

## **Rugby Local Plan Examination**

### **Statement Prepared by Oxalis Planning on Behalf of Roxhill Developments**

#### **Walsgrave Island Junction Improvements (Matter 3, Overall Development Strategy)**

**1 February 2018**

##### Introduction

1. At the Rugby Local Plan Stage 1 Hearing Session on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018, a discussion took place about the Walsgrave Island (also known as the Clifford Bridge Roundabout) and how improvements to this junction relate to the delivery of a mixed use allocation for 1,500 dwellings and 55Ha of employment land at Walsgrave Hill Farm.
2. Questions were asked about what infrastructure works would be needed to deliver the different components of the development in both Rugby and Coventry. This includes Coventry City's 900 home allocation on the western side of the A46 and a new emergency access to ease congestion to the University Hospital.
3. At the hearing sessions, Roxhill provided information about the delivery of a Grade Separated Junction (GSJ) at Walsgrave Island and how this related to plans by Highways England to deliver junction improvements as part of its Road Investment Strategy. It was stated by Roxhill that a new Grade Separated Junction will be provided and funded as part of an allocation, if necessary without any funding from Highways England. It was further stated that these works are essential to ease congestion on the A46 (improving general traffic movement in the area); to provide a new access to the University Hospital; to deliver Coventry's 900 homes; and to deliver a sustainable mixed use allocation in Rugby comprising 55Ha of strategic employment land and 1,500 new homes close to where the source of the need arises.
4. Roxhill reflected on the discussion after the hearing session ended and it was felt that the Inspector may not have fully understood Roxhill's commitment to the delivery of the grade separated junction and the wider strategic highway benefits of an allocation at Walsgrave Hill Farm to the east of the A46. The Programme Officer has kindly confirmed that the Inspector is prepared to receive this written explanation setting out why an allocation is essential and how this would be delivered. Roxhill apologises that it has not been possible to make this statement available before the Stage 1 Sessions close, but it is important that the detail of this important component of the scheme is set out clearly and accurately.

##### Context

5. Evidence has been presented to the Rugby Local Plan examination that a mixed use allocation at Walsgrave Hill Farm, on the edge of Coventry, presents a highly sustainable solution to meet housing and strategic employment needs. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that while the Walsgrave Hill Farm site is located within the Green Belt, there are exceptional circumstances to justify its release. A development on this edge of city site is consistent with employment and housing allocations on edge of city Green Belt sites in other Warwickshire Local Plans, providing essential strategic employment land and representing a highly sustainable solution to growth. A review of

the Green Belt in this edge of Coventry location is consistent with Paragraph 84 of the NPPF.

6. This note responds to the specific points that were raised at the Examination Hearing sessions.

#### Highways England's Position

7. The improvements to Binley and Walsgrave Islands were identified in Highway England's RIS1 programme. This sets out the government's intention for 100 strategic highway improvement works between 2015 and 2020, funded by £15.2 billion of public money. This identified the upgrading of the Binley and Walsgrave Islands as 'grade separation upgrades' under the umbrella of the scheme being 'Newly announced in this Investment Plan'. No detail was given for when these works would be carried out and would be subject to detailed design and approval. Subsequent information through Highways England's 2017 public consultation suggested that works would begin spring 2020 and be completed spring 2022.
8. Roxhill has been in regular discussions with Highways England about the delivery of the Binley and Walsgrave Islands as part of the modelling works for the planning and S278 applications relating to the Coventry and Warwickshire Gateway. As part of these discussions, it has become clear that funding for the Walsgrave Island grade separated junction is not secured and the anticipated start date of spring 2020 for the improvements is neither likely nor realistic. Furthermore, the design of the works has not been agreed and funding has not been secured. At the hearing session, an e-mail dated 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018 Mr Johnson at Highways England was referred to. This e-mail was read out by Mr Johnstone (on behalf of SALFV), which appears to suggest that there is not even agreement to grade separate the Walsgrave Island. Therefore it is possible that if Highways England undertake the works, they may implement an at-grade solution. This will clearly not provide a long-term solution to easing congestion. While it is recognised that a personal e-mail exchange does not provide a definitive position, this demonstrates the uncertainty of a Highways England delivered grade separated solution in the short or medium term. Furthermore, there is no evidence before the examination to suggest that Highways England can be relied upon to deliver this essential infrastructure. A copy of the 26<sup>th</sup> January e-mail is attached.
9. It is recognised that Highways England's position in terms of what works will take place to Walsgrave Island and the timescales for this is unclear. Roxhill welcomes the Inspector's decision to seek further information from Highways England about this matter although it is strongly contended that any lack of clarity should not be a barrier to understanding the significant highway benefits that a Walsgrave Hill Farm allocation will deliver.

#### Roxhill's Position

10. Evidence has been submitted to the examination to explain that a mixed use allocation to the east of the A46 will fund and deliver the £30 million grade separated junction within three years. Crucially, this will happen irrespective of whether Highways England choose to match-fund the works, although the indication from HE that they would be prepared to match fund the works helps to illustrate the importance and strategic benefit of grade separation.

11. The fact that Roxhill can fund and deliver the grade separated junction is important because it provides confirmation that the Walsgrave Hill Farm site can be suitably accessed and is not reliant on the delivery of works by Highways England or others. It also provides a guarantee about the design of the junction (grade separated rather than a sub-standard at-grade solution) and provides comfort about when the works will be completed. Aside from providing a safe and congestion-free access to the new allocation, this has significant wider benefits to the Coventry and Warwickshire economy, the operation of the University Hospital and reducing air pollution around the Walsgrave Island junction. These are significant wider benefits and provide a level of 'planning gain' that will not be secured through an alternative allocation.
12. Discussion took place at the hearing sessions about why modest improvements could not take place to the Walsgrave Island junction to deliver Coventry's 900 homes scheme, and an improved blue light access to the University Hospital. This is important to understand as Roxhill, who have control over the 900 allocation site, has provided evidence to the examination to state that neither the 900 homes, nor the hospital access improvements can come forward without the Walsgrave Island grade separated junction improvements.
13. The Walsgrave Hill Farm site within Coventry City has been allocated for nearly 17 years. It was allocated in the Coventry City Development Plan 2001 as a 500 home development (Policy H8). The main reason why this did not come forward is because of uncertainty about the timescale and format of the Walsgrave Island improvements.
14. Works undertaken by Roxhill indicated that, at a technical level, there is considerable doubt about whether an at-grade improvement to Walsgrave Island could have sufficient capacity to accommodate existing and future traffic volumes, both local traffic travelling into the city and strategic traffic on the A46, traffic using the University hospital (including new 1,500 space staff car park), and traffic to the new 900 home development.
15. At best, without a new grade separated junction, an access into the City Council's Walsgrave Hill housing site is complex, costly and severely constrained with no certainty about the prospects of delivery.
16. It was suggested at the examination hearings that a grade separated solution to Walsgrave Island was not a requirement of delivery of the 900 homes within Coventry and that the Inspector hearing evidence about the City's Local Plan was content that the allocation could come forward without this improvement. The reality is that this matter was not considered in detail because the allocation was not contentious and the Inspector did not seek assurances about what infrastructure works were required, whether they would be viable and when they would be delivered. This is not uncommon on an uncontentious site and can be a reason why occasionally allocations do not progress during the plan period. Irrespective of the reasons Coventry proposed the allocation, the commercial reality is that the 900 homes are highly unlikely to get delivered without the grade separated junction improvements to Walsgrave Island.

#### Delivery and Phasing Proposals

17. As explained above, a new grade separated junction at Walsgrave Island is essential to deliver the overall Walsgrave Hill Farm site (both east and west of the A46) and the

reality is that neither could come forward without these works. The work would encompass two key components as shown enclosed on Plan 1. These comprise:

- i) Replacement of the existing B4082 Walsgrave Island Roundabout on the A46 with a new grade separated junction. The junction would take the form of twin Dumb-Bell Roundabouts built “off-line”, with the A46 subsequently being diverted below the completed arrangement. Four new slip-roads would be provided together with links back to the B4082 and the nearby University Hospital;
- ii) A secondary Link Road between the two halves of the site, connecting land to the east of the A46 directly to the Hospital and the new A46 Walsgrave Interchange via an independent route and bridge. This route would provide for general traffic movements between the two halves of the site but would also include a physically segregated access into the eastern development for use by buses currently terminating at the Hospital (the “Busway”). When combined, the two would then ensure that a suitable secondary route into and out of the land to the east is available in the event of either the main access experiencing an issue or it being delayed in terms of delivery. The route is particularly important for phasing and the early release of housing land.

18. The scheme has been deliberately designed to enable its delivery in two discrete (but wholly inter-related) phases. These are shown on Plan 2 and have been developed to enable the early release of housing land to the east of the A46 in order to meet RBC’s expectations. The two phases are as follows:

- i) Phase 1 would comprise the link road between the two halves of the site, connecting land to the east of the A46 directly to the hospital and to the existing Walsgrave Island Roundabout via the new secondary bridge and a temporary diversion of the B4082. Phase 1 would provide an initial access to allow the early release of housing and would also allow bus services currently terminating at the Hospital to be extended to access the development from the outset as noted above. Physically segregated pedestrian and cycle access would be provided across the new bridge in combination with the dedicated “Busway”;
- ii) Phase 2 would be the construction of the main A46 Walsgrave Interchange and removal of the temporary B4082 diversion. The whole of the Interchange has been conceived to be “off-line” with respect to the existing A46, which means it is capable of being built completely clear of the existing carriageways and the congested Walsgrave Island. Buildability is an important consideration with a scheme of this magnitude and the adoption of an “off-line” design greatly reduces costs and speeds-up construction, since the need for extensive traffic management is avoided. It also means that the scheme could be built in advance of; in parallel with, or after HE’s planned scheme to grade-separate the Binley Island to the south along the A46.

19. The Phase 1 layout has been deliberately developed to facilitate quick and easy access to the housing land to the east of the A46. It could be delivered within 18 months of the adoption of the RBC Local Plan. Up to 200 new homes will therefore be available for first occupation within that same 18 month period, assuming concurrent construction with access initially via the Phase 1 highways layout.

20. Full approvals for the new Phase 2 scheme would take approximately 18 months to secure, with construction a further 18 months. This component of the site access would therefore be available approximately three years from the start of the planning process. For this reason the Phase 1 layout would be expected to serve the initial housing phases as described above over the ensuing period, but both phases would still be covered by the same fully-funded S278 Agreement. Phase 1 would not be permitted to start (nor houses occupied) until the principle and general layout of the Phase 2 scheme has been agreed with HE and enshrined into the S278. This mechanism would then effectively agree the temporary nature of the Phase 1 layout and define a timescale for its replacement.
21. The delay until the Phase 2 highways works are complete is expected to be no longer than 18 months. The number of homes completed on site over this period would be unlikely to exceed 400 so would not be expected to have a significant impact in respect of traffic generation. During this period the separate “Busway” would be available to provide a second point of access in the event of the general-purpose route over the A46 Phase 1 Overbridge becoming blocked.

### Conclusions

22. Roxhill will deliver and fully fund the £30million grade separated junction as part of an allocation at Walsgrave Hill Farm. This is not dependent upon HE match funding.
23. A grade separated junction is essential to ‘ensuring’ the delivery of a new allocation, 900 homes within Coventry and a new access for the University Hospital for emergency vehicles, staff and the public.
24. There is uncertainty about what improvements to Walsgrave Island that Highways England will eventually decide to deliver and when these might come forward. Roxhill’s proposals provide certainty.
25. Roxhill’s proposal ensure that the new junction will get delivered within three years, saving public investment and ensuring that congestion is alleviated on local roads.
26. A phased ‘off-line’ delivery ensures that the works do not conflict with proposed Highways England works at Binley Island and ensure that homes can come forward before the grade separated junction works are completed.
27. As well as delivering significant economic benefits to the Coventry and Warwickshire economy, an allocation would provide a level of ‘planning gain’ that cannot be secured through an alternative solution.