

Application No: 16/2314M

Location: LAND EAST OF ROYAL LONDON HOUSE, ALDERLEY ROAD, WILMSLOW, CHESHIRE

Proposal: Outline planning permission is sought for a new office development (Use Class B1) and associated car parking, access improvements for vehicles and creation of new pedestrian and cycle routes to the site and enhancement of existing and provision of new landscaping.

Applicant: PAG & RLMIS

Expiry Date: 10-Aug-2016

## **SUMMARY**

The site is partially previously developed however the majority of the site is undeveloped. The whole site is within the Green Belt where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. It is established that the proposals do represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt, and only if very special circumstances exist to justify the departure from Green Belt policy should they be approved.

The applicant has put forward what it considers to be very special circumstances, however the onus is on the decision maker, the LPA to determine what weight is attached to these in the planning balance and whether these circumstances amount to very special circumstances to justify the development, and outweigh the automatic harm the development would cause by way of inappropriateness.

The benefits in this case are:

- Meeting the needs of Royal London in Wilmslow. The development would provide a replacement office headquarters for Royal London Insurance to ensure the retention of this major employer within Wilmslow, retaining 960 jobs in the area.
- Securing the provision of an additional 500-600 jobs
- The development would provide significant economic benefits through the provision of employment during the construction phase, the creation of new jobs and the knock on benefits for local businesses. The proposal will not have an adverse landscape impact, following suitable mitigation being agreed.
- The proposal will result in the widening of Alderley Road in a southerly direction approaching the roundabout on the A34. As well as mitigating against the impact of the development this will overcome an existing issue in the local highway network and ensure that the highway network operates below capacity.
- Pedestrian and cycle linkages will be provided through the site.

The development would have a neutral impact upon the following subject to mitigation:

- There is not considered to be any significant drainage implications raised by this development.
- The impact upon the residential amenity/noise/air quality/landscape and contaminated land could be mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.
- The impact on local ecology can be mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.

The adverse impacts of the development would be:

- The loss of mature protected trees along Alderley Road. Although this can be mitigated to some degree through the imposition of planning conditions.
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In this case it is considered that the adverse effects of the scheme are significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the benefits and mitigation against these adverse impacts can be achieved through submission of further information as part of the conditions or as part of the reserved matters application. On balance therefore the application should be approved.

#### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Approve (subject to referral to the Secretary of State)

#### **PROPOSAL**

The application is for outline planning permission for a new office development (Use Class B1) and associated car parking, access improvements for vehicles and creation of new pedestrian and cycle routes to the site and enhancement of existing and provision of new landscaping.

The application is in outline with only the means of access for approval at this stage. Detailed matters relating to layout, scale, appearance and landscaping are reserved for future approval.

The site will be accessed through the existing Royal London campus with the existing connections on to Alderley Road being improved. A key part of the proposals involve the widening of a stretch of Alderley Road providing additional capacity travelling south towards the existing roundabout. The existing access point into the Royal London site from Alderley Road is proposed to be widened as is the access road that runs through the existing site.

#### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The planning application site consists of four distinct elements.

The first element is the site of the proposed office building and car park. This area is located to the east of the main Royal London site sitting between the existing site and the west coast mainline. This area of the site consists of fields the southern one of which sits at a higher ground level than the surrounding land and the existing parking areas at the southern end of the Royal London site. The ground levels are as a result of spoil being tipped on the site through the development of the existing Royal London site and the A34. Some mature trees

are located along the red line boundary of the site as well as a row of trees dissecting the site. To the north of the site are fields that separate the site from Wilmslow High School and residential properties.

The second element of the site consists of a strip of land that runs from the north western corner of the main application site to join a footpath onto Harefield Drive. Part of this route is already in use as a footpath with the remainder being part of the wider fields directly to the north of the application site.

The third element of the application site is made up of the existing access road that runs from Alderley Road and through the existing Royal London site through to the proposed location of the officer building. The boundary of the application runs at either side of the road allowing for this to be widened before widening out to included existing parking areas that are proposed to be re-configured to accommodate access.

The remaining element is separate from the main application site. This consists of a strip of land that adjoins Alderley Road and runs from the existing secondary access point into the site and runs in a southerly direction to the Whitehall Bridge Roundabout. This area of land currently contains a number of mature trees.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

The Royal London site has been subject to numerous planning applications in the past. The previous applications upon the site of the proposed office building are as follows;

15/3488M - Formation and laying out of permanent car park. Approved 29.10.2015

76234P – Land-raising with inert materials sourced from materials as unsuitable in the construction of the A34 Wilmslow to Handforth by-pass. Approved 25.02.1994

41761P - Tipping of material from adjoining site and land to be returned to pasture. Approved 11.06.1985

41807P – Tipping of material from adjoining site and land to be returned to pasture. Approved 25.07.1985

## **NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY**

By virtue of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for Cheshire East currently comprises the saved policies from the Congleton Borough (January 2005), Crewe and Nantwich (February 2005) and Macclesfield Local Plan (January 2004).

**The Macclesfield Borough Local Plan** is the relevant plan in relation to this site. The site is located completely within the Green Belt, parts of the red line boundary are located within the major developed site in the green belt.

Therefore the relevant Local Plan policies are considered to be:

Policy BE1: Design Guidance

Policy DC1: New Build

Policy DC3: Amenity

Policy DC4: Amenity

Policy DC5: Natural Surveillance

Policy DC6: Circulation and Access

Policy DC7: Car Parking

Policy DC8: Landscaping

Policy DC9: Tree Protection

Policy DC13: Noise

Policy DC14: Noise

Policy DC15: Provision of Facilities

Policy DC17: Water Resources

Policy DC18: Water Resources

Policy DC62: Renewable Energy

Policy DC63: Contaminated Land

Policy DC64: Floodlighting

Policy T1: Integrated transport policy

Policy T2: Provision of public transport

Policy T3: Improving conditions for pedestrians

Policy T4: Provision for people with restricted mobility

Policy T5: Development proposals making provision for cyclists

Policy T6: Highway improvements and traffic management

Policy NE2: Landscape character areas

Policy NE14: Natural habitats

Policy NE11: Protection and enhancement of nature conservation interests

Policy NE17: Nature Conservation in Major Developments

Policy GC1: Green Belt boundaries

Policy GC4: Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt

Policy IMP1: Development Sites

Policy IMP2: Transport Measures

**Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy** – Proposed changes version public consultation ended 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016 where this site is proposed as an allocation for a mixed use development, including B1 offices, residential use and playing fields.

The following are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy:

Site CS26 – Royal London, including land to the west of Alderley Road

MP1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development

PG1 Overall Development Strategy

PG2 Settlement hierarchy

PG3 Green Belt

PG6 Spatial Distribution of Development

SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD2 Sustainable Development Principles  
IN1 Infrastructure  
IN2 Developer contributions  
EG1 Economic Prosperity  
SC4 Residential Mix  
SC5 Affordable Homes  
SE1 Design  
SE3 Biodiversity and geodiversity  
SE4 The Landscape  
SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland  
SE6 Green Infrastructure  
SE9 Energy Efficient Development  
SE12 Pollution, Land contamination and land instability  
SE13 Flood risk and water management  
CO1 Sustainable Travel and Transport  
CO4 Travel plans and transport assessments

### **The National Planning Policy Framework**

The National Planning Policy Framework came into effect on 27 March 2012, and replaces the advice provided in Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements. The aim of this document is to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, to protect the environment and to promote sustainable growth. Local planning authorities are expected to “plan positively” and that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Since the NPPF was published, the saved policies within the Macclesfield Borough Council Local Plan are still applicable but should be weighted according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF. The Local Plan policies outlined above are consistent with the NPPF and therefore should be given significant weight given the stage the CELPS is at.

Of particular relevance are paragraphs:

14. Presumption in favour of sustainable development.  
18 – 21 Building a strong, competitive economy  
56-68. Requiring good design  
72-74 Promoting healthy communities  
80, 81 and 89 Protecting Green Belt Land  
109. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment  
186-187. Decision taking  
196-197 Determining applications  
203-206 Planning conditions and obligations  
216 Implementation

### **Supplementary Planning Documents:**

Supplementary Planning Guidance provides a more detailed explanation of how strategic policies of the Development Plan can be practically implemented. The following SPGs are relevant and have been included in the Local Development Scheme, with the intention to retain these documents as 'guidance' for local planning purposes.

- Trees & Development Guidelines

## CONSULTATIONS

**Environmental Health – Environmental protection:** Whilst a number of possible issues have been identified with regards to noise and vibration, especially during the demolition and construction phase of the development, conditions including an Environmental Management and noise conditions are recommended. With regards to air quality, the assessment concludes there will be a traffic impact of a minor adverse magnitude. A condition in respect of electric vehicle charging points is recommended to address this issue. Finally with regards to contaminated land, a condition and informative are recommended.

**Highways** – No objection. The comments are considered in detail in the main body of the report.

**Environment Agency** – No objections, but recommend conditions relating to a remediation strategy to deal with the risks associated with contamination, together with separate conditions relating to verification of the works set out, and if contamination is found how will it be addressed. A condition is also recommended with regards to requiring the approval of piling or other penetrative methods of foundation design to avoid risk to groundwater. Informatives are also recommended with regards to reuse of materials on site, waste removal from site, and they recommend that the EA is consulted prior to more site investigation works.

**United Utilities** – No objections are raised, but they recommend a drainage condition and make a series of recommendations with regards to water supply and drainage matters.

**Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service:** Agree the findings of the Heritage Appraisal that concludes the site has low potential to contain below-ground archaeological deposits that would be affected by the proposals. Therefore no further archaeological work is required.

## VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

**Wilmslow Town Council** - Wilmslow Town Council's Planning Committee recommend refusal of this application on the grounds of inappropriate development in the greenbelt without demonstrating the necessary special circumstances required by the NPPF.

**Alderley Edge Parish Council** - The Parish Council recommends refusal of this application on the grounds of inappropriate development of the green belt.

## OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

58 representations have been made in objection to the application including responses from the Cheshire branch of the Campaign for the Protection Rural England and the Wilmslow Civic Trust.

The points of objection relate to the following;

- The site is within the green belt and as such should not be developed.
- Very special circumstances have not been demonstrated to allow development on green belt land.
- The gap between Wilmslow and Alderley Edge is being eroded.

- The development is contrary to the five purposes of including land in the green belt.
- It is premature to determine the application in advance of the local plan being adopted.
- Only limited weight should be given to emerging local plan policies.
- Approving the application will set a precedent for releasing other green belt sites.
- Increase in traffic in the area adding to the already bad congestion
- The proposed highway improvements are not of any practical value.
- The Council should not feel under pressure to approve the application due to the risk of losing an employer.
- If Royal London decide not to remain in Wilmslow then the very special circumstances do not exist.
- A significant amount of office space is available at Alderley Park and the development could be accommodated there.
- The development will have an irreversible impact on the environment.
- A significant amount of vacant office space is available in the area.
- Loss of protected trees as a result of the widening of Alderley Road.
- The proposal will have an impact on local ecology.

The points of support relate to the following;

- The improvement of pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre.
- Improvement of the ecology habitat as a result of the proposal.
- The highway improvements will reduce congestion and significantly improve the existing traffic issues on Alderley Road.

#### **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- Planning Statement
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal
- Noise and Vibration Assessment
- Framework Travel Plan
- Transport Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Statement
- Geo Environmental Reports
- Heritage Assessment
- Ecological Assessment
- Tree Quality Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement
- Design and Access Statement

#### **APPRAISAL**

The key issues that must be considered as part of this application are considered to be as follows;

- Principle of development
- The Green Belt
- Sustainability
- Highways and access
- Landscape Impact

- Impact on protected trees
- Ecology
- Amenity
- Flood Risk
- Economic sustainability
- Social sustainability
- Representations
- Planning Balance

### **Principle of development**

The site is located to the east of the existing Royal London site at the southern edge of Wilmslow. The site is located within the Green Belt where the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, indeed the essential characteristic of Green Belts is openness. The whole site is washed over by Green Belt and the majority of the site has not been developed. The site has an open character.

Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines what is normally considered to be acceptable, this paragraph states;

*'A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:*

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;*
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;*
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;*
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;*
- limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or*
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), 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.'*

In terms of this application, there are no buildings on site at the present time, the application proposes a building of significant size together with extensive areas of parking. Part of the application site already consists of a large car park and as such the use of this land is not changed.

The remainder of the proposals relate directly to the development of the new office building. Such development is not considered to be acceptable within the Green Belt and therefore is inappropriate development and harmful by definition, unless very special circumstances exist

to clearly outweigh the harm by other considerations. The NPPF at paragraph 88 urges Local Planning Authorities to ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering planning applications.

A case made up of a series of considerations has been put forward. The applicant stresses in the planning statement that these considerations amounts to the very special circumstances required to help overcome the automatic harm by inappropriateness and to the purposes for including land within the Green Belt.

The following considerations have been put forward as very special circumstances for allowing the proposals:

**Consideration 1:** That there is no harm to the five purposes of the Green Belt.

**Consideration 2:** The proposal will have no perceived impact on the openness of the wider green belt.

**Consideration 3:** The decision to review the Green Belt boundary specifically for the application site.

**Consideration 4:** Benefits of allowing the proposals.

**Consideration 1 – There is no harm to the 5 purposes for including land within the Green Belt.**

This point refers to the contribution the site makes to purposes for including land within the Green Belt. Five purposes for including land within the Green Belt are set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF and are shown below:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The planning statement considers that the proposed development will not conflict with any of the purposes for including land within the Green Belt.

**- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;**

Having assessed the site it is considered that the proposal will contribute to unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. The Planning Statement claims that this is not the case as the site adjoins the existing built up area of Wilmslow and the site is within an area of land that is physically enclosed by existing urban areas and the west coast mainline and the A34. These do however form strong physical barriers between the built up area of Wilmslow and the wider green belt to the south and east.

The majority of the site is a greenfield site that has not been previously developed and the development results in an enlargement of the Wilmslow urban area. The nature of the site

and its enclosure by existing urban features the would provide the opportunity for the development of this site to round off the settlement pattern in this part of Wilmslow. However the proposals do not generally accord with this purpose for including land with the green belt.

- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

The planning statement puts forward the point that the development of this site does not compromise the aim of the green belt to stop neighbouring towns merging into one another. The site sits at the southern edge of Wilmslow with Alderley Edge being located close by to the south. Views of the site from this direction are limited from the south although the gap between the two settlements is not significantly wide at this point.

The proposed development is located to the east of the existing Royal London site and as such will not erode the green belt in the relatively narrow gap to the south of the site that separates the two settlements. Although it does narrow the gap when taken in the strictest sense the strong physical boundaries of the A34 and the west coast mainline separate the site from the farmland beyond.

As a result the development of this site will not result in any harmful erosion of the gap in the built up area between Wilmslow and Alderley Edge.

- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

The development will encroach into the countryside and this is not in doubt. The site is a greenfield site that was last in agricultural use and as such it is clear that on an initial view that the proposals are contrary to this purpose.

However the site is bounded on all sides by existing urban features and land uses as described previously in this report. The wider countryside to the east and south of the site is protected by the strong physical barriers of the A34 and the west coast mainline. It must also be pointed out that the A34 was constructed after the site and the wider land was first defined as green belt.

- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;

Wilmslow is considered to be a historic town and indeed has a number of conservation areas throughout the area. However no conservation areas are located close to the site and therefore no contribution is made to this purpose.

- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Wilmslow has only a small amount of previously developed land with potential for development. As a result it is considered that the future economic and development needs of the town cannot be met without the release of green belt land. It is not considered there is any conflict with this purpose.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the applicant does not consider the proposal to conflict with the purposes for including land within the Green Belt, this is not the test to determine whether development is acceptable in the Green Belt or not. A proposal can conflict or comply with any number of the purposes and still be found contrary to paragraph 80 of the Framework. Therefore consideration 1 is not considered to be a very special circumstance in itself, however weight can be attributed to this in combination with other circumstances.

**Consideration 2: The proposal will have no perceived impact on the openness of the wider green belt.**

As explained above the application is by definition harmful to the openness of the green belt. As part of the applicant's submission they have considered the impact of the development in these terms.

Firstly it is pointed out that the NPPF does not provide a definition of openness and as such it is left to case law to establish this. It is put forward that openness generally means the absence of buildings or development. Also of relevance is that case law regards openness and visual impact to be separate but related issues.

The proposed development will clearly introduce built form into the green belt and therefore a loss of openness will occur. The issue then moves onto the extent of harm that is caused by this development. As stated previously in this report the site is contained by existing development to the north and west and by strong physical boundaries to the south and east these being the A34 and the west coast mainline.

Whilst it is accepted that these strong boundaries are in place it is clear from the landscape visual impact assessment that is fully considered later in this report that the development will have some visual impact, although this can be mitigated against to some degree by retaining existing tree cover and landscape enhancement.

The site however, is visible from some distance and it cannot be considered that the proposal will not have an impact on the openness of the wider green belt. This issue centres around the extent and level of harm caused by the impact on openness. The visual impact on the landscape is considered in full later in this report and whilst a separate consideration it is closely entwined with the issue of openness as it goes some way to establishing the level of harm.

**Consideration 3: The decision to review the Green Belt boundary specifically for the application site.**

The site has been designated as a site for future mixed use development within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Proposed changes version (CELPS), as a strategic site.

The site is fully within the site identified as CS26 'Royal London including land to the west of Alderley Road, Wilmslow'. The illustrative masterplan submitted with this application demonstrates that the level of development proposed in the Policy can be accommodated within this site without compromising the wider aspirations for the site.

Policy PG3 Green Belt states that CS26 'Royal London including land to the west of Alderley Road, Wilmslow' will be removed from the Green Belt as part of the spatial strategy and to allow for the sustainable growth of Wilmslow which is one of only nine Key Service Centres in the settlement hierarchy.

CS26 states that the development of the site should achieve the following:

1. The retention and protection of buildings and their settings in the existing Royal London Campus.

2. The delivery of around 175 Dwellings (around 80 on land to the east of the existing campus, around 20 to the north of the existing campus and around 75 on land west of Alderley Road.
3. The provision 5ha of employment land for up to around 24,000 square metres of B1 employment space and a hotel.
4. Incorporation of green infrastructure and the provision of public open space at the southern end of the land west of Alderley Road.
5. Provision of at least 1 ha of land set aside for use as school playing field within the site in addition to the area marked as public open space in the map as well as an appropriate level of amenity open space and children's play space.
6. Pedestrian and cycle links and associated infrastructure.

Within the supporting text of CS26 the following is stated at paragraph 15.364:

*'This site represents an ideal opportunity for an infill development which, with a mixed use scheme, will facilitate the growth and expansion of a major employment site, provide jobs and meet Wilmslow's much needed requirements for open space provision, whilst retaining the character of the area'*

The designation of the application site as a future development site in the CELPS has been made through a thoughtful site selection process, where the designation has been assessed by the Council, a number of evidence based documents have been produced which do not preclude this site from coming forward as a mixed use site. In light of the evidence gathered by the Council, the application site is seen as a logical expansion of the town in order to accommodate the much needed growth and particularly housing growth. As a Key Service Centre, Wilmslow must accommodate future growth over the Local Plan period in order to ensure a sustainable future for the town and the wider borough.

It must be noted however, that this process should follow the plan-led system, where an Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate will make the final decision on which sites will be brought forward for development at the strategic level and until the CELPS has been through the full EIP process and has been adopted, it cannot be afforded full weight.

However, this is not to say that this matter cannot be afforded weight. There are limited options around the edge of Wilmslow for growth, and the level of growth that must be accommodated increases the likelihood that this far through the CELPS development process, this site will be released from the Green Belt. Especially as the evidence gathered to date has not prevented the site from being progressed in the plan-making process.

A recent Secretary of State decision from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 – Land at 'Perrybrook' to the north of Brockworth and south of the A417, Brockworth Gloucestershire – dealt with this issue. The site is located within the Green Belt and the development was for around 1500 dwellings and various other uses. The site has been allocated in the emerging Joint Core Strategy, (not yet adopted). The conclusion of the Inspector and the Secretary of State in this case was that *'the proposal could be described as plan-led development rather than one which would undermine the plan-making process. Since the proposal is in keeping with the emerging JCS, he agrees that the proposal should not be regarded as premature within the terms of Framework paragraph 216'*

The same is true in the case of Royal London, the proposal would not be at odds with the plan-led process, as it would result in an area of land as identified in the plan being released from the Green Belt for employment purposes. The SoS agreed with the inspector that *'as the consistent conclusion of extensive study over the past decade has been that the area represents a logical and acceptable option for the extension of the built up area, the planning policy context should be accorded significant weight'*.

This case does have similarities with the Royal London site. The aim for the Royal London site in the CELPS is to provide a fully policy compliant site, to provide other benefits such as highway improvements, access, and open space improvements. It also allows for the rest of the proposed development to come forward.

This does follow the plan-led system as far as the allocation is concerned. The proposals are accompanied by a masterplan that shows how the full aims of CS26 can be delivered and that the proposed development does not constrain delivery of the wider site in accordance with of the aims of the CELPS. Therefore the application is fully compliant with this allocation and in this instance the weight that can be afforded is considered to be significant.

#### **Consideration 4: Benefits of allowing the proposals.**

The applicant, within the planning statement, has set out the benefits that will arise should the development go ahead. This is carried out to allow the local planning authority to make a balanced decision on whether these benefits outweigh the harm to the green belt.

The main identified benefits are as follows;

- Meeting the needs of Royal London in Wilmslow
- Highway benefits
- Facilitating infrastructure delivery and investment in the wider strategic site.
  
- **Meeting the needs of Royal London in Wilmslow**

The applicant, in their supporting planning statement, places significant weight on the fact that Royal London is an important local employer and have submitted an economic case to support the proposals. This has been assessed by the Council's Spatial Planning Team and its conclusions are considered sound.

A number of factors are set out in section 2 of the report that sets out why Royal London's current and future business needs cannot be met in the current facility. The key points put forward are;

- Royal London as a business is growing and looking to expand.
- As part of the expansion plans Royal London are seeking to employ a further 500-600 people at this site and are unable to do this without the proposed development.
- The current building they occupy on the adjoining site is no longer fit for purpose and operates at full capacity.
- The refurbishment of this building is neither practicable or economically viable.
- A building up to the highest modern standards is needed.

- Other sites are being actively pursued by Royal London and the loss of this local employer will have a detrimental impact on local businesses. (This site is the only site with Cheshire East)
- The additional employees to be based at the site will have a positive impact on the local economy.

Royal London currently employ approximately 960 staff in the largest building in the existing campus that is known as Royal London House. Given the success of the business the company is seeking to expand and provide employment for up to 1,500 staff. The current level of employment at the site equates to approximately 1 in every 10 private sector jobs in Wilmslow and as a result the departure from Wilmslow of Royal London will have a detrimental impact on the local economy. This is further supported from the report by Regeneris that sets out the potential loss of £130 million of Gross Value Added (GVA) to Cheshire East.

Royal London House no longer meets the requirements of the company given the fact it operates at maximum capacity and following technological advancements it is no longer fit for purpose. This is not to say that it could be taken on by another occupier once it has vacated but it will require significant investment to be brought up to modern standards and the scale of the works can only be carried out if the building is vacant.

It is clear that Royal London play a significant role in economy in the Wilmslow and should the company re-locate outside of Cheshire East it would have a significant detrimental impact on the local economy in Wilmslow and the wider economy in Cheshire East. The proposals will not only ensure that the current positive benefits are maintained but the increased number of employees at the site will also make a positive benefit.

- **Highway benefits**

A Transport Assessment has been submitted to support the proposals and this matter is discussed in depth later in this report. In summary Alderley Road needs to be widened in order to accommodate the increase in traffic from the development. The Transport Assessment states that these improvements will result in the capacity and operation of the approach to the A34 roundabout being an improvement than the current situation.

- **Facilitating infrastructure delivery and investment in the wider strategic site.**

The application site is part of the wider area identified as site CS26 in the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and it is set out previously in this report what it is intended to deliver on this site.

A key aim of this policy is to deliver up to 24,000 square metres of B1 employment space and this application will go some way to achieving this aim. Also as important is that the site is designed in such a way that the other aims of the policy are not compromised. The indicative masterplan submitted with the application suitably demonstrates this.

Access is a matter that is for approval in this instance and involves the upgrade and extension of the existing access road through the site including junction improvements where it meets Alderley Road. The justification for the allocations states that the existing access points will have to be enhanced. By carrying out these enhancements at this stage it will assist in

increasing the future development potential of the site as it is suitable to accommodate the remainder of the development proposed for the allocation.

The applicant has put forward a number of special circumstances to demonstrate that the harm to the Green Belt is outweighed by the benefits and other special circumstances outlined above. It is the role of the LPA to determine if these outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and in this instance it is considered that very special circumstances have been demonstrated and the reasoning behind this is outlined in this report in considering the full planning balance of the harm and the benefits.

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability is the golden thread running through the National Planning Policy Framework, and proposals for sustainable development should be approved without delay. The National Planning Policy Framework definition of sustainable development is:

*“Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don’t mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate. Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment”*

There are, however, three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

**an environmental, economic and social role**

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Accessibility**

The accessibility of the site to pedestrians is important in regards to sustainability. The site is connected via the access road to the existing pedestrian network on Alderley Road that provides connectivity with Wilmslow. There are existing bus stops located on Alderley Road and are within a 400m walking distance of the site. To provide convenient access to the railway station, a pedestrian/cycle route is proposed that links to Harefield Drive and other residential streets that have good footways and provide a suitable route to the station. It is considered that this route is a more convenient route and it is much less trafficked, but a more direct route than the main Alderley Road. The Alderley Road widening scheme does include a shared footway and cycle facility that does link the southern site access with the cycle facilities on Pendleton Way.

There are local bus services that pass the site on Alderley Road, these bus services run at varying levels of frequency but does provide opportunities to commute to the site. In addition, Royal London provides a shuttle bus service between the site and Wilmslow railway station. Clearly, an important factor to improving accessibility is improving public transport access to the site, it is noted discussions with bus operators will be undertaken with a view to having bus services enter the site. In addition, improving frequency of the shuttle bus service will be explored through the submission of a travel plan for the site that will be part of the conditions attached to the planning permission.

A key part to promote sustainable mode usage is to ensure that there are convenient and safe routes, the pedestrian and cycle route to the station is being enhanced by the provision of the new footway/cycle link to Harefield Drive. A condition will be included on the decision notice requiring details of the design of this link and ensuring that it is available for use before the building is first occupied. A condition is also required to ensure that secure accommodation for 45 bicycles is also provided.

### **Highways**

Objections have been received by local residents in relation to increased traffic and highways issues. The introduction of a new office building must be safe and acceptable in highways terms, offices generate large levels of traffic especially at peak times, and it is very important that there are no adverse highways impacts as a result of the proposed development. CEC Highways have commented on the application.

### Traffic Impact Assessment

The scope of the highway impact has been agreed with the applicant and they have considered a number of junctions in the vicinity of the site, the two existing access points (northern and southern) with Alderley Road, the roundabout at the junction of Alderley Road/Bedells Lane and the roundabout on Melrose Way to the south of the site on the Alderley Edge By-pass.

The assessments have been undertaken on the worse case scenario with the existing buildings fully occupied and with the new Royal London building fully occupied.

The results of the 2021 capacity tests for the northern signal access and the southern access show that both site access points would operate within capacity with the proposed development added. The Alderley Road/Bedells Lane roundabout capacity results does show some of the arms are operating above capacity levels in 2021 although the queues are not particularly long and not ones that can be considered severe. The highway impacts in respect of these junctions is considered acceptable.

The operational assessment of the A34 Melrose Way/A34 Pendleton Way roundabout indicate that the existing road layout experiences capacity problems particularly in the PM peak on Alderley Road. The applicant has proposed an improvement scheme on Alderley Road on the southbound approach to the roundabout, this improvement involves widening to provide three 2.75 m lanes. The proposed design has been subject to a Stage 1 Safety Audit, no serious road safety concerns were raised in the audit.

A further capacity test has been undertaken with the improvement scheme in place, this shows that with the addition of the development it does not affect the operation of the

roundabout with the exception of A34 Melrose Way approach in the AM peak and Alderley Road (S) in the evening peak. Whilst, predicted queue lengths have increased with the addition of the development, these are not extensive queues that can be considered to be severe in the context of the NPPF and also these using traffic flows in the worse case scenario.

Overall, it is clear that the major traffic impact of the development falls on the southbound approach to the Melrose Way roundabout, there is a requirement for mitigation measures to be provided and there has been an improvement scheme submitted that deals with the development traffic. This scheme involves the widening of Alderley Road on the approach to the roundabout and the installation of an additional lane to accommodation traffic turning left. At present this stretch of Alderley Road operates above capacity at peak times. The agreed improvements not only ensure that the development is mitigated against but also results in this approach operating within capacity at peak times and represents a significant improvement on the current situation.

A condition will be included on the decision notice requiring the completion of these works within 6 months of the occupation of the new office building. This is a key benefit of the scheme that benefits the wider area, the transport assessment demonstrates the local highway network will function better, even with the new development fully occupied, than it does at present.

#### Car Parking Provision

The actual floorspace of the new building will not exceed 17,000sq.m and a condition will be included to reflect this. It is envisaged that the building would accommodate 1500 employees. The existing Royal London campus already employs a significant number of people and they have access to 752 car parking spaces across the site. The availability of car parking on the site has historically been less than operationally required and this has led to applications for further car parks to be constructed on the site. In addition, off site parking has occurred with vehicles being parked in residential street in the vicinity of the site.

This application consists of 1100 spaces for the 1,500 employees likely to be accessing the site, the number of car parking spaces is in excess of the recommended B1 office standard although it is important that sufficient parking is provided operationally and does not cause overspill parking externally from the site.

The level of car parking provision to serve the development is another important consideration, a balance needs to be struck between providing an operational amount of parking and high levels of parking that are not conducive to the use of sustainable modes. Historically there have been problems at the site with lack of parking provision and this application does provide a reasonable staff/parking ratio for the site. The final level of parking provision can be concluded at the reserved matters as it is only indicative at this stage.

#### Highways Conclusion

In summary, the application is acceptable subject to provide the Alderley Road improvement works to mitigate the traffic impact of the development, these works will be developer funded and implemented through a S278 Agreement. A condition on the decision notice will also ensure it is delivered within a reasonable timescale.

Subject to conditions relating to the implementation of the cycle links and improvements to Alderley Road, submission of a travel plan, and submission of a construction environment management plan the proposal is acceptable in highway terms.

### **Landscape Impact**

The Landscape Officer has assessed the application, and the Landscape Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA). The LVIA takes into account 17 viewpoints from all directions around the site although the majority of the views are taken from the south and east of the site as this is where most of the impact will occur.

Views of the site from the west are extremely limited due to the existing Royal London campus being set in a landscape of mature and well maintained environment. The only mitigation required is to retain and manage the existing landscaping.

The views from the south were taken from various points along the A34 between the residential property adjacent the roundabout and the west coast mainline. These views are all of varying sensitivity and take into account the view from the residential property, drivers on the A34 and users of a public footpath. From each of these views only a small part of the proposed building will be visible due to mature planting alongside the A34 and within the site. The recommended mitigation is to manage the existing woodland and supplement this with additional planting along the application site boundary. In time the building will not be visible from these areas.

From the north views were considered from Wilmslow High School and from residential properties at the Harefield Farm development. The degree of sensitivity is considered low in respect of the school but high in respect of the residential properties. From the school the building will be mostly screened by existing trees that form the southern boundary of the playing fields. In respect of the residential properties the magnitude of change has been assessed being medium as the building will be readily noticeable from this point but is not considered to dominate the view. The recommended mitigation is to retain the existing trees with additional landscaping and ensuring the building is located on the south eastern part of the site as shown on the indicative plan.

A number of different views have been taken from the east as the most open views of the site are from this direction. The furthest view from the site is taken from Castle Rock which is located 2.2 kilometres to the south east of the application site. This is an elevated vantage point that is publicly accessible and as a result the sensitivity of the view is considered to be high with views available across north Cheshire and Greater Manchester. It is not considered that the impact of the development from this view will be significant as only a small part of the building is likely to be visible from this point and will not result in a prominent feature in the landscape. The maintenance of the existing trees and planting along the site boundaries is considered sufficient mitigation in this instance.

A number of views from residential properties and along a footpath have been taken into account and are considered to be of high sensitivity as they are from public vantage points. The impact from each of these vantage points is considered to be low with suitable mitigation

being the retention of the existing planting and further planting along the eastern boundary of the site.

It is considered that the range of views taken into account is acceptable having been agreed in advance of the application being submitted. It is clear in the LVIA that the development will not be prominent in the wider landscape due screening by the topography, vegetation and buildings in the area. Additional mitigation will be required and shall be submitted as part of the reserved matters application and a condition relating to the wider management of the landscaping will also require details to accompany any reserved matters application.

### **Trees**

The site enjoys significant tree coverage and is subject to a significant tree preservation order therefore the Arboricultural Officer has made representations on the application and the application is supported by Tree Quality Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement (Tyler Grange Ref 10359\_R02a\_MR\_LP dated 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016. The tree survey has been carried out in full accordance with BS5837:2012 *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction-Recommendations*.

Selected trees within the site are protected by the Macclesfield Borough Council (Wilmslow - Harefield/Fulshaw Hall) Tree Preservation Order 1975, which was subsequently confirmed on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept 1975. This order covers the protection of 11 individual trees, 5 areas of trees and 20 groups of trees.

The assessment has identified 23 individual trees, 24 groups and 1 hedge within the application site, the majority of which it has been stated are in a fair to good physiological and structural condition. Three trees have been categorised as 'U' under the BS5837:2012 categorisation as unsuitable for retention due to their deteriorating condition. The Assessment identifies partial removal of 7 groups of trees of high (A) and Moderate (B) category trees and one low (C) category tree to accommodate the proposed development. The tree losses are identified in the tree survey and include protected trees (part of G19 of the TPO) along the Alderley Road frontage towards the roundabout to accommodate the widening of the Alderley Road on the southbound approach to the A34.

Within the site the loss of part of TPO Area A4 (G6 of the survey) and a protected Horse Chestnut to accommodate a potential roundabout is proposed along with the loss of part of TPO Area A2 and possibly TPO G9 (T10 and G7 of the survey) due to site level changes to accommodate an access and car park. The localised widening of the internal access indicate the loss of part of TPO Area A3 (G20) and potentially an impact upon the rooting environment of a tree within TPO G16 (T20 of the survey)

The partial removal of two Groups shown as Group G9 and G13 to accommodate access widening and the proposed car park are outside TPO control and consequently there are no objections in principle to the loss of these trees

The loss of protected trees along the Alderley Road frontage is described in the arboricultural statement as having a minor arboricultural impact (due to the quality of trees as individual specimens) but are classified as Category A specimens (Trees of high quality and landscape qualities of particular visual importance – BS5837:2012 Table 1). A number of these trees are large specimens which collectively provide the mature tree lined nature of this section of

Alderley Road. As the trees are protected by a TPO group designation they should be assessed in terms of their group collective value and contribution to the street scene rather than on an individual basis. Many of the trees proposed for removal are mature specimens and it will take some considerable time before any replacement planting will reach the size of those trees proposed for removal.

The loss of the trees within the site is considered to be acceptable subject to additional planting through the site that will be required as part of the reserved matters applications.

The loss of the protected trees to accommodate the widening of Alderley Road is a significant material consideration and must be balanced against the benefits of their removal. This benefit is that the operation of the local highway network will be improved as part of the improvements required as part of these proposals. The planning balance falls in this instance to allow the removal of the trees given the wider benefit the highway improvements will have to the area in general. Mitigation for the lost trees can be secured through the reserved matters application along with a management plan for the existing and additional woodland areas going forward.

Additionally the reserved matters application shall be accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan that shall inform the design of the definitive site layout.

## **Ecology**

As part of any development proposals it is important that proposals do not endanger European protected species of species of conservation importance. The Council's ecologist has fully considered the proposals.

### Woodland

The proposed development will result in the loss of an area of plantation woodland. The plantation woodlands on the site are individually considered by the submitted ecological assessment to be of site value, but collectively of local value. The revised ecological assessment anticipates a loss of 0.03ha of relatively immature plantation woodland as a result of the development itself and 0.1ha of more mature plantation due to the proposed road widening.

In principle, the loss of this small section of woodland is acceptable in ecology terms. The extent of the mitigation will be agreed as part of the reserved matters application following submission of a detailed ecological mitigation strategy.

### Common toad

This species was recorded during reptile surveys. The area of toad activity would not be directly affected by the proposed development. To compensate for any impacts on this species it would be ensured that sufficient replacement habitat is provided as part of the final design of the scheme. The provision of an additional pond on site would be beneficial for this species and this will be delivered through a condition on the decision notice.

### Badgers

Badgers are active on site, but no evidence of a sett being present was recorded. A condition be attached requiring an updated badger survey to be submitted with reserved matters application

### Bats

Levels of bat activity recorded on site during the submitted surveys appeared low. Two areas of habitat that supported sustained bat activity are however likely to be affected by the proposed development. The potential impacts will be localised and the level of impact will depend on whether any lighting of the car parks is required and the hours of operation of any lighting. The Landscaped buffers around the car park will reduce these impacts slightly and the proposed offsite habitat creation would be enough to compensate these impacts once it matures. The off site habitat creation is located within the blue line of the application and therefore within the applicant's control.

A condition be attached requiring any lighting strategy for the car parks to be submitted as part of any future reserved matters application. The lighting strategy should be designed to minimise light spill onto the adjacent boundary hedgerows and trees.

### Birds

A number of widespread species have been recorded as breeding on site. Whilst the site does not appear to be particularly important for birds, it should be ensured that any suitable habitat (trees, woodland, hedgerows etc.) lost is replaced at the detailed design stage and this will be considered at reserved matters stage when approval of landscape is sought.

### Hedgehog

This priority species was previously recorded on the application site. The landscaped buffers around the site will assist in facilitating the movement of this species through the site. To ensure any losses of habitat for this species are compensated for it must be ensured that any hedgerows, woodland etc lost are adequately replaced as part of the ecological mitigation strategy for the scheme and this will be considered at reserved matters stage when approval of landscape is sought.

### Ecological Mitigation

An outline ecological mitigation strategy, including the provision of additional ponds, is provided as part of the submitted ecological assessment (section 5). A condition requiring submission of a detailed strategy to be submitted with reserved matters application will be included on the decision notice. The strategy should be informed by the outline strategy and include an additional ponds and replacement woodland and hedgerow planting.

### **Amenity**

There are no objections to the proposal on the ground of noise / vibration and dust subject to conditions being applied to any approval.

Environmental Health have considered the noise and vibration assessment submitted with the application and have accepted the findings of the report. Any noise sensitive receptors are a sufficient distance from the proposed B1 development. In order to mitigate against any impacts that may occur as part of the construction works a construction environment management plan is required to be submitted as part of a condition.

With regard to air quality Environmental Health have commented that transport emissions associated with new development has the potential to worsen air quality and affect the health of people. The impact of this can be felt wherever additional vehicles use the highway network. To mitigate this, the development should incorporate technology to encourage the use of ultra low emission transport options including walking, cycling and electric / plug in hybrid vehicles. This will be ensured through a condition..

With regard to land contamination, detailed reports were submitted as part of the planning application process, Environmental Health has raised no objections to the proposals subject to conditions.

Therefore the proposals accord with policies DC3 and DC63 of MBLP and the NPPF.

### **Flood Risk**

The site is a greenfield site and to ensure that flooding is not caused by the development, run-off rates must not exceed the current greenfield levels. A Flood Risk Assessment was submitted with the application, which concludes the following:

The vast majority of the site is located within Flood Zone 1, indicating that the site is not at risk from fluvial or tidal sources. A small area of the site along its southern boundary around Mobberley Brook is within flood zones 2 and 3 which means that part of the site are at medium or high risk of flooding. This area does not impact upon the site of the office building itself.

Data obtained from the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) also places the site at low risk of flooding from other sources. In accordance with NPPF and local policy, this FRA has considered the impact on the surface water regime in the area should development occur.

Development of the site should be possible with careful consideration of the surface water and foul drainage, as well as other possible flooding issues. The proposals should balance the flood storage volumes and should not impede overland flows. Infiltration, if suitable, will be the preferred method of discharge of surface water, with all flows in excess of the infiltration rate being attenuated on site. The exact method and volume of attenuation will be submitted as part of any future reserved matters application.

Based on the information available the flood risk to the proposed development is low and development should not be precluded on flood risk grounds.

The Environment Agency and United Utilities have not raised objections to the proposals. United Utilities have recommended conditions in order to ensure that the proposed development does not create or exacerbate flooding through surface water run-off and to ensure that the drainage of the site is adequate. It is concluded therefore that the proposals accord with policy DC17 of the MBLP and the NPPF.

### **Environmental sustainability conclusions**

It is considered that the proposed development is environmentally sustainable. The location is sustainable in terms of accessibility however this will be improved in terms of providing pedestrian links which will be delivered through condition on the decision notice. With the

required mitigation the proposals will be acceptable in highway terms. Any harmful effects of the development with regard to pollution can be adequately mitigated. The landscape impact of the proposed development is, with suitable mitigation, considered to be acceptable. An adverse impact is that some mature protected trees need to be removed in order to accommodate the highway improvements on Alderley Road. On balance it is considered that the proposals are environmentally sustainable, the removed trees will be mitigated against and the highway improvements have a wider benefit to the local highway network.

## **ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Employment**

The proposed development is to meet the needs of Royal London's expansion plans that will result in an additional 500-600 jobs on the site. As set out previously in this report should the application not be approved there is a very real prospect that Royal London will leave the borough. Should this occur there will be a negative impact on local employment with the loss of the existing 960 jobs in Cheshire East.

The construction of this development of this size would bring the usual economic benefit to the closest shops in Wilmslow for the duration of the construction, and would potentially provide local employment opportunities in construction and the wider economic benefits to the construction industry supply chain. There would be some economic and social benefit by virtue of new resident's spending money in the area and using local services.

### **Economic sustainability conclusions**

The proposals will result in additional employment in the short term through the construction of the site along with an economic boost locally through the increase in employees working in the town. It is considered that the proposals will make efficient use of the land by providing market housing in a town centre location and are therefore economically sustainable.

## **SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The detailed design of the building is reserved for future approval so is not for consideration at this time. Likewise the details of open space will be determined at that stage and as part of any future development proposals for the adjoining land.

The issues on social sustainability are ones that will be considered as part of any future reserved matters application and there is no reason to suggest that the proposals at this point will not represent sustainable development.

### **Representations**

A large number of representations have been received in relation to the application, representations both in objection and in support of the proposal. Most of the representations relating to this scheme and its merits have been addressed in the main body of the report. With the remaining issues being addressed below;

- A significant amount of office space is available at Alderley Park and the development could be accommodated there.

The Alderley Park site has been subject to its own application for redevelopment. The site is not in control of the applicant as the application site is, and the use of that site is not in any event a material consideration in determining this planning application.

- A significant amount of vacant office space is available in the area.

It is likely that vacant office space is available in the area. This however is spread over a number of sites, whilst the requirements of Royal London is to have all employees located in a central building located in a high quality environment.

Having taken into account all of the representations received including internal and external consultation responses, the material considerations raised have been addressed within the main body of the report.

## **PLANNING BALANCE**

The site is partially previously developed however the majority of the site is undeveloped. The whole site is within the Green Belt where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. It is established that the proposals do represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt, and only if very special circumstances exist to justify the departure from Green Belt policy should they be approved.

The applicant has put forward what it considers to be very special circumstances, however the onus is on the decision maker, the LPA to determine what weight is attached to these in the planning balance and whether these circumstances amount to very special circumstances to justify the development, and outweigh the automatic harm the development would cause by way of inappropriateness.

In terms of consideration 1 and 2 it is considered that some weight can be attributed these. It is demonstrated that the site only offers a limited contribution in relation to the purposes of including land within the green belt, however it is clear from the submitted information that the proposed building will have some impact on the landscape and on the openness of the green belt. This can be mitigated against to a certain degree through submission of a suitable landscape scheme as part of the reserved matters submission and the continued retention of the mature trees already located around the site. On balance it is considered that these considerations in themselves cannot be considered as being very special circumstances, although they do provide some weight when considered in relation to the other circumstances.

Point 3 of the applicant's case relates to the fact that the site is earmarked for development in the CELPS. The degree of weight to be attached to an emerging plan which has not gone through the full EIP process depends on the level of how much the policy aligns with the NPPF.

The amount of weight to be given depends on the following as set out in paragraph 216 of the NPPF.

*-the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);*

*-the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and*  
*-the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).*

In light of paragraph 216 it is acknowledged that the stage of preparation of the CELPS is advanced, initial EIP hearings have taken place and changes have been made in line with the Inspectors recommendations. The hearings are due to resume later in the year, following which the Inspector will make final recommendations. The recommended changes have been made to the policies and these changes have been consulted on which ended in April 2016. The Royal London site has objections to the release of Green Belt land.

The weight in this case to attach to CS26 should be significant, due to the level of preparation of the CELPS, and the fact that the proposals are in compliance with the other non green belt policies set out in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

The remaining point put forward relates to the benefits that arise as a result of the development. It is considered that significant weight should be attributed to this. Paragraphs 18-21 of the NPPF compel local planning authorities to support the needs of business and assist in building a strong economy. The proposals will result in the protection of 960 existing jobs and the potential to accommodate up to an additional 600.

Royal London has an urgent need to expand and are also examining opportunities outside of Cheshire East. It is noted that the issues relating to the applicant's needs and as such the planning permission must reflect this. In order to ensure the permission reflects these circumstances it is proposed that rather than the standard three years to submit reserved matters applications it is intended to reduce this period to 18 months to ensure that should the local plan not progress or the circumstances of the applicant changes the application can be considered afresh on its own merits.

As part of the Transport Assessment it has been identified that the widening of Alderley Road is required to ensure that the proposal does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the operation of the local highway network. At present there is an acknowledged issue of traffic queuing in a southerly direction past the application towards the roundabout on the A34. This arm of the junction operates above capacity during peak time. Modelling undertaken by the highway consultant demonstrates that the widening of Alderley Road will result in a significant improvement in the flow of traffic to the extent that this part of the highway network will operate within capacity even with the level of the traffic the proposal will create. This is considered to be a significant benefit of the proposals that provides a positive improvement that benefits the wider community.

The proposal is largely sustainable in terms of the environment. The widening of Alderley Road will result in the removal of protected trees. However the balance in this issue is in the fact that a significant improvement in highway performance along Alderley Road, in addition mitigation will be agreed through the reserved matters relating to landscaping and through a landscape management plan that will be submitted as part of the conditions attached to the planning permission.

The proposal and the wider proposals are economically sustainable as detailed in this report.

The benefits in this case are:

- Meeting the needs of Royal London in Wilmslow. The development would provide a replacement office headquarters for Royal London Insurance to ensure the retention of this major employer within Wilmslow, retaining 960 jobs in the area.
- Securing the provision of an additional 500-600 jobs
- The development would provide significant economic benefits through the provision of employment during the construction phase, the creation of new jobs and the knock on benefits for local businesses.
- The proposal will not have an adverse landscape impact, following suitable mitigation being agreed.
- The proposal will result in the widening of Alderley Road in a southerly direction approaching the roundabout on the A34. As well as mitigating against the impact of the development this will overcome an existing issue in the local highway network and ensure that the highway network operates below capacity.
- Pedestrian and cycle linkages will be provided through the site.

The development would have a neutral impact upon the following subject to mitigation:

- There is not considered to be any significant drainage implications raised by this development.
- The impact upon the residential amenity/noise/air quality/landscape and contaminated land could be mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.
- The impact on local ecology can be mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.

The adverse impacts of the development would be:

- The loss of mature protected trees along Alderley Road. Although this can be mitigated to some degree through the imposition of planning conditions.

Through the assessment as to whether the scheme represents sustainable development, it is considered that it does not achieve this in terms of all three strands: social, environmental and economic sustainability. As the site is within the Green Belt under paragraph 14 there is not a presumption in favour of sustainable development where other policies in the framework state that development should be restricted which includes Green Belts at footnote 9.

On the basis of the considerations in this report it is considered that the very special circumstances have been suitably demonstrated that when weighed against the definitional and physical harm to the green belt are considered to overcome the limited harm that is caused. The adverse effects of the scheme are significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the benefits and mitigation against these adverse impacts can be achieved through submission of further information as part of the conditions or as part of the reserved matters application.

On balance therefore the application should be approved in principle subject to the following conditions. It should be noted that due to the nature of the development within the Green Belt that any approval would be subject to referral to the Secretary of State.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Approve with the following conditions subject to referral to Secretary of State.

*In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning (Regulation) delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Strategic Planning Board, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.*

Application for Outline Planning

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Development in accord with approved plans
2. Submission of reserved matters
3. Tree retention/retention/protection
4. Submission of construction and environmental management plan
5. Tree retention
6. Landscaping (implementation)
7. Access available for use before occupation
8. Limitation on use
9. Refuse storage facilities to be approved
10. Standard contaminated land
11. Importation of soil
12. Unexpected contamination
13. 18 months to submit reserved matters
14. Levels
15. Submission of materials
16. Travel Plan
17. Landscape & Habitat Management Plan
18. Updated ecological mitigation strategy
19. Drainage
20. Cycle Parking
21. Electrical Vehicle Charging Points
22. Separate drainage systems

23. Management beyond site edged red
24. Submission, approval and implementation of location, height, design, and luminance of any proposed lighting
25. The agreed landscape scheme should be implemented within the first planting season after commencement of development.
26. Implementation of Alderley Road widening
27. Details and implementation of cycle way and footpath
28. Restriction of floorspace to 17,000 square metres
29. Updated badger survey as part of reserved matters application



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