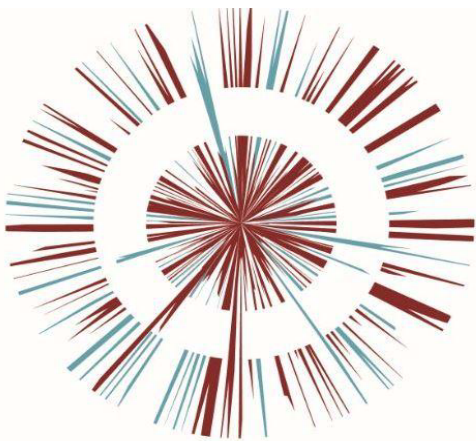




# OMEGA ZONE 8, ST HELENS

Omega St Helens Ltd / T. J. Morris Limited



Document Title  
ES Vol. 1 Chapter 4 Consideration of  
Alternatives  
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Omega St Helens / T. J. Morris Limited

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## **OMEGA ZONE 8, ST. HELENS**

Environmental Statement Volume 1 - Main Text  
OPP DOC.11.4 Chapter 4: Consideration of  
Alternatives





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Environmental Statement Volume 1 - Main Text

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## **OMEGA ZONE 8, ST. HELENS**

Environmental Statement Volume 1 - Main Text

OPP DOC.11.4 Chapter 4: Consideration of Alternatives

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## 4 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1. This chapter outlines the main alternatives to the Proposed Development that have been considered by the Applicant, together with the principal reasons for proceeding with the Proposed Development.
- 4.1.2. The purpose of this chapter is to consider whether there are potential alternative sites that could accommodate the Proposed Development, in whole or in part. This is not in itself a ‘test’ of national Green Belt policy, but where there is a lack of alternatives to accommodate a development, this may form a part of the assessment process.
- 4.1.3. The assessment of alternatives is undertaken in the context of a number of recent planning applications for large scale employment development in St. Helens Borough that have been determined or are currently being considered by St. Helens Council, all of which are within Green Belt on greenfield land in their entirety. It is also material to understand the context within which this application and the others referred to above are being promoted.
- 4.1.4. It has been demonstrated that there is a significant need for new employment floorspace, particularly of a larger footplate to address the employment deficit in St. Helens. It has also been demonstrated in evidence that has been submitted as part of the Local Plan and the aforementioned planning applications that St. Helens has a significant proportion of its administrative area designated as Green Belt, which has not been reviewed for a considerable time.
- 4.1.5. As a result, St. Helens Council has acknowledged through published “needs” studies and emerging Local Plan documents that to meet development needs in St. Helens, particularly through larger scale developments, there will be a need to develop land that is currently in Green Belt.

### 4.2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

- 4.2.1. Schedule 4(2) of the EIA Regulations 2017 (Ref. 4.1) states that an ES should include;
- “A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects”.*
- 4.2.2. To accord with the EIA Regulations 2017, the following alternatives have been considered:
- Alternative sites; and
  - Design alternatives (i.e. disaggregation of the development to smaller sites).

### 4.3 ALTERNATIVE SITES

- 4.3.1. There is a need to define an area of search for potential alternative sites. Given that the proposed development of Omega Zone 8 is being promoted in the context of meeting the needs of St. Helens, there is an obvious need to assess any relevant sites within the St. Helens Borough area. However, in the emerging Local Plan part of the application site is allocated for employment, which has been identified as being required to serve the employment land supply needs of the adjoining authority, Warrington Borough Council. For completeness and as agreed with St. Helens Council, this assessment therefore also includes a review of available sites within the Warrington Borough.

- 4.3.2. The following sources of supply of sites have been considered within the defined area of search:
- Sites with planning permission for employment purposes, and particularly logistics floorspace;
  - Sites allocated for employment development;
  - Where not included in the above two categories, brownfield sites listed at Table 4 of the St. Helens Economic Evidence Base Paper (2015) (Ref. 4.2) and the Warrington Economic Needs Assessment (2019) (Ref. 4.3); and,
  - Sites included in the proposed submission versions of the St. Helens and Warrington Local Plans.
- 4.3.3. The sites identified in the first three sources of supply have a clear planning status and could be brought forward for development in the short-term. The sites highlighted in the fourth source of supply have no planning status but they could be brought forward by landowners in the medium term and are therefore relevant in the context of this assessment.
- 4.3.4. In identifying the sources of supply, it is necessary to calculate, using an average development density of 40%, what the minimum site area requirement would be for the proposed 205,500 sq.m. On the basis of 40% site coverage, (i.e.  $[205,500/10,000]/0.4 = 51.375$  ha), it is assumed that a site of at least 51 ha would be required to accommodate the proposed logistics floorspace. Sites of less than this threshold would not be able to accommodate the Proposed Development and would not therefore represent suitable alternatives.
- 4.3.5. However, it is appropriate to consider the opportunity of disaggregating the proposed floorspace, which is split between the detailed Unit 1 proposals for 81,570, sq.m and the outline proposals for up to 123,930 sq.m.
- 4.3.6. The Unit 1 proposals are for a bespoke, purpose-built occupier-led requirement and therefore it is not considered reasonable or practical for this floorspace to be split up onto different sites as it would not meet the needs or purpose of the Proposed Development. Using the same 40% development density calculation, the Unit 1 proposals would require a minimum site area of at least 20 ha.
- 4.3.7. It is not known at this stage what form the development covered by the outline planning application site will come forward in, but it is expected that the site will, by virtue of its location, topography and high levels of access to the strategic road network, be most suitable for large-floorplate logistics developments. The indicative masterplan submitted with this planning application assumes a layout that would create three development parcels; although this is not prefaced on any identified market demand beyond the accepted need for large-floorplate developments and is likely to be subject to change based on occupier demand. If this three-parcel layout is used, the proposals would generate individual buildings of approximately 41,310 sq.m, which at 40% development density, would translate into a minimum requirement of at least 10 ha.
- 4.3.8. The assessment is carried out over four stages.

**Stage 1** the possible sources of supply and potential sites are identified.

**Stage 2** is to establish whether the identified sites meet the minimum requirements for logistics development, namely proximity to the motorway network, good access to this via A roads, public transport connectivity and ability to mitigate for sensitive uses where these are present.

**Stage 3** then considers a range of additional factors to establish the suitability of development such as site shape and proximity to workforce.



**Stage 4** then assesses the remaining sites against the five purposes of the Green Belt, reflecting the approach taken by the Local Plan Draft Green Belt Review 2016 and recent planning applications including Florida Farm (P/2016/0608/HYBR) and Haydock Farm North (P/2017/0254/OUP). Consistency with these recent applications and the evidence base prepared for the emerging Local Plan is considered to be a robust approach.

- 4.3.9. The criteria for the minimum site requirements have been established through reference to the Economic Evidence Base Paper and the assessment work carried out in support of the recent planning applications in St. Helens for large-scale logistics development. The following criteria are therefore considered to be essential for potential development sites.
- Access to an existing motorway junction within 2.5km;
  - Trunk road access;
  - Availability / proximity to public transport routes; and,
  - Separation from / absence of sensitive uses in surrounding area.
- 4.3.10. In total therefore, 24 potential sites were identified through Stage 1 for assessment to determine whether each site was, in principle, suitable for a major logistics development of an equivalent type and scale to the Proposed Development. Of these, nine sites were discounted at Stage 2 because they failed to meet with one or more of the defined minimum criteria identified for Stage 1.
- 4.3.11. The remaining 15 sites were then assessed for their suitability (Stage 3), whereby a further five sites were discounted due to either their irregular shape not being compatible with the Proposed Development, potential flood risk and their distance from the nearest settlement, which is not ideal for large-scale logistics development, which requires strong connections to existing settlements to provide workforce sources and reduce the need to travel.
- 4.3.12. Consequently, ten sites were progressed to Stage 4 (Green Belt Assessment), of which two were not applicable given their brownfield status. Of those remaining eight sites, only the application site scored sufficiently to be taken forward, together with the two brownfield sites.
- 4.3.13. The two brownfield sites were located at Omega South (Plots 7E and 7F and Zones 1 and 2) and were subsequently discounted on the basis that both sites benefit from planning permission, and in the case of Plots 7E and 7F, have now been constructed and part occupied. Therefore, neither site was considered capable of accommodating the Proposed Development.
- 4.3.14. A clear need for the proposals has been established and the development of the Omega Zone 8 application site is the only realistic site that can be delivered now.
- 4.3.15. As a consequence, an environmental appraisal of alternative sites is not considered to be necessary or practical.

## **4.4 SCHEME DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

- 4.4.1. The vision for Omega Zone 8 is the creation of a successful, leading edge commercial development which is attractive to potential occupiers with large space requirements, accords with the new sustainability agenda and Secured by Design standards, demonstrates environmental best practice, and is a worthy development for St. Helens.
- 4.4.2. Urban design principles for the Proposed Development are as follows:
- Ensure the development is appropriate to its context;



- Continuity and enclosure of the application site, so as to provide a sense of place with suitably defined public and private areas;
- Legibility, so as to ensure that the application site is animated in a manner that ensures the application site has key landmarks that aid navigation and provide a sense of place;
- The provision of services in an inconspicuous way so they appear as a purposefully considered element in the design of the logistics park;
- Encouraging easy access to the development parcel via a range of modes that include, public transport, HGVs, cycles, by foot and by private car; and

4.4.3. Ensuring that the buildings are designed and operated in a manner that is sustainable. It is intended that the design and layout of the Proposed Development will create a shared character and identity for the application site. Buildings will be designed to create a strong visual focus on the office component and should use materials and colours selected from the palette used successfully across the existing Omega Business Park.

## **4.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

4.5.1. A number of alternatives have been studied by the Applicant and an overview has been provided above. The design of the Proposed Development has taken into account environmental constraints and have integrated them into the design. By doing so, a number of potentially significant effects have either been reduced in severity, removed altogether or created positive effects.

## **4.6 REFERENCES**

- Ref. 4.1: Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. Statutory Instrument 2017 No. 571
- Ref. 4.2: St. Helens Economic Evidence Base Paper (2015)
- Ref. 4.3: Warrington Economic Needs Assessment (2019)



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