

APPLICATION NO: 13/1278/08 (PB)
APPLICANT: Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
DEVELOPMENT: Installation of an energy saving evaporative cooling system.
LOCATION: DATA CENTRE, TY BRONWYDD, BRONWYDD AVENUE, CYMMER, PORTH, CF39 9DL
DATE REGISTERED: 07/01/2014
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Porth

RECOMMENDATION: Approve

REASONS:

The plant fulfils a vital role in the Council's data storage and handling responsibilities. The plant and machinery, while large and visually prominent, are adequately screened by fencing and following the recommendations of the acoustic report the noise levels can be reduced to acceptable levels. Therefore, and on balance, the development is considered acceptable.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The application seeks retrospective planning consent for the retention of an external evaporative cooling system and boundary palisade fence at the Data Centre, Ty Bronwydd, Bronwydd Avenue, Cymmer, Porth, CF39 9DL.

The development consists of a large external ducting plant at two locations on the existing data centre that is on the roadside approach to the Council Offices in Bronwydd, Cymmer Porth.

The first location is above the walkway immediately adjacent to the caretaker's dwelling. The plant at this position is located at a height of approximately 2.5m and measures 1.2m in depth by 1.2m in width by 1.4m in height.

The second location is on a raised hardstand area between the Data Centre building and the pavement of Bronwydd Avenue. The plant at this position measures 4.1m in depth by 5.6m in width by 3.1m in height and is enclosed by a 2.4m high, green colour coated palisade fence.

The application is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement (DAS) in support of the application.

SITE APPRAISAL

Bronwydd Data Centre is a two storey building occupying a roadside location on Bronwydd Avenue, Cymmer Porth.

The property is one of numerous buildings within the larger Bronwydd site that serve as offices, storage and ancillary buildings in use by the Council in the exercise of its functions as the Local Authority.

The application building and the installed plant apparatus are in a prominent roadside location on the approach to the Bronwydd site. However, this part of Bronwydd Avenue, is a quiet side street containing the entrance to Dan y Mynydd home for the elderly, Tynycymmer Lodge and the pine end of a dwelling in High Street.

The apparatus are installed on a raised platform area on the roadside frontage of the building, immediately adjacent to the pavement and enclosed behind a green, colour coated palisade fence approximately 2.4m in height.

The gate piers, railings to the site and the main Bronwydd House are also Listed Buildings.

PLANNING HISTORY

09/0659/08	One4All Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, Bronwydd Avenue, Cymmer, Porth	Proposed replacement roof.	WFI 12/11/09
08/1119/08	One4All Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, Bronwydd Avenue, Cymmer, Porth	Extension to existing external car park at Bronwydd House.	Granted 29/09/08
08/1339/01	One4All Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, Bronwydd Avenue, Cymmer, Porth	Static sign at entrance to centre.	Granted 18/09/08
07/0751	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	New two storey office replacement for blocks C and D incorporating - 'One4All centre	Granted 30/07/07
04/0352	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	Create additional car parking on site and form a disabled footpath inclusive of lighting.	Granted 14/05/04
03/0846	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	G-Block, conversion of existing flat roof with built-up felt covering to lightweight self supporting steel pitched roof with interlocking steel roof tiles with concrete finish.	Granted 04/07/03

03/1152	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	Proposed installation of Microwave Antennas. (Listed Building application)	Granted 21/10/03
03/1153	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	Installation of two pole mounted 300mm diameter microwave dishes.	Granted 27/10/03
97/6570	Bronwydd House, High Street, Porth	Proposed new two storey office accommodation and car parking facilities to the rear of Dan-y-Mynydd	Granted 09/01/98

PUBLICITY

This has included site notices and the direct notification of properties surrounding the site. 1 letter has been received the points of which are summarised below:

1. Although efforts have been made to reduce the noise I believe that any noise emitted will be extremely disruptive. This is a very quiet area and the noise is simply unacceptable.
2. The visual impact is extremely detrimental to the area. The system faces onto the main access road leading to a listed building and detracts from this historically important feature.
3. The cooling system appears highly industrial in nature and does not fit in well with its surroundings.

CONSULTATION

Public Health and Protection Division – as part of the planning application the applicant has submitted an acoustic assessment with the application.

Having reviewed the assessment it is considered that with the acoustic treatment recommended in the assessment that the development should not have a negative affect on residential amenity.

Consequently, no objection is raised, subject to conditions requiring the works to be carried out as specified in the acoustic assessment and the completion of a post installation assessment to ensure the success of the works. A validation certificate shall be provided and the unit not brought into beneficial use until the certificate has been received.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The application site lies within the settlement boundary of Porth and is unallocated.

Policy CS1 - sets out criteria for achieving sustainable growth including, promoting and enhancing transport infrastructure services.

Policy AW2 - supports development in sustainable locations.

Policy AW5 - lists amenity and accessibility criteria that will be supported in new development proposals.

Policy AW6 - lists design and place making criteria that will be supported in new development proposals.

Policy AW7 – seeks to protect and enhance sites of architectural and or historic merit from developments that would be visually detrimental.

Policy AW10 – lists noise pollution and its effect on amenity as one of the issues to be considered in determining development proposals.

National Guidance

Chapter 4 – Planning for Sustainability

Paragraph 4.11.9 states that the visual appearance of proposed development, its scale and its relationship to its surroundings and context are material planning considerations.

Chapter 7 – Economic Development

Paragraph 7.6.3 states that employment and residential uses can be compatible and local planning authorities should have regard to the proximity and compatibility of proposed residential development adjacent to existing industrial and commercial uses to ensure that both amenity and economic development opportunities are not unduly compromised.

Chapter 13 – Minimising and Managing Environmental Risks and Pollution

Paragraph 13.15.1 states that noise can be a material planning consideration. Local planning authorities should make a careful assessment of likely noise levels and have regard to any relevant Noise Action Plan before determining such planning applications. In some circumstances it will be necessary for a technical noise assessment to be provided by the developer.

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes 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.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Main issues:

Principle of the proposed development

The building is one of numerous on the site used by the Council for services and functions carried out by the Authority.

This particular building is used to house the servers for the Authority's computers and is responsible for the efficient handling and storage of the data that is used and held by the Council. The demands on this facility have increased due to the expanded prevalence of e-services and the relocation of staff to the site. The demands have increased the energy consumption of the facility, increased the heat generated at the site and facilitated the need for a cooling system at the site.

Consequently, there are sound operational reasons for the need for the plant at this location.

Impact on neighbouring properties

The development is in a prominent roadside location that is visible to members of the public visiting the Council Offices, the nearby nursing home and Bronwydd Park. This accepted the inclusion of the palisade fence does largely screen the bulk and appearance of the plant from all but immediately direct views.

In terms of the noise emitted by the machinery when initially installed this was measured at some 70db and was particularly noticeable during periods of reduced levels of ambient noise levels such as early morning, evening and night time in the area. The noise levels led to complaints to the Council's Public Health and Protection Division since when the plant has been turned off until necessary modifications could be made.

The applicant has undertaken an acoustic assessment that, through a series of measures, will reduce the noise emitted to some 34db. This level of noise is considered to be acceptable, even at times of low background noise levels.

The Council's Public Health and Protection Division consider that subject to the identified measures being undertaken and a validation report being submitted verifying their effectiveness that the development would be acceptable in this regard.

Consequently, it is considered that by virtue of the screening that has already been undertaken and the measures identified to reduce noise emissions the proposal would be acceptable in this regard.

Effect on the visual amenity of the area

The plant and machinery are of a bulky, industrial and arguably unattractive appearance that is detrimental to the visual amenity of the area. The plant is also in a prominent roadside location on the main access road to a key Council facility. It has attracted an objection from a neighbouring resident.

Efforts have been made to screen the bulk of the plant and these have been reasonably successful. However, the method of screening the plant, palisade

fencing, has a character and appearance more suited to an industrial setting than a quiet, residential neighbourhood.

It is considered that whilst the plant has a detrimental effect on the visual amenity of the area however, it is adequately screened which helps reduce its visual impact to a large degree. Also, it is considered the development does not unduly affect the setting of the Listed Buildings the other side of the Data Centre inside Bronwydd.

Conclusion

The plant that has been installed is large, bulky and industrial in appearance which is exacerbated by its prominent roadside location. However, it is considered that the screening provided by the palisade fence that has been erected does screen the plant to a reasonable degree.

In terms of noise issues it is considered that these have been acknowledged and addressed by the applicant's consultant and an acceptable mitigation strategy devised. It is considered that the works would reduce the noise levels emitted to a reasonable level that would not be detrimental to neighbouring properties. Additionally, the post installation assessment would ensure the success of the works in this regard.

Consequently, despite its obvious issues in terms of its visual appearance it is considered that there is a need for the facility at this location. In this case the adequacy of the screening and noise mitigation measures further help mitigate the negative visual aspect of the proposal so that, on balance, a recommendation of approval is offered.

RECOMMENDATION: Grant

1. Prior to the plant being brought into beneficial use the works specified in the acoustic report and the mitigation calculations shall be undertaken and supervised by the Acoustic consultant.

Reason: To ensure that the noise emitted is not a source of nuisance to occupants of nearby residential properties in accordance with policies AW5 and AW10 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Development Plan.

2. A post installation noise assessment shall be undertaken to determine the success of the works detailed in condition 1 above and a validation certificate shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of the date of this permission. The plant shall not be brought into beneficial use until the certificate has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the noise emitted is not a source of nuisance to occupants of nearby residential properties in accordance with policies AW5 and AW10 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Development Plan.