



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**PLANNING COMMITTEE:** 19 October 2010  
**DIRECTORATE:** Planning and Regeneration  
**HEAD OF PLANNING:** Susan Bridge

**N/2009/0636:** Erection of cultural and recreation centre to include Hindu Temple, Multi-purpose hall, sports facilities, visitor centre and exhibition space, teaching spaces including library, creche, priest's house and six sheltered flats for over 55's. Externally, access, parking, all weather sports pitch and landscaping, including perimeter security fencing at land at Lings Way, Northampton.

**WARD:** Lumbertubs

**APPLICANT:** Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation  
**AGENT:** Robert Begley - PHP

**REASON:** NBC Land ownership

**DEPARTURE:** No

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**APPLICATION FOR CONSULTATION BY WNDC:**

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

1.1 **No objection** to the proposals subject to a suitable legal agreement that secures community access to the sport facilities and allotments / gardens proposed to the satisfaction of NBC.

WNDC must seek methods of landscaping and layout that mitigate the visual impact of large parking areas to the front of the building and the security fencing proposed.

**2. THE PROPOSAL**

2.1 The full application for a cultural and recreation centre was submitted to WNDC in July 2009 and registered at NBC in August 2009. It is a major application on NBC owned land and constitutes the following components:

- Main assembly and leisure hall

- 6 sheltered housing units for the over-55s
- A priest's dwelling
- Multi-use games area (MUGA)
- Gift shop
- Gym
- Crèche
- Café
- Visitor centre
- Education and conference rooms
- Temple and temple courtyard
- Associated ancillary floorspace (e.g. Atriums, toilets, kitchens, etc)
- 190 car parking spaces and 6 coach spaces.

2.2 The 2009 layout totalled 5,732 square metres of internal floorspace. After discussions with various parties through NBC and WNDC, a revised scheme was submitted in July 2010 with a reduced internal floorspace of 4,597 square metres.

2.3 The revised (and original) design is a dramatic and distinctive contemporary building borrowing a range of influences from the close continent, the far continents, postmodern architecture and the 'new town' vernacular in the locality of the site.

2.4 The main building is a series of spaces and uses interlinked creating an overall footprint measuring 90 metres wide and 70 metres deep. The general average height of the main structure varies around the 10 to 11 metre level, with the sikhara (temple spires) reaching 17 to 18 metres at their highest. The general design is contemporary with flat roofs providing the opportunity for green roofs.

2.5 Open space and vegetation that is left outside of the main building and off the car parking areas amounts to 4,400 square metres of meadow, 1,900 square metres of 'roof meadow' (green roof), 2,300 square metres of gardens / allotments and hedgerow planting.

2.6 The proposals would be reached via a new access to Lings Way positioned roughly half way along this road frontage that is presently marked by a grass bank preventing unauthorised vehicular access.

2.7 In terms of the changes made in the revised submission over the 2009 design, the scheme has reduced in footprint and floorspace, been located further away from the Local Nature Reserve, provided on-site cultivation areas (allotments), altered boundary treatments particularly close to the Nature Reserve aspect and provided a footpath to the nearest bus stop on Lings Way. The general theme of the design has remained largely unchanged.

2.8 The revised application is accompanied by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan, an ecology and biodiversity survey, a design and

access statement supplement and importantly a statement of community use of the proposed facilities.

### **3. SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 3.1 The application site is a triangular plot with approximately 170 metres of frontage on Lings Way running north to south. The land is 150 metres at its deepest and 40 metres deep (west to east) at the southern end of site nearest the current car park.
- 3.2 The land is Borough Council owned and used to be a sports pitch. It was bunded with inert materials around 10 years ago to prevent unauthorised access along the Lings Way frontage. It is now a meadow, loosely maintained and mainly used by dog walkers, as it remains entirely open to pedestrian access.
- 3.3 Lings Wood Nature Reserve is directly to the east of the site where Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust has its main office.
- 3.4 In terms of other neighbouring land there are mature trees in woodland to the north of the site and there is the existing public car park with access to Lings Way to the south. To the west is Lings Way itself, a busy arterial route that separates the site from the Lodge Farm community hub and nearby housing that generally faces away from the site.

### **4. PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 No relevant planning history.

### **5. PLANNING POLICY**

#### **5.1 Development Plan**

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a planning application to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The current Development Plan comprises of the saved policies of the Northamptonshire County Structure Plan and Northampton Local Plan 1997.

#### **5.2 National Policies:**

PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development  
PPS3– Housing  
PPS9 – Biodiversity and geological conservation  
PPG13 - Transport

#### **5.3 Northampton Borough Local Plan**

L1 – Existing Recreational Facilities  
E20 – New Development  
E19 – Implementing Development  
H7 - Housing Development Outside Primarily Residential Areas

E18 – Sites of acknowledged nature conservation value  
E40 - Crime

- 5.4 **Supplementary Planning Guidance**  
Northamptonshire County Parking Standards SPG 2003  
Planning out Crime in Northamptonshire SPG 2004

## **6. CONSULTATIONS / REPRESENTATIONS**

- 6.1 **NBC Public Protection** – Noise scheme and noise sensitivity assessment required by conditions. Desktop study of contamination required before commencement of development. A light scheme and refuse storage plan are also required and could both be applied by condition.
- 6.2 **NBC Housing** – Housing for the over-55s should be as per an agreement in the lease already set out by NBC Asset Management Team.
- 6.3 **NBC Tree Officer** – A number of comments through the progression of the scheme resulting in a requirement for tree protection to be controlled throughout any development.
- 6.4 **NBC Asset Team** – Factually indicate their involvement in the long lease and building agreement they have with the IWHO.
- 6.5 **NBC Access Officer** – no objections

## **7. APPRAISAL**

- 7.1 It is first important to outline the exact context and content of the development being proposed in order to understand the planning consideration that should be made.
- 7.2 The proposals are for a recreation, education and worship centre with some components of residential use. Community access to the proposed development is proposed albeit that it would not be free of charge with unfettered public access. The facility is directed at the Hindu community first, with an inherent wider community benefit supporting it as described later in the report.

### ***Principal of development and existing land use***

- 7.3 The primary planning consideration arising from the proposal is the loss of the existing leisure space that is clearly of natural and social benefit to the local area.
- 7.4 Policy L1 of the Northampton Local Plan states that permission will not be granted where there is the loss of public or private indoor or outdoor recreational facilities for which there is a need, unless suitable

replacements are provided, or the loss of open space of value, unless the development secures the majority of the site as a facility for sport and recreation.

- 7.5 It is considered that the current site primarily falls into the category of 'open space of value' and partly is an outdoor recreation facility as well. In short, the Policy advises that any development of such land should include compensation of the open space lost and re-provision of recreational facilities. The eastern districts of Northampton are well-served by this type of amenity green space that exists on the site at present and its loss in that regard is not considered unduly adverse.
- 7.6 The NBC Open Space Audit of 2009 indicates various current and projected public open space deficiencies in the eastern Northampton. During pre-determination planning discussions with the applicant, it has been made clear to the applicant by the case officer that this development should take steps to provide some of these facilities and spaces where possible in compensation for building on and occupying the existing meadow.
- 7.7 As a result of these discussions, the development now provides a wider buffer to the Lings Wood Nature Reserve including a relocation of the building and a drawing back of the fencing, sport facilities on the MUGA and in the sports hall that would be made available to the local and wider community at suitable times and costs to be secured and controlled through a section 106 agreement. Similarly, cultivated garden areas (allotments) are now included in an area on the southern part of the site and to be made available to members of the public within the same agreement, the details of which have yet to be negotiated.
- 7.8 The proposed overall scheme, whilst of social significance and of wider benefit to the greater Northampton community, will nonetheless need to be secured from crime and anti-social behaviour and as a consequence the public would not be able to access and circulate around the entire site at will. It is considered that a legal agreement can be achieved to secure the community use of the facilities in a controlled way and this in effect, will overcome the projected loss of the open space as protected by saved Policy L1 of the Local Plan.
- 7.9 In summary, the loss of the current publicly accessible meadow is compensated by the provision of more formal sport facilities, allotments and natural areas, all of which are desirable open space and would offer recreation benefits to the wider public.
- 7.10 The drafting of the terms of a legal agreement by which the community would be able to access to the allotments and recreation facilities has yet to commence in detail. It is recommended that in this regard, the Council should not object to the principal of development providing it is an active party in further negotiations with WNDC and the developer

regarding the contents of a community access strategy to be secured by legal agreement.

### ***Design***

- 7.11 The proposed building is a contemporary form of flat roofs punctuated by the temple spires. The design and access statements refer to a range of influences, but the finished proposal has a unique and modern feel that is considered of appropriate form for such a relatively isolated position.
- 7.12 Part of the designer's rationale is that the building is set back close to the backdrop of woodland at a scale that is slightly lower than the surrounding mature trees. This is laudable and it is agreed that the relationship allows the building to merge into its setting, however this does result in the large amount of car parking being positioned between the building and Lings Way. The building will be mainly viewed from Lings Way, therefore, most views of what is a very distinctive and interesting structure will be framed or blocked by a large number of parked cars. This is unfortunate, but it is not considered that this constitutes a reason in itself for an objection to the design.
- 7.13 The proposal will create a landmark structure giving a sense of place and identity that is presently lacking. Removal of the bunding along Lings Way will open up the site and reduce the negative sense of enclosure along this stretch of road. Surrounding the site with a 2.4 metre security fence will detract from the overall appearance and it is advised that WNDC continue to look at solutions to minimise this visual impact.
- 7.14 The layout of the site does little to enhance local pedestrian routes except for the single improved path to the nearby bus stop. However, again there is a balance to be struck in finding the right amount of improvements without compromising security, the proposed footpath solution is considered suitable in this instance.
- 7.15 As a whole, the building's appearance is considered contextual with a strong sense of identity but nonetheless has some shortcomings. These shortcomings, such as the frontage parking, should be highlighted to WNDC, but no overall objections raised.

### ***NBC Consultation Responses***

- 7.16 A range of internal consultees at NBC have provided comment and no significant objections have been raised that have not already been addressed or cannot be controlled by planning conditions applied by WNDC. All the comments have already been forwarded to WNDC for its consideration.

### ***Other Matters***

- 7.17 It is my understanding that a holding objection from Highways Agency is still in place, but details in the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan have been submitted by the applicant with the aim of overcoming this. This is a matter for WNDC as determining authority to resolve with the two parties and NBC as consultee need not be involved.
- 7.18 Similarly, there were objections from Natural England that have recently been retracted. It is not considered that there are any further ecological matters that need addressing that have not already been discussed between parties.
- 7.19 The six over-55s dwellings proposed do add an element of security to the scheme and are considered commensurate and ancillary to the overall use. Further dwellings on this land, which is protected under saved Policy L1 of the Local Plan, would be unlikely to preserve the public amenity that the land provides. Indeed additional residential development would take open space away and produce their own pressures for amenity space by introducing more residents. The priest house is again clearly ancillary to the function of the temple and considered to be appropriate in scale and kind.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The proposals are primarily for a recreation and religious development that will go some way to serve community sustainability. It is acknowledged that this is a community hub that will not serve everyone's needs, but more a specialist centre serving a wider community. It is considered that by entering an agreement allowing community access the centre will go some way to it being more closely integrated with all sections of the local community.
- 8.2 The loss of Policy L1 leisure space is unfortunate, but in reality the land is degraded and not of special importance. Replacing the leisure space with publicly available recreation space is suitable compensation and Members are advised not to object to the proposals providing WNDC involve NBC in reaching a robust agreement with the IWHO that enables integrated community access / use of the proposed development.
- 8.3 In short, subject to appropriate controls the allotments and sport facilities would provide an excellent resource to local people greater than the current land resource thereby Policy L1 of the Local Plan is overcome and complied with.
- 8.4 On other matters, WNDC should be advised to seek methods of landscaping and layout that mitigate the visual impact of large parking areas to the front of the building and the security fencing proposed.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

9.1 None.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 N/2009/0636

## **11. SUMMARY AND LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN**

11.1 In reaching the attached recommendations regard has been given to securing the objectives, visions and priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan together with those of associated Frameworks and Strategies.

<b>Position:</b>	<b>Name/Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Author:</b>	Richard Boyt	6/10/2010
<b>Development Control Manager Agreed:</b>	Gareth Jones	6/10/2010





Name: SW  
 Date: 7th October 2010  
 Scale: 1:2500  
 Dept: Planning  
 Project: Site Location Plan

Title  
**Lings Way**

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