NEIGHBOUR LETTERS SENT:-
The Occupier: 5,6,7,8,9 Benjamin Road, 6,7,8,9, Lyric Close, 5,6,7,8 Drury Close, 21,22,23 Shaftsbury Road, Europa Lodge Hotel, Lindbrook Audi, David Wilson Homes.

REPLIES RECEIVED:-
3 replies received raising the following comments:
- Supports residential development preferable than employment use;
- Preference for original employment development first planned;
- Concern density too a high, lack of infrastructure, public space and parking provision;
- Object to 4 storey residential development out-of-keeping– issues of overlooking and lack of privacy;
- Masterplan does not show any screening of trees to protect amenities of adjoining neighbours

THE APPLICATION SITE:-
1.1 The application site is a 1.88 hectare piece of Greenfield land located at the junction of Balcombe Road and Lucerne Drive. The site is bounded by Lucerne Drive and the residential properties in Benjamin Road, Drury Close, Shaftsbury Road and Lyric Close to the north and west, to the east by the Balcombe Road, Europa Hotel and Jungle Fields commercial development and to the south by a residential site currently under construction. The area is vacant and overgrown having formerly been used for agriculture.

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:-
2.1 The application is in outline for residential development with associated roads, footpaths, car parking, open spaces, landscaping and means of access. The only matter to be agreed is the means of access.

2.2 To accompany the application the following documents have been submitted:
- Transport Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Employment Assessment
- Planning and Design Statement – which includes illustrative Masterplan.
- Environmental Report
- Statement of Community Involvement

2.3 The masterplan indicates residential development at a density of 50 dwellings per hectare, a mixture of 2, 3 and 4 storeys set around a series of courtyards, including landscaping and traffic calming measures.

PLANNING HISTORY:-
3.1 The application site is part of land designated as a 12 acre business park in the agreed master plan for Maidenbower neighbourhood. Three applications

3.2 An application for housing on all of the site was refused due to loss of employment land CR/1997/0440/OUT.

3.3 In 2004 an outline application was permitted on the site for 10,016m² offices and parking and residential development (CR/2004/0433/OUT). The amount of office floorspace (10,016m²) proposed by the application equated to the previous approval for the headquarters office building for the site. It was considered that the concentration of office floorspace into a smaller area of the site would make more efficient use of the land while allowing the remainder of the site to be released for residential development. While this proposal for a mixed use scheme was a departure from the adopted local plan given there was still a substantial element of potential office development, the provision of housing to meet identified need on the remaining part of the site was considered an acceptable departure. The reserved matters application for the residential part of the site was granted permission under reference CR/2005/0478/ARM

PLANNING POLICY:-

4.1 National Guidance in PPG3 ‘Housing’, PPG4 ‘Industrial, Commercial and Small Firms’ and draft PPS3 ‘Housing’ emphasises the need for Local Planning Authorities to manage the provision of housing and employment land.

4.2 West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016
The plan was adopted on 25th October 2004 and the following policies are relevant:
- NE1 identifies a need for 280,000m² of employment floorspace and 4,495 dwellings in the plan period.
- NE5 which seeks the provision of business, industrial and warehousing suited to the varying needs of local business whilst resisting the loss of existing or proposed employment land to other uses.
- NE7 identifies the Crawley/Gatwick area as a focus for growth (in particular economic growth in the context of Western Policy Area in RPG9)

4.3 Crawley Borough Local Plan 2000
The plan was adopted in April 2000 and the following policies are relevant:
- E1 – which encourages employment generating development and the enhancement of the local economy in so far as it is compatible with the environmental capacity and economic needs of the area.
- E3B (21) which allocates the application site for B1 uses.
- E4 – which seeks to ensure employment provision and planning decisions are taken in the light of regular monitoring and assessment of land availability for development.

4.4 Draft Core Strategy Local Development Framework (LDF)
The Council has published a draft Core Strategy of the LDF for consultation purposes which was consulted on in late 2005. The LDF will run to 2018, 2 years beyond the Structure Plan period, however only the employment provision to 2016 has been identified.
Policy E1 - proposes a total of 280,000m² of employment floorspace by 2016 but acknowledges that given the strategic employment location of the town, the Council in conjunction with the County Council and adjoining districts would monitor floorspace and if appropriate amend the figures in line with Government advice which requires regular employment land reviews.

Policy E2 identifies the application site as an employment floorspace allocation.

Policy E3 places stronger emphasis on the protection of existing floorspace beyond the provisions of adopted policy E7 in the Crawley Borough Local Plan which relates to the main employment areas only. The wording of this emerging document has a stronger emphasis on safeguarding existing employment floorspace and the proposed employment allocations given the increasing pressure these allocations are under for other uses.

4.5 Since the preparation of the draft Core Strategy the Council has undertaken an Employment Land Review, while the results are still to be formally considered, the study recommends a strong policy stance towards the protection of existing floorspace provision and employment allocations and identifies this site as an opportunity which could come forward in the short term. The study will be included as a background document in support of the Submission Core Strategy LDF document later this year.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:-

5.1 The starting point for the determination of all planning applications are the provisions of the development plan (adopted Structure and Local Plan) and in this case the proposal is a departure from these provisions.

5.2 The site is allocated for B1 employment use in the adopted Crawley Borough Local Plan (policy E3B(21)). The site was identified and considered as part of the Local Plan process which was subject to a Public Inquiry prior to adoption in April 2000.

5.3 The recently adopted Structure Plan has set the required level of employment floorspace provision for the Borough to 2016 (280,000m²) and has identified the need to retain existing floorspace in the Borough. These floorspace requirements within Crawley are particularly significant given the strategic importance of the town and Gatwick Airport to the economic success of the sub region (as identified in RPG9). The protection of this site for employment use is further endorsed by the West Sussex Structure Plan policy NE5 which seeks to resist the loss of existing or proposed employment land to other uses.

5.4 The application site has been identified in the LDF as a suitable employment location. The emerging work on employment provision being undertaken to accompany the LDF suggests there is a need for the Borough to protect its existing employment allocations and make further provision in order to meet the future requirements of the Borough in the plan period to meet the requirements of the Structure Plan. The employment study work which accompanies the ongoing LDF work concluded that this site is required as part of the longer term employment provision for the Borough and that this site could come forward in the short term. It is therefore not accepted that this site should be released for housing given the importance of employment
land in the Borough to the wider sub-region and the longer term provisions for housing and employment of Crawley as a whole.

5.5 The applicants state that the site has been marketed and that there is no demand for office provision, there is a plentiful supply of offices and development opportunities, the site is not a good location for employment provision but is suited to residential development and that the release of this site would not prejudice the long term employment requirements for Crawley as provision is made elsewhere.

5.6 It is not accepted that there is a strong case for these arguments as the applicants marketing of this employment site (in particular at its reduced area) has been very limited and over a short period of time and that there is very short term evidence of future employment demand. The site remains a sustainable and suitable location for employment use and the fact the site may also be suitable for housing is not accepted as justification.

5.7 While the application in 2004 permitted the release of some of this employment allocation for residential use, this was on the basis that a significant amount of employment land was retained and that this represented a more efficient use of the site as whole. This has set no precedent and there is no justification to release this reduced employment area for residential use.

5.8 The proposed residential scheme is in outline with only the means of access to be considered. The proposed means of access to the site is considered acceptable to serve the development. The applicant has provided illustrative information including a masterplan which with some modifications relating to the height and siting of some of the dwellings could provide a suitable residential layout if the site was released for housing. The proposal indicates residential development at a similar density to the housing under construction on the land to the south of the site, the proposed layout would continue this form of development.

5.9 Given the overriding policy objection to this development, Officers have not engaged the applicant in negotiations to secure the necessary affordable housing and infrastructure provision that would be required by this development. It is therefore proposed that 2 refusal reasons should be included to acknowledge the absence of these provisions. It is accepted however that should the applicant lodge an appeal, negotiations would be required to prepare a draft S106 agreement with the appropriate levels of infrastructure provision for consideration by any appeal Inspection which would overcome these reasons for refusal.

CONCLUSIONS:-

6.1 The proposal is a departure from the adopted Crawley Borough Local plan and contrary to the employment policies EB3(21) and E4, the emerging policies of the LDF Core Strategy and policy NE5 in the adopted Structure Plan. The proposal conflicts with the emerging work on the LDF which reinforces the objectives of the adopted Structure Plan which seeks to ensure an adequate supply of employment land for the Borough to 2016 of which this site is identified.