

Application No: 13/3293M

Location: BOOTH'S PARK, CHELFORD ROAD, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE, WA16 8QZ

Proposal: Outline application including details of access and layout for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of up to 21,035 sq m gross B1a office accommodation, car parking, landscaping and associated works at Booths Park, Knutsford

Applicant: Dr Bruntwood Estates Ltd

Expiry Date: 12-Nov-2013

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approval subject to conditions.

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether the proposal represents “appropriate development”, and if not, whether there are any “Very Special Circumstances” which clearly outweigh the harm caused by inappropriateness, and any other harm identified
- Impact on landscape character and visual amenity
- Whether the proposal would result in sustainable economic growth
- Layout and Design
- Sustainability
- Amenity of Neighbouring Properties
- Transport, Accessibility, and Parking Provision
- Ecology
- Heritage/Archaeology
- Flooding and Drainage
- Trees and Landscaping
- Planning Benefits

REASON FOR REPORT

The application has been referred to Strategic Planning Board because it is a large-scale major development that is a departure from the Macclesfield Local Plan.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

Allocations:

The site is located in the North Cheshire Green Belt and is identified as a Major Development Site in the Green Belt in the Macclesfield Local Plan.

Topography:

The site comprises a total of 6.1 hectares of the wider Booths Park Estate. The existing commercial development at the Booths Hall Estate consists of 22,247sqm gross of office floorspace comprising the former Booths Hall which is used for offices, training and conferencing purposes;

There are five, two and three storey office buildings and Springwood, a two storey office building. The existing office accommodation is located to the north of the access road to Booths Park, which is split broadly in two by a spine road with a very large hard surface car park to the south of the road and the existing office complex to the north

Previous Developed Land:

The majority of the site comprises 'Brownfield' land in the form of a surface car park, with two residential properties, a hanger and a shed also occupying the car park. The remainder of the site is considered to be 'Greenfield' being grassed mound, wrapping around the rear of three of the existing commercial buildings and the land immediately to the north of the central estate road, but south of Booths Hall.

Access:

The application site is located approximately 2km to the south east of Knutsford town centre and is accessed from the central access road running, through the Booths Park Estate. This access road forms the northern boundary to the existing large car park. This access road leads to the public highway at a roundabout junction with the A537 Chelford Road and Gough Lane.

There is pedestrian access to the site via Chelford Road as well as a pedestrian only link connecting Booths Hall to residential areas to the North West at South Downs and Delmar Road. The site is accessible by bicycle with shower and parking facilities and free bike hire provided by Bruntwood.

Knutsford railway station is approximately 2km from the site and provides services to Manchester and Chester. A limited bus service operates along Chelford Road and links the site to Knutsford town centre and Macclesfield.

Surrounding Land Uses:

Beyond the existing office accommodation and car park, the site surroundings comprise open fields, farmland, woodland and Booths Mere, all forming part of Bruntwood's estate.

To the north east boundary of the car park is Booths Hall Farm and a number of farm outbuildings, adjacent to which, is the Norbury Booths Hall site, a moated site and designated Scheduled Ancient Monument, which is screened by existing trees and planting.

Moving clockwise round to the south east, south and western boundaries, the application site is bounded by extensive boundary woodland, with the exception of a break to a section of the car park where hedgerows run along the car park edge.

Further to the west, near the Booths Park vehicular site entrance, is a cricket ground to the north and playing fields to the south.

The application site is largely screened from the surrounding area by well-established, mature trees and hedgerows. In the wider surrounding of the estate, open countryside surrounds the east and south, and residential areas are located to the north and west forming part of the Knutsford urban area.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of new B1 office floorspace with associated car parking and landscaping. The application is in outline with 'scale', 'appearance' and 'landscaping' reserved for further approval.

The scheme will involve the demolition of existing buildings (located within the existing car parking area) and the erection of up to a maximum of 21, 035 sq m (gross) B1 floorspace.

This new commercial floorspace will be delivered in three separate blocks; two of which will be three storey buildings and one, which will be two storeys.

The proposed buildings will provide a range of accommodation, with each building having core common areas for ancillary accommodation and visible entrance lobby space.

Details of 'access' and 'layout' are sought to establish the amount of floorspace, car parking arrangements and circulation around the site.

Although all other matters are reserved. Indicative plans have been submitted that show how the buildings and landscaping would work in terms of appearance and scale.

Access:

Vehicular access to the proposed new office accommodation will be from the existing central estate road which runs from the A537, Chelford Road and Gough's Lane roundabout. Pedestrian and cycle access is also achieved via the existing estate road with a footway provided along the northern side. A pedestrian route also links the site (and the wider Booths Park Estate) with the residential areas to the west, namely South Downs and Delmar Road.

Layout:

The three units will be in the form of 'H' shaped buildings and be delivered across the existing car park in the southern portion of the Booths Park Estate. The applicant contends that the

layout seeks to counterbalance the extent of accommodation and landscaped spaces to the north of the access road.

The 'H' form of the layout does minimise bulk and the visual profile when viewed from outside of the application site, by providing narrow gables to the south elevation. It provides a central common area internally and leads out into landscaped gardens.

The location of the buildings and the undercroft parking need to be considered in the context of the Scheduled Ancient Monument adjacent to the site, with the proposed separation distances maximised in this location.

RELEVANT HISTORY

Following a review of the Council's records the following planning history on the site is considered relevant:-

In 1981, planning permission (25076P) was granted for the retention of a number of buildings, the removal of others, and the development of new buildings for office (B1) and ancillary purposes at Booths Park Estate.

Since this time there have been a number of applications for external alterations to existing buildings and significant landscaping improvements across the Booths Park Estate, however these are not relevant to this application proposal.

POLICIES

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).

Local Plan Policy:

The application site lies within the Green Belt as defined by the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan. The application is an outline, therefore the relevant Local Plan policies are considered to be: -

Environment

- NE2 Protection of Local Landscapes
- NE5 Historical landscapes, parklands and gardens;
- NE11 Nature Conservation;
- NE17 Major developments in the countryside
- BE1 Good Design;
- BE21-24 Archaeology;
- BE22 Scheduled Monuments;

Green Belt

- GC1 New development in the Green Belt;
- GC4 Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt;

Recreation

- RT7 Cycleways, bridleways and footpaths;

Employment

- E1 and E3 Employment Land Policies;

Transport

- T1 General Transportation policy;
- T2 Public Transport;
- T5 Provision for cyclists;
- T6 Highways improvements and traffic management;

Implementation

- IMP1 Development sites;
- IMP2 Transport Measures;

Development Control

- DC1 High quality design for new build;
- DC5 Measures to improve natural surveillance and reduce crime
- DC6 Circulation and Access;
- DC8 Requirements for Landscaping;
- DC9 Tree Protection
- DC17 Water resources
- DC18 Sustainable drainage systems
- DC63 Contaminated land

Other Material Considerations:

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 full weight.

- The NPPF sets out a clear presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 7 defines sustainable development as having three dimensions: economic, social and environmental;
- Paragraph 9 of the Framework explains that pursuing sustainable development involves *'seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment, as well as in people's quality of life'*;
- Paragraph 14 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be *'seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking'*;
- Paragraph 17 outlines 12 core land-use planning principles that should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking;
- Paragraph 18 of the NPPF sets out that: *'the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity'*;
- At paragraph 19 identifies that *'the Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth'*;
- Paragraph 21 identifies a number of measures for local planning authorities to consider when drawing up their plans to assist investment in business, which it is identified *'should not be over burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations'*;
- Amongst the measures identified in paragraph 21, is the need to support existing business sectors and to build in flexibility to be able to respond to changes in economic circumstances;
- Paragraph 32 indicates that developments generating significant amounts of movement should be supported by a Transport Statement/Assessment;
- Paragraph 24 states that local planning authorities should apply the sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up to date Local Plan;
- Paragraph 26 requires an assessment of impact on existing, committed and planned public and private investment and the impact on town centre vitality and viability;
- Paragraph 56 highlights that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development;
- Paragraph 61 sets out that development should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment;
- Paragraph 80 outlines the five purposes the Green Belt serves;
- Paragraph 109 states the planning system should contribute to the enhancement of the natural and local environment and protect and enhance value landscapes, minimise impact on biodiversity and provide net gains where possible;
- Paragraph 111 sets out that *'planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (brownfield land)';and*
- Paragraph 118 states Council's should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity through principles such as mitigating and compensating for significant harm that cannot be avoided.

Emerging Policy:

Cheshire East is currently preparing its new Local Plan which will guide the future planning and development of the area. The latest stage of consultation on the new Cheshire East Local Plan ran from 15th January to 26th February 2013 and whilst clearly the emerging policies within the Pre-Submission Core Strategy carry less weight than adopted plans, they still need to be considered as part of the assessment of this application.

The following policies within the Pre-Submission Core Strategy are relevant:

Policy MP 1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
Policy PG 1 Overall Development Strategy
Policy PG 2 Settlement Hierarchy
Policy PG 3 Green Belt
Policy PG 6 Spatial Distribution of Development
Policy SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
Policy SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles
Policy IN 1 Infrastructure
Policy IN 2 Developer Contributions
Policy EG 1 Economic Prosperity
Policy EG 3 Existing and Allocated Employment Sites
Policy EG 5 Promoting a Town Centre First Approach to Retail and Commerce
Policy SE 1 Design
Policy SE 2 Efficient Use of Land
Policy SE 3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Policy SE 4 The Landscape
Policy SE 5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
Policy SE 6 Green Infrastructure
Policy SE 7 The Historic Environment
Policy SE 8 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
Policy SE 9 Energy Efficient Development
Policy SE 13 Flood Risk and Water Management
Policy CO 1 Sustainable Travel and Transport
Policy CO 2 Enabling Business Growth Through Transport Infrastructure
Policy CO 4 Travel Plans and Transport Assessments

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:

- Section 106 (Planning) Agreements SPG 2004;
- Booths Hall Development Brief (2007);
- Cheshire East Local List of Historic Buildings (2010);
- Employment Land Review (2012); and
- Cheshire East Economic Development Strategy (2011).

Circulars of most relevance include:

- ODPM 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation;- 11/95 The use of Conditions in Planning Permissions; and
- Circular 02/99: Environmental Impact Assessment

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011.

Relevant legislation also includes the EC Habitats Directive and the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 2010.

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways: No highway objections are raised, subject to a financial contribution being secured as part of the S106 package of mitigation measures.

This development is a large development that has impacts at various junctions in Knutsford and especially at Gough's Lane and road junctions close to the site. Speed limit changes in Gough's Lane will be of benefit in reducing through traffic speeds and although traffic flows are predicted to increase in Gough's Lane, the Strategic Highways Manager would not wish to improve the vehicle access to Gough's Lane by improving the junction with Toft Road, as this would only draw more traffic into using the road. This impact on Gough's Lane could be reduced if the congested principal routes are improved as vehicles reassign and journey times are reduced. It is important that the congested junctions in Knutsford are addressed not only for this particular development but for existing road users and improvements to the network are required.

United Utilities: No objections, subject to conditions requiring a separate system for foul and surface water; with foul connecting into the sewer and surface water details to be submitted.

Environment Agency: No objections, subject to conditions detailing with surface water and flooding.

Environmental Health: No objections subject to conditions controlling the hours of construction, hours and method of pile foundations and floating of concrete floors (if necessary), and submission of a scheme to minimise dust emissions. A travel plan and construction method statement conditions are also suggested. As the application is for new offices, which are a sensitive end use and could be affected by any contamination present, means that a Contamination Land Phase 1 report will be required.

English Heritage: No objection in principle, subject to a scheme of archaeological recording/investigation being carried out.

Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service: No objections subject to a scheme of archaeological investigation being carried out.

Public Rights of Way: Advises that the proposed development is unlikely to affect the public right of way. It is therefore requested that an advice note be added to any planning consent to ensure that developers are aware of their obligations not to obstruct the public right of way.

Leisure Services: No comments received.

The **Countryside Access Development Officer PROW**, comments that the proposed development may present an opportunity to improve the walking and cycling facilities in the area for both travel and leisure purposes. The proposed development site includes part of Public Right of Way, namely Public Footpath No. 17 in Knutsford. A suggestion has been received from a local user group for this Public Footpath to be upgraded to a Public Bridleway in order that it can be used by horse riders and cyclists in addition to pedestrians, and thus form part of a network of off-road routes for these non-motorised users.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Knutsford Town Council: No objections to the outline application but raise concerns as to the potential impact of any increase in vehicular traffic on the immediate area, in particular Goughs Lane.

REPRESENTATIONS

One letter has been received, which raises no serious objections to additional office space as long as it is within the current building area and is suitably screened so as not to present an eyesore. An objection would be made to wholesale housing development.

A letter has been received from a resident who has no problems with any increase in jobs in the area, but much thought should be given to the road system, which will feed the park. The present arrangement is totally inadequate and any increase will produce further damage to the local infrastructure.

One resident objects on highways grounds. A significant proportion of commuting traffic to this site uses the narrow Goughs Lane. Pedestrians use this road in peril because of the high volume of cars And lack of pavement along most of the length. This development is therefore unsustainable from a safety and environmental perspective, because the site's location on the town outskirts means that the number of 'green' commuters will never exceed a minimal level as car will always be the preferred transport option for workers.

One letter of objection has been received from a local resident and their objections can be summarised as follows: -

- Fails to justify very special circumstances;
- Fails to refer to any exiting travel plan coordination;
- Fails to acknowledge exiting access concerns;
- More employment on site would create a problem for the existing infrastructure;
- The scheme is speculative;
- There is no statement regarding existing residents employed or likely to be employed.
- No pre notification on the planning application.
- TA complete before Aldi; and
- Barclays provided better green travel option for Radbrook hall.

South Knutsford Resident Group:

Are ambivalent about the application. There is some welcome for additional employment in the area and the development is largely on already developed land and well screened from the road. Some, or course, would welcome the status quo to be maintained on the site. What all are concerned about is the increase in traffic particularly on Goughs Lane and the A537 into Knutsford and the western end of Goughs Lane at its junction with the A50 Toft Road. The reduction in speed limit is too little.

SKRG have registered the submission as an objection because the developers appear to have taken insufficient account of current traffic conditions on the ground let alone the potential doubling of vehicular movements in the area. The planning application makes minimal provision (free bikes and a bus from the station with no evidence as to likely patronage) to meet the increase in traffic.

Knutsford Conservation & Heritage Group:

- Knutsford Conservation & Heritage Group (KCHG) acknowledges that there would be multiplier benefits to Knutsford's economy deriving from such development:
- These economic benefits would be enhanced by Bruntwood's facilitation of improved transport links between Booths Park and the town centre, as proposed;
- KCHG accepts that it is difficult for the total of 10 or 11 ha specified for additional employment uses by CEC in the Local Plan Development Strategy to be accommodated at non-Green Belt sites and through building adaptations in Knutsford (although there is some such potential);
- KCHG's opinion it is preferable for these to be located on brownfield land in the large cul-de-sac of Booths Park, mostly hidden from view, helping retain Knutsford's distinctive character and identity, rather than on other Green Belt land which is more visible to more people and is located in a setting which more obviously intrudes into the Green Belt;
- To protect the character of Booths Park and the setting of Booths Hall and the Scheduled Ancient Monument, KCHG recommends that an approval of this application is conditioned by CEC to provide appropriate safeguards and mitigation for Booths Park and its heritage, wildlife and vegetation significance, and to deal satisfactorily with traffic management issues, including in Legh Road Conservation Area, arising from the additional on-site jobs which would be created and serviced;
- This proposed additional office accommodation at Booths Park, on a site of 6.02 ha, should count against the Cheshire East Local Plan Development Strategy requirement for 10 or 11 ha in Knutsford to be allocated for additional employment uses; and
- The traffic management data was stated to be incorrect, when this application was considered at the Knutsford Town Council Planning and Licensing Committee meeting on 2 September 2013.

A full copy of all the comments made by the local residents toward this application as summarised above, can be viewed on the electronic file on the Council's public access website.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The applicant has submitted the following documents, details of which can be read on file:

- Planning Statement;
- Design and Access Statement;
- Economic Need and Benefits;
- Transport Assessment;
- Travel Plan;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Phase 1 Ecological Assessment;
- Arboricultural Survey;
- Desk Based Archaeological Assessment;
- Flood Risk Assessment; and
- Statement of Community Engagement.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Outline Planning Permission is sought for the erection of three B1 office blocks (maximum of 21 035 sq. m). Whilst all matters have been reserved except for means of access and layout, the indicative site layout plan indicates there will be 1, two storey office block and 2, three storey office blocks.

Green Belt

The site is located within the Green Belt therefore, policy GC1 of the Macclesfield Local Plan applies. The proposal does not fall within one of the exceptions therefore consideration must be given as to whether there are any Very Special Circumstances and other material planning consideration exist, which clearly outweigh the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness.

The site is identified as a Major developed site, therefore policy GC4 is applicable, however, it is evident that the proposals will not comply with the policy requirements of Policy GC4 and therefore, Very Special Circumstances must be considered.

Paragraphs 87 and 88 of the Framework mirrors the advice contained within policy GC1 of the Local Plan. Paragraphs 87 and 88 advise:

87. "As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special

circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations."

The applicant accepts that the proposal represents "Inappropriate Development", and has submitted a case to demonstrate that very special circumstances exist along with overall planning justification as to why this development is acceptable within the Green Belt.

As the proposal represents a Significant Departure from the Development Plan, should it be recommended for approval, it will need to be referred to the National Planning Casework Unit, under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009.

Impact on Openness of the Green Belt

The site largely comprises brownfield land, and there will be no substantive increase in hard standing as a result of the development. There is extensive landscaping along the site boundaries, which effectively screens the development from outside the site. The existing landscaping will be maintained and significantly supplemented as part of the proposals. It is not considered that the development at this site will detract from the open environment of the surrounding Green Belt.

The proposed development is designed to tie in with the existing commercial development around Booths Hall. There is a cluster of two and three storey office buildings with a total floorspace of circa 22 000 m sq. The new development proposed on the car park utilises the topography of the site to relate the new build to elements to the existing. The business park will provide a cluster of knowledge based business, it will in addition provide accommodation in a cluster of buildings which relate well to one another in the wider landscape setting and Green Belt.

Very Special Circumstances

The economic benefits generated by the delivery of the additional office accommodation are presented in a separate Economic Needs and Benefits Report. In summary, the success of Booths Park and the existing tenants has resulted in a need for those tenants to plan for their expansion in this location and for Bruntwood to seek to build on the success of the hub created at Booths Park.

The existing tenant profile closely matches the target sectors for growth in the north west and Cheshire East economy. Planning permission is needed to provide certainty of delivery through expansion of floorspace within a given timeframe. It will also maximise the opportunity for additional inward investment of similar high value knowledge based companies seeking to locate in Cheshire East.

The Regeneris report sets this out and Bruntwood, as a significant landlord with properties in Greater Manchester is well placed to satisfy this market and identified need.

A key element of the NPPF is for local planning authorities to look for solutions rather than problems when considering development proposals. This application represents a solution to the expansion needs of existing businesses at Booths Park, which will secure their retention in the local area and generate a wide range of other benefits including sustainable transport

initiatives that also contribute to the offering solutions in tackling climate change and reducing travel levels.

One of the objectives of the Cheshire East Economic Development Strategy is to ensure that Cheshire East maintains and enhances its role as a 'knowledge economy', through innovation in its businesses and skills development in its workforce. To achieve this objective the priorities will include retaining and growing existing businesses already in the area; attracting new investment for growth and providing employment opportunities for local people.

The development would provide additional floorspace for the existing businesses at Booths Hall enabling them to expand their operations within the business estate rather than seeking to relocate elsewhere. Based on the Economic Need and Benefits Assessment prepared by Regeneris, 80% of the existing occupiers at Booths Park are in the priority growth sectors. This highlights the importance of the existing businesses at Booths Park contributing to the local, Borough-wide and regional economy given that it already represents a nod of highly successfully knowledge based companies.

If these businesses were to relocate to be able to expand elsewhere, it could have a negative effect on the economy and the vision for the future of Cheshire East.

An estimated 1 340 jobs to be created on site as a result of the additional floorspace. In terms of construction jobs, over a period of three years period it is estimated that 170 full time equivalent jobs per annum will be created.

The proposed development incorporates a free shuttle bus between Booths Park and the town centre which will inevitably lead to greater expenditure within the town to the benefit of other local businesses. The provision of additional office space at Booths Park would also generate wider economic benefits through indirect and induced effects. Based on HCA guidelines, Regeneris estimate that a further 390 jobs could be created as a result of the indirect and induced supply chain impacts.

The Employment Land Review (2012) made an assessment of existing employment sites were undertaken, which included Booths Park Estate. The assessment confirms that there is potential for further development at the site. The Employment Land Review notes that Booths Hall has recently achieved the highest rental value in Cheshire East, which demonstrates a continuing demand for accommodation at the site.

It is considered that the Very Special Circumstances and substantive benefits advanced justify the proposed development in the Green Belt and show how the proposal will assist the Borough in meeting its economic and wider growth objectives.

Bruntwood acquired the site in 2004 and invested £12 million in refurbishment and development works at the site. The site now contains over 80 office suites with attractive tiered courtyard and landscape gardens. A hub of ancillary services and facilities are also present including a café and sandwich shop, cricket club, croquet pitch, shower and changing facilities, and gardens and mere for recreation use.

There are 62 companies based at the site which employ over 1 300 people. AMEC, Mastercard, Sir Robert McAlpine and Medline are amongst those businesses based at Booths Park.

Booths Park is now at full capacity and approximately half of those businesses have a requirement to expand.

It is recognised that as with any development, there is a critical mass which is required in order to make other ancillary facilities viable. An additional critical mass of employees at Booths Park will enable Bruntwood to deliver a new free shuttle bus service. This shuttle bus will offer free journeys for employees to and from Booths Park travelling to Knutsford town centre and the train station.

The delivery of a free service is only worthwhile and viable given the concentration of employees there will be at the park. This shuttle bus service has a number of direct and indirect benefits.

The direct benefits are that by making it a free service will encourage employees to use sustainable transport to get to work and then also at lunchtime to access the services and facilities of Knutsford. This will result in less private vehicles on the highway network surrounding Booths Park, which is a positive step in tackling climate change and reducing emissions from traffic.

Providing a free service for accessing the Town Centre will also encourage employees to utilise the facilities in Knutsford. This will result in increased expenditure supporting local businesses and services thereby assisting in strengthening the economy of the Town Centre.

A greater critical mass of employees and floorspace will also lead to the provision of a service hub within the park. This is a central space where workers can park their bicycles and benefit from showers and washroom facilities in the middle of the overall business estate. Bruntwood has incorporated such hub facilities on other business parks in their ownership and they have proved a great success in encouraging staff to travel by sustainable means of transport.

Sequential and Impact Test

Paragraph 26 of NPPF requires consideration of the sequential test for proposals for office development in out of centre locations, the purpose being to maintain and enhance town centre vitality and viability.

Booths Park is an existing and long established out of centre office destination.

Knutsford is a historic town with a tight grain centre with small scale shops, restaurants and cafes. With narrow streets and limited parking. It is considered that there are no available sites that could accommodate the scale and flexibility of space proposed.

This is further recognised by the allocation within the Local Plan of Parkgate employment area, to the north east of the town. Parkgate Industrial Estate is further from the town centre than Booths Park. It provides for a different employment offer (B1/B2/B8) to the high quality business park offer at Booths.

In addition, it should be noted that an application for 230 residential dwellings has been submitted on land to the rear on Parkgate Industrial Estate. If that application is granted planning permission, that would further enhance the importance of Booths Park to drive and deliver future economic expansion in Knutsford and Cheshire East.

The proposal for office expansion space at Booth Park seeks to address the need for expansion space at this location from existing businesses and also attract inward investment from new knowledge based industries. It is not considered that locating new office space in the town centre would address the expansion needs of existing customers (even if there were sequential sites available) as the existing businesses have chosen to locate at Booths Park due to its prestigious parkland setting and flexible accommodation.

The proposal also seeks to attract further inward investment in line with the economic objectives of Cheshire East Council to build on the critical mass and success of the Park to date. An attractive business park location such as Booths Park, with its ready access to a large skilled workforce and clusters of other knowledge based businesses, is an attractive proposition for other high end knowledge businesses that are looking to move to the north west. Such organisations are seeking a certain product, and Booths Park is in competition with similar locations, potentially across the far wider region, or nationally. Such clusters facilitate a high degree of interaction and knowledge sharing, which drives innovation and growth. Such sites and opportunities are not available in the town centre.

Furthermore, if the development were located elsewhere, this would not achieve the critical mass required to provide a free shuttle bus and other sustainability benefits at Booths Park.

The increase in salaries in the local area would increase spending power and as nearly half of existing employees live in Cheshire East, a large proportion of salaries would be spent in the local area. As such, the proposal would have a positive impact on the vitality and viability of Knutsford town centre.

Overall, the proposal satisfies the sequential and impact tests of the NPPF. It will not detrimentally impact town centre vitality and viability.

Highways

The Strategic Highways Manager has assessed this application and considers the key issues to be as follows: -

- The traffic impact of the development on the local infrastructure
- The traffic impact of the development on Gough's Lane

Parking

As part of the development proposals the internal car park will be reconfigured to provide parking for both the existing use and the proposed new office. The overall car parking provision on the site is 1443 spaces, this level of car parking is consistent with CEC standards for B1 development and no issues are raised concerning the number of parking spaces. Included in this number are 24 disabled spaces that will be located adjacent to the main building entrance within the site.

Traffic Impact

With regard to the traffic impact of the development the applicant has submitted a Transport Assessment. The trip generation has been based upon the existing traffic generation going to the site. Traffic counts were undertaken at the site access roundabout in the morning and evening peak hours. The traffic generation for the new office proposal was then calculated pro rata and the resultant figures are 456 AM two way and 413 PM two way, although this number of trips was subsequently reduced by 10% to reflect the bus service from the site that connects to Knutsford and the railway station. The Strategic Highways Manager would normally expect justification to be submitted to show that this level of traffic reduction is achievable by the introduction of the bus service, the assessments should provide a sensitivity test with full trips on the road network for robustness.

A number of junction assessments have been undertaken by the applicant, these are follows:

A537 Chelford Road/Goughs Lane roundabout

A50 Toft Road/Goughs Lane priority junction

A537 Brook Street/Mobberley Road priority junction

A537 Brook Street/Hollow Lane Signal junction

A537 Adams Hill/A50 Toft Road/Stanley Road/Bexton Road

It has been assumed by the applicant that the development will be completed and open in 2014. This is a very optimistic timetable used for assessment although a future year test at 2019 has been undertaken that includes growth and committed development.

The applicant has identified a number of net impacts at all of these junctions in terms of percentages, however, it is the capacity assessments of the junctions that are important. The site access roundabout on Chelford Road does operate within capacity in the assessment year of 2019, this is to be expected as this roundabout does work reasonably well currently.

Gough's Lane is a residential road that is used as a rat run for traffic avoiding the congested junctions in Knutsford. The priority junction at Gough's Lane and Toft Road has capacity problems in the PM peak. This is as a result of the right turning traffic into the A50. The proposed development will add significant additional traffic onto this road - some 30% to 33% over existing 2013 surveyed flows.

The junctions of A537 Brook Street/Hollow Lane and A537 Adams Hill are important junctions in Knutsford and it is important that these junctions operate efficiently. The A537 Brook Street/Hollow Lane junction has recently been improved as part of the Aldi development, however, it is recognised that this junction still has capacity problems and not only in the peak hour. There are further improvements proposed at this junction and Adams Hill as part of the infrastructure improvement plans for Knutsford. As part of this work CEC have undertaken assessments at these junctions and have shown that they operate over capacity. The

applicant's junction assessments do not show the same level of congestion problems, but do recognise that these junctions are at capacity.

An assessment of the roundabout junction at the A50 Manchester Road/Northwich Road has been submitted that suggests that this junction operates well and within capacity. Clearly, there has been no validation of the queues that occur at this junction. This junction has long queues towards the junction both on Northwich Road and Manchester Road. This junction has congestion and capacity problems and this has not been recognised in the Transport Assessment.

To improve the accessibility, the applicant is proposing a dedicated free bus service for the site that will link the site with the town centre and also the railway station. It is proposed that the service will run in peak hours and at lunchtime on a daily basis. There is an existing travel plan for the site, this is being extended to cover the new office development.

Internally the proposed layout is acceptable and there are no design issues raised concerning the car parking layout.

The submission by the South Knutsford Residents group has recognised these issues especially in relation to the predicted increase in usage in Gough's Lane and problems with turning at the junction with the A50 Toft Road. The Group has also raised concerns about the existing capacity of A537 Brook Street and Adams Hill to accommodate the development.

Highways Conclusions

As stated above, one of the main concerns is the use of Gough's Lane, as this is already used to access and egress to the site. This will increase should the development proceed. There are capacity issues at the junction with Toft Road, although the Strategic Highways Engineer would not wish to see this junction improved, as this would only likely draw more traffic onto the road. The Strategic Highways Engineer would wish to see the congested junctions on the principle roads into Knutsford improved, which would improve journey times and reassign traffic back onto more appropriate routes.

The applicant has proposed that the speed limit is changed from 40 mph to 30mph and also this is reinforced with additional road markings and signage.

There will also need to be changes to the speed limits on the A50 Toft Road and A537 Chelford Road to provide buffer 40mph speed limits. This speed limit change is supported by the Highway Authority.

The junction assessments presented in the Transport Assessment at the major junctions in Knutsford are not consistent with CEC and other developer assessments of the same junctions that show higher congestion levels. The applicant's model results have not been validated against current queue length surveys at these junctions and therefore, the Strategic Highways Engineer raises concern regarding the accuracy of the predicted ratio of flow to capacity (RFC), or the Degree of Saturation (DOS).

Both the junctions at A537 Brook Street/Hollow Lane and A537 Adams Hill/Toft Road are at capacity currently and the consequence of adding further traffic to these junctions is to extend

queues significantly. Therefore, as this development does add significant amounts of traffic to these junctions it should at the very least provide mitigation measures that allows the junctions to work at a no worse off situation in 2019, with development included.

As part of the Local Plan there are infrastructure improvements planned for these junctions to be funded through development contributions, as this site has a direct impact, it is appropriate that this site is one that could provide a contribution towards these improvements. Discussions with the applicant have taken place regarding providing funding towards these improvement schemes. The contribution has been derived from the number of development trips passing through the junctions in the worse case peak hour AM in relation to the construction costs of the improvements, this equates to a contribution £630,000.

However, the applicant has considered this request and subsequently submitted a viability assessment on the proposed development and has offered £20,000 towards speed reduction in Gough's Lane and £380,000 towards town centre improvements in Knutsford. Whilst, this is not the full contribution requested it does provide a significant amount towards funding the Local Plan infrastructure improvements that have been devised in conjunction with the Town Council.

There are other development sites in the Local Plan that will need to contribute to the infrastructure improvements and Booths Park is one element of these contributions. However, the contribution does provide a not unreasonable amount in mitigation for its own impact and the Strategic Highways Engineer accepts the £400,000 contribution offered.

Therefore, the Strategic Highways Engineer raises no highway objections subject to the financial contribution being secured as part of the S106 package of mitigation measures.

Environmental

Layout, Design and Amenity

It is considered that the layout provided would be acceptable. Due to the location of neighbouring properties, it is not considered that there would be any impact from the building on neighbouring properties.

Setting

The Conservation Officer has considered the impact of the three, 3 storey buildings and associated car parking on the ancient scheduled monument and within the Historic Parkland and Locally Listed Booths Hall. The proposals will to a certain degree, further compromise this once rural setting through the introduction of additional built structures.

The current use of the site has completely changed the setting of the hall and car parking now surrounds the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The site has an eclectic mix of architectural styles, therefore imposing a particular style is not appropriate, but consideration must be given to a high standard of building design, use of materials, hard and soft landscaping.

There is a good opportunity to fully record the boundaries of a cluster of outbuildings around the site and provide this information on the Historic Environment Record as it would better reveal the significance of the site.

Archaeology

English Heritage have also provided some observations on the proposals and recognise that the significance of the scheduled site lies largely in its historic and evidential value as an important example of a moated site. While the setting of the heritage asset is important, 20th century development to the northwest has eroded its characteristic rural setting. The introduction of three 3 storey buildings and associated car parking to the North West of the ancient monument will compromise this once rural setting through the introduction of additional built forms which (although partially screened by existing foliage) will be partially visible from the scheduled site. However, in light of the current use of the site in question (car parking) and existing tree cover, this harmful impact is considered to be less than substantial, and must therefore be considered by the LPA against the public benefits of the proposal under paragraph 134 of the NPPF.

The archaeological potential of the site is to some extent diminished as a result of its uses – firstly as an orchard in the 19th and 20th centuries and later as a car park. However, the desk based assessment supplied with the application suggests that there is moderate potential for medieval remains associated with the scheduled site within the proposed development area. This matter is considered in more detail below.

The Development Control Archaeologist from the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service has been consulted with regard to the proposals.

The medieval moated site at Booths Hall lies immediately adjacent to the south-eastern limits of the proposed development area, much of which is currently used for car parking. The moat and subsidiary features extending to the west are recorded in the Cheshire Historic Environment record (CHER 1242/1). They are also designated as a Scheduled Monument (SM 13449) and are statutorily protected. The moat currently contains no standing buildings as the focus of activity moved c 300m to the west in the mid 18th century, when a new hall was constructed on the site of the present Booths Hall, amidst landscaped grounds. Limited excavations have, however, suggested the presence of well-preserved below-ground remains on the platform of the moat.

An archaeological desk-based assessment, which considers the historical development of the site, the nature of the remains, the physical impact of the development proposals, and the effect on the setting of the Scheduled Monument has been submitted to accompany the application.

The report (prepared by the archaeological consultants) concludes that the development has some potential to disturb archaeological remains, particularly in the vicinity of the moat, where ancillary building such as barns and outhouses might be expected. The report is also particularly helpful in that it contains a comprehensive collection of historic maps, which are sufficient to show that the development is unlikely to reveal any buried traces of the landscaped grounds, which surrounded the later hall and have survived the 20th-century developments within the grounds. The maps do, however, show a number of ancillary

buildings associated with the later hall, which are within the proposed development area and whose below-ground remains may be vulnerable to disturbance.

In view of the proximity of the Scheduled moat and the possible effect of the development on the setting of the monument, the proposals and the scope of any archaeological mitigation, have been discussed with the relevant persons at English Heritage. It is accepted that in view of the extensive development works that have occurred at Booths Park in the recent past, there will be no effect on the setting of the Scheduled Monument and that there is likely to have been a degree of disturbance to any archaeological remains within the application area, which makes further pre-determination work unnecessary.

Instead, it is suggested that if planning permission is granted the site should be subject to a staged programme of archaeological work which should consist of an initial phase of trial trenching in the car park area to the south of the main east to west road across the site, followed by more extensive investigations if significant deposits are located. In the area to the north of the road, the footprints of the ancillary buildings depicted on the 19th-century mapping should be subject to targeted investigation prior to redevelopment. A report on the work will be required and it will be vital to ensure that sufficient time and resources are built into the development programme to allow for the completion of the programme of archaeological mitigation.

It is recommended that the mitigation is secured by condition

Landscaping

Booths Park forms an area of historic parkland, with Booths Hall, a number of existing office buildings, woodlands, lakes, playing fields and also a Scheduled Ancient Monument on the moated site and fish ponds of the original Norbury Booths Hall. The proposed development is an outline application, but a Masterplan has been submitted as part of the application.

Methodology

A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment has been submitted to accompany the application. This does follow the methodology as outlined in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition 2013, and appraises the landscape in terms of value, condition and the significance of landscape and visual impacts that the proposals may bring about.

The baseline information includes the Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment 2009, which identifies the application site as being located in the Estate, Woodland Meres, Landscape Character Type 9, and specifically within the EWM5 Tabley character area. The wider landscape around, and including some of Booths Park does appear to have many of the characteristics of this character area, namely a slightly undulating topography, the intact and extensive hedgerow system with numerous hedgerow trees, woodland blocks and watercourses and ponds, as well as areas where agriculture appears more intensive and where hedgerows have been trimmed low and the landscape appears far more panoramic; however, the Landscape Officer agrees with the assessment that the application site itself displays few of these character area characteristics, since it is currently an extensive area of tarmac.

An assessment of the landscape character of Booths Park has been included. The Landscape Officer agrees with this characterisation and feels that it does help to identify the baseline landscape character of the application site, as well as the wider Booths Park landscape.

Landscape Proposals

The proposed development consists of one two-storey and two three-storey buildings, with underground and above ground parking and associated landscape works. The proposals would result in the loss of 112 trees, 35 of these of 'arboricultural or landscape value' although the assessment indicates that 225 semi mature trees will be planted as part of the proposals, along with a number of smaller trees and shrubs, 1700 is indicated in the arboricultural report submitted as part of the application..

Impacts on Landscape Character

The assessment includes a baseline landscape assessment and includes an assessment of the landscape character impact on the different zones identified across the application area. However, I feel that the assessment only really examines the positive impacts that additional planting may have and fails to address the landscape impact that the three office buildings may have in an area that is currently a car park with a fairly substantial landscape structure surrounding it. The application site is in close proximity to the scheduled ancient monument area and the historic park. It is noted that section 3.2 of the LVIA is titled 'Sensitivity of the Landscape', the sensitivity of the landscape is not actually stated. Further, Paragraph 3.2.4 states 'while the development is perceived as having adverse effects', there is no indication of the significance of landscape effect.

Nevertheless, the Landscape Officer does feel the points highlighted in section 3.2.2 would be largely positive in terms of the landscape impact. Due to this being an outline application, the Masterplan can only be regarded as being illustrative, so a positive outcome would depend on the final details to be submitted at the Reserved Matters stage.

Visual impacts

The impact on visual receptors has been considered at the construction phase, at completion of development and after 15 years. While, the Landscape Officer broadly agrees with the assessment of impact on those receptors identified, the assessment has been based on an outline application and the assessment has also been based on the Masterplan, namely for one, two storey building and two, three storey buildings. Any deviation from the proposals as shown in this application would inevitably have an impact on the visual assessment and that impact could be either positive, or negative, depending on the scale of change. In addition, it should be noted that the landscape proposals are also outline in nature and any reduction or change to these could also inevitably either reduce, or increase the visual impact that the proposals may have.

Landscape conclusions

While it is considered that the proposals could have a positive impact and the Landscape Officer broadly agrees with the visual assessment, the proposals are outline and these impacts would ultimately depend on the final scale and detail of the design and also on the final Masterplan, provided that the extent of landscape to be retained is retained, that the additional landscape shown is provided within the scheme. This can be ensured through reserved matters and appropriate conditions.

Trees

The site lies within historic parkland comprising of managed arable and pasture land. Many of the parkland trees and some mid 18th century planting to the front of the Hall are still in existence. A public right of way (FP17) runs through the site from the A537 along the existing access road through to Pavement Lane to the north east, where many of these parkland trees are visible as public amenity features.

A Tree Preservation Order (The Knutsford UDC, Over Knutsford Tree Preservation Order 1973 affords protection to a woodland adjacent to Lynton Close to the north of the Estate and an area of trees adjacent to Carrwood to the east. There are, however no Tree Preservation Orders protecting any trees, or woodland within area proposed for development and the site does not lie within a Conservation Area.

An Ancient Woodland stands to the north east of the estate to the south of Spring Wood. The woodland lies outside the area for proposed development.

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment. The Assessment states that the trees were assessed in accordance with BS5837:2012 *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations*, which is the primary document, which guides the process of determining planning applications and the impact upon trees. It is accepted that the submitted AIA complies with the parameters set out in the above Standard.

None of the hedgerows assessed are considered to be 'Important' within the defined criteria defined under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

A woodland to the south of the existing car park (identified as W1) is designated as a lowland mixed deciduous woodland UK BAP Priority Habitat

The Assessment has recorded 2 individual trees and 2 woodlands as High (A) category; 1 individual tree, 10 groups and 1 hedgerow as Moderate (B) Category; and 2 Individual trees; 16 groups and 2 hedgerows as Low (C) category.

All trees are deemed a material consideration, however High (A) category and Moderate (B) category trees should be presumed for retention unless there is an overriding justification for their removal and that mitigation measures for avoidance and replacement have been adequately demonstrated

The Assessment identifies that 112 trees (which include individuals, individual trees within groups), part of one woodland two hedgerows and part of a third hedgerow will be required to be removed to facilitate the development (para 5.1). Of these only 35 are considered to be of arboricultural or landscape merit (para 5.2).

In addition, the Tree Survey Sheet identifies two further groups of trees to be removed (Groups G16 and G26 outlined in red on the plan). Group 16 comprises of various mature trees including Poplar, Sycamore and Beech of which 2 at the northern end of the group are proposed to be removed to accommodate the Shuttle bus loop. Group G26 comprises of a group of 9 low category ornamental trees, to be removed to allow provision of additional car parking south of the Booths Hall building, (Block G).

The development will require the removal of a number of moderate 'B' Category trees (about 68 in total) located within groups around the existing car park and south of central access road including 3 Oak within the High woodland (W2) located to the south east of the site to accommodate the proposed extension to the existing car park. No trees which are associated with the historic planting around the Hall are proposed to be removed apart from 2 low category trees to the south of the Hall within Group G16. A number of low 'C' category trees are also proposed to be removed to accommodate the proposed changes to the car park.

Existing car parking provision is proposed to be extended and reconfigured to include undercroft parking, but parking will not be extended beyond the southern boundary of the existing car park. Boundary trees within the existing woodland W1, (A BAP Priority habitat) will therefore not be affected. The Assessment identifies that any excavations within this area will not exceed the current depth of the existing sub base to avoid damage to the rooting environment of trees. It is agreed that such matters can be dealt with by a Method Statement at Reserved Matters stage.

It is proposed to plant 225 trees within formal landscaped areas and a further 1700 trees within a new woodland walk. The Illustrative Master Plan provides details of the new planting within proposed landscaped areas around new buildings and the new car parking areas where it is proposed to plant 225 trees within formal landscaped areas. A further 1700 trees are proposed, providing additional woodland planting as part of a woodland walk adjacent to the woodland to the south of the site.

Whilst it is accepted that the proposal will result in the loss of a number of low and moderate category trees, which will have some impact in the immediate area, all of the trees are associated with, or are located within the existing built infrastructure and in terms of the wider impact in amenity terms and from an arboricultural perspective; justification for their retention does not outweigh development considerations and can be adequately mitigated within the site.

The proposed landscaping provides a basis for a more detailed mitigation package to address any tree losses.

Should the application be granted consent, conditions should be attached requiring any future reserved matters application to be supported by a Tree Protection Scheme (in accordance with BS5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations) and a Method Statement for excavation and construction of proposed areas of Hard Standing within the root protection areas of retained trees.

Amenity

The Environmental Health Officers comments are noted. It is considered that the suggested conditions are acceptable which seek to: -

- control the hours of construction;
- control the hours and method of pile foundations and floating of concrete floors (if necessary);
- minimise dust emissions.

A travel plan and construction method statement would also be required. As the application is for new offices, which are a sensitive end use and could be affected by any contamination present, means that a Contamination Land Phase 1 report will be required.

Flooding

The Environment Agency has no objection in principle to the proposed development. It is acknowledged that the surface water from the existing site currently discharges to the artificial moat located next to Booths Hall Farm. This is understood to overflow into a local watercourse, which in turn outfalls to Birkin Brook. Surface water from the redeveloped site should ensure no increase in runoff to the local watercourse. For discharges above the existing allowable rate to this watercourse, attenuation will be required for up to the 1% annual probability event, including allowances for climate change.

The discharge of surface water should, wherever practicable, be by Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). SuDS, in the form of grassy swales, detention ponds, soakaways, permeable paving etc., can help to remove the harmful contaminants found in surface water and can help to reduce the discharge rate. Therefore, the Environment Agency request that planning conditions are attached to any approval which require a surface water regulation scheme, and a scheme to manage the risk of flooding from overland flow of surface water.

Ecology

The application is supported by an acceptable Phase One habitat survey.

Bats

Evidence of bat activity in the form of a minor roost of a relatively common bat species has been recorded within the house proposed for demolition. Due to the lateness in the season when the survey was undertaken there remains a possibility that the building may support a more significant roost. However, on balance the usage of the building by bats is likely to be limited to small-medium numbers of animals using them for relatively short periods of time during the year. The loss of the buildings on this site in the absence of mitigation is likely to have a low upon bats at the local level.

The submitted report recommends the installation of bat boxes on as a means of compensating for the loss of the roost and also recommends the supervision of the works to reduce the risk posed to any bats that may be present when the works are completed.

The EC Habitats Directive 1992 requires the UK to maintain a system of strict protection for protected species and their habitats. The Directive only allows disturbance, or deterioration or destruction of breeding sites or resting places

- (a) in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment, and provided that there is
- (b) no satisfactory alternative and
- (c) no detriment to the maintenance of the species population at favourable conservation status in their natural range

The UK has implemented the Directive in the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 2010 (as amended) which contain two layers of protection (i) a requirement on Local Planning Authorities ("LPAs") to have regard to the Directive's requirements above, and (ii) a licensing system administered by Natural England and supported by criminal sanctions.

Local Plan Policy NE3 seeks to protect habitats from destruction and indicates that development which adversely affects habitats would not be accepted.

Circular 6/2005 advises LPAs to give due weight to the presence of protected species on a development site to reflect EC requirements. "This may potentially justify a refusal of planning permission."

The NPPF advises LPAs to conserve and enhance biodiversity: if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts) or adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, planning permission should be refused.

Natural England's standing advice is that, if a (conditioned) development appears to fail the three tests in the Habitats Directive, then LPAs should consider whether Natural England is likely to grant a licence: if unlikely, then the LPA should refuse permission: if likely, then the LPA can conclude that no impediment to planning permission arises under the Directive and Regulations.

The Nature Conservation Officer advises that the proposed mitigation/compensation is broadly acceptable in principal, however further details will be required from the applicant regarding the proposed mitigation measures. It is suggested that an indicative plan showing the locations of the proposed bat boxes/ bat tiles is provided.

Subject to this, the Council's Nature Conservation Officer does not object to the scheme, as the proposal will comply with Policy NE11 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The determination of this application is on balance. On the one hand the development will clearly have an impact on the openness of the Green Belt and will impact to a certain degree of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. On the other hand, the proposed development is in

close alignment with the Government's clear Growth Agenda and Very Special Circumstances have been put forward which justify the proposals in this Green Belt location and public benefits arise from the proposal in respect of securing and expanding the businesses during challenging economic conditions, significant investment to the local economy, direct and indirect employment.

The comments from consultees, the Town Council and residents are noted and have been addressed in the report above.

The NPPF is a material consideration to this planning application and sets a clear presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The **economic benefits** to be generated by the proposal include:

- Provision of high quality flexible office accommodation in keeping with the landscape and Green Belt setting;
- Retention and expansion of existing high end knowledge based businesses at Booths Park;
- Growth and inward investment from new knowledge based industries;
- Creation of over 1,300 jobs at Booths Park;
- A construction spend of £25m and average of 170 FTE construction jobs per annum over three years;
- Indirect job creation of an estimated 390 jobs as a result of additional expenditure in the area;
- Increased spending in Knutsford town centre as a result of new workers in the area which will be boosted further by the provision a shuttle bus to facilitate linked trips; and
- Re-use of underutilised brownfield land to deliver economic growth objectives.

The **social benefits** include:

Bruntwood is committed to corporate social responsibility and has a strong history of supporting social and charitable work. Bruntwood donates 10% of profits to environmental and charitable organisations every year and volunteering forms an important part of the business with over 900 hours donated to charity each year.

At the Booths Park, Bruntwood donates time and resources to local community groups and charities and support a number of sporting and social events.

The above activities will continue at Booths Park however, with increased critical mass as a result of the proposed development, Bruntwood will have additional support in time and resources to local community projects and events.

In addition, to the above, social benefits provided directly by Bruntwood, the proposed development would have the following social benefits:

- Growth of knowledge based industries to promote ambition and aspirations and raise educational and income prospects in the area;
- Job creation would include a wide range of job opportunities from high end jobs to lower and intermediate skills level jobs such as administration, maintenance and

cleaning, which assists in tackling exclusion and deprivation providing jobs at a variety of entry levels;

- Improved social cohesion and engagement through the creation of outdoor meeting places and work based activities such as lunch time walking, running and cycling routes;
- Contribution to healthy communities through provision of walking, running and cycling routes within the park and cycle parking facilities to encourage cycling to work; and
- Improved vitality of Knutsford town centre as a result of an increased size in workforce visiting and spending in the town centre.

The **Environmental benefits** include:

- Re-use of an underutilised brownfield site to deliver economic growth objectives;
- Protection of higher environmental quality greenfield land through re-use of existing brownfield resources;
- A high quality office development designed in keeping with setting and landscape character, largely set outside of views from the surrounding area;
- Significant planting and creating a woodland belt to the southern site boundary adding to existing woodland;
- Enhanced biodiversity through the landscaping scheme;
- Improved environment for users of the park through the landscape strategy creating better linkages and access in through the landscaped environment;
- A range of travel plan measures to significantly enhance the current offer at Booth Park including a free shuttle bus to the town centre and train station to reduce reliance of private car and vehicle emissions.

A planning balance needs to be considered to establish if there are any other adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefit.

With regard to the other material considerations relevant to the proposal, landscape; heritage and ecology have all been assessed and mitigation proposed to offset any impact. There will be a number of mature trees removed as a part of the development, but this loss will be offset by substantial planting and a robust landscape strategy.

The traffic generated by the additional commercial uses proposed will be mitigated through a comprehensive approach to green travel and include a new shuttle bus service to link the site to the town centre. The impacts at various junctions in Knutsford and at Gough's Lane and junctions close to the site will be mitigated.

The economic case is compelling. The development will significantly enhance employment growth in a high quality and sustainable environment. It will build on an existing cluster of knowledge based companies and further enhance Booths Park's reputation as one of the premier employment locations in the North West.

When the impacts are weighed up against the significant economic benefits and sustainability credentials of the proposal, and taking into consideration mitigation proposed, the balance weighs strongly in favour of granting planning permission and should therefore be granted without delay.

If Members are minded to approve the development, as this would constitute a significant departure from policy, the application would need to be referred to the Secretary of State should the Council be minded to approve it.

The Town and Country Planning (Consultations) (England) Direction 2009 indicates that developments of over 1000 sq. m within the Green Belt would have a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt for the purposes of referral. It therefore stands to reason that such developments should also be treated as having a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt in the application of planning policy. These proposals are in excess of 1000 sq. m and would therefore have a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt notwithstanding the impact associated with car parking, visitors and general activity associated with the use.

(circular 02/09)

HEADS OF TERMS

The developer has submitted a viability appraisal has been submitted, which indicates that it is not possible to provide the highway contributions outlined above. Bruntwood has offered £400 000, split with £380 000 for the junction improvements and £20 000 for the Goughs Lane speed restriction. In addition, the delivery of the shuttle bus to and from Knutsford should be secured via the S106.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations

In order to comply with the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 it is now necessary for planning applications with legal agreements to consider the issue of whether the requirements within the S106 satisfy the following:

- (a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- (b) directly related to the development; and
- (c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

The payment towards highways improvements to the junctions in Knutsford and shuttle bus are considered necessary in order to deal with traffic impacts on the highway network, and address congestion issues in Knutsford.

All elements are necessary, directly relate to the development and are fair and reasonable in relation to the scale and kind of development.

Application for Outline Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to a Section 106 Agreement and the following conditions

1. A06OP - Commencement of development
2. A03OP - Time limit for submission of reserved matters
3. A01OP - Submission of reserved matters
4. A08OP - Ground levels to be submitted with reserved matters application

5. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
6. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
7. Implementation of a programme of archaeological work
8. Surface water not to be discharged to foul/combined sewer
9. A surface water regulation scheme
10. A scheme to manage the risk of flooding from overland flow of surface water
11. No change to surface of the Public Right of Way without consultation with the PROW unit
12. Piling hours
13. Piling method statement
14. Floor floating
15. Environmental Management Plan
16. Hours of operation
17. Travel Plan
18. Dust control
19. Contaminated land
20. Reserved matters application to be supported by a Tree Protection Scheme
21. Breeding birds
22. Indicative plan showing the locations of the proposed bat boxes/ bat tiles to be provided.
23. At least 10% of the energy supply of the development shall be secured from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon energy sources
24. Protection of breeding birds
25. Details of lighting to be approved
26. Refuse storage facilities to be approved
27. Travel Plan to include Electric Vehicle infrastructure within the car parking area

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KNUTSFORD

Springw
Cottag

Booths Hall
Farm

Booths Hall

Booths Hall
Cottages

r Knutsford

THE SITE

Booths
Park

Recn Gd

80 40 0 80 Meters