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Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RUGBY LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION RESPONSE – STRATEGIC LAND SOUTH OF DUNCHURCH

Introduction

Sworders are instructed by a collaboration of landowners to prepare and submit a response to the current consultation on the draft Issues and Options document.

Our clients own land to the south of the A45, between the A426 and the A45 Dunchurch Road. The total site area comprises some 170.35 hectares of agricultural land. The site lies outside of the Green Belt. There are two public rights of way which cross the site.

The majority of the site lies in Flood Zone 1, the area at lowest risk of fluvial flooding. A small area of the south eastern part of the site lies in Flood Zones 2 and 3, associated with the Rains Brook. There are some areas of the site subject to surface water flooding, but these would not pose a significant constraint to development.

The site is being promoted for either a residential, commercial or mixed use development. A residential led development could deliver approximately a new settlement of approximately 1,500 new homes, supported by employment, community and educational facilities. Alternatively, a wholly commercial development could provide warehousing as identified in the draft Plan, with flexibility, that is essential for a rapidly changing economy, to provide for other employment uses such as A.I. or other technology park, science park, data centre and R and D facilities.

The development would be carefully planned to take account of landscape sensitivities at the northern part of the site. Vehicular access is achievable from either the A426 or from the A45 in multiple locations. The access point onto the A426 adjacent to the M45 would be suitable for vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access, and could potentially also be used for bus access.



We wish to respond only to those consultation questions which are of relevance to the potential development of our clients' sites for either a residential led, mixed use development, or for an entirely commercial development.

1. How much employment land should we be planning for?

The draft Plan notes that the Local Planning Authority now has new, longer term employment projections for the need for land for employment uses. Paragraph 86 of the NPPF (December 2023) states that:

'Planning policies should:

a) set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration;

b) set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period.'

We note that a West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study has been commissioned by Rugby Borough Council with other West Midland Local Authorities, and that the findings from this study will inform the strategy to allocate land for strategic warehousing across these authorities. The Plan should make provision to deliver the Rugby allocation of all the land required by this study.

In addition, the HEDNA (November 2022) identifies a strong need for separate allocations for manufacturing development. Paragraph 3.37 of the draft Plan notes that if the plan period covers from 2021 to 2050, there will be a need for 40.29ha of industrial land to meet Rugby Borough's own needs.

We also note from paragraph 3.32 of the draft Plan that there may be an additional requirement for industrial land if Coventry is unable to meet its own needs. The Rugby Local Plan Review should comply with the requirement of paragraph 35a of the NPPF, which states that Plans are positively prepared if they accommodate unmet needs from neighbouring areas where it is practical to do so. It would be practical to meet some of that unmet need on this site.

Our clients' land provides a strategic site which could deliver a significant amount of employment land, to contribute both to the need identified within the Borough, and to the potential unmet need from Coventry. Its location adjacent to the M45 would enable it to serve commercial markets in the Borough and beyond, with excellent accessibility to the strategic road network.

2. What type of employment land should we be planning for?

There is a high demand for warehousing in the Borough, which is due to 'just in time' inventory management, increase in online sales and increasingly complex supply chains. Paragraph 3.16 of the draft Plan notes that Rugby Borough sits within the so-called 'Golden Triangle' for distribution. This is an area of the East and West Midlands that has 35% of all UK warehouse floorspace, due to its efficient access to the motorway network.



In paragraph 3.10 of the draft Plan, we note the HEDNA recommendation that, because of the high demand for warehousing land, the Plan should separately make specific site allocations for B2 industrial and light industrial (now use class E(g)(iii)) land).

The draft Plan focuses on the need for industrial land and warehousing. However, we note that paragraph 3.12 also states that:

'Successful business clusters have developed in the borough.... there is an impetus to diversify the borough's economy and support the development of local skills to meet future business needs.'

Rugby Borough Council is producing a new economic strategy which will inform the local plan, and that the expectation is that this strategy will support the expansion of manufacturing, research and development employment land.

Our client's land would be highly suitable to deliver with warehousing or industry and also has the flexibility, that is essential for a rapidly changing economy, to provide for other employment uses such as A.I. or other technology park, science park, data centre and R and D facilities.

3. Please provide any comments you have on the suitability of any of the broad locations listed above (or another location we have missed).

Paragraph 3.40 of the draft Issues and Options document identifies potential strategic employment locations which have good access to A roads and motorways, and the Plan notes the importance of such access to motorways for large-scale manufacturing and distribution uses.

Our clients' site does not lie within the potential strategic employment locations identified within the Plan. However, we would strongly encourage the Local Planning Authority to consider adding this site to those areas, as it does benefit from the access required.

It has excellent access to the M45, the A426 and the A45, affording accessibility to the strategic road network without the need for vehicles to use local country roads. There is convenient access to Daventry and to Rugby, for any local workforce to take advantage of.

The M45 connects the city of Coventry with Junction 17 of the M1 motorway, providing access to the Midlands, London and northern England. The M45 is relatively under utilised and has capacity for additional traffic.

Importantly, the site also has the benefit that it is not located within the Green Belt, so land would not need to be released from Green Belt to deliver a strategic scale employment site. When considering potential locations for employment development, paragraph 3.42 of the draft Plan states that:



'Other important considerations will be landscape impact, the capacity of the highways network, and transport accessibility, both for commercial traffic and for employees getting to work.'

Below, we demonstrate how our client's site complies with these criteria.

Landscape impact: There is mature hedging along the southern boundary of the site, and the eastern boundary is defined by the Rains Brook. There is a mature hedge with trees along the full extent of the site's boundary with the A45. An additional landscape buffer could be planted along the northern boundary to improve the screening of the site from the M45, although any views into the site are only drivers' glimpsed views. Additional planting would also be required behind the existing residential properties on Southam Road, the A426.

It is understood that there is significant unused capacity on the M45. Work on highways capacity in respect of the adjoining A roads to the site has not yet been undertaken, but there is potential to create a number of access points onto the A45 including close to next to the M45 junction as well as the A426.

We also note that the site lies only some 3.5 miles from the centre of Rugby and that the workforce could come from the town, from the new SW Rugby SUE or from any of the surrounding villages.

Should the site be allocated in the draft Local Plan, a Transport Assessment would be prepared that provides clear evidence of local conditions to support a proposed access and internal layout strategy, and how traffic generated by the proposed scheme could be satisfactorily accommodated within the surrounding highway network, identifying any necessary mitigating improvements.

6. Are there exceptional circumstances that mean we should amend Green Belt boundaries to meet the need for employment land?

Paragraph 145 of the NPPF states that:

'Authorities may choose to review and alter Green Belt boundaries where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, in which case proposals for changes should be made only through the plan-making process.'

While many of the strategic location for employment identified in the draft Plan lie within the Green Belt, and would require land to be released from this designation, our clients' site lies outside of the Green Belt. As such it should be given serious consideration for allocation for strategic residential or employment uses, as its allocation would remove the need to release Green Belt land elsewhere in the Borough.

Question 31: How many homes should we be planning for?

- a) Minimum local housing need
- b) HEDNA 2022
- c) Other



We consider that the housing requirement in the Plan should be based on the HEDNA 2022. This is because the HEDNA methodology more accurately reflects the census based demographic projections for Coventry, whereas the Standard Method is based on 2014 projections for Coventry, which have historically been over-estimated by the ONS. The overestimate of population projections has been acknowledged by the ONS and is considered to justify the exceptional circumstances to diverge from using the Standard Method to calculate housing need.

The HEDNA has therefore, remodelled the demographic projections based on 2021 census results and has applied the standard methodology framework to these results.

The trend based HEDNA methodology results in an overall reduction in housing need across the HMA; that reduction largely relates to Coventry. However, the methodology results in an uplift for Rugby Borough, from 516 new homes under the 2014 projections, to 735 new homes. Under the HEDNA methodology, an additional 3,114 new homes would be required in the Borough to 2041, or an additional 8,101 to 2050.

Given that the adopted Rugby Local Plan already makes provision for 620 new homes per annum, and that between 2011 and 2023 an average of 673 new homes were delivered annually, it would seem realistic and achievable for the new Local Plan to allocate sites to deliver 735 new homes per year, to support the Government's stated objective to significantly boost the supply of new homes.

Paragraph 82 of the NPPF notes that:

*'Planning policies should
d) be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices (such as live-work accommodation), and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.'*

The adopted Rugby Local Plan provides a pipeline of new homes primarily through the allocation of two large, strategic sites; 4,766 new homes at SW Rugby SUE, and a further 4,603 new homes at Houlton. The SUE approach is delivering homes for Rugby Borough in sustainable locations, using land and infrastructure efficiently and providing new, high quality, energy efficient homes, supported by sustainable transport provision.

The delivery of a further 1,500 new homes on our clients' site would continue the successful SUE approach in the Borough. It would deliver a sustainable site which would be supported by sustainable transport initiatives. It would be of a sufficient size to enable the delivery of educational and community facilities, and employment land would also be delivered, significantly reducing the need to travel by private car.

Such an allocation would deliver high quality market and affordable housing on a masterplanned site, without the need to remove land from the Green Belt.



Question 33: Please provide any comments you have on the suitability of any of the broad locations listed above for new housing. Are there any locations that we have missed?

We note that the draft Plan identifies a number of potential housing locations, but that paragraph 9.26 acknowledges that there may be other locations that are not shown on the map that will be put forward in response to this consultation.

We would strongly recommend that Strategic Land south of Dunchurch is identified as a potential location for housing. It lies in close proximity to Rugby and to the national highway network. It is not Green Belt land, and it is relatively unconstrained in terms of planning and environmental designations.

The site could deliver a strategic scale development which is highly sustainable, offering educational, work, leisure and community facilities to support new housing. It could be easily connected to Rugby and Dunchurch by a regular and frequent bus service. Existing hourly bus services to Rugby and Leamington Spa (services 63 and 64) could be expanded.

Summary

We have sought to respond to a number of the consultation questions posed, to demonstrate that Land south of Dunchurch represents a suitable, available and achievable strategic site which could accommodate either a residential led mixed use development, or a wholly commercial development.

Its allocation would make a significant contribution to meeting the needs identified in the draft Plan for housing land and for employment land, in a highly sustainable, non Green Belt location.

I would be grateful if you would acknowledge safe and timely receipt of these representations. If you need any additional information, please do get in touch.

Regards,

