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Planning & Trading Standards
West Berkshire District Council
Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

Attn: Colin Inwards

20th February 2009

Your contact is: Julie Williams, Planning & Building Control

Dear Mr Inwards,

CONSULTATION ON APPLICATION - 08/02297/COMIND - AWE Burghfield

Construction of main process facility and support building with 16 lightning protector towers, associated plant building, gates houses, vehicle inspection bays, sub-station buildings, security fence, access roads, hardstanding and sustainable drainage system infrastructure.

I refer to your consultation with this Council on the above planning application, which was received by Reading Council on 5th February 2009.

This application will be considered by Reading's Planning Applications Committee at its next scheduled meeting on 4th March next. However, given that it is understood that West Berkshire intends to consider this application at a specially convened meeting of West Berkshire's planning applications committee on 4 March, I have been asked to set out in this letter Reading Council's Planning Officer's response to the planning application. The contents of this letter are, of course, without prejudice to the views which will be expressed by Reading Members at Reading's Planning Applications Committee on 4th March, who will be asked to endorse the comments in this letter. However, I am sure you will appreciate that Reading's Planning Applications Committee may have additional comments to make, which I will forward on to you along with a copy of my Report and any other representations subsequently received by this Council.

I must begin by expressing concern at the late consultation by West Berkshire in connection with this application. It has been explained to us that Reading was not consulted initially on the application because its administrative boundary is over 3kms away from the application site. However given the scale and sensitivity of the proposal and the fact that the extended construction phase could have a potential impact on Reading (residents, visitors and local businesses) if the proposed main haulage route is through Reading (along the mainly residential Burghfield Road and the A4 Bath Road to and from Junction 12 on the M4), I am pleased that the original decision not to consult Reading has been reconsidered. The Environmental Appraisal (non-technical summary) submitted with the application explains that that the average additional HGV construction traffic generated will be 58 movements per day rising to a peak of 182 HGV movements per day during a 5 week period in the winter of 2010/2011 with car and van trips anticipated to peak at 1,228 movements per day in the winter of 2012/2013.

This oversight was rectified by West Berkshire consulting us on 3 February but in view of the nature of this major and complex planning application, which raises a clear public interest, the Council has nevertheless been given little time to consult and consider it and to formulate its response. I therefore have been instructed to make a formal request via this letter that West Berkshire defer making a decision on the application until Reading's Planning Applications Committee has had a proper opportunity to consider the information provided and come to a formal view on it.

It is accepted that in planning terms the planning application does not represent a material change in use (this establishment has been used for processing explosives since the WWII and has been used since the 1950.s as part of the UK Atomic Weapons Programme with many of the existing buildings and facilities dating from this period) nor an intensification of use in terms of resultant floor area (the total new floorspace proposed is 26,573 sq.m replacing an existing 30,000 sq.m of floorspace). It is also accepted that in general the principle of reusing this existing brownfield site for continued employment use does comply with most national guidance and local plan policies. However, the nature of the proposal raises material planning issues in term of health and safety and amenity and highway safety issues which this Council wishes to fully consider.

Reading planning officers have considered the comments submitted to you by the Health & Safety Executive - HSE (research strategy) confirms that they have no objection on nuclear safety grounds to this development and HSE (hazardous installations directorate) have confirmed that having considered carefully the type and location of the proposed development it has no objection to it proceeding. They note in their letter that as AWE Burghfield is an explosives site the works would be subject to licensing by the Explosives Inspectorate. It is my interim conclusion from the above that Reading planning officers are unlikely to have planning objections to the planning application in terms of its health and safety impacts on Reading. I have, however, been instructed to raise a "holding objection" to the proposal pending confirmation that adequate measures and mitigation will be put in place to limit the potential disruption and loss of amenity caused to Reading residents and businesses adjacent to the construction traffic routes and to Reading road users.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Julie Williams on the above number.

Yours sincerely,

David Breeze
Planning Manager