

# **Warwick District Council Local Plan Examination**

## **Response to Inspector's Matters and Issues**

### **Matter 11**

Policy MS1 - University of Warwick

Policy MS2 – Major Sites in the Green Belt

### **Issue**

Whether the approach towards the University of Warwick and Major Sites in the Green Belt is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

**October 2016**

## Policy MS1

### 1. What is the background to development on the site? To what extent is it already developed?

- a) The University campus, which straddles the boundary between Warwick District Council and Coventry City Council, has been subject to a large number of planning applications since its inception in 1965.
- b) In 2009 a masterplan for the site was agreed (W/07/1120) which runs until 2019; a new masterplan will therefore be brought forward during the plan period. A significant amount of development within the extant masterplan has now been completed including a day nursery, halls of residence, Warwick Business School Phase 3B, Cryfield Energy Centre and a conference facility. In addition further halls of residence are currently under construction and a new sports centre has recently been granted planning permission. In total to date 51,500 sq. m has been implemented. The Masterplan proposes a total of 81,500 sq. m.
- c) The University is one of the top ranked universities in the country, and has developed strong links with industry and makes a significant economic contribution to the sub-region. It continues to have aspirational growth plans and the Council, along with Coventry City Council, will continue to work with the university through the masterplan process.
- d) Although the current masterplan runs until 2019, the University intends to bring forward a new masterplan during 2017.

### 2. What is the justification for removing the site from the Green Belt? Are there exceptional circumstances which justify altering the Green Belt?

- a) It is proposed to remove a parcel of land from the Green Belt know as Central Campus West, which is already primarily of built character and principally houses residential accommodation for students, although the Masterplan referred to above involves some substantial non-residential uses as well. .
- b) When reviewing removal of land from the Green Belt, the site was assessed as to whether it still met the key purposes of the Green Belt. Given the significant amount of allocated development, the parcel no longer serves its principle Green Belt functions and can no longer be considered open. This is supported by the Joint Green Belt Study 2015 (LA07PM). This area falls within Parcel C19 which overall score 8 out of 20. In relation to openness the study notes *“The parcel contains buildings and sports fields associated with the University of Warwick. This represents as significant development in the Green Belt which compromises the openness of the Green Belt within the majority of the parcel”*. Whilst it notes southern parts of the parcel are still predominantly open, these are outside the area which the Local Plan proposes to remove from the Green Belt. The removal of this area is therefore consistent with paragraph 85 (2<sup>nd</sup> bullet) of the NPPF.
- c) The importance of the University to the provision of higher education to a world-class standard and its role in the local, sub-regional and national economy provide exceptional

circumstances for the alteration of Green Belt boundaries. The location of the University within the confirmed green Belt means that the Council feels the local plan review is an appropriate time to look at whether the boundaries surrounding it are appropriate over the longer term and whether exceptional circumstances justifying their realignment exist.

- d) The Council contends that the importance of the University as an economic and educational driver of national and international standing, and the built-up character of the campus as it appears at present, provide the case for amending the current Green Belt boundary.

### 3. Is the site boundary appropriate and what is the basis for it?

- a) The revision of the Green Belt boundary has taken into account the current developed nature of Central Campus West, and the planning permissions that have been granted on it.
- b) This is appropriate as the site is already principally developed, is sustainable, and any further development will only be able to be brought forward as part of an agreed masterplan that will fully address all matters and provide suitable mitigation.
- c) The proposed boundary encompasses the approved Masterplan boundary as this area is predominantly built up or includes land which has planning permission for further development. Specifically, the boundary generally follows natural boundaries such as hedgerows, without excessively removing land from the Green Belt. Only to the south are existing boundaries less well defined. However, in this area a boundary has been defined which encompasses developed and committed areas to the north without removing any open land to the south.
- d) The boundary is contiguous with the revised Green Belt to the west of the site relating to the proposed safeguarded land at Westwood Heath.



**4. What are the potential adverse impacts of further development on the site and how could these be addressed?**

- a) Further development must carefully consider and mitigate its impacts on infrastructure, neighbouring residents, Green Belt, landscape, heritage and flooding. It is not anticipated that the Masterplan proposed for 2017 will extend the boundary of the existing Masterplan. In this context it is considered likely that the impacts can be successfully mitigated, although this will need to be demonstrated in detail through the Masterplan process.
- b) A particular issue is the limited capacity on the surrounding road network, and further development will need to consider this carefully. A Statement of Common Ground between the Council, Warwickshire County Council and the University is being prepared to set out how the three organisations envisage transport capacity being addressed in the short term. It will also outline the shared aspirations of the three organisations to deliver a new link road which will have the potential to release further capacity in the highway network.

**5. Is Policy MS1 clear enough in terms of what development may be permitted?**

- a) The policy does not specify what development may be permitted, instead referring to the extant and future masterplans as the vehicle for that detail. This is appropriate as it does not fetter the production of future masterplans by prescribing the uses that may be acceptable.
- b) Given that the Policy concerns the University of Warwick, it is expected that developments within the revised green belt boundary will be for uses associated with education.

**6. Should the policy itself be clearer about removing land from the Green Belt?**

- a) Section 3.146 of the Policy is clear about the need to remove the land around Central Campus West from the Green Belt, and the justification for this.
- b) Policy Map 7 details this removal, showing the proposed site boundaries.
- c) Furthermore, the removal is cross referenced in Policy DS19 (2.80).

## **Policy MS2**

**7. Should the policy be more positive / definite about the prospects of development on the specific sites concerned?**

- a) **Stoneleigh Park**
  - i) Stoneleigh Park benefits from a detailed masterplan, granted permission in November

2012 (W/12/0766), which included outline permission for the reuse and redevelopment of buildings, and the development equivalent to 5ha of employment land.

- ii) The current masterplan runs until 2020 and a new masterplan will therefore need to be brought forward during the Plan period. The majority of the conditions have now been discharged with some notable exceptions (highways conditions in particular) due to the uncertainty with regards to the implementation implications of HS2.
- iii) The route of HS2 cuts through the park, and a specific provision for dealing with consequent changes without revisiting the masterplan provides flexibility and a positive position for addressing this impact.
- iv) Given the sensitive nature of the site, situated in Green Belt and with two Listed Historic Parks adjacent, it is appropriate to bring forward development through a focussed and holistic masterplan that has the opportunity to reflect these circumstances in appropriate detail.

**b) Stoneleigh Deer Park (Stoneleigh Business Park / Abbey Business Park)**

- i) Development within this site has been subject to a previously approved (W/12/0535) and modified (W/15/1614) masterplan.
- ii) The site sits within Stoneleigh Deer Park, a Grade II Historic Park, as well as within the Green Belt. Given this setting it is unlikely that further intensification of development would be appropriate.

**c) Former Honiley Airfield**

- i) The site benefits from some 10ha of employment land allocation, approved in (W/10/0893 and W/14//1152) concentrated on the two developed areas around the track. The restriction of uses to those relating to motorsport and advanced engineering research ensures the unique and important nature of the site.
- ii) The unique nature and opportunity of the site has been recognised within MS2, specifically in Sections 3.149-3.152
- iii) The site remains within and integral to the Green Belt, contributing to its openness particularly. It is remote in nature, and does not provide a sustainable location. Further development beyond the allocated 10ha would therefore be inappropriate unless very special circumstances were to be demonstrated.

**8. Should it be more specific about the types of development that may be acceptable?**

- a) It should be noted that a minor wording change to this policy was proposed alongside the submission of the Local Plan – see LP21. This sought to reinforce the importance of these sites to the district's economy.

**b) Stoneleigh Park**

- i) A broad definition of acceptable uses appropriate to the site are detailed in 3.157 within Policy MS2.
- ii) Further specification should be brought forward through the masterplan process and further detailed specification within the Plan may fetter the production of a suitably flexible masterplan. In particular, the Council is keen to ensure that development in this location can justify very special circumstances. The site operators have suggested a range of potential uses that should be specifically identified in the Policy. Without detailed and specific justification through a masterplan, the Council cannot assess whether these uses constitute very special circumstances. The Council therefore contends that the approach set out in the Policy is appropriate
- iii) In the extant permission granted in November (W/12/0766) detailed specification of the types and use class of development were agreed, and remain relevant to the site for the duration of the masterplan. It can be expected that the next masterplan will be brought forward in a similar vein to provide the relevant details and specifications for acceptable development. Following discussions with the site's representatives, some minor amendments to the policy are suggested and included as Appendix 1 to this document.

**c) Stoneleigh Deer Park**

- i) Beyond the details in the agreed masterplan it is not felt appropriate to develop this site further.

**d) Former Honiley Airfield**

- i) Explanatory note 3.152 in Policy MS2 references the types of development that may be deemed suitable on the site. Its unique nature as a motorsport and vehicle test facility is important and restrictions to these and relevant ancillary activities remain in order to preserve this uniqueness.

**9. Should the sites be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for development?**

**a) Stoneleigh Park**

- i) It would not be appropriate to remove the site from the Green Belt as it still meets the principle Green Belt purposes. Whilst the site includes some substantial buildings, significant parts of it are predominantly open in nature. The site fall within Broad Area 3 (see LA07PM) which is important in ensuring the Green Belt as a whole still aligns with the essential characteristics set out in Paragraph 79. In this context, the site is still an important part of the Green Belt.
- ii) Given this, development in this predominantly rural location should only come forward if very special circumstances can be demonstrated. .

**b) Stoneleigh Deer Park**

- i) Similar to Stoneleigh Park, it would be inappropriate to remove the site from the Green Belt as the site still meets the purposes of the Green Belt.
- ii) The site remains in an isolated rural setting, inappropriate for significant development, and is within a Grade II Historic Park.

**c) Former Honiley Airfield**

- i) This site also sits within well-functioning Green Belt, and openness of the site contributes to the openness of the Green Belt. This site falls within Broad Area 4 (LA)7PM) and is also adjacent to Green Belt within neighbouring Solihull.
- ii) It is in an isolated rural location where significant concentrated development above what has been already allocated would not be appropriate. In this context, development should only come forward if very special circumstances can be demonstrated.

**10. Is the boundary for the Former Honiley Airfield site appropriate, should the site be extended to include the test track?**

- a) The Council contends that the boundary of the site is appropriate, and covers the primary and ancillary buildings as well as development opportunities appropriate to the current usage and constraints on the site.
- b) The test track has been excluded from the boundary as its presence plays an important contributory role to the openness of the Green Belt. The Council would not therefore wish to see development within the track area.
- c) Further development, beyond the approved quantum would be inappropriate due to the site's remote and unsustainable location.

**11. Are the potential implications of the HS2 route for the Stoneleigh Park site adequately taken into account?**

- a) The route of HS2 bisects Stoneleigh Park towards the east of the site. The implication of this to the Park and its aspirations will be addressed through the forthcoming Masterplan that the Park representatives are working on.
- b) However, specific provision is made. The Policy states that appropriate amendments may be made as a result of HS2 without the need to revise the extant Masterplan, and this is expanded upon in 3.160, which states that:  
*“amendments will be accepted providing they are within the approved parameters in terms of overall floor space and uses”.*

- c) This allows the Park to respond more quickly to mitigate the impact of HS2 than bringing forward a revised masterplan would allow, if required.
- d) Warwick District Council has a dedicated HS2 Project Officer who remains in close contact with Stoneleigh Park representatives, and is working proactively with them on their Masterplan revisions as well as mitigation of the effects of HS2.



## MS2: Major Sites in the Green Belt

Development at existing developed sites in the Green Belt will be restricted to the limited infilling and redevelopment of previously developed land, and will be assessed in accordance with national planning policy.

Due to the importance of the Former Honiley Airfield, Stoneleigh Park, and Stoneleigh Deer Park to the economy and the District, there may be very special circumstances to justify further development (within the boundary identified on the Policies Map).

In order to ensure that development proposals are appropriate the Council will support the preparation of Masterplan planning applications or development briefs for the Former Honiley Airfield, Stoneleigh Park, and Stoneleigh Deer Park which demonstrates that the openness and the purposes for including the land in the Green Belt is retained, and which complies with other relevant policies in this Plan.

In the case of Stoneleigh Park, appropriate amendments as a result of HS2 will be supported without the need to revise the Masterplan. If, as a result of the impact of HS2, development is demonstrably required in the Green Belt, this may be considered as 'very special circumstances'.

### Explanation

3.147 National planning policy allows limited infilling or partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites within the Green Belt whether redundant or in continuing use which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development

3.148 However the Council recognises that the sites identified in the above policy have a unique and important role in delivering the objectives of the Strategic Economic Plan and in the local and sub regional economy. It is considered that whilst these sites fulfil an important role in maintaining the openness of the Green Belt and should be retained within it there may be very special circumstances to justify further development within the boundaries identified on the policies map. These are set out in detail below.

### Former Honiley Airfield

3.149 The former military airfield has been used for a variety of aeronautical and automotive uses since the 1950s and most recently for vehicle testing and research and design associated with the automotive industry. It is unique in allowing the co-location of research and development facilities together with a test track for off road testing.

3.150 The site has planning permission for the development of an advanced engineering research and development campus for the automotive and motorsport industries including the provision of a new access and roundabout taking traffic away from the existing access on Oldwich Lane East.

3.151 The site has an important role in delivering the aims of the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) in relation to the growth of advanced manufacturing particularly in the long term through the implementation of the planning permission. Funding has been agreed through the City Deal to secure the delivery of the access and traffic proposals set out in the planning permission. Further investment is proposed through the SEP to undertake a utilities upgrade to ensure the site is attractive to companies wishing to relocate.

3.152 The Council acknowledges the site's importance to the sub regional economy and is supportive of the approved proposals in the context of the unique role of the site. It is also recognised that the delivery of the planning permission may provide benefits to the wider community such as noise attenuation. In this context it is considered that significant employment generation relating to the role the site has in meeting the objectives of the LEP and proposals set out in the City Deal, may justify very special circumstances in assessing further proposals for the site. However, it is important that redevelopment of the site is carefully managed in the context of the site's sensitive rural location in the Green Belt. This is

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particularly with regard to the sites limited access to the strategic road network and potential impact of the activities on neighbouring residential communities. It is therefore unlikely than any proposals to extend the range of uses beyond that in the planning permission which are restricted to automotive and motorsport uses would be acceptable.

3.153 In addition to the permission it is recognised that some small scale development may be necessary adjacent to the test track to assist in its operations, however the Council will ensure in assessing any proposals that the openness of the Green Belt is maintained.

3.154 The boundary identified on the proposals map reflects the approved planning unit and defines the areas the Council considers is acceptable for limited development and infilling. This recognises that some of the approved development is located on woodland rather than previously developed land.

### Stoneleigh Park

3.155 Stoneleigh Park is a unique facility within the Green Belt which is home to the headquarters of the Royal Agricultural Society for England (RASE) and a number of other agricultural and countryside organisations. The park hosts a wide range of shows and events showcasing rural activities and businesses from across the country and as such is an established part of the rural economy both locally and nationally.

3.156 A long term Masterplan for the park has been set out to develop the site as a rural innovation science park with an emphasis on sustainability, the environment, agriculture, equine activities, forestry, and rural businesses. Outline planning permission was granted in November 2012 for the redevelopment and reuse of buildings at Stoneleigh Park. [The masterplan planning permission time expires in November 2020. The Council will support the preparation of a new masterplan planning permission to guide the development of Stoneleigh Park for the latter part of the plan period](#) It is intended that the site will evolve into a national hub for rural and sustainability research and equine activities, providing the opportunity for the clustering of businesses relating to these activities.

3.157 It is recognised that the delivery of the long term plan is therefore likely to bring significant economic benefits for the local area. The Council supports the unique role of the Park and the delivery of the Masterplan to secure its long term future. A wider range of uses have been permitted on the site than previously allowed to assist this. It is considered that uses associated with rural innovation and equine activities necessary as part of enhancing the parks status as a rural business park may justify very special circumstances in the future. Some ancillary uses may also be reasonable as part of bringing forward the wider development of the site as a centre for rural excellence.

3.158 It is accepted that there may be a need to revisit this Masterplan in the future during the plan period. It is important that future development is carefully planned and guided in the context of the Parks sensitive location in the Green Belt, adjacent to two Listed Historic Parks, and its relationship to the village of Stoneleigh. The land at Stoneleigh Park continues to fulfil an important function in maintaining the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore any future updates to the Masterplan will need to be assessed in terms of the proposed intensity of development and mix of uses.

3.159 It is recognised that some of the land proposed for development through the Masterplan does not fall under the definition of previously developed land. This policy therefore defines the boundary, in line with the planning permission, which reflects the area the Council believes is appropriate for redevelopment of the Park.

3.160 It is recognised that the need to safeguard land for HS2 (policy NE6) may impact on the delivery of the Masterplan. Amendments to the existing Masterplan as a result of HS2 will be accepted providing they are within the approved parameters in terms of overall floor space and uses.

### Stoneleigh Business Park

3.161 Now the site of Abbey Business Park it has been used for a range of uses over the years including a Military hospital during the Second World War. It lies within Stoneleigh Deer Park which is designated as a Grade II Historic Park. 3.162 Since outline planning permission was granted for an office Masterplan in

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2002 the site has been subject to phased redevelopment which has included the development of a new headquarters facility for the British Horse Society. A revised Masterplan has recently been granted permission to include demolition of the remaining World War II hospital huts for new office space.

3.163 The redevelopment of the site has been carefully managed in the context of the historic parkland setting and it continues to fulfil an important role in the Green Belt. The Council supports the continued use of the site but considers that development beyond that approved is unlikely to be appropriate.

#### **Other Major Sites in the Green Belt**

3.164 Development at other major sites will be restricted to limited infilling and redevelopment of previously developed land and will be assessed in accordance with national planning policy.

#### **References**

- National Planning Policy Framework