Units 6, 6a & 7b (now known as Units 9, 10, 14 & 15) Ricebridge Estate, Station Road, Thorpe Le Soken

Conversion of former Class B1 (now Class E) commercial premises in to four live/work units including first floor dormer extensions

Planning Statement

Flood Risk Assessment

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Planning Statement and Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared on behalf of De Roy Tool Company Ltd in support of an application for the conversion of former B1 (Class E) commercial premises into four live/work units including first floor dormer extensions at Units 6, 6a & 7b Ricebridge Estate.

2.0 Context of Site

2.1 The Ricebridge Estate originally comprised a mix of office and industrial units located close to the railway bridge and railway station in Thorpe le Soken. At the entrance to the estate is a large two storey building (Units 7 and 7a) constructed in the 1980's for which prior approval was issued on 28th May 2020 for conversion into 8 residential dwellings. This conversion has since been undertaken. Immediately to the east is a range of single storey B1 (now Class E) commercial units in the same ownership as Unit 7 & 7a. These were occupied by a specialist timber joiner, a company specialising in fire extinguishers and fire alarms which are currently vacant but until recently were occupied by a company involved in the assembly of electrical components.

2.2 To the south of the estate access road is a surfaced car parking area available for at least 9 vehicles and used in the past by employees of the units.

3.0 Development Plan Policies

National Guidance

3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework advises that in determining planning applications for residential development, local planning authorities should take into account the Development Plan Policies and all other material considerations. Local planning authorities should follow the approach of the 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development' and that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay. It emphasises the need to plan positively for appropriate new development; so that both plan-making and development management are proactive

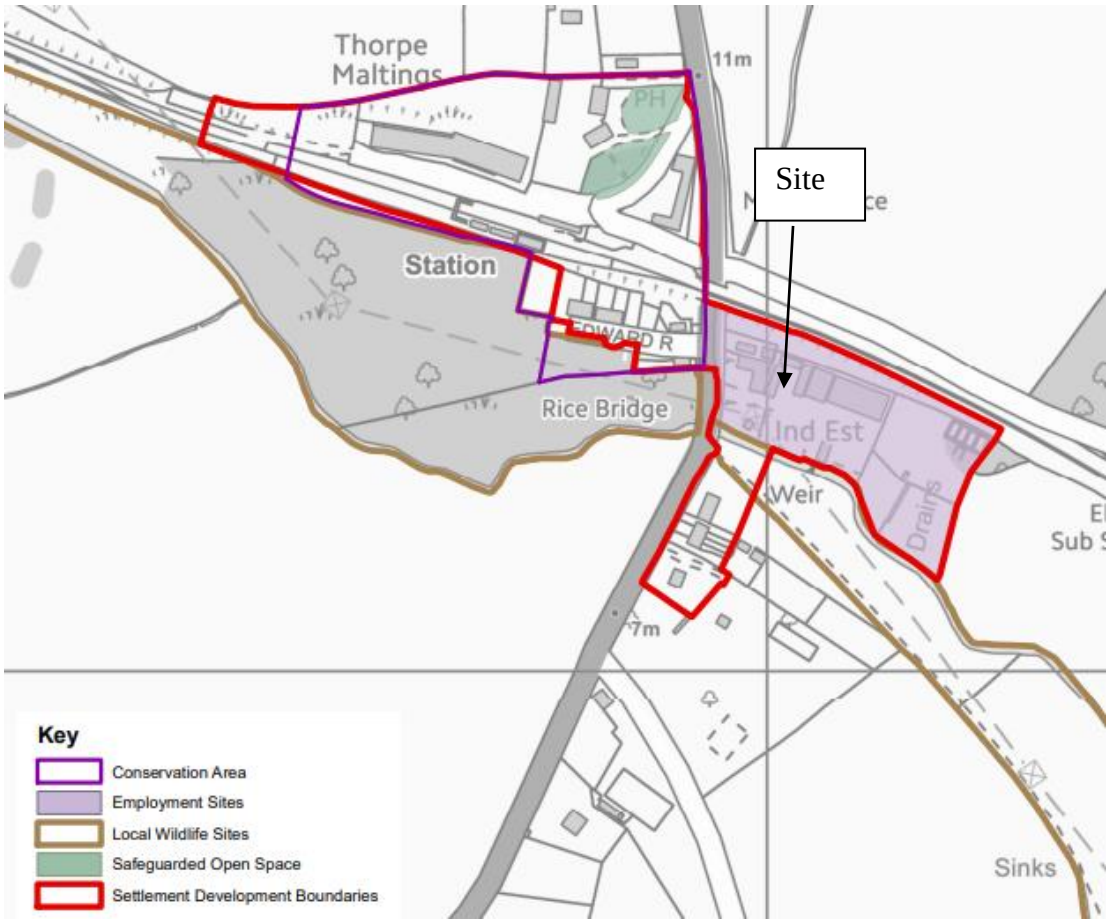
and driven by a search for opportunities to deliver sustainable development, rather than a barrier.

3.2 Paragraphs 159 to 167 sets out the government's approach to development and flood risk. This considers, inter alia, that:-

> Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. All plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development – taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change – so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property. They should do this, and manage any residual risk, by: a) applying the sequential test and then, if necessary, the exception test as set out below; b) safeguarding land from development that is required, or likely to be required, for current or future flood management; c) using opportunities provided by new development and improvements in green and other infrastructure to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, and d) where climate change is expected to increase flood risk so that some existing development may not be sustainable in the long-term, seeking opportunities to relocate development, including housing, to more sustainable locations. The aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source. Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.

<u>Local Plan 2022</u>

3.3 The site is located within the settlement boundary for Thorpe le Soken Station and Maltings, wherein the principal of development is accepted. The site is identified as a commercial area to be protected.



3.4 In respect of the safeguarding of employment land, the Council recognises the need to maintain an adequate level of sites to meet the needs of the local economy. It indicates that it will be supportive of the redevelopment of sites which would lead to an improvement in the quality of employment floorspace suited to modern day needs (Policy PP 6)

3.5 Policy PPL 1 concerning Development and Flood Risk states, inter alia:-

> All development proposals should include appropriate measures to respond to the risk of flooding on and/or off site. Within the Flood Zone (which includes Flood Zones 2 and 3, as defined by the Environment Agency) shown on the Policies Map and Local Maps, or elsewhere involving sites of 1ha or more, development proposals must be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment. Where development is classified as “more vulnerable” the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) should demonstrate that there will be no internal flooding in the event of a “design

event flood". The FRA should demonstrate that in the event of a breach or failure of flood defence infrastructure, refuge will be available above flood levels and that a means of escape is possible from first floor level. All development classified as "More Vulnerable" or "Highly Vulnerable" within Flood Zone 2 and 3 should set finished floor levels 300mm above the known or modelled 1 in 100 annual probability (1% AEP) flood level including an allowance for climate change.

4.0 The Proposal

4.1 Units 6, 6a and 7b form two similar single storey buildings located on the north side and perpendicular to the access road. They are in a sound condition but now vacant. The units are fully equipped with power supply together with toilets and kitchen facilities. It is also double glazed and insulated. The buildings were erected in 1986 pursuant to planning permission TEN/00531/85 which was specifically for B1 light industrial purposes. Until April 2023 they were being used for light industrial purposes as defined within Class E of the Use Classes Order.

4.2 The applicant was aware last autumn that the units would be vacated. In an attempt to make the units more attractive for new commercial leaseholders, the applicant applied in January 2023 for extensions at first floor level to create four modern commercial Class E premises. Planning permission was granted in March 2023 (reference 22/01944/FUL). The units have remained vacant since April 2023. Unfortunately, no interest has been shown for commercial letting purposes since, but a strong interest has been forthcoming for the continuation of the ground floor commercial uses with residential accommodation above. The residential units would operate in conjunction with the ground floor uses as live/work units and not become independent dwellings.

4.3 This scheme will therefore ensure no loss of commercial floorspace will result. It is proposed to extend the first floor with dormer additions in an identical manner to the approved scheme. In this respect, the units would appear identical to the approved scheme, with no increased visual impact upon the locality. Access to all the units would be from the existing front doors, with no separate access to the first floor accommodation available. Each unit would comprise one bedroom at first floor and

comply with the nationally prescribed housing standards. Other than bathroom and kitchen facilities and a new internal staircase, only minor internal partitions are required.

4.4 Externally, the units would have the benefit of a shared communal amenity space within a courtyard at the front of the units. Each unit would also have its own private parking space on the opposite side of the estate road. The vehicular access is as per the existing formal bellmouth arrangement, with appropriate radii and visibility splays. There are therefore no highway or transport issues affecting the site beyond the current activities.

4.5 The site is partly within Flood Zone 2 and Unit 9 is within Flood Zone 3, but all is within an area shown as being protected by existing flood defences. The risk of flooding is therefore low and no greater than for the existing commercial use. The application is accompanied by a full topographical survey of the area. This plan provides details of both ground surface levels and the finished floor levels (FFL) of the buildings subject of this application. This indicates the lowest part of the site adjacent to Unit 7b is located at 3.16m while the remainder is between 3.48 and 3.89m AODN. The finished floor level of the buildings are at 3.96m AODN for units 14 & 15, and 4.0m AODN for units 9 and 10. The EA has provided details of the 1:100 and 1:1000 year events at a number of locations. One position is located on the western side of Station Road and the other is next to the pylon adjacent to the application site. I enclose full details of the advice received from the EA. For the position located in close proximity to the site, the predicted flood levels are 2.58m AODN (1:100 year) and 2.81m AODN (1:1000). The 1:100 level including 30% climate change is shown as 2.70m AODN. Thus, the entire site is above the 1:1000 level by at least 0.46m while the FFL is at least some 1.04m above this predicted level. It is therefore clear that the simple application of the Zone 3 approach is incorrect, and the development will therefore be safe from any expected flood levels within the lifetime of the development.

4.6 The development as existing provides no access above ground floor level in an extreme event. Coupled with the requirement for visual enhancement of the buildings, this scheme proposes the provision of a converted area available at an upper floor level for each unit, which is a significant improvement compared with the existing flood risk conditions. An internal staircase within every unit will lead to a first floor at a level of not

less than 6.66m above AODN. All dormers will have a minimum opening of 0.33m² which accords with the Building Regulations as a means of escape. Additional details for improved building resilience is also included as detailed upon the sectional drawings. Of course, as these buildings already exist, there is no actual requirement for the developer to include these details, but they are considered to improve the rental ability for the commercial floorspace. An evacuation plan is also included. There are no known surface drainage problems in the area.

4.7 There are no forms of development or use of land in the locality which could cause any form of noise disturbance for the intended occupiers of the dwellings nor would the scale of the residential use be likely to cause disturbance to any neighbouring development. The Council considered within a previous application for the adjoining site that the occupants of the proposed dwellings might be susceptible from noise caused by neighbouring commercial uses and the nearby railway line. A full noise assessment report prepared at that time is again attached with this application. This demonstrates that the Council's concerns were unfounded.

4.8 In terms of design, each of the buildings will be re-clad with fibrous cement horizontal boarding (Hardiplank) and cement fibre slates for the roof areas. The boarding will be water resistant when compared with the existing render finish. The site contains 9 car parking spaces, which has been more than sufficient for the existing uses on the site. The site is clearly in a sustainable location given the close proximity of Thorpe le Soken railway station. There are no on-street parking restrictions within this private estate.

4.9 The site is shown within the adopted Local Plan as an Employment Area. This plan is already out of date following the development of 8 residential units on the adjoining site (Units 7 & 7a). No issues were raised when the Council accepted the development of the adjacent part of this industrial estate for residential purposes. However, this application does not propose the loss of any commercial floorspace.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 This scheme represents a significant improvement to the visual appearance of the commercial estate, while providing enhanced flood safety measures in the unlikely

extreme flooding event. The buildings already exist and are currently above the protected levels advocated within Policy PL1. Nevertheless, the applicant has sought to improve the appearance and safety of this site, which is otherwise shown to be retained for commercial purposes within the aforementioned development plan. The provision of a live/work unit will not increase the risk or danger to life given that the occupants of the first floor will be employed within the ground floor workspaces. As such, the consideration of a sequential test is too simple a methodology to be used in this unique instance. No additional persons would be present within any of the units than would otherwise be resident within the ground floor area, while significant improvements to safety would now be available. The scheme therefore accords with both national and local development policies.