REF. NO. F/12/71694

PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

DESCRIPTION/ ADDRESS	-	Construction of new freestanding data centre within existing car park and reconfiguration of car parking spaces. Stoneham Rectory, Stoneham Lane, Eastleigh, SO50 9NW.

SITE VISIT DATE – 22/11/2012

ARE PLANS ACCURATE? - Yes

HAVE ALL NECESSARY NEIGHBOURS BEEN CONSULTED? - Yes

THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICATION	As above to provide a purpose built building to house computer servers relating to the applicants business operations.
SITE AREA	Total application site area is 3.4 hectares but the floor area of the proposed building is 183 sqm.
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT DENSITY (NET)	n/a
TOPOGRAPHY	Generally flat and level.
TREES	There are a number of trees immediately to the north of the proposed site, three of which will be removed and replaced.
BOUNDARY TREATMENT	To the south the site is open onto a parking area, to the north and west is the old boundary fence/railings and planting, and to the east is the neighbouring office building. The old Rectory is to the south-east of the proposed building's site.
SITE CHARACTERISTICS	The Stoneham Rectory site and its former grounds are now part of a modern office development which provides a base for a number of companies. The location of the proposed data centre is in the north-western corner of the site approximately 25 metres away from the Listed Rectory. The site is currently used as a parking area for the applicant.
CHARACTER OF LOCALITY	The surrounding area is generally made up of open playing fields and parkland, although St. Nicholas' Church a very short distance away on the other side of Stoneham Lane.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION	DECISION
L/12/71693	Listed Building Consent: Construction of new freestanding data centre within existing car park and reconfiguration of car parking spaces.	Under consideration with the current planning application.
F/11/69755	Construction of new freestanding data centre within existing car park and reconfiguration of car parking spaces.	Withdrawn Jan 2012

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REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

SOURCE	SUMMARY OF CONTENT
None received.	

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

CONSULTEE	SUMMARY OF RESPONSE
Head of Regeneration & Planning Policy (Policy)	Whilst the application appears to be contrary to the countryside and strategic gap policies of the Development Plan, it could be viewed provided that a high quality design is achieved, landscape, and parking concerns can be resolved that there are material planning considerations in this case which could warrant permission being granted.
Head of Regeneration & Planning Policy (Conservation Officer)	On the basis that there is no other accommodation available on the site and one would not want to see this function within the listed building, this is a low profile solution to the problem. The majority of trees in that corner of the site are pretty scraggy so the new trees proposed would actually be a benefit but the amount of tree cover in this corner of the site is an important landscape feature that needs to be retained, be it by existing or new. However, it is disappointing to note that very little maintenance or improvement has been made to the listed entrance gates. Details of how the data centre is to be linked to the Rectory are required.
Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy (Design)	No objection, subject to landscape details being submitted and agreed to include planting, maintenance, paving, refurbishment of the entrance gates. We also need details of the cable connection works required to the main building on the basis that excavation is required.
The Environment Agency	The site is close to a culverted section of the Monks Brook river but the nature of the development is such that no objection is raised. Advisories recommended.
Head of Transportation & Engineering	No objection in principle but does have some concern at the loss of parking spaces. However, this is a private car park with little scope for any parking outside the site which may cause obstructions and could encourage more sustainable transport measures by staff.
Tree Services Manager	No objection provided the submitted arboricultural impact assessment is followed in full. Conditions recommended.
Head of Environmental Health	No objection.

POLICY CONTEXT

DESIGNATION APPLICABLE TO SITE
Outside Built-up Area Boundary Affects Setting of Listed Building Listed Building Grade II

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Review (2001-2011): 1.CO, 2.CO, 17.CO, 18.CO, 59E & 174.LB
Pre submission Eastleigh Borough Local Plan 2011-2029: S1, S8, DM1 & DM10
Supplementary Planning Document: Quality Places

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework

POLICY COMMENTARY

The above policies combine to form the criteria against which this application will be assessed with particular regard to the principle of that proposed, its layout and design, impact on the adjacent listed building, the amenity of the area, trees, parking, as well as the street scene and character of the surrounding area.

COMMENT ON CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The comments from the Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy with regards to requiring improvements to the listed old entrance gates to the Rectory are noted. These gates and the planting around them and along the former Rectory driveway are in need of significant maintenance before they fall into further disrepair. However, it is felt that it would be hard to insist upon this as part of the current planning application, as the gates are not directly affected by the proposed development and it is not believed they are within the responsibility of the applicants, who lease the Rectory from the main site owners. It may therefore be the case that the Council will need to contact the site owners directly in order to get the necessary refurbishment and maintenance works undertaken.

COMMENT ON REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

n/a

PLANNING OBLIGATION/CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed data centre is purely to house equipment relating to the applicant's company, it is not intended for use as additional office space and it is not intended that additional staff would be employed. This being the case, there would be no increase in trips to and from the application site which would warrant any developer's contributions towards sustainable transport measures being required.

ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND/OR LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states:-

> *"If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."*

The proposal is considered to comply with relevant Development Plan policies.

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ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND/OR LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

In this case policy issues for consideration include:

Principle – The application site lies outside the urban edge and within a strategic gap where there is a presumption against development unless it is required for genuine agricultural or horticultural purposes and other specified uses which cannot be located within urban areas, Policies 1.CO and 2.CO of the current local plan.

Policy 1.CO outlines the types of development considered appropriate for countryside locations, which include development necessary for agricultural, forestry or horticultural purposes, outdoor recreational uses, public utility services, extensions to education or health facilities and that any development meets the other criteria of the plan. Policy 2.CO states that planning approval will not be granted for development which would physically or visually diminish a strategic gap as identified on the proposals map.

Other countryside policies which are of relevance are saved Policies 17.CO and 18.CO.

Policy 17.CO relates to commercial employment sites outside of the urban edge and states that proposals to redevelop existing authorised sites will be allowed provided "it is for a use and of a design, scale and layout which is in keeping with its surroundings". It should also be constructed of appropriate materials and should not result in any increase in traffic generation.

Policy 18.CO ensures that any development within the countryside is respectful to the existing landscape character of the area.

Saved Policy 59.BE is a general design and amenity policies which is intended to ensure that all new development is appropriate for its surrounding context, in terms of its design , siting and appearance, and that it respects surrounding uses and will not have any adverse impact upon their amenity or the amenity of the surrounding area.

And finally saved Policy 174.LB states that "The alteration or extension of a listed building or any development within the curtilage of a listed building including the display of advertisement will not be permitted if it would result in a detrimental impact on the building or its setting."

In terms of saved Policies 1.CO, 2.CO and to some extent 17.CO and 18.CO, as well as their equivalent policies within the pre-submission local plan, the proposed development would appear to be contrary to these. While the data centre will not increase the number of employees or traffic movements, it is a new structure which will have physical impact upon the countryside and strategic gap. However, in this instance it is felt that other material issues warrant a recommendation against policy.

Layout & Design – The majority of the data centre will be below ground level with only the roof and air handling plant above ground. Externally it will have the appearance of a 1.8 metre brick boundary wall with hedge above, to hide the plant equipment on the roof. In one corner there will be a simple timber clad box which will house the door and stairs down into the server rooms below.

Listed Building – The previously withdrawn application proposed an entirely above ground structure which it was intended should appear as a stable block to the main Rectory. However, whilst having the potential to be a suitable solution in theory, the resulting structure was considered to be much too large and did not really look very convincing as a stable block which would have served a dwelling the size of the Rectory. Its position was also not where a stable block would have been built were it to be seen as part of the original Rectory.

This revised design is much simpler and more low key. While quite modern it could also be considered as a structure that may have been found within the ground of the Rectory. It almost has the appearance of being a boundary wall to a walled garden and remains visually and

ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND/OR LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

physically subservient and much more respectful to the listed Rectory. The proposal is therefore considered to meet the requirements of saved Policy 174.LB of the current adopted plan and DM10 of the pre-submission plan relating to heritage assets.

Amenity – In terms of general amenity, the proposed data centre will have a very limited impact upon the neighbouring offices within the business park. There are no residential properties within close proximity and it will be well screened from Stoneham Lane by the existing and replacement planting and trees proposed. It is therefore considered to meet the requirements within the 'Quality Places' SPD and saved Policy 59.BE of the current local plan.

Trees – The proposed data centre will require the removal of a number of trees along the north-western boundary of the site onto Stoneham Lane. However, this area is in need of some maintenance and their removal will not have any adverse impact. It is also proposed to replace these trees and provide additional landscaping which will help to soften any physical impact resulting from construction of the building. Conditions have been recommended by the Borough's Tree Services Manager.

Parking – The construction of the proposed data centre will result in the loss of a number of parking spaces which are used by the applicant. While this could be seen as a problem, the existing parking is not formally laid out and it is unlikely that very many of the existing spaces will be lost, although some reorganising of the remaining parking area will be required. This can be conditioned as part of the planning approval. Any loss in spaces will also encourage staff who can to use other more sustainable modes of transport. There is also little or no scope for any off site parking in this area, so it is unlikely that there will be any overflow parking onto surrounding roads which would cause any issues.

Street Scene & Area Character – As has been mentioned above, while the proposal will result in some existing trees and planting being removed, this will be replaced by new more appropriate landscaping and trees. Conditions to this effect are recommended. This landscaping will also help to soften any visual impact resulting from construction of the data centre, which means that it will not have any adverse impact upon the character or appearance of the surrounding countryside or strategic gap.

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the principle of the proposed data centre is contrary to some of the countryside policies within the current adopted local plan, by being a new development within the countryside and strategic gap which is not intended for agricultural or other identified uses, the proposal is nonetheless considered to be appropriate and acceptable. The NPPF states that local authorities should encourage and promote sustainable development and encourage local businesses. The applicants have been based in the Borough for a number of years and need the proposed data centre in order to ensure that they can continue to operate from their existing offices. Without the centre they will be forced to look for alternative accommodation elsewhere, potentially outside the Borough and with the added expense of moving their existing operation. In this case, an acceptable design has been put forward which will not have any adverse or unacceptable impact upon the surrounding countryside or strategic gap, or the adjacent listed Rectory and if approved will help the applicants to remain where they are.

CONCLUSIONS

For the reasons given above, the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

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