



Planning Application

Extension and reconfiguration of the weighbridge office and welfare block at the Robertsbridge Works, Mountfield, East Sussex

Supporting Statement

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UNITED KINGDOM & IRELAND



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 British Gypsum Ltd ('BG' or 'the Company') wishes to extend the existing weighbridge office and reconfigure the adjoining welfare block at the Robertsbridge Works.
- 1.1.2 BG has commissioned URS Infrastructure and Environment Ltd ('URS') to prepare and submit the planning application to the Minerals Planning Authority, i.e. East Sussex county Council (ESCC), on its behalf.
- 1.1.3 The general location of the Robertsbridge Works is shown on plan **47059895.WBO.001**.

1.2 The Purpose of this Document

- 1.2.1 This Supporting Statement accompanies the planning application and provides a description of the proposed development and an appraisal of how the application accords with the Development Plan and material considerations, including national planning policy.
- 1.2.2 This statement should be read in conjunction with other documents/attachments that form the planning application submission, which comprise:
- Planning Application Form and Certificates;
 - Design and Access Statement;
 - Plans; and
 - Photographs.

1.3 Referencing

- 1.3.1 For the purposes of this Supporting Statement and for the avoidance of confusion, the following definitions have been adopted:
- **the Robertsbridge Works** comprises the wider factory site (approximately 26 hectares (ha)), containing a Plasterboard manufacturing facility and associated development, as defined by the blue line boundary on plan **47059895.WBO.002**; and
 - **the Application Site** comprises site proposed for construction of the new weighbridge office and is defined by the red line planning application boundary on plan **47059895.WBO.002** and **003**.

1.4 The Applicant

- 1.4.1 BG is the country's leading manufacturer and supplier of gypsum-based plastering and drylining solutions. With its headquarters at East Leake in Nottinghamshire, the Company currently has five major manufacturing plants in the UK, including the Robertsbridge site.
- 1.4.2 The Robertsbridge Works operates an Environmental Management System (EMS) certified to BS EN: ISO 14001:2004 standard by BSI (Certificate No: EMS 550620).

2. THE SITE

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The Robertsbridge Works is situated approximately 8 kilometres (km) to the north of the town of Battle and to the west of the A2100, comprising approximately 26ha (working area) in total.
- 2.1.2 The general location is shown on plan **47059895.WBO.001**.

2.2 Site Description

- 2.2.1 The Robertsbridge Works extends across a northeast to southwest axis, comprising a Plasterboard manufacturing facility, gypsum stockpiles, gypsum processing, two gypsum landfill sites, railway sidings, the closed Mountfield Mine head and former Ready Mixed Concrete site.
- 2.2.2 The Application Site covers an area of 55m² and is situated within the eastern section of the Robertsbridge Works adjacent to the site access road, approximately 400 metres (m) to the west of the site access.
- 2.2.3 The Application Site comprises the existing weighbridge office and a small piece of adjacent land and is bounded by the site access road and railway lines to the north and south, beyond which dense woodland is situated.
- 2.2.4 The Robertsbridge Works and Application Site are shown on plans **47059895.WBO.002** and **003**.

2.3 Access

- 2.3.1 The Robertsbridge Works is served by a private access road that is approximately 2km in length, running directly from the A2100. This private road runs from east to west through the Robertsbridge Works.

2.4 Surroundings

- 2.4.1 The Robertsbridge Works is surrounded by dense Ancient Woodland, including, amongst others, Limekiln Wood, Snep's Wood, Great Wood and Counsellor's Wood, Crowhurst Wood, Millham Wood and Castle Wood.
- 2.4.2 The closest residential properties, along Church Lane, are situated approximately 350m to the northeast of the Application Site. There are no public footpaths or other Public Right of Way providing access to the Application Site through the surrounding woodland.
- 2.4.3 The features surrounding the Application Site are shown on plan **47059895.001** and **002**.

2.5 Designated Sites

- 2.5.1 The Application Site and the wider Robertsbridge Works are situated within the 145,000ha High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the valley of the River Line. The Application Site itself is covered by no further designations, although there are further designated sites in the area.
- 2.5.2 The Limekiln Wood Complex Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) forms part of the Ancient Woodland adjacent to the Robertsbridge Works. The River Line Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), designated as such for its geological interest, is situated within the Ancient Woodland, to the southwest of the Robertsbridge Works.

2.5.3 There are no Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings on the Application Site or in the surrounding area.

2.6 Relevant Planning History

2.6.1 Planning permission RR/564/CM was granted for a weighbridge office extension at the Application Site in November 2008 (Note: the permission was never implemented). The extension granted planning permission was of a similar size to that detailed within this Supporting Statement.

2.6.2 The Local Planning Authority granted planning permission in 2008 on the basis that:

- the extension would be important for the functioning of the Robertsbridge Works;
- the proposal would not be detrimental to the quality of the AONB being small-scale, within the Robertsbridge Works and isolated from public view; and
- the proposal complied with the Development Plan.

2.6.3 The principle of the development proposed by this planning application has previously been judged acceptable at the Application Site.

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 It is proposed to extend the existing weighbridge office and reconfigure the adjoining welfare block at the Robertsbridge Works. The particulars of the proposed development are detailed in the remainder of Section 3.

3.2 Need

3.2.1 The existing weighbridge office is small and is not considered fit for purpose. The windows are small and weighbridge operators are positioned at a low level within the office, making interaction with drivers utilising the weighbridge, difficult.

3.2.2 The existing weighbridge office and welfare facilities are contained within a single building, as shown on plan **4566/002**. There is very limited space for welfare facilities and, at present, only toilets, sink and a small mess area are provided.

3.2.3 BG wishes to provide more space and higher quality welfare facilities for staff; therefore, there is a need to extend the weighbridge office to the east, in order to provide space and reconfigure the existing welfare facilities.

3.3 Proposal Overview

3.3.1 The weighbridge itself, to the north of the existing office, would be retained.

3.3.2 The weighbridge office would be extended to the east, effectively splitting the office/administrative area and welfare facilities into two blocks. The proposed layout, identifying the two blocks, is shown on plan **4566/003**.

3.3.3 The extended weighbridge office would provide a larger administrative area and lobby, allowing for less restricted working conditions. An elevated position would be provided within the office for weighbridge operators and windows included on all sides – providing an effective viewing/interaction platform, as shown on plan **4566/003** and **005**.

3.3.4 The internal layout of the welfare block would be re-configured to provide a shower, additional toilets, locker room and a larger mess area.

3.4 Design and Access

3.4.1 A separate full Design and Access Statement is included as **Appendix A**. The remainder of Section 3.5 below is a summary.

Dimensions

3.4.2 The extended weighbridge office would adjoin the eastern elevation of the newly reconfigured welfare block, measuring:

- 4.4m wide;
- 6.0m long; and
- 3.4m high.

The extension would only be slightly higher than the existing building, which is approximately 2.9m high.

The footprint of the existing building is 22.8m² and the extension would be 26.4m². The total combined footprint would be 46.2m².

Access and Windows

- 3.4.3 An access (door) would be provided on the south-western corner of the building and an existing window on the northern elevation of the welfare block would be converted to form a new access (door). The existing access on the western elevation of the welfare block would be blocked up. Windows would be provided on the northern, eastern and southern sides of the building; with a suitable sliding window on the north-western corner adjacent to the weighbridge.
- 3.4.4 Appropriate access arrangement would be provided for the disabled persons:
- all installations for access for the disabled to be undertaken in accordance with Part M of the Building Regulations;
 - paths from pavement to entrance door to be ramped and with level landing at the door entrance;
 - entrance doors to have clear opening width minimum 775mm and flush threshold; and
 - disabled person's toilet to be set out and supplied with grab rails, as shown on plan **4566/003**.

External Cladding

- 3.4.5 The external walls of the new extension and existing building would be clad/re-clad in horizontal UPVC boarding.

3.5 Construction

- 3.5.1 The construction details are shown in more detail on plan **4566/003** and **005**.

3.6 Drainage

- 3.6.1 The drainage details are shown on plan **4566/003** and **005**, and are broadly as follows:
- surface water drainage – 65mm downpipes would be provided on the new extension, connecting into 100mm underground drains with discharge to a soakaway in accordance with BRE Digest 365; and
 - foul water drainage – water from shower, basin and toilets would drain into 100mm underground drains and then discharged into the existing foul water drainage system at the Robertsbridge Works.

3.7 Lighting

- 3.7.1 It is envisaged that lighting on the existing structure would be largely sufficient and that any new external lighting on the proposed extension, would comprise small-scale lights above points of access, which would be angled downwards to prevent unnecessary glare and spillage from the Robertsbridge Works.

3.8 Operating Hours

- 3.8.1 The weighbridge office would continue to operate 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, as per existing operating hours at the Robertsbridge Works.

3.9 Waste Minimisation

- 3.9.1 Any suitable excavation material, i.e. uncontaminated soils, would be utilised to restore other parts of the Robertsbridge Works. Other materials generated by demolishing the lobby (e.g. bricks, bitumen roofing, glass, UPVC boarding etc.) would be recycled or disposed of, off-site at a suitable waste management facility.

4. PLANNING POLICY

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This application for planning permission falls to be determined by ESCC (in its capacity as MPA), in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ('PCPA 2004'). As such, ESCC is required to determine the planning application in accordance with the Development Plan and other material considerations.

4.2 Policy Overview

4.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2011 and is a material consideration in the determination of this planning application.

4.2.2 The Development Plan for East Sussex comprises: (i) the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Minerals Local Plan 1999 ('MLP'); and (ii) the Rother District Council Local Plan 2006 ('LP').

4.2.3 Emerging Development Plan Documents (DPDs) at county and district level will form part of a new Minerals and Waste Development Framework (LDF) under provisions of the PCPA 2004, and upon adoption will replace the MLP and LP.

4.2.4 ESCC and Brighton & Hove City Council are currently preparing a joint Waste and Minerals Plan, scheduled for adoption in late 2012 or early 2013. Rother District Council approved the publication of its Core Strategy on 27th June 2011.

4.2.5 The emerging DPDs are not yet adopted and, on this basis, are not considered any further by this Supporting Statement.

4.3 Policy Analysis

Introduction

4.3.1 The proposed development comprises a small-scale extension of the weighbridge office at the Robertsbridge Works, with minor demolition works and construction upon entirely previously development land.

4.3.2 The environmental or other impacts would be insignificant and, on this basis, this analysis only considers policies relating to the High Weald AONB and general development control.

National Planning Policy Framework

4.3.3 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system and it provides a framework within which local people and Local Planning Authorities can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.

4.3.4 Paragraph 14 sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development:

"At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

For decision-taking this means:

- *approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*

- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, granting permission unless:
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
 - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.”

4.3.5 Paragraph 15 goes on to state the following:

“Policies in Local Plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay. All plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally.”

4.3.6 **Compliance:** The proposed development complies with the relevant policies in the Development Plan, as demonstrated by the policy analysis contained within the remainder of Section 4. The proposed development is therefore sustainable and planning permission should be granted.

4.3.7 Paragraphs 115 and 116 state the following in regards to AONBs:

“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.

Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

- 4.3.8 **Compliance:** It is acknowledged that the proposed development is situated within an AONB. However, there would be no adverse impact upon the AONB, given that: (i) the proposed development predominantly comprises a small-scale extension, (ii) it would be seen in the context of the rest of the infrastructure at the Robertsbridge Works and (iii) it would be suitably screened, as it is situated at a lower level than the adjacent woodland, which provides significant screening on all sides.
- East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Minerals Local Plan (1999)**
- 4.3.9 The MLP was prepared jointly with Brighton & Hove City Council. The plan provides specific policies and guidance in respect of minerals related development within East Sussex. The document is predominantly concerned with balancing the demand for minerals extraction against the need to protect the environment and amenity. The MLP policies have been saved until superseded by new DPDs under provision of the PCPA 2004.
- 4.3.10 Policy 26 states the following in regards to future development at the Robertsbridge Works:
- “The minerals planning authority will support the continuation of the present gypsum (and anhydrite) mining, processing and manufacturing activities at Mountfield and Brightling. Favourable consideration will normally be given to developments which sustain these activities as follows:*
- ...developments associated with the processing plant at the Robertsbridge Works”*
- 4.3.11 **Compliance:** The proposed development is ancillary to processing operations at the Robertsbridge Works and should be viewed favourably, given that it would not have any adverse environmental impact.
- 4.3.12 Policy 31 states the following in regards to general amenity:
- “Proposals should not have an unacceptable adverse effect on the standard of amenity appropriate to other established, permitted or allocated land uses, particularly residential amenity, and will be most carefully considered where they are in close proximity to groups of dwelling or other sensitive land-uses;*
- Development should not have an unacceptable adverse effect on recreational or tourist use of an area, or existing public access or right of way;*
- Proposals should not have an unacceptable adverse effect on sites and features of landscape, wildlife or geological interest, whether or not they are statutorily protected or of demonstrable importance, unless appropriate mitigation measures are clearly demonstrated”*
- 4.3.13 Policy 31 goes on to state the following in regards to ancillary development:
- “The scale and character, size and design of plant, equipment and associated buildings for processing should be compatible with the surrounding landscape and their impact minimised by appropriate siting and screening”*

4.3.14 **Compliance:** There are no residential properties in the immediate vicinity and due to the nature and scale of the proposed development – there would not be any adverse impact upon amenity.

[The Rother District Council Local Plan \(2006\)](#)

4.3.15 The LP sets out the vision and strategy for land use and development in the Rother District and was adopted in July 2006. It includes specific planning policies and proposals to manage development and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The policies within the LP policies have been 'saved' until superseded by documents contained within the new Local Development Framework under provisions of the PCPA 2004.

4.3.16 Policy GD1 provides general development criteria for all development within the Rother District, some of which are relevant to the proposed development, as follows (summary):

“it is in keeping with and does not unreasonably harm the amenities of adjoining properties;

it respects and does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality;

it is compatible with the conservation of the natural beauty of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

it respects the topography, important views to and from the site and retains site features that contribute to the character or amenities of the area;

it protects habitats of ecological value and incorporates, wherever practicable, features that enhance the ecological value of the site, with particular regard to wildlife refuges or corridors, or fully compensates for any necessary loss;

it provides adequate and appropriate means for foul and surface water drainage, with suitable alleviation and mitigation measures where necessary and does not prejudice water quality;

it takes account of flood risk and in the areas of flood risk, as shown on the Proposals Map, it is expected to minimise and manage the risk to flooding”

4.3.17 **Compliance:** The proposed development would be set in the context of the wider Robertsbridge Works and is small-scale. Therefore, no significant impact upon the local environment (including landscape) and/or amenity is anticipated.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The principle of the proposed weighbridge office extension has previously been established at the Application Site, as demonstrated by planning permission RR/564/CM. The material circumstances at the Robertsbridge Works have not changed since.
- 5.1.2 The Application Site itself, having previously been developed, is not considered to be sensitive in environmental terms, and it is bounded on either side by the site access road and railway lines.
- 5.1.3 The proposed development would facilitate a new and improved weighbridge office and welfare facilities and there would be no adverse impact upon the environment or amenity.
- 5.1.4 The proposed development is compliant with the Development Plan and there are no other material considerations that would preclude a grant of planning permission.

PLANS

Plan Number	Title
47059895.WBO.001	Location Plan
47059895.WBO.002	Planning Application and Land Ownership Boundary
47059895.WBO.003	Site Plan
4566/002	Plans and Elevations as Existing
4566/003	Plans and Elevations as Proposed
4566/004	Section A-A as Proposed and Construction Notes

APPENDIX A – DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT