

Application No: 13/4458M

Location: WOODFORD AIRFIELD, ADLINGTON/POYNTON

Proposal: Partial removal of the runway, regrading works, footpath and cycle links, the naturalisation of the culverted watercourse through the site and restoration and landscaping works

Applicant: HARROW ESTATES PLC and others

Expiry Date: 05-Mar-2014

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approval subject to conditions.

MAIN ISSUES:

- The principle of the development;
- Open Space and Landscaping;
- Ecology Implications; and
- Access.

REASON FOR REPORT

The application has been referred to Strategic Planning Board because it is a large scale major application which includes an Environmental Impact Assessment.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The former Woodford Aerodrome site is located on the southern edge of Greater Manchester. The overall site extends to 205ha and spans the boundary between Stockport and Cheshire East Council. It is situated immediately to the south of the village of Woodford and to the west of the town of Poynton. Within the boundary of Cheshire East the site extends to 83 ha.

The former aerodrome site comprises the former BAE Systems plant. This broadly consists of several large buildings including an aircraft manufacturing facility, a three storey office block and a single storey research building. There are extensive areas of hard standing surrounding these buildings, with an 'X' pattern runway to the south of the site.

The airfield occupies a large central area of the site and comprises two tarmac runways set out in the classic 'X' pattern. A short runway, approximately 950m in length, runs broadly north to south between the two main developed areas of the site. The main runway is 2.3km in length and runs broadly east to west, across the boundary with Cheshire East Council. The runways are surrounded by open grassed areas.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The redevelopment of the former Woodford Aerodrome requires the submission of three separate planning applications.

The wider proposals which are situated within the boundary of Stockport MBC are for works comprising the erection of up to 950 dwellings, a primary school, employment provision, community facilities, landscaping, access and associated infrastructure.

This application is submitted to Cheshire East Council and two further applications have been submitted to Stockport Council. Stockport has consulted Cheshire East on the other two applications.

This application seeks planning permission for the partial removal of the runway, regrading works, footpath and cycle links, the naturalisation of the culverted watercourse through the site and restoration and landscaping works.

RELEVANT HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history of the site that relates to this landscaping application.

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 (MLP) therefore the relevant Local Plan policies are considered to be: -

- In terms of the principle of the development, MLP Policy GC1 (Green Belt – New Buildings) is the relevant development plan policy;
- In relation to open space and landscaping, Policies NE2 and NE3 of the MLP seek to secure the conservation and enhancement of the landscape character and the rural landscape;
- Policies T3 and T5 of the MLP seek to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists through new development proposals, including the provision of appropriate new routes.

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 Framework (paragraph 69) promotes the provision of safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space encouraging its active and continual use. Public rights of way and access should be protected and enhanced (paragraph 75).

The Framework also sets out guidance on the protection of Green Belt land. In particular, the Framework (paragraph 89) confirms that the provisions of facilities for outdoor recreation are appropriate within the Green Belt as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt.

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways: No objections.

Sustrans: No comments received.

Public Rights of Way: No objections, subject to further details being submitted regarding footpaths.

Natural England: No objections.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust: No comments received.

Council for Protection of Rural England: No comments received.

Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service: No objections subject to the imposition of a condition securing the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

Environment Agency: No objections subject to conditions controlling the submission of a further contamination survey.

United Utilities: No comments received.

Environmental Health: No objections subject to conditions controlling working hours and the submission of a further contamination survey.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council: No comments received.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Adlington Parish Council: No objections.

Poynton Town Council: No objection in principle, however the Town Council raised the following points: -

- A full appraisal of the environmental impact was requested;
- What impact on flooding, given that the site is a flood area?
- An archaeological investigation requested;
- What are the proposals for the low dark passage under the railway by Lostock Road to prevent it from continuing to attracting anti-social behaviour?
- The site needs to be secure as the remaining runway surface could be used for road racing. Obstacles needed to prevent this; and
- The proposed cycle paths need to be linked into broader cycle networks.

REPRESENTATIONS

The application has been advertised in accordance with the General Development Management Order 2010, in this case incorporating the following elements:-

- On site, by the means of a site notices making reference to major planning application which includes an EIA and that affects a right of way;
- Site notices were posted from the 11 December 2013;
- Notice was published in the local press (Macclesfield Express) on 20 November 2013; and
- Surrounding residential properties (61 properties) have also been written to directly.

The publicity period for this application expired on 3 January 2014.

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

- An SPD should be prepared to cover the Cheshire East side of the site;
- Identification of all potential impacts and their satisfactory mitigation must be provided before any work is permitted to start;
- Poynton residents have not been properly consulted;
- Issues relating to ecology, pollution, contamination of land and watercourses, vehicle movements, archaeology need to be addressed;
- Will new footpath and cycle way have full public right of way? More detail should be provided regarding re-establishment from the site to existing right of way; and
- The application should evidence how the removal of part of the runway and restoration of the landscape will increase the amount of open countryside. It should also indicate how much of this restored area will be accessible to the general public from outside the site.

A full copy of all the comments made by the local resident 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;

- Sustainability Appraisal;
- Open Space Assessment;
- Landscape Proposals;
- Lighting Proposals;
- Design Code;
- Environmental Statement; and
- Statement of Community Involvement.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

This application seeks planning permission for the partial removal of the runway, regrading works, footpath and cycle links, the naturalisation of the culverted watercourse through the site and restoration and landscaping works.

Essentially these works can be described as ‘engineering operations’.

Principle of Development

The National Planning Framework (NPPF) differed from Planning Policy Guidance 2 (PPG2) in that the former seeks to define development which is “not inappropriate” as opposed to the approach in PPG2, which was to define the types of development which were inappropriate. The effect of this is that all development is inappropriate unless it is specifically identified in the NPPF as one of the categories which is potentially not inappropriate

Engineering operations fall within one of the categories set out in paragraph 90 of the NPPF therefore it is capable of being considered appropriate development.

The proposals will open up the secure site for public use and provide enhanced public rights of way and therefore comply with local planning Policy GC1.

Open Space and Landscaping

A comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment has been carried out for the proposed development. The scheme aims to establish a new pattern of ‘repaired’ field boundaries around the proposed development to help to connect the site with the wider surrounding landscape and to help form a soft edge to the settlement.

The key elements of the scheme include the removal of a small section of the runway to de-culvert the existing stream and reinstate it as a fully functional stream and wildlife corridor. The exposed banks will be replanted in a native swale plant mix whilst the wider field area will be seeded as a wildflower meadow and managed to enhance the species diversity and composition.

The scheme also proposes the creation of a new network of native hedgerows to form a field buffer to the edge of the development. New hedge planting is a mix of native species trees and shrubs. New fence lines in conjunction with the hedging to reinforce the planting, and provide stock/ access control are also proposed.

The application proposals also include the creation of new public access pathways across the aerodrome that reconnects lost routes. Routes will be provided using either the remnant hard surfaces from the main runway and service roadways or through new compacted stone pathways constructed as 2.5m wide shared foot/cycle routes with informal soft verges.

It is not proposed to remove the full extent of runway hard standing or introduce additional field boundaries other than that required to fully integrate the proposed development into its landscape context and also to fully mitigate views into the site.

In terms of longer term management, it is proposed that new field areas immediately adjacent to the western brook be managed as hay meadow with suitable cutting regimes put in place. The balance of the sites green spaces will remain and be managed as arable farmland in a similar manner to the current arrangement.

Conditions are suggested to be imposed to ensure the implementation of the landscaping and boundary treatments.

No areas of designated strategic and local open space will be lost as a result of the proposed redevelopment. It is therefore considered that the proposed development complies with the relevant development plan policies NE2 and NE3.

Ecology Implications:

Article 12 (1) of the EC Habitats Directive requires Member states to take requisite measures to establish a system of strict protection of certain animal species prohibiting the deterioration or destruction of breeding sites and resting places.

In the UK, the Habitats Directive is transposed as The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. This requires the local planning authority to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive so far as they may be affected by the exercise of those functions.

It should be noted that whilst a European Protected Species has been recorded on site they are unlikely to be adversely affected by the proposed development. Therefore the planning authority do not have to consider the three tests in respect of the Habitats Directive, i.e. (i) that there is no satisfactory alternative, (ii) maintenance of the favourable conservation status of the species and (iii) that the development is of overriding public interest.

The Council's Ecologist has reviewed the application. In terms of bats and barn owls, there is no requirement for a protected species survey to be undertaken as the buildings at Shirdfold Farm have been demolished. Great Crested Newts have been recorded at a pond within the red line of the planning application. On the basis that all the existing habitat in close proximity to the identified pond will be retained it is advised that the proposed development is unlikely to have significant adverse impact upon this species. No information has been provided on the location of the identified Badger setts, however the submitted Environmental Statement assesses the potential impact of the proposed development as having no impact on this species.

A number of bird species of nature conservation value have been recorded in association with the open arable and grassland habitats near the former runway. The limited nature of the proposed development means that a significant direct impact upon these species is unlikely. There may potentially be an impact associated with increased public access to this area however this impact would be at least partially offset through the creation of the new woodland copses and hedgerows.

Conditions are suggested to secure detailed planting specification for proposed woodland copses and new hedgerows and to secure the submission of 10 year habitat management plan.

It is considered that the mitigation put forward is a material consideration which if implemented will further conserve and enhance the existing protected species in line with Local Plan policy NE11 and is therefore on balance, considered to be acceptable.

Environmental Impact Assessment:

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was submitted with the application. It considers the likely effects based on current knowledge of the site and surroundings, desk top assessment, survey and fieldwork information. The EIA addresses the following; Transport, Dust & Air Quality, Noise & Vibration, Hydrology & Drainage, Ground Contamination, Ecology & Nature Conservation, Cultural Heritage & Archaeology, Landscape & Visual Impact and Socio-Economic Effects.

The proposed main development (not this engineering operation) may result in the creation of some adverse impacts. However, where relevant, mitigation measures have been proposed. None of the impacts are of such significance that they should prevent the development of this site. Furthermore, the overall scheme results in significant, positive environmental effects and overall regeneration and sustainability benefits.

Access

The provision of public footpaths throughout the development will return permeability to the formerly secure site and enable residents of the surrounding area to utilise the open space and recreation facilities. A condition has been suggested to control the details of the footpaths. The proposals will therefore comply with Local Planning Policies T3 and T5.

Other suggested conditions

In line with the comments contained within the consultation proposes from the Environment Agency and the Council's Environmental Health Section, conditions are suggested below to control working hours and ground condition investigations. A condition is also suggested to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in line with the comments from Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service.

Response to issues raised by third parties

The bullet pointed list below provided a response to the issues raised by the interested third party: -

- An extensive pre-application consultation programme has taken place both in advance of preparation of the SPD for the main site and prior to submission of the planning applications. This has involved two public consultation events, workshops and significant stakeholder consultation;
- The works within the Cheshire East site are of a minor nature with any built development limited to engineering works only. As a result, there is no requirement for the SPD to guide development proposals on this part of the site;
- An Environmental Statement has been provided with the planning application;
- An Environmental Statement with associated technical appendices has considered all these issues and identified appropriate mitigation where necessary;
- The proposed footpaths and cycleways will link into existing footpath and cycle links and have full public right of way. A Design and Access Statement submitted with the application provides greater detail on this; and
- The Design and Access Statement addresses this issue. Significant parts of the new site will be accessible to the general public.

Response to issues raised by Poynton Town Council

The bullet pointed list below provided a response to the issues raised by Poynton Town Council: -

- The planning application is accompanied by a full Environmental Impact Assessment which includes a full assessment of the impact of the proposed development on ecology;
- Chapter G (Hydrology & Drainage) of the Environmental Statement confirms that the site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 (low probability). It also identifies that the proposed development will result in either negligible or minor beneficial impacts in relation to flood risk and drainage;
- Chapter J (Cultural Heritage & Archaeology) of the Environmental Statement considers the impact of the proposed development on heritage assets within the application site and its vicinity. It concludes that the impact of the proposed development on Lostock Hall is negligible; and
- This passageway falls outside of the application. However, it is considered that the proposed development will increase the use of the site by members of the public which in turn will help to increase conditions of natural surveillance.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

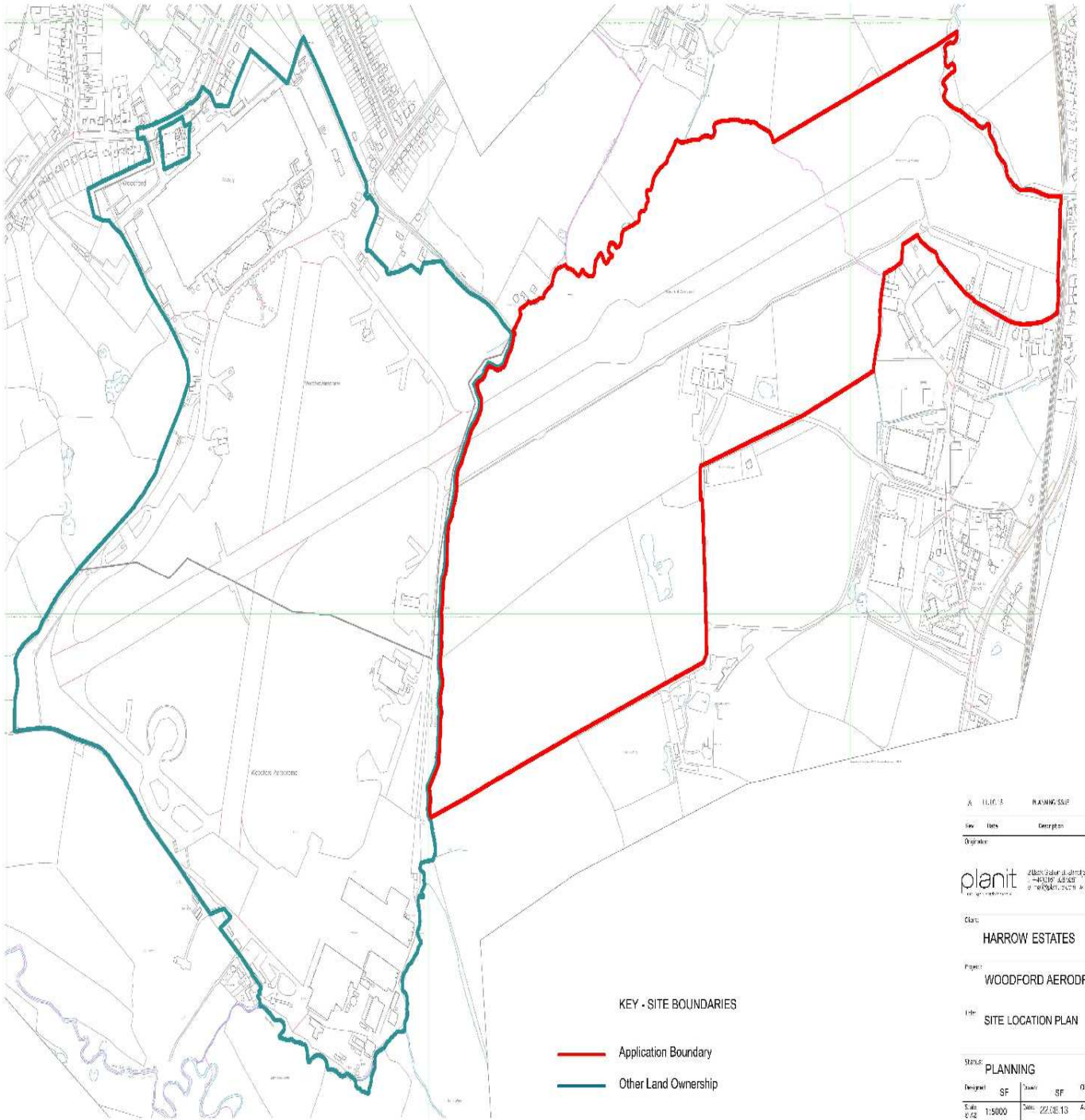
The proposals positively enhance the openness of the Green Belt; restore areas of open countryside and re-establishes public rights of way. The scheme will also provide an important amenity resource for existing and future residents through the provision of a network of open spaces, green corridors and ecological areas.

The proposal complies with the relevant development plan policies and the NPPF and therefore is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A22GR - Protection from noise during construction (hours of construction)
4. A17MC - Decontamination of land
5. A02TR - Tree protection
6. A05LS - Landscaping - implementation
7. A15MC - Archaeological watching brief
8. Unidentified Contamination
9. Detailed scheme of footpath facilities together with a programme of implementation
10. Submission of 10 year habitat management plan
11. Detailing planting specification for proposed woodland copses and new hedgerows



KEY - SITE BOUNDARIES

- Application Boundary
- Other Land Ownership

Rev	Date	Description	Drawn	Checked
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Date:
HARROW ESTATES
Project:
WOODFORD AERODROME
Title:
SITE LOCATION PLAN

STATUS: PLANNING				
Designed	SF	Drawn	SF	Checked
0/02	1:5000	22/03/13	0/02	PS
Drawn by:			Checked by:	

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