meet the PPS4 tests of availability, viability and suitability – the current proposal brings the certainty of investment and employment and a new facility – next year, 2011 – far better than the uncertainties and distant prospects of the suggested alternatives.

Regards
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