

Planning Applications Committee

23 October 2008

Agenda Number:	B1
Section/Area:	OUTER
Ward:	MANCROFT
Officer:	Lee Cook
Valid Date:	16 June 2008
Application Number:	08/00552/F
Site Address :	43 - 47 Barker Street Norwich NR2 4UR
Proposal:	Partial demolition of existing building and alterations to form Motor Dealership and associated parking and display areas.
Applicant:	Mr M Wallace
Agent:	Rone Design Ltd

THE SITE

The application relates to vacant business premises sited at the bend of Barker Street between Barn Road to the south and Heigham Street to the west. The premises are sited within an established employment area and were previously used as a factory and offices. Other car sales and maintenance type business uses are located along Barker Street. Access to the rear of the site is via Paddock Street.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

This application follows the grant of an earlier permission for similar proposals on the site in January of this year (07/00639/F). Amendments to the details of the approved scheme are proposed and the merits of these need to be considered as part of the formal application process. The scheme in part is related to the refurbishment of the Robinsons Autostar garage in Heigham Street which was approved by an earlier application (07/00638/F). Robinsons is a long established business in this area and the Heigham Street premises have an authorised use as a car dealership and motor workshop. The Barker Street property is a long standing commercial building on the City trading estate. This property has been vacant for some time and was previously occupied by a packaging manufacturer under Class B1/B8. Other previous history includes: - **4/1991/0941** for change of use to light industrial and warehouse use approved December 1991 and **4/1997/0906** for external alterations including re-cladding, removal of three loading bay doors and new visitor car parking approved January 1998.

THE PROPOSAL

The scheme involves the partial demolition of the existing building and alterations, including new walls and laying out of the forecourt, associated parking and display areas and rear external secure storage yard. The use will include office space, a workshop area and sales as part of the operation. Alterations are also proposed to the main entrance and fencing and lighting to the site. The proposals provide for the transfer of the Heigham Street workshop operation to these premises. There would be 35 employees based at Barker Street.

The main differences between the current proposal and the scheme approved in January are a reduced element of car repair and maintenance on the site and an increase in the amount of showroom area when compared with the earlier scheme.

CONSULTATIONS

Neighbours: Advertised on site and in the press and adjacent business premises notified: No comments received.

Environment Agency: Flood Risk Assessment considered to meet the requirements of PPS25 and Sequential Test conclusions accepted. Conditions requested to be imposed on any approval relating to flood protection and drainage details.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant National Policy Guidance:

PPS25 - Development and Flood Risk

PPS4 (Consultation Draft) – Planning and Economic Development

Relevant East of England Plan policies:

- E1 - Job Growth
- E2 - Provision of land for Employment
- E3 - Strategic Employment Sites

Relevant Local Plan Policies:

- EMP2 - Expansion of existing businesses
- EMP5 - General employment area
- EMP6 - Sites for car showrooms
- EP22 - High standard of amenity for residential occupiers
- TRA6 - Maximum parking standards
- TRA7 - Cycle parking standards
- TRA8 - Servicing provision
- HBE3 - Area of main archaeological interest
- HBE12- High quality of design

Other relevant policy documents:

Greater Norwich Employment Growth and Sites and Premises Study

ASSESSMENT

Flooding:

The site is located within Flood Zone 2 and is considered to be at a medium risk of flooding. However, it is considered that the issues relating to flood risk have been adequately addressed by the Flood Risk Assessment and the Sequential Test. Subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in relation to this issue.

Mix of uses on the site:

The site falls within a General Employment Area allocated under policy EMP5 which primarily promotes business uses in classes B1, B2 and B8. Certain other uses are accepted, including ancillary uses to existing occupants in the area, provided they do not result in the proportion of the employment area devoted to B1, B2 and B8 uses falling below 50%. The City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan makes a specific allocation for car showrooms along the frontage to Hall Road (under Policy EMP6). Policy EMP2 seeks to promote development and expansion of existing business. The proposal would allow for the expansion and retention of a long established motor dealership on this estate which is one of a cluster of such businesses in the Heigham Street area.

The main policy issue to be addressed relates to the acceptability of a reduced element of car repair/maintenance (B2 use) and an increased showroom area (sui generis) compared with the previous scheme.

Since the approval of the previous application in January, the East of England Plan has been adopted (May 2008) and the Greater Norwich Employment Growth and Employment Sites and Premises Studies – key evidence studies supporting the emerging Joint Core Strategy – have been published (June 2008). Both of these are relevant to the consideration of the proposed amended scheme. In addition, draft Planning Policy Statement 4 (Planning and Economic Development) has been issued for consultation.

Although still an emerging document, draft PPS4 signals a shift in national policy emphasis from protecting employment areas for narrow categories of employment use (such as light industry and warehousing) to a more proactive and flexible approach promoting job-creating development of all kinds, subject to considerations of sustainability, accessibility and environmental impact and the encouragement of high quality, inclusive design. Regeneration of brownfield sites and reuse of redundant premises is strongly supported.

Policy E1 of the East of England Plan provides for significant job growth in the Norwich area with an indicative target of 35,000 new jobs between 2001 and 2021. To support the sustained high level of job growth required, Policy E2 of the Plan requires employment sites and premises to be provided at appropriate scales and sustainable locations that meet the needs of the region's sectors and clusters. For Norwich, Policy E3 highlights the need for job growth which promotes urban regeneration, as well as the expanding biotechnology industries.

The Greater Norwich Employment Growth and Sites and Premises Study points to the need for substantial new employment land allocations to support the level of growth required in Greater Norwich, but also a need for strong policy protection of existing sites and premises allocated for employment use.

In policy terms there are both benefits and disadvantages associated with this proposal.

- On the plus side, the proposal will allow for the expansion and retention of a long-established motor franchise with an established customer base in this part of the city. The proposal will generate new employment in a particularly accessible employment location close to the city centre which meets most of the criteria for new growth locations listed in the RSS. Additionally, it will bring long-term vacant premises back into productive use, enhancing the appearance and assisting the regeneration of this part of the estate which is dated in parts and in need of renewal.

- On the minus side the proposal would result in a fairly low density form of development (car showroom) which is not an especially high employment generator and which the Local Plan does not generally accept within employment areas, notwithstanding that there are many such businesses in the area already. The premises could be potentially reoccupied for a B class business use (industry or warehousing) or redeveloped for a higher-density form of employment use such as B1 offices. There may be other suitable sites available for car showrooms as well as a specific allocation in the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan at Hall Road.

On balance it is considered that the merits of the proposal outweigh the disadvantages, although strictly contrary to Local Plan policy EMP5. It is unlikely that the existing premises could find a B1/B2/B8 occupier in the short term and even, if they were reoccupied for a B8 warehouse use, the employment generated could be less than is now proposed. Although the Employment Growth Study has identified the site as suitable for development for business space, it is not high-profile in terms of market demand and visibility and (though reasonably accessible) it has poor connectivity to the established focuses of office and commercial activity, shopping and services in the city centre. It is considered therefore that this site is not one on which it is appropriate to focus new office development.

As well as increased emphasis in regional policy on urban regeneration and the imperative for job growth in the Norwich area, emerging national policy strongly promotes economic development and employment growth in general terms, with much less regard paid to narrow protectionist policies which reserve land for specific categories of employment use and which could potentially lead to low-demand employment sites and premises lying idle.

Although there is a recognised deficiency of available sites and premises for certain types of employment use in the City, the employment sector experiencing the most growth locally is likely to be that related to the provision of B1 offices and for the reasons outlined above the premises are not considered to be especially suitable for a re-use of this nature. Consequently, on balance, it is considered that, in this instance, it would be difficult to resist the loss of these premises for a B1/B2/B8 use on the grounds that they were essential to the maintenance of an adequate supply of employment land and premises.

Other matters:

It is proposed to remove part of the front of the building and create a new front extension for the showroom element of the application. The site is reasonably visible in the area and the existing building is industrial in nature. The simple form of alteration together with frontage parking would be in keeping with design and character of area.

Turning and parking provision are an issue with such uses, however, on the basis of initial information supplied it is considered that adequate operational facilities can be achieved within the site and parking is shown at levels consistent with the proposed use. Given that there is no increase in the footprint of the building and that the previous use is likely to have generated higher levels of peak hour traffic no transport contribution is required for this development. The development would not therefore have any major impact on the adjacent highway or operation of estate. Alterations are being made to the existing forecourt layout including the stopping up of a site access and a condition is suggested to ensure the reinstatement of the adjacent footpath.

The site falls within the Area of Main Archaeological Interest where an archaeological assessment is required for any development likely to disturb remains below ground. The proposals are principally a remodelling of existing buildings and do not involve any substantive new construction, consequently an assessment is not required in this instance.

Conclusion:

The proposed development is located within a designated Employment Area and although contrary to policy EMP5, it is considered that, in this instance other material considerations are such that the use proposed on this site is acceptable. In terms of the risk of flooding and the design of the alterations proposed to the building the proposals are considered acceptable. The commercial building will be brought back into use and the site will be able to operate without significant impact on highway safety or an adverse affect on amenities of either adjacent occupiers or within the wider area.

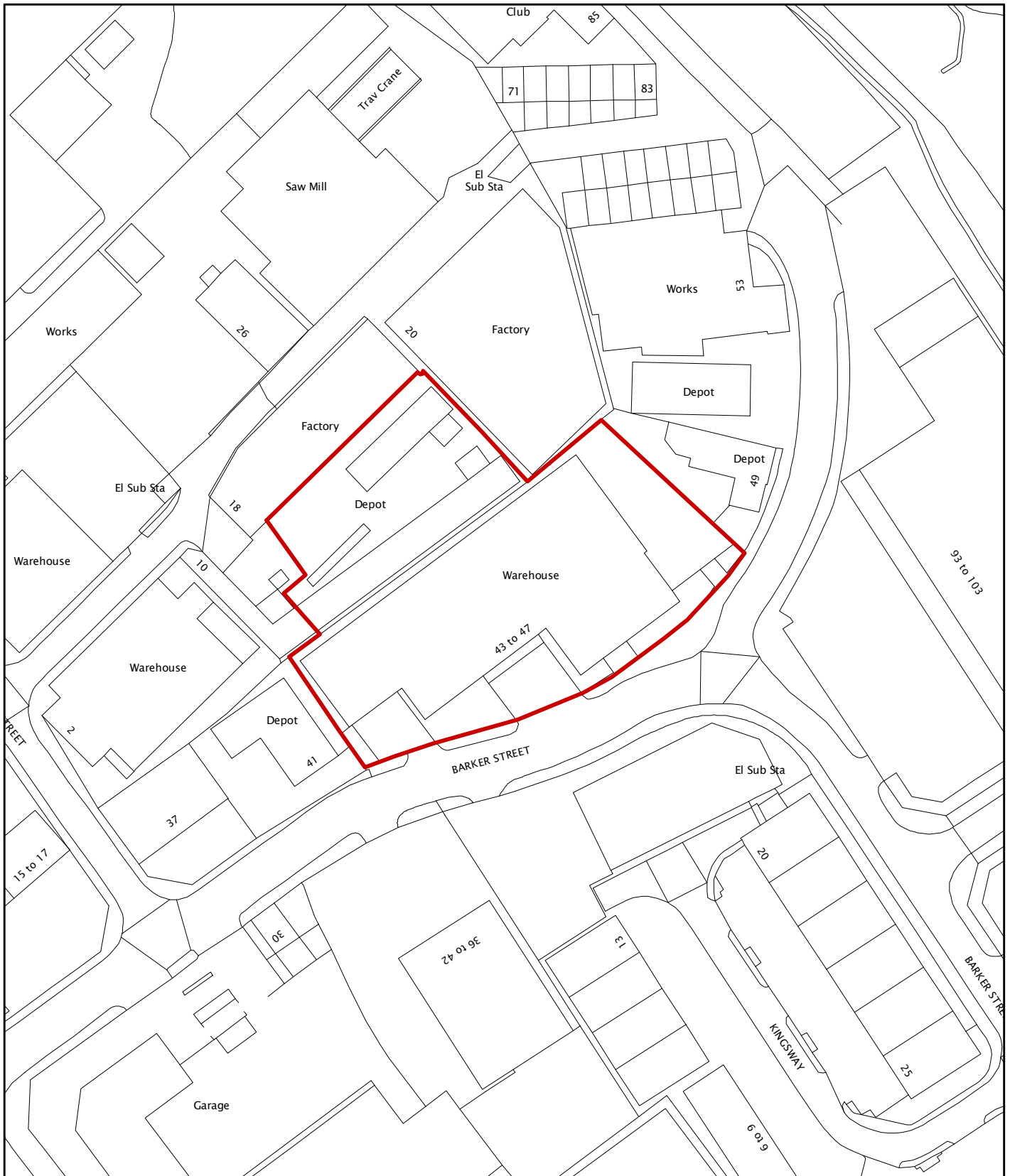
RECOMMENDATION

GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following conditions:

- 1 Development must be begun within 3 years
- 2 Further details of: boundary walls and fences; lighting; facing materials; rear access.
- 3 Details of protection of existing landscape areas during construction.
- 4 Details of car parking, cycle parking and service areas.
- 5 Details of reinstatement of footpath.
- 6 Details of plant and machinery
- 7 Details of fume extraction and flue
- 8 Limit to extent of sales use
- 9 Flood protection details and requirements including finished floor levels, flood evacuation plan and flood proofing measures
- 10 Foul water drainage details and pollution control measures

REASONS FOR APPROVAL

The decision to grant planning permission has been taken having regard to PPS25, PPS4 (Consultation Draft), East of England Plan policies E1, E2 and E3 and saved policies EMP2, EMP5, EP7, EP22, TRA6, 7 and 8, HBE3 and HBE12 of the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan (November 2004) and to all material planning considerations. The proposed change of use to a workshop and motor dealership brings back into use a vacant building and, notwithstanding the extent of the site proposed for sales, the mix of uses would be appropriate in this location. There is adequate space for parking and servicing for the proposed use in accordance with Policy. Subject to the requirements of the conditions the proposal should safeguard highway safety, flood risk and amenity in the area.



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Scale - 1:1250



NORWICH
City Council

DIRECTORATE OF REGENERATION
AND DEVELOPMENT

