
APPLICATION NO.	P08/E1401
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	16 January 2009
PARISH	HENLEY-ON-THAMES
WARD MEMBERS	Ms Roswitha Myer Mr Terry Buckett MBE
APPLICANT	Scottish and Southern Energy
SITE	Land to rear of 38 Reading Road, Henley-on-Thames
PROPOSAL	Change of use from land with buildings for parking and maintenance/repair of cars to land for the use of electricity undertakings. Replacement of fences with boundary walls, unification of boundary wall heights, erection of new switch house, formation of new transformer bunds & bases and installation of two new transformers
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	476108/182370
OFFICER	Mr P Brampton

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application is referred to the Planning Committee at the request of both ward members.
- 1.2 The application site is located to the rear of buildings that front onto Reading Road. It has previously been used as a garage for the repair and maintenance of vehicles, but the site currently lies vacant. There are two buildings on the site, a part single storey part two-storey building along the full width of the southern boundary and a two storey building on the western boundary.
- 1.3 The application site lays immediately adjacent to the main Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area. The site's access road approaches the site from the north and joins Reading Road between Nos. 6 and 8. Immediately adjacent to the application site is the existing electrical substation, with a second vacant garage on the northern portion of this area, which is also under the ownership of the applicant.
- 1.4 The application site is shown on the OS extract **attached** at Appendix One.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The applicants propose to change the use of the land from the existing vehicle repair use to land associated with electricity undertakings. The associated works involve the demolition of the existing buildings on the site to allow the introduction of a new electrical substation. As this site is outside the Conservation Area, this demolition work does not require any formal consent.
- 2.2 In removing the buildings, space is created within the site for the introduction of a new switch room and two new transformers. The switch room is a single storey building measuring approximately 13.9 metre wide, 5.75 metres deep and reaches a height of 4.3 metres. The two transformers occupy a footprint of 10 metres wide by 5.7 metres deep, with the various elements of the equipment reaching a maximum height of 5.1 metres. The applicant has indicated this equipment will eventually replace the adjacent existing substation, with the land to remain in use for electrical undertakings.

- 2.3 It is proposed to make good the existing boundary treatments after demolition works and to offer some uniformity between the application site and the existing substation. Along the southern elevation, where one of the buildings will be removed, the wall height will be reduced to 3.6 metres to match the existing, whilst a new wall to the same height will be built along part of the western elevation. The eastern boundary will consist of two new sections of wall at 3.6 and 2.5 metres in height, whilst the northern boundary will be defined by palisade fencing at a height of 3 metres.
- 2.4 The plans of the proposed development are **attached** as Appendix Two.
- 3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**
- 3.1 **Henley-on-Thames Town Council** – No strong views subject to neighbour comments
Henley-on-Thames Society – No comments
OCC Highways – No objections
Conservation Officer – Some concerns over brickwork to be used in boundary wall, no objections subject to conditions regarding materials
Environmental Health – Land Contamination Officer – No objections subject to standard condition regarding land contamination investigation prior to works commencing
Environmental Health – Noise Officer – No objections subject to standard condition regarding noise emissions from the transformers and switch house
Neighbour Representations – One received from resident of Albert Road, raising concerns about noise and the health implications of the transformers and the harm to the visual outlook from the rear of their property. One received from resident of Reading Road regarding hours of construction and possible damage to nearby parked cars.
- 4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**
- 4.1 P99/S0188/LD - Use of the buildings and land for parking and for motor car maintenance and repair - Certificate of lawful use issued
- 5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**
- 5.1 Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 – Policies G2, G6, CON7, EP2, EP8, D1, D4, E6 and T1
“Electric and Magnetic Fields – The Facts” - The Energy Networks Association – January 2007
“Electricity Substations and Power Lines” – Health Protection Agency – March 2004
- 6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**
- 6.1 The main issues in this application are:
1. Whether the scale and design of the proposal respects the character of the site and the adjacent Conservation Area.
 2. Whether there would be any adverse impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties, with particular reference to noise.
 3. Whether there would be health implications arising from the proposed development
 4. Whether there are any issues over a loss of employment land
 5. Whether there are any issues in respect of highway safety
 6. Whether there are any issues regarding land contamination

6.2 **Design Issues**

Policy D1 states that the principles of good design and the protection and reinforcement of local distinctiveness should be taken into account in all new development. Policy CON7 states that planning permission will not be granted for development, which would harm the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

6.3 The site lies in the town centre and the two existing garage buildings on the southern and western boundaries currently dominate the site. They can be seen from Reading Road, across the grounds of the Congregational Church Hall, are highly functional in appearance and have little architectural merit. Thus, Officers consider their removal, for which no consent is required, would improve the appearance of the area.

6.4 It is important to note that both the garages and electrical substation means that the area has a very functional appearance. The existing substation in particular with its surrounding palisade security fencing dominates the unattractive site. However, there are very limited views of this substation, with buildings fronting onto Reading Road significantly screening the site. Officers consider that the impact of the new switch house and transformers would be limited in a similar way. In particular, in comparison with the buildings it will replace, the switch house is a low-key single storey addition to the site, and the new transformers will be no more prominent than the existing. Thus, Officers are satisfied this element of the proposal will not cause harm to the character of the site or the wider area.

6.5 Although prominent in appearance, the new boundary walls would offer good screening of this industrial equipment. In particular, the new wall to the western boundary of the site would face directly onto the rear of properties along Albert Road, which fall within the main Henley Conservation Area. The applicant proposes the use of engineering brickwork with expansion joists. Given this proximity to the Conservation Area, Officers consider that brick laid in a traditional garden wall bond using lime mortar would be more appropriate for this site. This detailing could be controlled by condition if planning permission is granted and would significantly improve the impact of this element of the proposal on the surrounding Conservation Area.

6.6 As the palisade fencing to the northern elevation would match that surrounding the existing substation, Officers have no objections to this.

Impact on neighbouring occupants

6.7 Policy D4 states that development will not be permitted if it would unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties through loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight. One of the objections to the scheme raised by the resident of Albert Road is the visual intrusion of the new equipment immediately to the rear of residential gardens. Whilst Officers accept that the new transformers, in particular, are large and unsightly, they are no more so than the existing substation. Furthermore, the removal of the two sizeable garage buildings, with a corresponding reduction in the boundary wall height along this western boundary, would actually open up this area and allow more sunlight into the rear of Albert Road. As such, it would be likely to improve the outlook for many adjacent properties and Officers consider the visual impact of the proposal to be acceptable.

6.8 Policy EP2 states that proposals that would be a reason of noise or vibrations have an adverse effect on existing occupiers will not be permitted. Concerns have been raised by residents about the noise impact of the new transformers. Officers accept that there is a consistent audible hum from electrical equipment when it is in operation,

and have sought clarification from the applicants as to the likely noise levels that the new transformers would emit.

- 6.9 In response, the applicants have provided indicative noise levels, but it has not been possible for a full noise survey to be produced that accurately replicates the conditions of the application site. As an alternative, the Council's Environmental Health Officer has visited an existing substation in Eynsham, where identical equipment to that proposed here has been installed. This equipment is markedly quieter than the existing substation and so Officers are satisfied that this new equipment will be likely to improve the impact on neighbours rather than worsen it, particularly as if this new equipment is permitted it will allow the existing, noisier substation to be removed. This application also allows a condition to be put on any planning permission that offers the Council a degree of control over future noise emissions from the site, which is not currently in place for the existing substation. As such, Officers have concluded that this application is acceptable in terms of its impact on the amenities of nearby residents.
- 6.10 One resident has requested restrictions on the hours of construction if this scheme receives planning permission but Officers do not consider this development is of a large enough scale to warrant such a condition be placed on any permission. Concerns regarding the security of nearby parked cars are also not relevant to this application.

Health Implications

- 6.11 Concerns have been raised by neighbours about the health implications of having an electrical substation positioned so close to residential properties. Officers accept that the substation will result in an electromagnetic field being emitted, and that if strong enough, such a field can have health implications. However, based on the submitted information, Officers are satisfied that the field produced from this substation is likely to be insignificant.
- 6.12 The applicants have referred Officers to "Electric and Magnetic Fields – The Facts" a nationally available information document produced on behalf of the electricity industry. This states that electromagnetic fields are measured in microteslas and offers the following on substations: *"Small electricity distribution substations, typically one for every few hundred homes, generally produce up to 2 microteslas close to their perimeter [casing], and often no electric field at all. The fields fall rapidly with distance, and within 1 to 2 metres from a typical substation, the fields associated with it are usually indistinguishable from other fields present in homes."* By way of comparison, the booklet advises that the electromagnetic field experienced standing next to a typical domestic appliance such as a vacuum cleaner is 800 microteslas, which drops to two microteslas when standing one metre away from it.
- 6.13 Officers have had regard to how quickly the electromagnetic field drops away with distance from a substation, and the conclusions of this document is consistent with advice from the Health Protection Agency (HPA). The HPA are a branch of the Government's Health and Safety Executive, who are the body responsible for administering the legislation that governs such matters. The transformers will be some 12 metres away from the western boundary with Albert Road and Officers are satisfied this is a sufficient distance to ensure that, at this boundary, the electromagnetic field emitted from the transformers will be indistinguishable from fields emitted from ordinary domestic appliances.

Loss of employment land

- 6.14 Although now vacant, the application site's current authorised use is that of a vehicle repair and maintenance garage, which offers some employment opportunities. However, Policy E6 states that proposals for the redevelopment or change of use of redundant land or buildings in employment use will be allowed in the towns of the district if the site is less than 0.25 hectares and the buildings on it are less than 500 square metres. The site and the garage buildings are well under these respective thresholds and as such, there is no objection to the loss of this employment site.

Highway Safety

- 6.15 Access to the site will be unchanged and unaffected by this development. The County Council Highways Liaison Officer has confirmed their support of the application as the new use is likely to greatly reduce the number of vehicular trips in comparison with the previous use. Parking, turning and visibility are also all unaffected and Officers are satisfied that the application accords with the requirements of Policy T1 of the Local Plan.

Land Contamination

- 6.16 Policy EP8 states that development on contaminated land will not be permitted unless the contamination is effectively treated by the developer. Given the previous industrial use of the site, there is potential for the land to have some contamination. Thus, the Council's Contaminated Land Officer has recommended a condition requiring a contaminated land risk assessment be carried out prior to work commencing. Officers are satisfied such a condition offers appropriate control in accordance with the requirements of Policy EP8.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The proposal complies with the relevant Development Plan policies and it is considered that, subject to the attached conditions, the proposed development would be acceptable in terms of its relationship to the character of the existing site and the surrounding Conservation Area and in terms of its impact on neighbouring amenity, in terms of visual outlook, noise emissions and the health of nearby residents. It is also acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety and land contamination issues can be addressed

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 **Planning Permission is granted subject to:**

- 1. Commencement three years**
- 2. Sample materials – brickwork for boundary walls**
- 3. Use of lime mortar in construction of boundary walls and to be laid in traditional garden wall bond**
- 4. Noise emissions from site to be no greater than existing background noise levels**
- 5. Land Contamination Report to be agreed prior to work commencing on site**

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