

Statement in support of the planning application for retrospective permission for the storage of steel wire on land adjacent to Stanley Mills, Talbot Road, Penistone.

This Penistone based firm has been very successful over recent years, and has been expanding its business. It has 70 workers, and is a major industrial employer in the town. The factory at Talbot Road processes steel wire, which is brought in bulk to the site. Because of fluctuating costs and availability of the steel wire, it is often necessary to have considerable quantities stored on site.

The 2 ton bales of steel wire are stacked three high, reaching a combined height of approximately 3m. It is not safe to stack above this height and so this is the maximum that will occur. Storage of steel wire has been taking place on an area directly to the west of the factory site for over four years without any complaints being received. The site is well screened on three sides, with the high disused railway embankment to the south, woodlands to the west and large industrial buildings to the east. On the southern boundary is a row of trees, and then some fencing. The tops of some of the stored bales can be seen from the upper floors of houses on Thurlstone Road.

Policy Background

The site is allocated as Safeguarded Land in the Unitary Development Plan, and Policy GS10 applies. This states that "In areas shown as safeguarded land on the proposals map existing uses will normally remain during the plan period and development will be restricted to that necessary for the operation of the existing uses. However, the plan period referred to covered the years 1986 to 2001.

The above policy must be balanced against Policy ED10 which deals with the growth of existing firms. This states that "the expansion of existing firms will normally be permitted subject to satisfactory standards of design, the amenity of neighbouring uses, and adequate car parking, loading and vehicle manoeuvring facilities." In support of this policy the UDP advises that the growth of existing firms will be one of the most important ways in which the future employment needs of the Borough's people will be met, and this will often lead to situations where the firm wishes to expand its premises. The Council will encourage this process, but will seek to maintain a balance between the needs of those firms wishing to expand, and the impact of such expansion on their neighbours and on the services and facilities of the Borough. It will seek to avoid placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of expansion but it will not neglect its overall responsibility to control development in a positive way which will benefit the Borough as a whole.

In respect of outside storage the UDP advises that "many employment uses involve some areas of outside storage and these will be assessed in the context of Policy BE6 (criteria B) and the Council's SPG Note No.1. Where outside storage does take place it should be adequately screened (for example by locating it behind buildings or by carrying out landscaping)."

Policy BE6 states that "The council will seek to achieve good design standards for all types of development. Proposals for development will be assessed using the following design criteria :

B) the use, quality, design and landscape treatment of open land within the site and the area around buildings"

Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 1 – Open Storage – states that "on sites where open storage may be acceptable, any such areas should be carefully sited to avoid visual intrusion. Screen fencing, planting or walling will be required where any such areas would be visible from residential properties, roads or public footpaths."

Assessment.

While the land was shown as land to remain undeveloped during the original plan period, this must be balance against the need for the firm to remain competitive. The steel wire is the basic raw material for the business. Storage is very restricted on the existing site, and there is no alternative location adjacent to the site for storage. To store the materials elsewhere would be disruptive to the day to day operation of the business, and uneconomic. Moreover, there is unlikely to be a better alternative site in the wider area for such storage, in terms of its impact on adjoining users.

In the current economic situation considerable weight must be given to the aims of Policy ED10 to secure the retention and encouragement of local employment. This is particularly important in the Penistone area where there has been a significant fall in the number of local manufacturing jobs in recent years, with the loss of Hoyland Fox, David Browns and HiTech, and the redevelopment of those sites for housing.

With regards to the issue of noise and disturbance from activities on the site, the storage area is set well away from houses. Buildings, a high embankment and woodlands further reduce the impact in three directions, and the houses to the south are 120m away. Moreover, any noise is unlikely to be noticeable above the background noise of the existing operations on the factory site.

In terms of visual impact, the site is hidden from view on three sides by the firm's buildings, the embankment and woodland. On the southern boundary the existing fencing and trees, together with the rising land levels, provide screening from houses to the south, though it is accepted that from their first floor windows some of the steel wire bales will be seen. However, it is proposed to plant a 10m belt of trees adjacent to this boundary, which when grown will provide complete screening.

The new storage area has also provided additional benefits for houses on Talbot Road. An area directly to the rear of these properties previously used for storage, and which gave rise to complaints, no longer has to be used for this purpose.

In conclusion, given the limited impact on visual amenity, it is suggested that in this case most weight should be given to Policy ED10, "that the expansion of existing firms will normally be permitted", and that this application should be supported by the Council.