

ITEM 11: APPLICANT PRESENTATION NOTES 5TH DECEMBER 2018 RBC COMMITTEE

Good evening Councillors and Officers

Firstly, the S106 mentioned in the recommendation is a **holding objection**- off-site parking has been secured with a formal licence, but Council officers have not progressed the paperwork pending your decision tonight. This need not occupy your time tonight.

We only found out at midday today that the HSE has already requested a Call-In. I believe this makes your decision tonight much more straightforward as it means any decision to approve will be examined by another party, thus any perceived worries about safety will be resolved by the Secretary of State. But I hope by the conclusion of this meeting you will be confident that the risk is both miniscule and acceptable.

I trust you have all had the chance to study the Legal Opinion provided to the site owner by a leading Queens Counsel (included in the update).

On the outstanding issue of HSE concerns, I want to focus your attention on 3 key points

1. Is there evidence that the adjoining Gillette site is safe?
2. What will be the consequences of a refusal?
3. What will be the consequences of you resolving to grant permission?

Is there evidence that the adjoining Gillette site is safe?

The answer is YES –

- HSE Licence granted controlling all storage and use of LPG
- No objection from P&G/Gillette – who must be assumed to be responsible experts
- There are regular safety checks not only by the HSE and Gillette, but also the emergency services; site layout and barriers avoid risk of collisions on site; robust procedures during tank filling; no surrounding fire hazards such as proximity to inflammable materials.
- The application site is recognized by Gillette to be at a lower risk than neighbours who are close to the warehouse on Gillette Way, where a special evacuation strategy **is required**. To date, none has been required for the application site.
- In fact, in 22 years of ownership, the owner has never at any time been alerted to any risk from the Gillette tanks by P&G or the HSE or asked to adopt any special safety or evacuation measures.
- The proposed change of use would voluntarily (and as controlled by conditions) achieve improved safety measures and a very detailed evacuation strategy

- While I am not an expert on risk, I would suggest that there is potentially a greater risk from on road transport of LPG around Reading- while these transits have a smaller capacity than the 5 tanks on site, tankers on the public highway are far more likely to be in a collision/high risk situation.
- And finally on the matter of safety In relation to your consistency of approach – HSE raised no objection in 2017 to Gillettes’ addition of new buildings to accommodate **250 extra staff within the same risk zone**, and this Committee granted planning permission to that scheme.

2. Consequences of a refusal

If the current application is not approved, subject to finding an alternative occupier for the lawful long established office use the site is likely to have **more** people on site Mon-Friday than the new use.

There is only a very remote likelihood of Church finding an alternative site – it has taken 10 years to find this one – thus there will be a huge loss of community benefits.

3. Consequences of an approval

Some of you might feel worried about voting to approve in the light of the HSE comments. However:

- If the Committee resolve to Grant permission as before, Members will not ultimately be deciding the safety issue themselves, because the HSE has already asked the SoS to review it- as cogently outlined in paras 49-58 of the attached Counsel’s advice to the owner.
- Members will note that when this happened on a much higher risk site at The Oval Cricket Ground, the Secretary of State determined that development could proceed – in part because HSE advice takes no account taken of existing use. In determining a planning application, you are able to take account of existing and potentially continuing use of the application site as a large office.

CONCLUSION

I ask you to take a proportionate and balanced view of the risks associated with this project, to remember how supportive you were of it in September, and to resolve to Grant PP subject to the same Conditions as you did before.

This will show the people of South Reading and the Secretary of State that you really want the community benefits of this project to go ahead, and that you do not consider that the residual (unquantified) risk is a genuine barrier to the future use of the site.

***Deirdre Wells Dip TP MRTPI
Red Kite Development Consultancy on behalf of Reading Family Church
December 5th 2018***