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## **CONSULTATION FROM SOUTHEND ON SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **ERECT 3 STOREY OFFICE BUILDING, LAYOUT 770 PARKING SPACES AND CREATE NEW ACCESSSES**

#### **LAND EAST OF NESTUDA WAY, SOUTHEND ON SEA**

##### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report deals with the consultation that has been carried out with this Council on a full planning application that is being dealt with by Southend Borough Council. It is discretionary as to whether this Council makes any response to the consultation. The processing of the application is a statutory duty for Southend Council.

##### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The development proposals have been submitted by the Royal Bank of Scotland (the Bank) and relate to the development of a credit card operations centre.
- 2.2 Currently the Bank has existing operations located at four sites in Southend. These are at Priory Crescent, two at Victoria Avenue and one on the Eastern Esplanade. The Bank seeks to unify all its operations at one site and none of its existing sites are sufficient to allow this. It also wishes to be able to accommodate existing and future expansion plans.

##### **3 SITE AND LAYOUT**

- 3.1 The site is located directly to the east of the B1303 Nestuda Way link road between Eastwoodbury Lane and the A127 Prince Avenue in Southend. It is immediately to the North of the Strawberry Fields Public House, the Travel Inn Hotel and the Tesco Supermarket. A location plan is included as an Appendix to this report.
- 3.2 The total site area is 5.34ha. Within that, two phases of development are proposed. The first of these is for the erection of a three storey office building with a floorspace of 21,027sq.m. on three floors. Although one building, the structure has been designed so that it could be sub-divided, if necessary, into three at a later stage.
- 3.3 The building, which is to be rectangular in shape, is to be placed to the north east of the Thanet Grange roundabout (off which lead the access roads to Tesco, Strawberry Fields and the Travel Inn Hotel).

- 3.4 The building is to have a full height concrete frame with floor to ceiling glazing to all elevations. There will be projections to the roof of the building, with metal cladding, to house plant and machinery. There will be two side projections, again with metal cladding, to house additional stairwells. The building is to have a flat roof. The overall dimensions of the building will be: width 146m, depth 54m (including a front canopy), height to the main roof 12.2m and overall height to top of roof projection element 16.5m (all measurements approx.).
- 3.5 To the north east and north west of the building, car parking will be laid out. 760 spaces are to be provided along with 40 disabled spaces and 28 visitor spaces with the first phase of the development, total 828. Access to the site will be achieved from the Thanet Grange roundabout, by extending the current leg from the roundabout, which serves the Strawberry Fields Public House. A link to the second leg of that roundabout (which serves for delivery vehicles to the Tesco Supermarket) is also shown on the plan. 240 cycle parking spaces are shown, as are walkway links to the existing roadside footways in the area.
- 3.6 There appear to be two possible options for Phase 2. Both of these are for an additional building to be placed behind (north east of) the main building. One option involves a slim building parallel to the main one and running for two thirds of its length. The other is for a square building about one third of the length of the main building. In each case, there would be a link to the main building.
- 3.7 Further car parking spaces would be provided, bringing the total to 1059. In addition, the construction of a vehicular link direct to Nestuda Way is shown on the plans. This would be placed North of the Strawberry Fields Public House and allow a left turn in and left turn out of the site only. It is not clear as to during which phase this link is to be provided.

#### **4 POLICY SITUATION**

- 4.1 The Essex and Southend on Sea Replacement Structure Plan indicates that 30ha of land should be made available within the Southend Borough for the expansion of existing firms and the introduction of new employment.
- 4.2 The Southend on Sea Local Plan was adopted in 1994 and part of the site is identified within it as land which can be utilised for the development of a business park. In the Local Plan it is indicated that the development of this site is dependant on:
- the completion of the B1013 new access road link;

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- junction improvements to the Bell and Kent Elms junctions on the A127; and,
  - the Southend/ Rochford outer by-pass if it is justified in highway terms.

It is clear that the new B1013 new access link is in place and that the outer by pass is not being pursued in transport plans at this stage. It is not clear what improvements were required to the A127 junctions and whether these have been implemented.

- 4.3 As indicated not all of the application site is allocated for development in the Local Plan. It extends further to the north west than the Local Plan site such that the majority of the car parking areas shown will be outside the Local Plan allocation. The Local Plan site is quoted as 3ha whereas the application site is 5.3ha.
- 4.4 The applicants point to the document 'An Urban Vision for the New Millenium' issued by the Borough Council. This is an issues paper related to the review of the Local Plan. Whilst the site is identified in that document as a key employment site, its stated size remains at 3ha. It appears that the proposals must represent a departure to the current Local Plan then.

## **5 TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY ISSUES**

- 5.1 A Transport Assessment Report (TA) has been carried out for the developer by Peter Brett Associates and submitted with the planning application. There has clearly been some early consultation between Southend Council and the Consultants with regard to the matters to be addressed in the report. This is manifested in indications which have been given by the Council of current perceived shortcomings in the road system local to the site.

### **Walking and Cycling**

- 5.2 The report deals with all modes of travel, including walking, cycling and public transport links to the site. It is acknowledged in the report that the dual carriageway nature of the A127 Prince Avenue, in the vicinity of the site, does act as a barrier to walking and cycling journeys from the major residential area to the South of the road. It is also pointed out that, with the construction of Nestuda Way, the Prince Avenue roundabout and that section of Prince Avenue, dedicated and segregated walking and cycling routes were provided.
- 5.3 Cycle storage and within building showering and changing facilities are to be provided, but it does appear that, given the local provision of cycling/walking routes, further provision is all but dismissed in the report. It does seem, given the considerable number of staff, that

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some attention could be paid to cycling/walking route deficiencies off site and outside the immediate locality.

**Public Transport**

- 5.4 With regard to public bus services, the report identifies the three services (see below) which serve the area. It is indicated that discussions are underway with the Bus Companies with regard to the possible enhancement of these services. There is little further elaboration as to what these enhancements may be.

Bus Services serving proposed RBS site:

Number 15A/B/C 16	Route Southend-Rayleigh- Thundersley- Basildon/Canvey	Operator Thamesway	Mon-Fri Frequency approx 9 journeys each way
25	Southend-Rayleigh- Wickford-Basildon	Thamesway	Every 30 mins
Diamond	Southend-Rayleigh Chelmsford	First Eastern National	Hourly

- 5.5 The report concludes that the site is well served by bus services and that by changing services at interchange points, most notably Southend town centre, all staff who live in the south east Essex urban area can access the site by bus services.
- 5.6 Whilst that is technically true, the report omits to specifically state that:
- the service which passes closest to the site has infrequently timed journeys with none between 8 am and 3 pm from Southend;
  - the service which has the most frequent journeys requires the traveller to walk from the site, through the Tesco site, across the A127 Prince Avenue and into the residential area to the South to catch the buses;
  - whilst changing buses allows most residents to access the site via public transport, this is invariably by much lengthier and more complex journeys than by private car; and
  - there is no comparison with accessibility of the current Bank sites. These are located in the centre of the Town and will invariably be more closely related to a whole range of public transport services than the new site will be.

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**Highways**

- 5.7 Private vehicles at the site are to be accommodated in the 770 (and additional disabled and visitor) spaces proposed for the Phase I development. The ratio of spaces to floorspace is 1:27sq.m. This is slightly higher than the ratio suggested in Government Guidance (PPG13, Transport) which is 1:30sq.m. This is justified by the Consultants on the basis that, as a call centre, the density of occupation of the building is higher than would normally be found in a B1 Office Use.
- 5.8 The Consultants have considered traffic generation at the development, the likely times of arrival and departure of the Staff and measures that the Company indicates will be put in place to reduce car movements. They have carried out traffic counts, considered existing data, including accident data and have taken into account the likely traffic generation from the Rochford Business Park at Cherry Orchard Way. The conclusion reached is that, other than the Thanet Grange roundabout (directly serving the site) and the link road to Prince Avenue, there will be no noticeable deterioration in road traffic conditions.
- 5.9 What the consultants do state is that the impact of a car sharing scheme is relied on heavily in reaching the conclusions. This is on the basis of experience at other Bank sites, most notably one in Edinburgh, which is claimed to have the most extensive car sharing scheme in the UK. It is stated to be company policy to implement such an approach. Whilst this is the case it will be necessary for Southend Council to satisfy itself that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to secure a car sharing scheme if it does form a fundamental approach to reducing car movements associated with the new development.
- 5.10 It is clear from the consultants report that highway engineers at Southend Council have had some concerns in relation to the impact of the proposals and, no doubt, they will be considering the report closely in relation to the conclusions reached. It is essential that there should be thorough testing of the results by the appropriate highways staff at the Council to ensure that the conclusions are sound and justified.

**6 VISUAL IMPACT AND DESIGN**

- 6.1 The building is clearly going to have a considerable visual impact with a frontage of 146m and a height to the top of the roofplant of 16.4m. This impact will be mitigated by the planting which is proposed to the frontage, up to 15m in depth, the height of the neighbouring Travel Inn Hotel and the fact that the building is set back from the main Nestuda Way and Prince Avenue roads.

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- 6.2 In terms of design the Bank claims that a flagship building is required to meet their needs and aspirations for the future of the business and its image. Although clearly a matter of judgement and taste, the design offered does not appear to match these criteria.
- 6.3 The design is considered to be rather bland and un-inspirational. It has no distinctive design features and offers little in terms of the individuality that a company would normally seek to achieve to set itself out from the competitors. In fact the glass walling design appears little different from the many others of the same type, albeit that there are few of them in the local area. This is not a building that would showcase leading edge design for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- 6.4 Any change to the design approach will involve a quite fundamental rethink with regard to this issue. It is not clear whether design considerations have formed part of any early discussions with the Borough Council or whether there has been any endorsement of the approach that has been followed.
- 6.5 In terms of residential impact, the closest dwellings are located in the North Crescent/ Feeches Road area. As part of the Local Plan proposals a public open space use, presumably with landscape planting, is to be implemented between this application site and the residential area. It seems that this separation use should be secured, if it is not already in place, to offset the visual impact of this considerable building on the residential area. No residential areas in the Rochford District will be affected visually by the development.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 As set out above, this development has clear implications for the environment, in terms of traffic generation and travel to the site. It will involve the development of a considerable area of land but is likely to result in considerably more planting than is currently present on the site. The report submitted with the application refers to the possibility of water recycling facilities on the site and building design to maximise natural sunlight for heating.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 This is a major development opportunity in the Borough and there will be a clear desire to retain what is a major employer in the area. To be balanced against that is the need to take full account of the visual and environmental impacts of the development.
- 8.2 Summarised here are the issues that have been raised above in this report and which are recommended to be forwarded to the Borough Council as the comments of this Council:

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- It appears that part of the application site is outside that area allocated for business park development in the Local Plan and as referred to in the replacement Local Plan issues paper. The application should be advertised as a departure to the Plan and consideration given to the need to refer the matter to the Secretary of State.
  - It should be determined that the appropriate improvements have been made, or will be secured to the Bell and Kent Elms junctions on the A127, as set out in the Local Plan, prior to the development of this site.
  - It should be determined whether any further provision can be made to assist walking and cycling journeys to the site, given the recognised severance of the site from the main residential areas to the south of the A127.
  - Careful consideration should be given to the assessment of public transport conclusions in the submitted travel assessment report given the shortfalls in existing provision (identified in para 5.6 above). Methods of securing enhanced services should be ensured and established at this stage. There may be some merit in investigating the possibility of enhanced public transport as a result of the development of this site and the Rochford Business Park site to the north.
  - Consideration should be given to the justification for the number of private vehicle parking spaces at the site. It appears from the travel assessment report that the level is pre-established rather than flowing from an assessment of the alternative travel options.
  - Careful consideration should be given to the conclusion of the traffic consultants that the development proposals will not give rise to noticeably worsened traffic conditions in the area of the development.
  - Measures to ensure the implementation of car sharing proposals, as referred to in the travel assessment report, should be put in place and secured as part of the development.
  - Lastly, consideration should be given to the design approach proposed. Whilst this may have been the result of early consultations with Southend Council, it does not appear to have resulted in a building that is inspirational in design terms. It would appear that alternative design solutions are available which will allow the creation of the appropriate floorspace whilst allowing a far more individualistic and inspirational appearance.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

**9.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES**

that the comments set out in the conclusion to this report (at para 8.2 above) are forwarded to the Southend Borough Council as the comments of this Council on these development proposals. (HPS)

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning Services

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**Background Papers:**

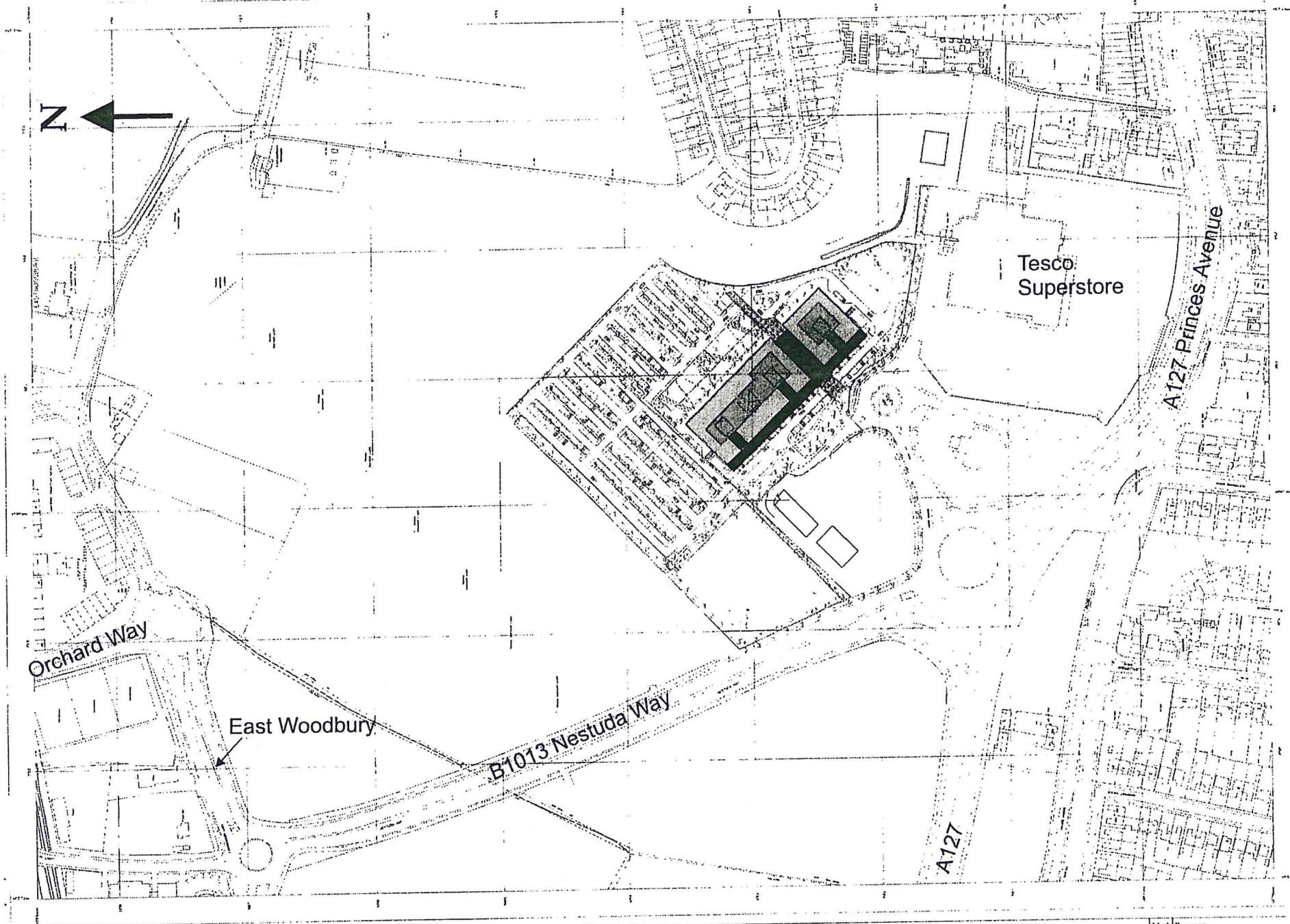
Planning Application SOS/01/01102/FUL submitted to Southend Borough Council together with associated supporting reports.

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