Addlestone Town Centre, Surrey

Purpose of the project

Nexus Planning had been commissioned to obtain planning permission produced the Environmental Statement and managed pre-application discussions with the Council, the preparation and submission of the planning application, and post submission discussions relevant to this development.

Description of the project

The development scheme comprised: Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 213 residential apartments (Class C3), hotel (Class C1), retail accommodation (Class A1 to A5), cinema, with associated plant, road infrastructure, open space and landscaping (“the Proposed Development”).

The application site covers an area of some 2.5 ha, comprising previously developed land within and adjacent to Addlestone town centre (“the Site”). Addlestone is a small town in Surrey, positioned just inside the M25 motorway. It has excellent transport links to central London and the wider south east of England, making it a popular place to live. The settlement area is surrounded by Green Belt, which places an enormous pressure on developable land to accommodate the many future needs of an enlarging population.

The development will deliver significant sustainability benefits to the Addlestone town centre and the wider area.

Key Issues

This study examines two aspects of the Environmental Impact Assessment (“EIA”) process relating to a large mixed use town centre redevelopment scheme. The first is how the Environmental Statement (“ES”) was appropriately focused to address only the most sensitive environmental issues (transport and air quality) on which the development could have a likely significant effect. The second is how the ES was utilised by the applicant and Council (as local planning authority and decision maker) in balancing the benefits and identified suitable mitigation for a number of interconnected and complex issues.
Lessons learnt

The Proposed Development, as an urban development project fell comfortably within Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (“the Regulations”) with likely significant environmental effects.

In pre-application discussions with the Council, it quickly became clear that the two most significant environmental issues in the local area related to closely linked air quality (the northern part of the Site lies within an Air Quality Management Area ("AQMA")) and traffic congestion issues.

Subsequently, a detailed Scoping Opinion was submitted; and taking account of widespread consultation, the Council confirmed that the ES need only address the twin matters of (i) traffic generation, routing, queues and changes to road junctions; and (ii) impacts on the AQMA in respect of existing and future occupants. In combination effects from other committed developments in the area were also identified.

The scoping process was a positive mechanism to ensure that where an ES is needed, it is focused and directed on issues that need further detailed consideration. This benefitted the applicant in time/cost reduction and the Council in not receiving volumes of marginal information.

Lessons learnt cont. -

Other relevant planning issues were addressed in standalone technical reports and a planning statement.

With the completion of the Transport Assessment ("TA") and Air Quality Assessment ("AQA") for the Proposed Development, the complex relationship between traffic generation, junction modeling (with a number of different improvement/mitigation options) and the resultant modeled levels of NO2 pollutants in the AQMA became clearer.

The ES was extremely useful in helping to understand the resultant air quality effects and weighing up different impacts/mitigation options. It enabled the design team to reach an optimum mitigation package.

A risk to the project was that the Highways Authority, Environmental Protection Officer and Energy/Sustainability Officer, would take entrenched positions. Through careful discussion, positions were understood and priorities attained. Utilising the analysis based on the ES, an agreed position was reached.

Where an ES is suitably focused on the critical issues of likely significant effect, it can be utilised as a positive negotiation tool to optimise mitigation measures in a complex urban environment.

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