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816 Stockport Road: Planning Statement Addendum – Loss of Existing Use

Compliance with Local Policy

Policy EC2 'Existing Employment Space' states that the Council will seek to retain and enhance existing employment space and sites. Alternative uses will only be supported on sites allocated accordingly, or if it can be demonstrated that:

- *The existing use is unviable in terms of business operations, building age and format;*
- *The existing use is incompatible with adjacent uses;*
- *The existing use is unsuitable for employment having had regard to the Manchester-Salford - Trafford SFRA; or*
- *On balance, proposals are able to offer greater benefits in terms of the Core Strategy's vision and spatial objectives than the existing use.*

The supporting text to the policy goes onto explain that whilst the Council values employment land, there are circumstances where it will be appropriate to support alternatives uses. These circumstances are outlined above, and they broadly aim to acknowledge situations in which it would be unproductive to protect the land for employment uses, either because:

- *Employment is un-viable, particularly if the site has remained empty or vacant for a period of time although it has been marketed and the employment space no longer serves the needs of businesses due to its age and the conditions of the property; or,*

- *An alternative use would bring more benefits to the City, either because the employment use is not the optimum use for the site or because any harm is outweighed by the benefits of the new use. Judgements on the net value of such benefits will be based on the key strategic objectives in the Core Strategy.*

The supporting text to the policy makes it clear that it is not necessary to demonstrate compliance with all of the circumstances described in the policy, rather if it can be demonstrated that the development complies with one of the two scenarios described in the supporting policy text then development should be viewed as acceptable.

In this instance, it is clear that an alternative use for high quality mixed use scheme with commercial at ground floor and residential on the floors above would be a much more suitable use for the site.

The site is located within the district centre of Levenshulme and currently the existing buildings comprise low quality single storey structures comprising a car repair garage and a carpet storage / retailer. The proposed development plans to replace these uses with commercial uses falling within use classes E(a) and E (g)(i). These uses will still generate an employment offer that will likely be the same if not greater than existing (note – the form was not able to disclose the number of existing and proposed employees as this information was not accurately known). Furthermore, it is considered that the mix of uses proposed at ground floor are far more suitable for a district centre and would be similar to surrounding uses thereby complementing the existing offer in the locality and strengthening the centre.

The built form / architecture that would also be delivered as part of the proposals is also preferable to the existing built form which causes harm to the character of the streetscene. The application proposals will complement the existing buildings and architecture in the locality.

The existing buildings are also considered to be an inefficient use of urban land in a highly sustainable location. Such locations are precisely the type of locations where new high quality mixed use developments should be located to ensure that the optimum benefits of the land are extrapolated.

The key core strategy vision in relation to employment is:

'a City with a growing economy driven by the strength of the Regional Centre and Manchester Airport which supports a successful City Region. The knowledge based economy flourishes within an entrepreneurial community, characterized by a fully skilled, inclusive working population'.

Additionally, Spatial Objective 2 'Economy' states:

Support a significant further improvement of the City's economic performance and spread the benefits of this growth across the City to reduce economic, environmental and social disparities, and to help create inclusive sustainable communities.

The proposals will bring greater economic activity to the site as well as the creation of jobs. Spending in the shops will be circulated back into the local community. The provision of active frontages will attract a higher footfall to the site. The new businesses on the site will help to build a community identity by representing the area and becoming part of the local landscape. The employment opportunities created as part of this scheme will assist with supporting the local community help to create an inclusive sustainable community within Levenshulme.

The proposal would contribute to the Council's ability to meet its overall housing land target as expressed in the recently adopted Places for Everyone Plan. It would contribute towards the supply of apartments within the area, in a sustainable district centre location. The site has good access to public transport routes, schools, parks and other services / amenities.

Compliance with National Policy

The NPPF supports the regeneration of town centres and paragraph 86 f) recognises that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and residential development should be encouraged on appropriate sites.

Additionally, there is also likely to be a small economic benefit during the construction phase of the proposal.

Whilst the proposal would result in a fairly limited contribution to the requirement for new homes, it is still considered that significant weight should be afforded in the determination of this planning application to the scheme's contribution to addressing the identified housing shortfall within the Greater Manchester Area and the efficient use of land that the proposals represent.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that the economic objective of the planning system is to: *"help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure."*

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that: *"Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential"*

Paragraph 126 states that: planning policies and decisions need to reflect changes in the demand for land.

Paragraph 127 states that LPAs should take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated, where this would help to meet identified development needs. **In particular, they should support proposals to use retail and employment land for homes in areas of high housing demand, provided this would not undermine key economic sectors or sites, and be compatible with other policies in the Framework.**
The proposal would provide slightly less commercial floor space than the existing building, however the quality of the space is far greater. The site is within the district centre of Levenshulme and therefore the proposal of the ground floor as retail / commercial would not compromise the primary retail function of the locality.

The loss of commercial space on site not considered to preclude approval. The use as housing is also expressly supported by the NPPF and there is a clear need for the land use in this locality.