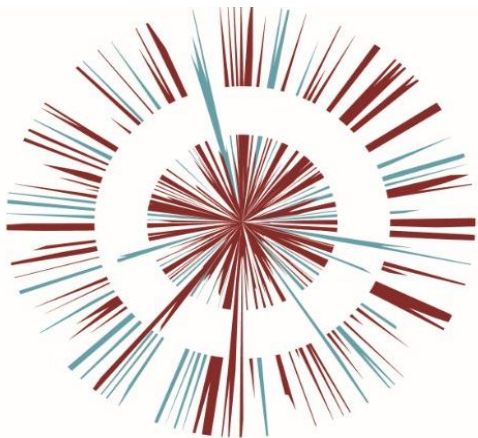




# OMEGA ZONE 8, ST HELENS

Omega St Helens Ltd / T J Morris Ltd



Planning Statement  
OPP DOC. 6

progress

planning consultancy ltd



# Planning Statement

Hybrid Planning Application  
Omega Zone 8, St Helens

Omega St Helens Ltd  
& T.J. Morris Limited

December 2019

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. THE APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDINGS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. PLANNING MATTERS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>7. IMPACT ON GREEN BELT</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>8. VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>9. COMPLIANCE WITH PLANNING POLICY</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>10. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>11. SUMMARY &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>58</b>

**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1** – Site Location Plan (OPP DWG. 2)

**Appendix 2** – Parameter Plan 1 – Outline and Detailed Application Boundaries (OPP DWG. 3.1)

**Appendix 3** – Omega Zone 8 Indicative Masterplan (OPP DWG. 1)

## **Executive Summary**

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Progress Planning Ltd on behalf of Omega St Helens and T.J. Morris Limited, joint applicants of the hybrid planning application submitted for Omega Zone 8, St Helens.

The Site covers an area of approximately 75.3ha and is located wholly within the Green Belt. It is accepted that the proposed development at Omega Zone 8, by virtue of its proposed use (B2/B8), size and scale, can only be considered as 'inappropriate' development within the Green Belt.

It is considered that 'very special circumstances' exist that serve to justify the proposed development in the Green Belt, as required by the Framework, adopted Development Plan and emerging Local Plan policies. These circumstances are sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt associated with the proposals (i.e. in relation to both 'inappropriateness' and 'other harm').

The proposed form of the development meets the requirements of the Development Plan and the associated investment and job creation will have significant benefits for both St Helens and Warrington Boroughs. The proposals also comply with guidance contained relevant policies in the Development Plan and emerging Local Plan with regards to design and layout, highways, amenity and other environmental assets.

There is specific need for the development, in so far as the proposals seek detailed approval for part of the site to meet a 'live' occupier led requirement for a bespoke, purpose-built development which it has been demonstrated cannot be accommodated elsewhere within the Borough. There is an identified need for employment land to deliver large-scale logistics development in both St Helens and Warrington and an acceptance that this will need to be satisfied through the release of Green Belt land. The Application proposals will therefore help to meet the employment land supply needs of both St Helens and Warrington Borough Council's.

The proposals represent sustainable development and will secure meaningful economic and social benefits whilst mitigating the potential adverse environmental impact associated with the scheme. As a consequence, the adverse impacts of permitting the development would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

As a consequence, when assessed against the provisions of S.38(6) of the 2004 Act, the considered position is that the proposals present no conflict with the Framework or Development Plan policies (because 'very special circumstances' have been demonstrated) and material considerations also weigh in favour of the development.

On this basis it is considered that planning permission should be granted without delay for this sustainable and much needed development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Progress Planning Ltd on behalf of Omega St Helens and T.J. Morris Limited, joint applicants of the hybrid planning application submitted for Omega Zone 8, St Helens.
- 1.2 Omega St Helens Ltd (OSHL), has been set up by Miller Developments Ltd to bring forward the Omega Zone 8 proposals. Miller Developments are the developers behind the regeneration initiative known as Omega Warrington and have over the course of the last 7 years delivered, in partnership with Homes England (the owners of the Omega site), over 6m sq.ft of manufacturing and logistics development at Omega, together with permission for up to 1100 residential units and a mixed-use zone, all set within a high quality environment underpinned by a strong landscape framework.
- 1.3 T.J. Morris Limited are the prospective occupiers of Zone 8 Unit 1, which is being brought forward in detail as outlined below. T.J. Morris Limited (TJM), trading as Home Bargains, is one of the UK's fastest growing discount retailers, having been established over 40 years ago. Since opening their first store in Liverpool, TJM has grown organically to become one of the biggest privately-owned companies in the UK. The company now boasts over 500 stores and employs more than 22,000 staff. It is the largest employer on Merseyside and is the largest independent grocer in the country. The company intends to continue its rapid growth with ambitious expansion plans to grow to 1,000 stores, employing over 40,000 staff. The proposed development of Unit 1 is central to these growth plans.
- 1.4 The proposed development forms a natural extension to the existing Omega site, which is nearing capacity particularly for large-floorplate for logistics development and offers an opportunity to meet an identified need for B2/B8 development and deliver meaningful economic and social benefits to both St Helens and Warrington Boroughs.
- 1.5 The proposed description of development is:
- 'Hybrid Planning Application for the following development (major development);*
- (i) Full Planning Permission for the erection of a B8 logistics warehouse, with ancillary offices, associated car parking, infrastructure and landscaping; and*
  - (ii) Outline Planning Permission for Manufacturing (B2) and Logistics (B8) development with ancillary offices and associated access infrastructure works (detailed matters of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are reserved for subsequent approval).'*
- 1.6 This Statement forms only one part of the application submission. The Statement makes cross reference to a series of other documents submitted as part of or alongside the application. Those other documents should be considered in full, albeit this document identifies the principle conclusions of each and provides a useful single point of reference. For clarity and

ease of reference a document register is submitted with this application identifying the relevant document and drawing references.

## **2. APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA**

### **Site and Surroundings**

- 2.1 The Site is located within St Helens Council authority boundary, albeit the Site adjoins the authority boundary of Warrington Borough Council to the east.
- 2.2 The Site covers an area of approximately 75.3ha and is under the ownership of Homes England (HE) and local farmer and landowner, Mr Bromilow. OSHL has a Development Agreement in place with HE and a signed option agreement with Mr Bromilow, ensuring the deliverability of the site is secured.
- 2.3 The Site is located approximately 4 miles to the south east of St Helens town centre and 3.3 miles to the north west of Warrington town centre. The Site is bound by Omega South to the east, a substantially developed strategic employment site within the Warrington area identified for a mix of uses including large-scale B2/B8 logistics development. Existing occupiers include ASDA Walmart, The HUT Group, Amazon and Plastic Omnium.
- 2.4 To the south east is the Lingley Mere Business Park occupied by United Utilities, North West Fire Control and Royal Mail, amongst others.
- 2.5 To the south and west of the Site is further Green Belt agricultural land, beyond which is an established residential area at Lingley Green, the Mersey Valley Golf & Country Club and large areas of deciduous woodlands and ponds.
- 2.6 The Site is bound by the M62 motorway to the north, beyond which is Omega North which includes existing occupiers such as Travis Perkins, Hermes and Brakes. Further north is Green Belt agricultural land.

### **The Application Site**

- 2.7 The Site is located wholly within the Green Belt, although is partly brownfield because until 1994 the part of the Site under HE ownership was in use as a US/RAF Airbase ('RAF Burtonwood'). Since then, the Site has been used as agricultural land together with the rest of the application site. There are no existing buildings contained within the Site.
- 2.8 Within the Site boundary are a number of ponds, areas of woodland and established tree lines / hedgerows which define the existing agricultural fields. There are also a number of internal access tracks currently used for farm access. There are no public highways through the Site, however one public right of way does traverse the north-west corner of the site connecting to a pedestrian bridge that crosses the M62 and link to St Helens.
- 2.9 A Site Location Plan is enclosed at **Appendix 1**.

## **Access**

- 2.10 The Site will be accessed via the existing highways infrastructure built to serve Omega South. As such the site has strong connections to the strategic highway network with Junction 8 of the M62 motorway, situated due east of the site. The construction of this junction was originally promoted and funded by Homes England (then English Partnerships), in order to facilitate the development of Omega.
- 2.11 As part of the redevelopment of Omega South, a series of financial contributions have been made to fund improvements to Junction 8, including the installation of an intelligent traffic light system known as MOVA and a major redesign of the junction itself brought forward by the Council as part of its Strategic Growth Fund allocation.
- 2.12 The capacity of Junction 8 to accommodate further development is discussed in later Sections of this document.
- 2.13 In terms of the local highway network, Omega has also delivered a new major infrastructure connection from Lingley Green Ave, via Omega Boulevard, to Junction 8, known as Skyline Drive. This road has recently been classed as an A-road and has been successful in drawing traffic (particularly HGVs) off the surrounding, more minor road network. Catalina Approach, the road that will provide access from Omega South to Omega Zone 8, is fed from Skyline Drive.
- 2.14 The Site also lies close to three major rail corridors. Within 4km of the site lie two Liverpool – Manchester and Trans-Pennine routes and the west coast main line. The nearest mainline stations are found in Warrington Town Centre, namely Warrington Central and Warrington Bank Quay and there remain proposals to create a third railway station at Chapleford (Warrington West), which would be within easy access of the site.



### 3. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

#### Description of Development

- 3.1 The Proposed Development is subject to a Hybrid Planning application for both Full and Outline Planning Permission and is described as follows:

*'Hybrid Planning Application for the following development (major development);*

- (i) Full Planning Permission for the erection of a B8 logistics warehouse, with ancillary offices, associated car parking, infrastructure and landscaping; and*
  - (ii) Outline Planning Permission for Manufacturing (B2) and Logistics (B8) development with ancillary offices and associated access infrastructure works (detailed matters of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are reserved for subsequent approval).'*
- 3.2 A hybrid (part detailed/part outline) planning application has been submitted to accommodate a 'live' occupier-led logistics requirement (TJM) whilst establishing the principle of outline planning permission on the remainder of the site. In addition, detailed planning permission is sought for access and highways, landscaping and drainage proposals associated with the development of the TJ Morris site.
- 3.3 In terms of the remainder (outline) of the site, access has been brought forward as a reserved matter (given that the majority is shown within the full planning site) but all other matters such as landscaping, layout, appearance and scale have been reserved for future approval. Given that the application is made in outline, and that sufficient detail is provided to assess the likely impacts of the development, this approach is considered entirely appropriate.
- 3.4 Parameter Plan 2 (OPP DWG. 3.1) provides details of the split between detailed and outline parts of the site and is submitted with this application (**Appendix 2**).

#### Proposed Development

##### Detailed Proposals (Unit 1)

- 3.5 Unit 1 will be located in the northern part of the wider application site, immediately to the south of the M62 and west of the existing Omega South development.
- 3.6 Unit 1 will comprise a 81,570 sq.m (878,012 sq.ft) B8 logistics warehouse with ancillary office development comprising of a 3-storey structure providing main reception / staff facilities / Goods In and Transport Office.
- 3.7 The development will be served by a private car park containing 576 parking spaces, including up to 35 disabled spaces, 48 motorcycle and 156 cycle spaces. Provision will also be made for up to 39 electric vehicle spaces. The warehouse will also incorporate a service yard with 383 HGV / trailer parking spaces.

- 3.8 The maximum building height for Unit 1 will be approximately 41m to the ridge, with the high-bay area located at the eastern end of the building, closets to the existing Omega site. This high-bay area will house a fully automated storage and racking system, which is a bespoke occupier requirement and is integral to the design and operation of the unit. The remainder of the Unit will be approximately 29.4m in height.
- 3.9 For Unit 1 the proposed building materials are as follows:
- Warehouse Walls - Horizontally laid trapezoidal profiled cladding in the following colours:
    - White - RAL 9003;
    - Ice Blue – RAL 230 80 10;
    - Adventure / Alsaka Grey – RAL 7000; and
    - Basalt / Slate Grey – RAL 7012.
  - Office Walls – Horizontal composite microrib panel in the following colours
    - White - RAL 9003;
    - Adventure / Alsaka Grey – RAL 7000; and
    - Basalt / Slate Grey – RAL 7012.
  - Roof – Profiled steel cladding (Goosewing Grey RAL 080 70 05) with translucent non-fragile GRP roof lights, PVC lined pre-galvanised steel gutters and projecting eaves with PPC profiled steel fascia (Higher Level – Ice Blue RAL 230 80 10; Lower Level – Basalt / Slate Grey RAL 7012)
  - Doors – as follows:
    - Free standing steel & glass entrance canopy with painted galvanised steel columns White - RAL 9003;
    - Metal Personnel Doors painted to match Basalt / Slate Grey – RAL 7012;
    - Electrically operated steel sectional Loading Doors with vision panels painted to match Basalt / Slate Grey – RAL 7012; and
    - Electrically operated steel sectional Dock Levellers Doors with vision panels painted to match Basalt / Slate Grey – RAL 7012.
  - Windows (offices only) – PPC Window frames and curtain walling with grey tinted anti-sun glazing and grey lookalike panel spandrels where required. External Frame - Basalt / Slate Grey RAL 7012 and Internal Frame White RAL 9003.
- 3.10 Surface water drainage and attenuation is provided in the form of a series of attenuation ponds to be situated within the wider landscape areas to the north and west of the proposed development. Full details of the drainage strategy and proposals for this plot have been submitted as part of site wide Drainage Strategy document submitted as part of this application.
- 3.11 The proposed unit has been designed to satisfy BREEAM 'Very Good' standards. The proposed site layout plan (UNIT 1 DWG. 1 - 6385 - 181 Rev. A) also shows the proposed location of the cage storage and pallet storage areas to be situated with the service yard. Whilst these areas

have been identified on the layout plan, both areas are allocated as informal storage areas only and do not involve any permanent or temporary physical structures that require approval.

### **Outline Proposals**

- 3.12 The outline planning proposals, which will extend to the south of Unit 1 but also include an area of future expansion land for Unit 1 (to the east), are for up to 123,930 sq.m (1,333,9710 sq.ft) of employment development, spread across the Unit 1 expansion land and three separate warehouse buildings to the south (Units 2, 3 & 4).
- 3.13 In total the floorspace proposed within the redline totals 205,500 sq.m (circa 2,210,500 sq.ft). It is proposed that there will be a 30% B2/70% B8 split within this total floorspace.
- 3.14 The building dimensions and heights for Units 2 to 4 are not known given the outline nature of the proposals for this part of the site. However, for the purposes of the application and the Environmental Statement submitted with the application, it has been assumed that these buildings will be a maximum of 19m to ridge height (see Parameter Plan 2 Maximum Building Heights Plan Dwg Ref. OPP DWG 3.2), which reflects average building heights across the rest of the Omega site. Actual building heights for these units will be dictated by future occupiers, whose requirements will vary depending upon the use and nature of the operations involved.
- 3.15 It is important to note that for the purposes of the application it has been assumed that there are no specific development proposals for the Unit 1 expansion land at this stage, which is included within the outline part of the site. The future land use for this part of the application site, will depend upon TJM's future business requirements, however for now it is assumed that this will come forward in a form pursuant to the outline planning proposals.
- 3.16 The proposed floorspace figures for Unit 1 and the Outline Planning area have been defined above already. At this stage, a breakdown of units and corresponding floorspace proposed within the outline planning area has not been finalised and will be subject to change as the layout and design progresses. However, the Indicative Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) shows the potential for three units on the outline planning area of the Site, with a potential combined floorspace of up to up to 123,930 sq.m.
- 3.17 A key part of the proposals is the creation of a sustainable transport connection between St Helens and the Omega development. The Proposed Development therefore incorporates a central pedestrian/cycle route that will link the existing pedestrian bridge that crosses the M62 in the north west corner of the application site with the existing Omega development through a connection point on Catalina Approach.
- 3.18 The Proposed Development also includes the provision/creation two landscape and ecology mitigation buffer areas within the site. The larger of which is referred to as the "Green Wedge" and is situated in the north-west corner of the site immediately south of the M62 and west of Unit 1. This green infrastructure area, covering approximately 7 ha, offers

opportunities for extensive habitat creation, specifically for BAP species. The second area will line the western boundary of the Site adjacent to Units 2 and 4 for approximately 730m.

- 3.19 These areas will provide opportunities for replacement tree planting, pond creation and recreational open space. In addition to the 'Green Wedge', green spaces which provide landscape, ecological enhancements and attenuation are proposed along the boundaries of Zone 8 and along the main proposed access and circulation routes. across the Unit 1 expansion land and three separate warehouse buildings to the south (Units 2, 3 & 4). It is proposed that detailed matters of appearance, layout and scale and access for the expansion land and units will be reserved for subsequent approval through separate reserved matters.

#### **4. PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Pre-application consultation has been undertaken with both St Helens and Warrington Borough Councils at various stages during the preparation of the application.
- 4.2 This consultation has been primarily held with the respective Planning Departments, but consultation has also been held with Highways, Environmental Protection and a range of advisory agencies and bodies including the LLFA, MEAS and Natural England.
- 4.3 The feedback received has been incorporated into the proposals and accompanying documents submitted with this application. It is anticipated that engagement with the key stakeholders will continue throughout the planning application determination period.
- 4.4 Unfortunately, because one of the landowners (Homes England), with whom OSHL have signed a development agreement for the site, is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) it has not been possible to undertake any public pre-application consultation in advance of the submission of the application.
- 4.5 Like all other Government organisations, Homes England have been subject to 'purdah' during the 6-week election period, which has restricted their activities and meant that they were duty bound not to enter into any form of publicity that may have a bearing on local or national politics. Publicity is defined as "any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public." Unfortunately, public / community consultation for the proposed development would have fallen into this definition and has therefore been avoided.

## 5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1 This section reviews the national and local planning policy considered relevant to the application proposal. Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to determine any planning application by having regard to the policies set out within the prevailing Development Plan, unless material considerations would indicate otherwise. Any application for this site will therefore be assessed against the following planning policy framework:

#### National

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019
- Planning Practice Guidance

#### Local

- Saved Policies of the St Helens Unitary Development Plan (1998) and Proposals Map
  - Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted October 2012)
  - Bold Forest Park Action Area Plan (adopted July 2017)
- 5.2 In addition, there are series of adopted Supplementary Planning Documents that provide additional guidance to the interpretation and application of policies contained in the adopted plans. Of most relevance to the application proposals would be:
- Local Economy SPD (2013) Design & Crime SPD (2009)
  - Design Guidance SPD (2007)
  - Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD (2010)
  - Biodiversity SPD (2011)
  - Trees and Development SPD (2008)

- 5.3 St. Helens Council is also preparing a new Local Plan and whilst no weight can be afforded to this document given its limited status as a 'Submission Draft' document, brief reference is made to the most relevant policy proposals.

#### National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.
- 5.5 At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which it defines as development that meets *"the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.

- 5.6 The Framework identifies that to achieve sustainable development the planning system must adopt three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:
- a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
  - b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
  - c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 5.7 These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework, importantly it is stated they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged.
- 5.8 Paragraph 11 of the Framework sets out the how the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be applied. For decision-taking this means - approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date<sup>7</sup>, granting permission unless:
- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed<sup>6</sup>; or
  - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.
- 5.9 When it comes to determining applications, the Framework confirms that Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.10 The Framework also provides that Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:
- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);

- b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
  - c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 5.11 Within the Framework, Chapter 6 is focused on building a strong, competitive economy and establishes that decisions should *“help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt”* (Para. 80). Decisions should also *“recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors...”* including making provision for *“storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations”* (Para 82).
- 5.12 Chapter 9 of the Framework seeks to promote sustainable transport and confirms that significant development proposals should be focused on *“locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes”* (Para. 103). In assessing specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:
- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes are adopted, given the type of development and its location;
  - b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users; and
  - c) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be mitigated to an acceptable degree.
- 5.13 Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. Within this context, the Framework expects all applications for development to:
- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;
  - b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;
  - c) create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;



- d) allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and
  - e) be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.
- 5.14 The Framework seeks to secure high quality, well-designed development and states that “good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities” (Para 124).
- 5.15 The Framework respects the great importance that the Government places on the Green Belt and states that *“the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”* (Para. 133).
- 5.16 The Framework confirms that inappropriate development in the Green Belt is, by definition, harmful and should not be approved except in *“very special circumstances”* (Para. 143).
- 5.17 The Framework goes on to advise that 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.
- 5.18 Chapter 13 of the Framework indicates that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk by helping to contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 5.19 Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.
- 5.20 The Framework (Chapter 15) requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.
- 5.21 In terms of biodiversity, planning permission should only be refused if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated or compensated for. Opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- 5.22 Development should also be located on sites that are suitable for the proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from land instability and contamination. Account should also be taken of the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of

the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. Opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified, such as through traffic and travel management, and green infrastructure provision and enhancement.

- 5.23 The Framework provides (Para. 189) that when assessing the impact of proposals on affected heritage assets, the level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance (including setting) of a designated heritage asset, will require clear and convincing justification. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

#### **St Helens Unitary Development Plan (1998)**

- 5.24 The St. Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was originally adopted on 2 July 1998 and replaced all previous plans covered the Council area. The majority of policies in the UDP were saved indefinitely from 27 September 2007 by the Secretary of State, although several were replaced through the adoption of the St Helens Core Strategy (Oct 2012) and the Merseyside and Halton Joint Waste Local Plan (July 2013). A revised list of UDP saved policies was published in 2013 and these together with the Core Strategy Local Plan, the Merseyside and Halton Joint Waste Local Plan and Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan form the Development Plan for the Borough.

- 5.25 The relevant UDP policies are:

**Policy S1** (Green Belt) maintains a Green Belt around the built- up parts of the Borough to achieve Green Belt purposes.

**Policy GB1** (General Criteria for Development Control in the Green Belt) sets out a requirement for 'very special circumstances' to be met in order for new buildings to be permitted in the Green Belt.

**Policy GB2** (General Criteria for Development Control in the Green Belt), sets out the criteria against which development will be judged, should the provisions of UDP Policies S1 & GB1 be met.

**Policy ENV10** (The Mersey Forest) seeks to encourage woodland planting where it would contribute towards the creation of the Mersey Forest.

**Policy ENV11** (Tree Surveys) requires tree surveys to enable the effect of development on trees to be assessed.

**Policy ENV12** (Development Affecting Trees) indicates that development will not normally be permitted if it would result in a significant loss of trees and it does not incorporate adequate mitigation measures.

**Policy ENV13** (New Trees Planting on Development Sites) states that Council will normally require the planting of trees on development sites adjacent to public frontages, the Green Belt and any environmental improvement corridor.

**Policy ENV21** (Environmental Improvement of Transport Corridors) requires development to be of a high standard of design and suitably screened or landscaped along major transport corridors including the M62.

**Policy ENV30** (Drainage) indicated that development will not be permitted in flood risk areas or where it would give rise to substantial changes in surface water run-off or have a detrimental impact on the water environment.

#### **Local Plan Core Strategy (2012)**

- 5.26 The Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) is the principal document in a framework of planning policy documents, that make up the St Helens Development Plan.

Planning law requires that decisions on planning applications be made in the context of national planning policy, the Development Plan for the area and any other material considerations. The St Helens Development Plan is a collection of Development Plan Documents, of which the LPCS is the principal document. It contains strategic policies, provides an overall plan of where development should be located, and the needs of the Borough will be met. The LPCS needs to be read as a whole and alongside the saved UDP policies, the Joint Merseyside Waste Local Plan and Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan.

- 5.27 The relevant LPCS policies for the application are:

**Policy CSS1** (Overall Spatial Strategy) establishes that ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist for the release of land in the Green Belt. In particular, the removal of land from the Green Belt will be required to meet the Borough’s longer-term development needs.

**Policy CIN1** (Meeting St. Helens Infrastructure Needs) directs development towards locations already well-served by infrastructure and requires developers to provide the necessary infrastructure that their development will require, either through on or off site provision of infrastructure or financial contributions.

**Policy CSD1** (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) reiterates the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the Framework (NPPF) and confirms that the Council will work proactively applicants jointly to seek solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

**Policy CAS5** (Rural St Helens) requires development outside of existing settlements to comply with Green Belt policy and sets out the aims and objectives of the Bold Forest Park, which include the creation of new economic opportunities through sustainable development.

**Policy CP1** (Ensuring Quality Development in St. Helens) seeks to:

- protect the natural and historic environment and avoid unnecessary tree loss and safeguard landscape character;
- minimise and mitigate the effects of air, dust, light, noise and vibration caused by development;
- ensure development is located where it is compatible with the identified Flood Zone and include satisfactory drainage arrangements;
- protect the biodiversity and geodiversity and bring these resources into positive management; and
- ensure developments maintain or enhance the overall character and appearance of the local environment including inter alia the siting, scale, massing and design of new buildings.

**Policy CP2** (Creating an Accessible St. Helens) includes six policy strands, ensuring a choice in mode of travel, access to local facilities, safe and adequate access to and from the public highway, sustainable location for significant generators of journeys, a reduction in the adverse impacts of traffic on the community, support for local transport plan priorities.

**Policy CE1** (A Strong and Sustainable Economy) complements Policy CSS1 in identifying a need for 37ha of employment land and setting out the need to identify employment sites through an Allocations DPD. Directs economic development to those sites that are either within, in close proximity to, or have easy public transport access to the most deprived areas of the Borough.

**Policy CQL1** (Green Infrastructure) seeks to protect, manage, enhance and where appropriate expand the Green Infrastructure network and requires new development to contribute to the expansion and/or improvement of Green Infrastructure in accordance with local circumstances.

**Policy CQL2** (Trees and Woodlands) requires the conservation, enhancement and management of existing trees and woodland and the absolute protect of all ancient woodland with the Borough. Seeks to ensure that development does not damage trees subjected to Tree Preservation Orders or other tree or hedgerow of value unless there is a clearly demonstrated public benefit, which outweighs the value of the tree(s) and/or hedgerow(s). Replacement of trees will be required on at least a 2 for 1 ratio.

**Policy CQL3** (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) seeks to protect and manage species and habitats, as well as enhancing and creating habitats and linkages between them and requires that where harm to protected species or habitats is unavoidable, that developers ensure suitable mitigation measures are implemented to enhance or recreate the features, either on or off-site.

**Policy CQL4** (Heritage and Landscape) protects landscape character and the historic and built environment by all new development respects the significance and distinctive quality of the built and historic environment and landscape character and is of a high standard of design, reinforcing St. Helens' local distinctiveness.

**Bold Forest Park Action Area Plan (2017)**

- 5.28 Area Action Plans are Development Plan Documents that provide a planning framework for specific areas of opportunity, change or conservation and give a geographic or spatial dimension and focus for the implementation of policies for such areas.
- 5.29 The Bold Forest Park Action Area Plan (AAP) aims, in partnership with The Mersey Forest and Bold Parish Council, to develop a Forest Park and encourage inward investment via rural entrepreneurship in the visitor economy, whilst providing leisure opportunities for the community. The AAP provides a framework for the development of the Bold Forest Park area, setting out the planning policies against which development proposals will be considered.
- 5.30 The aim of Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan is to provide an outdoor leisure destination in an attractive, wooded setting with the following objectives:
1. Create new economic opportunities through sustainable development within Bold Forest Park;
  2. Create opportunities for tourism and leisure related business, supported by the natural economy;
  3. Create an easily understood and accessible network of linked open spaces within Bold Forest Park and with surrounding areas;
  4. Promote the provision and positive use of green space for the benefit of the local community and visitors; and
  5. Enhance the natural environment through targeted delivery of green infrastructure programmes that improve and expand the biodiversity and landscape quality of the Bold Forest Park area.
- 5.31 The relevant policies of the AAP for the application site are:

**Policy BFP1** (A Sustainable Forest Park) provides that the Council will work with its partners to seek an economic focus, balanced with environmental sustainability, in order to meet the needs of the community. It seeks to ensure that the Forest Park area contributes to meeting the Borough's needs for housing, employment, open space, sport and recreation and that new built development is appropriate in scale for its location and use. In addition, it seeks to enhance the landscape character of the area, including a 30% increase in tree cover, through additional and/or improved landscaping from new developments.

**Policy BFP ECON1** (Supporting Economic Growth) supports proposals that enhance the range and quality of economic opportunities or facilities, where it can demonstrate they help to

deliver the objectives of the Forest Park, and they comply with national and local planning policies, particularly with regard to the Green Belt.

**Policy BFP INF6** (Creating and Accessible Forest Park) seeks to ensure that journeys to and within the Forest Park can be made by a range of transport modes, partly through the protection and enhancement of key walking and cycling routes within the Forest Park.

**Policy BFP SN1** (Meeting the Development Needs of the Borough in a Manner Appropriate to the Forest Park) provides that development must make a positive contribution to the development of the Bold Forest, not result in the loss or prevent implementation of critical infrastructure elements and in the case of employment development include measures to enhance connectivity between the urban area and the Forest Park.

**Policy BFP SN2** (Planning Obligations) expects development to contribute to the infrastructure of the Forest Park, including the provision of, maintenance or improvements to, footpaths, bridleways and cycleways and mitigation and enhancement for landscape conservation and biodiversity.

**Policy BFP ENV1** (Enhancing Landscape Character) expects new development to contribute to increasing tree cover through on-site landscaping or where appropriate, by contributions towards off-site provision within the Forest Park area.

**Policy BFP ENV3** (Heritage) seeks to ensure that all new developments respect the significance and, where possible, enhance the distinctiveness of the built and historic environment of the Forest Park area in their location, design and layout.

#### **St Helen's Borough Local Plan (2020-2035)**

- 5.32 The Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan for the Plan Period 2020-2035. This new Local Plan is now at the 'Local Plan Submission Draft' stage and is due for adoption during the course of 2020. However, due to the limited status of this document at this time, the Plan can be afforded no weight in the determination of the application.
- 5.33 Notwithstanding this, it is worth noting that the emerging Local Plan identifies part of the application site (31.22 ha) suitable site for B2 / B8 development under Employment Allocation 1EA (Omega South Western Extension) that will primarily help Warrington Council to meet their employment land needs.
- 5.34 **Policy LPA04.1** (Strategic Employment Sites) confirms that the allocated land under 1EA shall constitute a Strategic Employment Site, any planning application for which must be supported by a comprehensive masterplan. It also establishes that where detailed development proposals are brought forward these must be supported by a comprehensive package of training schemes and / or other measures to enable local residents to access the employment opportunities of the development. Development will also be required to, subject to compliance with Policy LPA08, provide or make financial contributions towards the provision,

expansion and / or enhancement of transport infrastructure (including road, public transport, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure) and / or other infrastructure to serve the needs of the development.

5.35 Policy LPA04.1 also refers to Appendix 5 (Site Profiles – Allocated Housing and Employment Sites) of the Local Plan, which sets out the site-specific requirements for 1EA, which are as follows:

- Appropriate highway access via the existing Omega South development.
- Implementation of any measures required to mitigate impacts on the M62 (Junction 8) or other parts of the highway network.
- Measures to secure suitable access to the site by walking, cycling and public transport from residential areas in St Helens and Warrington.

### **Summary**

5.36 Based upon this review of national and local planning guidance the proposed development of the land at Omega Zone 8 is required to accord with the following key principles:

1. The development of the site should satisfy the three themes of sustainable development which comprises economic, social and environmental gains.
2. It will be necessary to show ‘very special circumstances’ to justify development in the Green Belt and these circumstances will not apply unless the potential harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
3. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth in both St Helens and Warrington Borough Council areas.
4. High quality development should be located alongside the M62 gateway corridor and it is a key aspect of sustainable development.
5. Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.
6. Walking and cycling accessibility and permeability should be prioritised through the new and enhanced connections, and opportunities to encourage sustainable transport modes maximised through the implementation of a travel plan.
7. Development should minimise impacts on environmental assets including protected species and habitats as well as important landscape features and, where possible, include proposals for biodiversity enhancement and contributions towards the objectives of the Bold Forest Park AAP.
8. Development should ensure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupiers of land and buildings.

## **6. PLANNING MATTERS**

- 6.1 The preceding chapters of this report have described the nature of the Hybrid planning proposals for Omega Zone 8 and reviewed the relevant national and Development Plan policies upon which a decision on the planning application should be made. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Act and Section 70(2) of the 1990 Act require that the applications be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2 It is important therefore to note that it is the UDP which sets out the relevant policies relating to the Green Belt, however the UDP is now substantially out-of-date, with the plan period ending in 2001. The Core Strategy has superseded significant parts of the UDP and whilst it has not replaced the key Green Belt policies in the UDP, it does establish that there are 'exceptional circumstances' for the release of Green Belt land for development.
- 6.3 Nevertheless, the saved policies of UDP remain part of the adopted Development Plan and these set out what development is appropriate in the Green Belt and that 'very special circumstances' must exist for 'inappropriate' development to be granted permission. If such 'very special circumstances' (VSC) exist, the proposal will comply with the Green Belt policies in the development plan. In this regard there is broad conformity between the provisions of the Development Plan and the Framework.
- 6.4 Based on this policy analysis there are four planning issues raised by the proposed development; namely:
1. Would the proposed development cause harm to the Green Belt and to what extent?
  2. Are there very special circumstances that apply in this case?
  3. Does the proposed development comply with the Development Plan and relevant national planning guidance?
  4. Does the proposed scheme represent sustainable development?



## 7. IMPACT ON THE GREEN BELT

7.1 The Framework (Para. 133) attaches great importance to Green Belts and confirms that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The Framework defines the essential characteristics of Green Belts as their “openness” and their “permanence”. The Framework (Para. 134) also identifies five purposes that Green Belts serve:

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

7.2 The Framework (Para. 145) and UDP (Policy GB1) define those developments and uses that are considered ‘appropriate’ within the Green Belt. Beyond these exceptions the Framework instructs local planning authorities to regard the construction new buildings in the Green Belt as ‘inappropriate’. It is accepted that the proposed development at Omega Zone 8, by virtue of its proposed use (B2/B8), size and scale, can only be considered as ‘inappropriate’ development within the Green Belt.

7.3 As a consequence, the Framework (Para. 143) and UDP [Policies GB1 & GB2] establish that inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful, should not be approved “except in very special circumstances”. In this context, the Framework (Para. 144) states that:

*“...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.”*

7.4 To consider the VSC it is therefore firstly necessary to consider the extent of the harm to the Green Belt that results from the development through an appraisal of the characteristics of the proposed development against the impact on ‘permanence’, ‘openness’ and the five Green Belt purposes as set out below.

### **Harm to Permanence**

7.5 The question of permanence relates to whether there would be harm to the purposes of the Green Belt and to whether there might be consequential effects on the remaining Green Belt in the area, should the proposals be granted, and the application site lost to the Green Belt.

7.6 Firstly, because the site current lies wholly within the Green Belt in the adopted Development Plan, it is important to consider whether there is any prospect of the Green Belt boundary being amended.

- 7.7 Within St Helens there has been a long-standing need to remove land from the Green Belt to meet the Borough's longer-term development needs as indicated in the Core Strategy. This need was also recognised in the subsequently abandoned Allocations Local Plan, the evidence base for which identified an acute shortage of available, quality industrial accommodation across all size parameters in the North West.
- 7.8 As part of the preparation of the Allocations Local Plan, the Council commissioned the preparation of a new Employment Land Needs Study (BE Group 2015). The report concluded there were very limited opportunities for larger industrial operations within the Borough, particularly large-scale logistics businesses and projected an employment land requirement of 177-214ha between 2012 and 2037. Of this requirement, between 100-130ha was identified as being for B8 distribution uses.
- 7.9 The studies undertaken by the Council demonstrated that this scale of development could not be accommodated without revising the Green Belt boundaries. This was a major factor in the Council abandoning the Allocations DPD and commencing the preparation of the new Local Plan so that significant releases from the Green Belt to meet the identified need could be brought forward.
- 7.10 In preparing the new Local Plan, the Council commissioned an Employment Land Needs Study (ELNS) Addendum Report (2017) which indicates that the Borough, due to its location on the M6 and M62 motorways, is ideally positioned to provide a critical role in the North West large-scale logistics and distribution sector. The ELNS also suggested that, despite its historical strength as a manufacturing centre, based around large-scale B2 (general industrial) operations, there would be a strong shift to B8 (storage and distribution) uses during the Plan period.
- 7.11 A further ELNS Addendum Report (Jan 2019) has been prepared to further support the preparation of the new Local Plan. This Addendum concluded there are very limited opportunities for larger industrial operations within the Borough, particularly large-scale logistics businesses and projected that St Helens would have an employment land requirement of 190-239ha between 2012 and 2037. Of this requirement, between 55-70 ha was identified as being required for B2 General Industrial uses and between 110-155ha for B8 storage and distribution uses.
- 7.12 The Local Plan takes this estimate and uses it to calculate an Objectively Assessed Need for new employment land (2012-2035) figure of 227.4 ha from which there is a residual land requirement of 215.4 ha, which represents the minimum supply from new sites that must be provided for in the Plan.
- 7.13 The Local Plan establishes that to strengthen the local economy, the Council needs to build on those sectors where the Borough enjoys a competitive advantage. As identified above one such sector is logistics and distribution, where the Borough's location in relation to the M6 and M62 motorways makes it particularly attractive for development. The Local Plan

identifies a total supply of allocated employment sites of 234.08 ha (excluding site 1EA), which exceeds the residual requirement, but is justified on the basis of a need to reverse the historic suppression of land take-up and the need to provide flexibility to respond to any requirement to meet B8 strategic land needs resulting from the Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment (SHELMA).

- 7.14 However the delay in the preparation of an up-to-date Local Plan, means that many of the Green Belt release sites relied upon in the new Local Plan for employment land have come forward and now either benefit from planning permission or have been developed. This take-up demonstrates that it is not a lack of demand that restricted employment land take-up in St Helens over recent years, but a lack of suitable available sites.
- 7.15 In these circumstances the Council will have to balance the need for employment development against the Green Belt purposes and identify additional land which have least impact for release if brought forward.
- 7.16 In this context, it is considered that the application site offers an ideal opportunity for further Green Belt release to meet this need without harming 'permanence' because:
- a) the site has a strong contextual relationship with the existing Omega site, which defines its eastern boundary and is well contained to the north by the M62 corridor;
  - b) due to the remote nature of the site on eastern periphery of the Green Belt, at its boundary with Warrington, the development will have limited impact on the strategic Green Belt purposes;
  - c) There is a very strong prospect of the site being allocated for development in the new Local Plan; and
  - d) The Application Site will result in a new defensible long-term boundary for the Green Belt and not result in the release of additional land for development.
- 7.17 In these circumstances, the proposals will provide a firm, clear and a defensible long-term Green Belt boundary in this location where such a boundary does not exist at present. It will have a limited impact in relation to 'permanence'.

### **Harm to Openness**

- 7.18 By definition the development of the site will harm the openness of the Green Belt, on the basis that openness can only be defined as an absence of development. It is therefore a question of the degree of harm and whether any such harm can be adequately mitigated for. A full consideration of the impact of the development is contained within the Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment contained within the Environmental Statement (Doc. XX), however, to address the issue of Openness a brief assessment is provide below.
- 7.19 The site is located on the edge of the Green Belt, immediately adjacent to the Borough boundary with Warrington, which in turn is defined by the western edge of the existing Omega

site. The relationship with the developed areas of Warrington already reduce the openness of the Green Belt in this location and development of the site will be viewed in this context.

- 7.20 In addition due to the location of the site, remote from the main St Helens urban area, and its relatively flat topography, views of the site are mainly available from the M62 and some raised locations in the surrounding area. In the majority of cases, the existence and prominence of the existing Omega development will offer a perspective and backdrop against which the proposals will be viewed. The proposed development will therefore be seen as part of the urban area of Warrington and will not result in a material reduction in the openness of the wider Green Belt.
- 7.21 It is acknowledged that the development proposals will introduce new buildings on the site and thereby reduce openness. However, the proposed layout seeks to minimise the impact of the development by locating development close to the boundary with the existing Omega development, meaning it will appear as a continuation of the Omega site and will match the form of development already established in this location. The establishment of new structural landscaping where views into the site may be most prevalent and the combination of careful consideration of the site layout, choice of materials and colours, control of light and noise emissions will also limit the impact of the development.
- 7.22 In addition, the design of the proposed structural landscaping aims to reduce the visual effects by setting the development within a strong landscape framework appropriate to the location. The landscape proposals are primarily concentrated on the perimeter of the development to provide the long-term defensible boundaries that will protect the Green Belt from further encroachment, but also provide an internal landscape framework around which the development will be based.
- 7.23 Through the implementation of the principles set out above, the development's impact upon the openness of the Green Belt will be substantially reduced. In time, the landscaping will mature and make a significant contribution to the setting and filtering of views towards the proposed buildings and more generally to the Green Belt and the Gold Forest Park. In these circumstances, whilst the proposals will have an impact upon the 'openness' of the Green Belt, this impact will be substantially mitigated and reduce over time.

#### **Harm to the Green Belt Purposes**

- 7.24 As detailed above the Framework outlines the five purposes of the Green Belt and as part of the assessment of harm to the Green Belt, these have been considered below to determine the contribution that the site makes to the Green Belt.

#### **Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

- 7.25 It is not considered that the development of the application site will contribute to the continued unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area.

- 7.26 It is accepted that the proposals do, of course, involve development on land outwith existing urban settlement boundaries. However, the Site is largely contained by existing development of Omega to the east and M62 to the north and will provide new robust landscape features to its western boundary, ensuring that the development will not result in unrestricted sprawl. The proposals have also been subject to a masterplan process to ensure that the most appropriate development is being achieved in terms of scale, design and layout.
- 7.27 In addition, it is not envisaged at this stage, that the proposed development is the first phase of further development to be proposed along the M62. The proposals are predicated on a 'transfer' of trip generation figures from the current outline planning permissions affecting Omega South, which create sufficient capacity for the development proposals in their current form, but which would not support further expansions in the future. This is reinforced by the masterplan layout which has been designed to deliver a self-contained development, with substantial landscaping along the western boundary that will define the extent the development and will represent a firm, clear and a defensible long-term Green Belt boundary in this location.

#### **Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another**

- 7.28 It is not considered that the development of the application site will have a significant impact on the merging of neighbouring towns.
- 7.29 As referred to previously, the Site is remote from the main St Helens settlement boundary, being located on the eastern edge of the existing Green Belt. The site is also physically separated from the settlement boundary by the physical barrier of the M62 motorway corridor and will be defined by new structural planting along its western boundary. As a consequence, the proposals do not pose a threat in terms of coalescence once developed.
- 7.30 Furthermore, the design and orientation of the development together with the proposed landscaping will create a visual and physical connection between the Site and the existing Omega development which will mean that the proposals are viewed as a natural extension to the Omega site.

#### **Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

- 7.31 The proposals involve development within the countryside and therefore there is an obvious impact from development in this location. However, as mitigation to this impact, it is noted that:
1. The Site can be characterised as relatively flat and featureless with fields currently being used for agriculture purposes;
  2. In terms of ecology and biodiversity, the value of the site is limited due to the agricultural nature of the site;
  3. The proposals, whilst involving development in the countryside, will open an area of previously private land to public access through new and improved pedestrian and

cycle links between St Helens, the Site and into Warrington, significantly enhancing public access and enjoyment of the area. As such, the development proposals will have a community benefit; and,

4. Again, for the reasons outlined above, the prospect of further development into the adjacent areas of countryside is considered unlikely.

- 7.32 It is unavoidable, given the Green Belt status of the site, that the development will encroach on the countryside. However, for the reasons outlined above this impact is outweighed by the positive benefits that the development will deliver in terms of economic regeneration and investment, ecological protection and enhancement and enhanced sustainable travel opportunities that will offer the opportunity for greater enjoyment of the countryside as a whole.

**Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

- 7.33 Given the remote location of the site from any settlement the requirement to preserve the historic character of towns is not relevant in this instance.

**Assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.**

- 7.34 It is considered that the development of a logistics development at Omega Zone 8 will have a positive impact on urban regeneration initiatives in the area.
- 7.35 The Green Belt is an urban regeneration mechanism designed to direct development and investment towards existing urban areas. In this instance, an Alternative Site Assessment Study has been undertaken to accompany the planning application. The purpose of this document is to establish whether the development could be located elsewhere.
- 7.36 The results of the Study have demonstrated that there are no alternative non-Green Belt sites within St Helens or Warrington (included due to the fact that part of the site could contribute towards WBC's employment land supply) that could accommodate a logistics development of this scale and the bespoke design required of Unit 1. As such, there is no option but to provide the facility on a Green Belt site. In this instance, the Green Belt, if regarded as sacrosanct, would function as a mechanism through which to deflect investment and promote regeneration elsewhere, but instead to prevent regeneration and investment altogether.
- 7.37 Furthermore, the proposals represent a significant investment in the local area and will contribute towards existing economic initiatives. The proposed development is expected to generate a wide range of direct and indirect economic impacts, both during the construction and in the longer term. These impacts will be spread over a wide area and should benefit the Borough as a whole. Table 7.1 below provides a summary of the likely economic impacts that the development will have:

Table 7.1 – Summary of Economic Impacts

Direct Impacts	Indirect Impacts	Wider Economy and Catalytic Effects
Capital Expenditure	"Spin-off" from construction supplier and wages expenditure	Meeting the need for new residential accommodation
Construction Jobs	Additional Council Tax receipts	Supporting mixed communities by providing affordable housing
Gross Value Added to local economy from construction jobs	New community services and infrastructure	Support existing and new communities through the provision of new services and infrastructure
Jobs creation within mixed-use zone	S106 Planning Contributions	Provision of jobs in those sectors that would benefit most from additional opportunities
Additional retail expenditure to town and district centres	Greater access to affordable housing in Warrington	Promotion of Warrington as a more sustainable and attractive place to live

7.38 This range of economic effects aligns well with national, regional and local policy objectives, in particular the creation of enhanced economic prosperity through creating employment opportunities for local people and providing suitable accommodation for business growth and contributing towards a more attractive and accessible public realm.

7.39 The Population & Health chapter of the ES (OPP Doc. 11.15) provides a detailed assessment of the likely positive impacts of the development in this regard.

7.40 More generally the wider economic benefits are also considered to include:

- Maintaining and enhancing the profile and image of Omega as a major focus for the distribution sector, and send a strong signal of investment confidence in the both St Helens and Warrington Boroughs;
- It would build on the competitive advantages of the area for the distribution sector, including investment in the SuperPort, helping build a critical mass of such activities and encouraging further distribution investment so that the City Region remains competitive against other areas with similar facilities
- It would contribute towards a diversified local economy in an area where the traditional sectors of mining and manufacturing have declined or stagnated and where revitalised economic growth is a key driver for the area; and

- It would help to grow an efficient, sustainable logistics sector in the Liverpool City Region that is necessary to maintain and support the growth of other sectors such as manufacturing and higher technology activities and building upon on the investment in the SuperPort.

- 7.41 Significantly, as is reflected by the hybrid nature of this application that there is an urgent demand for a bespoke, purpose built B8 warehouse to serve a defined occupier demand for TJ Morris/Home Bargains, which cannot be accommodated elsewhere within the Borough. There is also a need for employment development now to stimulate economic activity in an efficient and sustainable manner and in response to the market demand and the Council's identified need for between 55-70ha B2 industrial and 110-155ha for B8 logistics land.
- 7.42 The location of the development within the M62 corridor, will provide an appropriate form of development in a sustainable location that will provide much needed investment and job creation. As such, the proposals will assist the strategic objectives of the City Region, LEP and Council to an extent that other Green Belt alternatives will not.

### **Conclusions**

- 7.43 In accordance with the Framework, the proposals will cause a defined harm to the Green Belt by reason of 'inappropriateness' and this must be given substantial weight. However, the 'other harm' to the Green Belt and the environment is limited.
- 7.44 It is considered that the harm to 'permanence' will be limited because of the need to release land for development of this type and scale and because the development will be seen as a natural extension to the existing Omega site.
- 7.45 It is accepted that development of this scale within the Green Belt will cause harm to 'openness' but through measured masterplanning and mitigation, the harm will not be substantial. Furthermore, the harm to Green Belt purposes will not be substantial because the proposals:
- a) Will not result in the unrestricted sprawl of a large built up area;
  - b) Will not result in the merging of neighbouring towns;
  - c) Whilst involving development in the countryside, it will not involve development at a site that has any current substantial agricultural, ecological or community value, and will deliver benefits in terms of community access to the countryside;
  - d) Will have no impact in terms of the setting or character of historic towns; and,
  - e) Will assist in urban regeneration, bringing a substantial investment to the local area and delivering much needed local employment opportunities as well as helping achieve the strategic objective for the City Region.



- 7.46 Overall, therefore, whilst the proposals will result in a degree of harm to the Green Belt, this harm is substantially mitigated as required by the Framework, UDP Policy GB2. The next section considers the 'Very Special Circumstances' that outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

## **8. VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

- 8.1 As set out previously, the Framework and UDP (Policies GB1 & GB2) require 'very special circumstances' (VSC) to be present in order to justify inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Where it is possible to demonstrate VSC and compliance with the requirements of UDP Policy GB2, the presumption in favour of granting planning permission that complies with the development plan set out in s.38(6) of the 2004 Act will apply.
- 8.2 The High Court (in (2002) *Doncaster MBC v Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions* (EWHC 808) and (2005) *West v First Secretary of State* (EWHC 729)) has held that a VSC must be 'exceptional' and any application for permission must present evidence to demonstrate them. The analysis of the VSC case for Omega Zone 8 will therefore be based upon the following arguments:
- a) The over-riding need for warehouse development at this location, to serve an identified 'live' occupier-led need and the employment land requirements of St Helens and Warrington (the 'need case');
  - b) How this need can only successfully be satisfied at Omega Zone 8 (the 'alternative site case');
  - c) No other options in terms of logistics developments of this scale can satisfy the identified need (the 'alternative options case'); and,
  - d) The significant benefits that the proposals will deliver to the economy and other local social and environmental benefits.
- 8.3 An Alternative Sites Assessment Study accompanies the planning application.

### **The Need Case**

#### **Occupier-led Need**

- 8.4 The proposed development is submitted in the form of a hybrid planning application which seeks full planning permission for the erection of a 77,084 sq.m B8 logistics warehouse and outline planning permission for up to a further 123,930 sq.m of B2 manufacturing and B8 logistics development. The B8 warehouse subject to the full planning element of this application, referred to as Omega Zone 8 Unit 1, is proposed in response to a specific 'live' occupier-led requirement from locally based company TJ Morris/Home Bargains who need a new distribution centre to service their current and future business requirements. This new distribution facility will comprise a bespoke, purpose-built unit that has been designed to meet the specific operational requirements of the occupier and to take advantage of the specific locational advantages provided by the application site.
- 8.5 The proposals are for a 81,570 sq.m cross-docked warehouse which can accommodate a high-bay racking system that means that part of the building must be in excess of 41m to ridge height at its highest point and on average 29m to ridge height across the rest of the unit. The occupier also has a requirement for expansion land to accommodate either further growth to the unit itself or additional complementary logistics floorspace, linked to the use, as part of

the business in the future. The Alternative Site Assessment that accompanies this application demonstrates that there are no alternative existing premises, brownfield or greenfield sites that would be capable of accommodating these specific requirements.

- 8.6 Consequently, there is therefore, a clear and defined occupier-led need for the detailed element of the proposed development in this location, which will deliver significant benefits for the Borough in terms of economic regeneration & investment and employment opportunities.
- 8.7 The outline proposals, which cover the remainder hybrid application site, seek permission for up to 123,930 sq.m of B2 manufacturing and B8 logistics development. The scale and nature of these proposals are, to a large degree, a product of the need to accommodate the full planning proposals for Unit 1.
- 8.8 To meet the urgent 'live' occupier-led requirement and to also deliver on the identified employment land supply requirement, the only option available to the applicant was to orientate Unit 1 parallel with the M62 pushing the development beyond the proposed allocation envelope and further into the Green Belt.
- 8.9 Having established, through the masterplanning process, that the Unit 1 proposals could only be accommodated through the release of land in the Green Belt, the masterplan had to consider the most sustainable form of development for the remainder of the allocation. The most appropriate solution was to extend the site further to east. In doing so the masterplan has provides opportunities to create a more defensible boundary between the site and the Green Belt, which effectively runs from the north-west corner of the Site adjacent to the M62 to the southern boundary of the site and which ties in. with the existing woodland (Booth's Wood) adjacent to the site.
- 8.10 It is considered therefore that there is a need for the outline element of the proposals in terms offering a sustainable scale and form of development, through sound masterplanning principles.

#### **General Logistics Need**

- 8.11 In more general need terms, according to the JLL *UK Big Box Industrial and Logistics Market Report* (Jan 2019) the industrial sector continues to set the pace among commercial property asset classes, and the 'big box' logistics market is no exception. With occupiers taking up 22.6m sq ft of Grade A big boxes (100,000 sq ft and over) in 2018, well above the historic five-year average.
- 8.12 Despite prevailing economic uncertainty and softening consumer spending, the big box sector is evolving rapidly, driven by structural change and the rise of online retail and the associated consumer expectations for flexibility. As well as increasing the number of deliveries, consumers also increasingly expect flexible delivery options, 'click and collect' services, and

specific delivery times. This generates more demand for the logistics industry, and it will continue to grow as consumer behaviour increasingly moves online.

- 8.13 The logistics market has responded by funding, building and occupying the right buildings to underpin robust e-commerce operations. The JLL Report confirms that this is reflected in the fact that Retailers were the most active source of demand in 2018 accounting for 40% of take-up. In addition, and importantly in relation to the bespoke nature of the detailed element of the application proposals almost three-quarters (74%) of all new floorspace taken up in 2018 was built to suit, totalling 12.6 million sq.ft.
- 8.14 As a consequence, logistics has a vital role to play in bringing people and products together. It is critical not only to the distribution of consumer goods etc. but also is essential for manufacturing, particularly 'just-in-time' manufacturers, such as Plastic Omnium already located on Omega. Logistics therefore underpins our national wealth and well-being. But without the necessary high quality and efficient infrastructure (i.e. warehouses and transport network) and the availability and quality of the human resource needed, logistics cannot function competitively.
- 8.15 At a City Region level, the proposed development meets and will assist in the delivery of, the regional economic development objectives of the Government's Northern Powerhouse agenda, also reflecting the Liverpool City Region LEP's support for logistics in association with Liverpool SuperPort.
- 8.16 In order to secure the benefits from investment initiatives such as the Atlantic Gateway and the SuperPort, the Liverpool City Region acknowledges it will need to pursue freight and logistics growth. The provision of large warehousing and logistics units at Omega Zone 8, could act as part of the supply chain for the delivery of the Atlantic Gateway, and therefore has more than local importance in helping to drive growth.
- 8.17 The North West of England has long been sought after by large space industrial and distribution occupiers primarily due to its extensive motorway network and large urban population. The bulk of large space occupiers have tended to locate their operations along the M6 and M62 North Manchester corridors. The success of Omega to attract major occupiers such as ASDA Walmart, Travis Perkins, Amazon and the Hut Group as well significant amounts of speculative development is strong evidence of this fact. The proposals seek to build on this success in a sustainable manner whilst responding to specific occupier-led demand and the continued overall demand for logistics development.
- 8.18 Large-floorplate occupier demand is now also focused on the Liverpool City Region, due in part to the SuperPort but also because of the success of major manufacturing companies, such as, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) and Halewood and the demand for large space by suppliers to be relatively close to these manufacturing facilities. In fact, Omega currently house one such supplier, Plastic Omnium, who supply JLR, thus demonstrating the versatility of this site to

serve both the City Region specific requirements but, due to its wider transport network links, the national requirements of operators and suppliers as well.

### **Policy Need**

#### **St Helens**

- 8.19 The Core Strategy and the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan clearly demonstrate a need for logistics development and the M62 is identified as a preferred location for such development. However, whilst the applicant has worked with the Council to secure an allocation through the Local Plan review process it has become necessary for the applicant to submit this application now, as there is an urgent need to provide bespoke employment floorspace to respond to the 'live' occupier-led logistics requirement, whilst at the same time satisfying the need identified by the Council in its evidence base.
- 8.20 The Core Strategy provides the vision, aims and objectives for the future economic development of the Borough with a focus on land needs and supply and under Policy CE1 identifies a need for 37 hectares of employment land to be developed between 2012 and 2027.
- 8.21 Of this requirement 32 hectares was identified as being for B8 Warehouse and Distribution floorspace. The reasoned justification for the policy stated that in 2012 there was enough land, and indeed a surplus, to meet those needs.
- 8.22 Notwithstanding this, at the time of publication, the Core Strategy indicated a need to remove land from the Green Belt to meet the Borough's longer-term development needs, although it did not identify the scale or location of any such removal. Since then the economy has evolved, most notably with the rise of online retailing, and the demand for logistics development in the Region has risen due to the SuperPort, which have necessitated the scale of the employment land requirement to be revisited.
- 8.23 The Council therefore began the preparation of the Allocations and Sustainable Development Plan and whilst this was subsequently abandoned, the Employment Land Needs Study [ELNS] carried out by the BE Group on behalf of the Council (2015) has, in subsequent iterations formed the basis for the preparation of the new 'Submission Draft' Local Plan.
- 8.24 In preparing the new Local Plan, the Council commissioned an Employment Land Needs Study (ELNS) Addendum Report (2017) which indicated that the Borough, due to its location on the M6 and M62 motorways, was ideally positioned to provide a critical role in the North West large-scale logistics and distribution sector. The ELNS also suggested that, despite its historical strength as a manufacturing centre, based around large-scale B2 (general industrial) operations, there would be a strong shift to B8 (storage and distribution) uses during the Plan period.

- 8.25 A further ELNS Addendum Report (Jan 2019) has been prepared to further support the preparation of the new Local Plan. This Addendum backed up the findings of the 2017 study and concluded there are very limited opportunities for larger industrial operations within the Borough, particularly large-scale logistics businesses and projected that St Helens would have an employment land requirement of 190-239 ha between 2012 and 2037. Of this requirement, between 55-70 ha was identified as being required for B2 General Industrial uses and between 110-155ha for B8 storage and distribution uses.
- 8.26 The Local Plan takes this estimate and uses it to calculate an Objectively Assessed Need for new employment land (2012-2035) figure of 227.4 ha from which there is a residual land requirement of 215.4 ha, which represents the minimum supply from new sites that must be provided for in the Plan.
- 8.27 In terms of Market Information, the ELNS identified that the logistics market continues to be the most in-demand commercial market in the broader region, focussed on the motorway corridors. The ELNS also suggests that there is substantial further demand for large logistics space in the region in coming years with no significant signs of saturation and in fact that the market is showing signs of being constrained, by lack of space. High quality, large, flat sites with excellent access to the motorway network and with planning support are in very short supply. Specifically, the ELNS states that there is demand *“on the doorstep of St Helens, as the current stage of Omega Warrington is built out, there is a need for further large-scale logistics sites to be provided near the intersection of the M6 and M62”*.
- 8.28 The ELNS also highlights that employment land take-up in St Helens has been suppressed for a significant number of years by an inadequate supply of market attractive sites. However, the Council’s decision to review the Green Belt boundaries as part of the new Local Plan process, has led to a series of representations and planning applications targeting the warehouse sector, with activity largely focused around the Haydock area on the opposite side of the Borough from the application site.
- 8.29 Overall, the ELNS identifies that market characteristics in 2017 were consistent to those being experienced at the time of preparing the ELNS in 2015. The anticipated dominance of the warehousing market was evident in 2017 and the latest information supports that this is the most likely sector to drive growth in St Helens and the broader North West region in years to come.
- 8.30 The ELNS considers that employment land take-up in St. Helens has been suppressed for a significant number of years by an inadequate supply of market attractive sites, within the Borough. This is evidenced in the ELNS, which shows that Warrington (primarily through Omega), Halton, Liverpool, Knowsley and Wirral have all experienced significantly more take-up of employment floorspace than St. Helens between 2005 and 2015. In that similar period the only large scale B8 site taken-up in St. Helens was the 15.66 ha Somerfield/Co-op distribution facility (56,290 sq.m/605,920 sq.ft) in 2002/03 and since then whilst there has

clearly been market demand, as illustrated in the high take-up rates in other areas , there has not been an adequate supply of market attractive sites in St Helens.

- 8.31 In addition to the ELNS, the Council prepared the Economic Evidence Base Paper 2015 (EEBP), which sought to update the economic development situation since the adoption of the Core Strategy, refresh of the evidence supporting the Core Strategy and provide recommendations for change, where needed, through the Allocations Local Plan.
- 8.32 The EEBP carried out an assessment of the supply of large-scale Employment Land within the Borough. The Assessment concluded that none of the sites previously considered to be potentially suitable in 2011 met the criteria for large scale employment development meaning that there was zero provision of suitable land for logistics / distribution uses within the Borough's identified employment land supply.
- 8.33 The EEBP recommended that there was a need to identify new employment sites that could meet the site specific criteria for large scale sites and that the Allocations Local Plan should seek to ensure a sufficiency of supply and choice of accessible large scale sites to support the economy in the long term.
- 8.34 In addition, the EEBP concluded that to help ensure there would be sufficient capacity to meet projected demand for large sites for B2/B8 logistics and to address the opportunity presented by the regional shortfall of large scale sites, any future search for suitable sites in St. Helens will have to consider the Green Belt.
- 8.35 The Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment (SHELMA) (March 2018) considered the objective assessed needs for large scale B8 warehousing and distribution (over 100,000 sq.ft) for the Liverpool City Region. In this respect, it drew upon "B8 Land-use Forecasts for the Liverpool City Region", prepared by GL Hearn in May 2016. The Report forecast the land use requirements to 2043 of the large-scale B8 sector (greater than 9,000 sq.m) based on an estimation of replacement stock required in the region, as well as stock driven by growth in the cargo throughput in the region. The Report forecast that there would be substantial growth in the large-scale warehouse market in the Liverpool City Region in coming years and it is considered that St Helens, as an area with excellent access to the motorway network and key North West markets is well positioned to take a significant share of this market.
- 8.36 The Liverpool City Region LEP: Growth Scenario (Oxford Economics Nov 2016) provided a jobs growth scenario forecast for the LEP which took account of transformational developments that are intended for the region in coming years (such as Atlantic Gateway and the SuperPort). The Study found that St Helens is projected to have the second highest additional employment (behind only Liverpool City) in the growth scenario, with an additional 18,700 jobs projected for the Borough. The largest growth sectors by employment numbers in St Helens in the growth scenario are anticipated to be warehousing and support services (+3,600 jobs) and land transport (+3,200 jobs) reflecting the key drivers of employment in the market.

- 8.37 The Study also concluded that Manufacturing in St Helens is anticipated to grow by 2,000 jobs, driven by the increasing availability of strategic industrial land in St Helens in coming years that would encourage manufacturers to locate to the Borough, with further logistics infrastructure and warehousing capacity allowing for improved conditions to deliver goods to markets.
- 8.38 The 2019 ELNS identifies the critical information from these studies and reports that has implications for employment need in St Helens, which are:
- *“The warehousing and logistics market is performing strongly with further demand for growth in the regional market, including within St Helens.*
  - *The large-scale warehousing market has substantial land requirements across the Liverpool City Region, equating to some 512 ha by 2043. St Helens could play a significant role in the provision of such land, particularly given its proximity to the motorway network and the employment development around the former Parkside colliery (including a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI)).*
  - *The latest take-up information results in a reduced average of take-up over the last 20 years and therefore slightly reduced forecast of the land requirement to 2037.*
  - *Planning applications and permissions suggest that the market is on the cusp of a growth period, driven by warehousing development. Of particular note is that the former Parkside colliery scheme is likely to come forward earlier than anticipated in the ELNS.”*
- 8.39 Taking the above into consideration, the ELNS identified a Total Employment Land Needs for the Borough of 190-239ha for the period 2012-2037, of which, the upper limit was considered more likely to be a better representation of the actual growth level if the market is able to develop without significant land supply constraints. Broken down this equates to a need of between 55-70 ha (B2) and 110-155ha (B8).
- 8.40 In this context the emerging Local Plan identifies five Strategic Employment sites which include the application site (1EA: Omega South Western Extension, Land north of Finches Plantation, Bold) and:
- 2EA: Land at Florida Farm North, Slag Lane, Haydock;
  - 6EA: Land west of Millfield Lane, south of Liverpool Road and north of Clipsley Brook, Haydock;
  - 7EA: Parkside East, Newton-le-Willows; and
  - 8EA: Parkside West, Newton-le-Willows.
- 8.41 Of these, planning permission (2016/0608/HYBR) has already been granted and development complete at Florida Farm North, for a 135,000 sq.m scheme consisting of two buildings at 85,000 sq.m and 50,000 sq.m, of which the larger unit has already been occupied. Whilst an outline application is currently pending for the employment part of Parkside West site for up to 92,900 m<sup>2</sup> of employment floorspace (2018/0048/OUP). The fact that planning applications (and planning permission in the case of Florida Farm) for both of these sites have come forward prior to the adoption of the new Local Plan demonstrates the latent demand in



St Helens has been released, as a result of the ELNS and the Green Belt Review, through identification of Green Belt land for employment development,.

- 8.42 The application site is ideally suited to further address this latent demand in the short-term, given the relatively unconstrained nature of the site and it's highly accessible location at Junction 8 of the M62. The ability of Omega Zone 8 to address this shortfall, in a location other than Haydock, where the majority of the logistics development has been focused is also a major benefit to a market where specific occupier requirements, such as location, will vary.

### **Warrington**

- 8.43 Due to the site's proximity to the Warrington Borough Council authority boundary and the relationship with the existing Omega site, there is also an opportunity for the site to contribute towards Warrington's employment land supply as well (as identified in the emerging St Helens Local Plan). It is therefore also important to consider the employment land needs of Warrington Borough.
- 8.44 BE Group published the most recent update to the Warrington Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) in Feb 2019, that will inform the preparation of the merging Warrington Local Plan. This was an update of the 2016 EDNA, which identified a realistic employment land supply comprising local supply of 34.85 ha and a strategic supply of 69.68 ha at Omega and a need for a further of 276.37 ha of employment land, to 2037.
- 8.45 The 2019 EDNA provides a review of the current property market relative to logistics, which confirms that rents for prime industrial and logistics locations of more than 10,000 sqm in Warrington had increased by almost a third in five years, from £51/sqm in 2013 to £67/sqm today. The current high was achieved in a pre-let of 32,000 sqm at Mountpark, Omega to Royal Mail in July 2018. This is set against a North West average of £64/sqm, rising to a regional maximum of £70/sqm in Manchester. It is estimated that headline rents of £73/sqm will be achieved at prime industrial and logistics sites in Warrington by the end of 2018. The high rents achieved in Warrington reflect the Borough's position at the centre of the region's communications network and ongoing declines in supply, with the availability of big sheds in the North West having declined by two thirds since 2010.
- 8.46 The EDNA confirms that the North West remains the logistics market leader in the UK, with the highest amount of supply overall, but, just 1.5 years' worth of supply for Grade A units, the lowest of any region outside of the M25. In addition it confirms that demand from the logistics sector is felt to be sustainable, if a pipeline of modern serviced space and units can be maintained, to compete with other locations in the North West and that developers remain interested in the provision of land for still further schemes at the Omega site.
- 8.47 The 2019 EDNA identifies a realistic supply, as of June/July 2018 of 83.91 ha in 10 sites, comprising:
- Local supply: 23.94 ha (28.5 percent), eight sites

- Strategic (Omega): 59.97 ha (71.5 percent), two sites

- 8.48 The EDNA also identifies that take up over 2016-18 has been focused at Omega a trend that is considered will continue for the next few years. Take Up at Omega, to 2018, is 121.50 ha, with up to 33.70 ha likely to be taken up over the next few years as part of the Mountpark scheme.
- 8.49 Using a strategic/local projection take-up rate, inclusive of Omega, and applying it to the Local Plan period 2017-2037 (20 years), the 2019 EDNA identifies that Warrington requires 277.60 ha of land to 2037. Which when a 5-year buffer (to reflect a choice of sites by size, quality and location and to provide a continuum of supply beyond the end of the 2037 period) is applied rises to 347 ha. Based upon the realistic supply, this results in a combined further need of 277.80 ha to 2037.

### Conclusions

- 8.50 In this context, the commercial property market in the region is being driven by an increasing demand for large-scale logistics operations. Large, flat sites with excellent motorway access and proximity to markets/supply chains are highly sought after, as evidenced by the success at Omega to date. St Helens' and Warrington's key location on the M6 (north-south) and M62 (east- west) motorways mean that it is ideally positioned to provide a critical role in the large-scale logistics sector and Omega Zone 8 is considered to be key to realising this potential.
- 8.51 The application site, given its close relationship with the established employment site at Omega is well located to build on this trend for large logistics sites in the Merseyside region. To satisfy a 'live' occupier-led need and the requirements of the emerging policy both generally and specifically, there is a requirement for the proposed development at Omega Zone 8 now, which will contribute to meeting the clearly identified need, whilst enhancing the existing logistics facilities at Omega for the benefit of the Region.
- 8.52 The need case at Omega Zone 8 can be summarised as follows:
1. A direct response to a 'live' occupier-led requirement for a bespoke, purpose-built development that cannot be accommodated elsewhere;
  2. The requirement to cater for the growth demands of the logistics industry; and
  3. The overwhelming policy support for the principle of the further logistics development in the Liverpool City Region (and St Helens in particular) to benefit from the investment through the Northern Powerhouse and the SuperPort.
- 8.53 Together they combine to present a strong need case for the development and represent a key contributor towards the VSC required to justify development of this Green Belt site.

### **Alternative Sites Case**

- 8.54 An Alternative Sites Assessment Study accompanies the planning application. The Study seeks to establish whether there are any alternative sites to Omega Zone 8 that could meet the need for large-scale logistics buildings to serve St Helens and / or Warrington.
- 8.55 It provides evidence that no other non-Green Belt site exists that could potentially meet the operational and policy need for such a facility. It also evaluates the availability of other Green Belt sites, to establish whether the locations could accommodate the facility with less of an impact upon the Green Belt and the wider environment.
- 8.56 It was predominately desk-based exercise and in relation to the technical aspects of logistics developments, seven key criteria were considered (loosely informed by the EEBP):
1. Site Size: minimum area of 10 ha (to allow for a minimum unit size of 41,000 sq.m).
  2. Topography: relatively level and should be above flood plain;
  3. Strategic road access: direct access to the trunk road network, distance to a motorway junction and no direct residential frontages between the site and nearest main road network;
  4. Public Transport accessibility: to provide sustainable travel choices.
  5. Proximity to labour: an accessible workforce, including a ready supply of local labour.
  6. Relationship to other land uses: comparability with surrounding land uses.
  7. Environmental constraints: limitations on the development of the land due to heritage, ecological of other environmental factors.
- 8.57 A comprehensive review of the supply of potential sites has been undertaken, with information obtained from all relevant and accessible sources within both St Helens and Warrington.
- 8.58 For St Helens this evidence based comprised the Economic Evidence Base Paper 2015 (EEBP), prepared on behalf of the Council as part of the Allocations Local Plan, whilst for Warrington the most up-to-date evidence base is the Economic Developments Need Assessment 2019 (EDNA)
- 8.59 A total of 14 sites, including the application site, were identified as meeting the minimum size requirement. Only two sites were brownfield and the remaining 12 were Green Belt sites.
- 8.60 These sites were assessed against the minimum site requirements criteria set out in Stage 2 of the methodology. These criteria, taken from the EEBP, related to access to the strategic road network, availability of public transport and proximity to sensitive uses. Three of the 14 sites did not meet with the defined minimum criteria and were subsequently discounted from further assessment.
- 8.61 The remaining eleven sites were assessed against the site suitability requirements set out in Stage 3 of the methodology. Four sites were excluded from further analysis because they did not represent realistically suitable alternative sites for large scale logistics distribution

development, due to their irregular shape and distance to local settlements and a labour force.

- 8.62 Five of the remaining seven sites were then assessed against their impact on Green Belt purposes as set out in Stage 4 of the methodology (the other two being excluded from this stage given their brownfield status). All sites robustly served at least one Green Belt purpose. It was therefore necessary to undertake the supplementary assessment discounting the protection of the countryside which resulted in four sites being discounted from further assessment and only Omega Zone 8 scoring sufficiently to be taken forward.
- 8.63 Of the remaining sites, the two brownfield sites located at Omega South were discounted on the basis that both sites benefit from planning permission and in the case of one has now been constructed and part occupied. On this basis neither site is capable of accommodating the proposed development and whilst both sites are capable of accommodating B2/B8 development.
- 8.64 A clear need for the proposals has been established and the development of the Omega Zone 8 site is the only realistic Site that can be delivered now.

#### **Alternative Options Case**

- 8.65 A clear need for the proposals has therefore been established and the Omega Zone 8 is considered to be the only realistic alternative site that can be delivered in the timescales required.
- 8.66 However, in recognition of the status of the Application Site as Green Belt, there is a need to demonstrate that not only is Omega Zone 8 site the most suitable location for the proposed development, but that the form of development proposed also represents the only way in which the identified need for logistics floorspace of the scale and type proposed could be delivered (i.e. that there are no other options). There are two parts to this disaggregation assessment, namely:
1. Is there a need for single buildings of between 82,000 sq.m. and 41,000 sq.m or could the need be satisfied by a number of smaller developments?
  2. Could the proposed development be provided on separate sites and still meet the needs of the market?
- 8.67 In this regard, the Study includes an assessment of the need for large-scale logistics buildings based on the following principles:
1. The need for a single, large unit of the type proposed for Unit 1 comes from a 'live' occupier-led requirement so the need for this is clearly demonstrated;
  2. More generally the market requirement from major users of warehousing is for larger facilities with buildings of between 82,000 sq.m. and 41,000 sq.m;
  3. To meet the gap in the provision in the Region; and,

4. The disaggregation of the floorspace into numerous smaller buildings will not meet the needs of the market for large scale logistics facilities.

8.68 The opportunity to disaggregate the proposed development has been considered but discounted on the basis that this would not satisfy the occupier-led demand that compromises part of the application proposals and because, in the context of the particular need for large-scale logistics buildings, of the risk disaggregation could have in prejudicing the financial viability of the development and its attractiveness to the distribution market.

8.69 All of the potential sites identified in this Assessment were greater than 10 ha and therefore in theory capable of accommodating at least one of the units that comprise the outline proposals. However, as the Assessment has shown, it is considered that:

1. There are no sites available within the existing urban areas that are suitable for logistics development of this scale;
2. There are no more suitable sites that meet the disaggregated parameters for the proposed scale of development; and
3. Even if some of these sites were pursued, the disaggregation of the development would require the use of two areas of Green Belt land which would have a cumulative impact which is greater than the single release proposed at Omega Zone 8.

8.70 As a consequence, only Omega Zone 8 is realistically capable of delivering the 'live' occupier-led requirement that forms the proposed development, alongside the outline B2/B8 floorspace, in the short-term.

### **Other Very Special Circumstances**

#### **Economic Benefits**

8.71 The VSC case to justify development at Omega Zone 8 also relates to the economic implications of the proposed development, in terms of the direct local regional and national benefits. As referred to above, to accompany this application an assessment of the economic impact has been prepared within the ES (OPP Doc. 11.15 Chapter 15: Population & Health), to quantify the economic implications arising from the development proposals. The proposed logistics development is likely to have the positive impact of improving the profile of the area, particularly through the provision of sustainable transport links to the southern areas of the St Helens urban area.

#### **Social / Community Benefits**

8.72 The community benefits associated with the proposals also contribute towards the VSC case. These take the form of physical works and wider community benefits associated with the operation of the development, namely:

- The introduction of new and enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes through the site that will provide links with the southern areas of the St Helens urban area, via an

upgraded link bridge across the M62 and multiple connection points into the existing Omega site and wider Warrington network;

- The provision of a nature conservation and woodland area ('the Green Wedge'), extending to c. 4 ha in the north-west corner of the site which will be open to the public.

### **Environmental Benefits**

- 8.73 It is acknowledged that the proposed development will have an unavoidable environmental impact, and a full assessment of the environmental impact of the development is provided within the ES (OPP Doc. 11.9 Chapter 9: Biodiversity) submitted to accompany the application.
- 8.74 However, whilst the erection of a logistics buildings on the site will not be without environmental concerns, through proposed mitigation measures, the environmental impacts are reduced, and in certain circumstances, result in net benefits to environmental conditions.
- 8.75 In particular, through implementation of an ecological mitigation scheme, involving landscaping enhancements integrated with the ecological habitat design, good practice construction methodologies, and the implementation of a sustainable urban drainage system, the proposed development will have a long-term positive impact on local ecological conditions.

### **Conclusions**

- 8.76 The above assessment has presented the VSC that exist at Omega Zone 8 to justify the development proposals, as required by the Framework and UDP [Policies GB1 & GB2]. In summary, the VSC case relates to:
1. An overriding need to address a 'live' occupier-led requirement that cannot be met elsewhere within the area;
  2. A more general need for the provision of large-scale logistics buildings in St Helens, to meet the needs of the SuperPort, Northern Powerhouse and the objectives of the LEP and Local Authorities;
  3. A lack of alternative sites that could accommodate large-scale logistics buildings within the local area;
  4. A lack of alternative options, other than the provision of large-scale logistics buildings, to meet the identified need; and,
  5. The economic, social and environmental benefits associated with the scheme.
- 8.77 It is therefore considered that VSC do exist to justify the proposed development and that these circumstances are sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt associated with the proposals in relation to both 'inappropriateness' and 'other harm'.

## **9. COMPLIANCE WITH PLANNING POLICY**

- 9.1 Having assessed the proposals against their impact on the Green Belt and demonstrated that VSC exist at Omega Zone 8, to justify the development proposals, this section of the report considers the compliance of the proposals with other relevant policies of the statutory development plan and emerging policy, together with the relevant supplementary planning guidance, as previously identified. It demonstrates that the proposals broadly accord with the relevant policies and, in accordance with s38(6) of the 2004 Act, should be granted planning permission.

### **Principle of Development**

#### **Green Belt**

- 9.2 The Application Site is located outside the defined urban area of St Helens and lies within the designated Green Belt (see UDP Policies S1, GB1 and Core Strategy Policy CAS5).
- 9.3 It is recognised that the scale of the works and the nature of the proposed use mean that the proposals can only be considered as ‘inappropriate development’ within the Green Belt.
- 9.4 The Framework and UDP (Policies GB1 & GB2) require VSC to be demonstrated in order to justify development within the Green Belt. If it can be shown that VSC apply, the proposal will comply with the development plan. The VSC should be exceptional and clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by virtue of ‘inappropriateness’ and ‘any other harm’ to the Green Belt or other matters for the application proposals to be positively considered.
- 9.5 As discussed in Chapter 8, it is accepted that there is a defined harm caused to the Green Belt by reason of ‘inappropriateness’ and this must be given substantial weight. However, Chapter 8 goes on to demonstrate that the proposed development will cause limited harm to ‘permanence’ and the harm to ‘openness’ will be substantially mitigated and reduced over time. Furthermore, the harm to Green Belt purposes will not be substantial because the proposals:
- a) Will not result in the unrestricted sprawl of a large built up area;
  - b) Will not result in the merging of neighbouring towns;
  - c) Whilst involving development in the countryside, it will not involve development at a site that has any current substantial agricultural, ecological or community value, and will deliver benefits in terms of community access to the countryside;
  - d) Will have no impact in terms of the setting or character of historic towns; and,
  - e) Will assist in urban regeneration, bringing a substantial investment to the local area and delivering much needed local employment opportunities as well as helping achieve the strategic objective for the City Region.
- 9.6 Overall, therefore, whilst the proposals will result in a degree of harm to the Green Belt, this harm is substantially mitigated as required by the Framework and the UDP (Policy GB2).

9.7 The assessment in Chapter 9 has presented the VSC that exist at Omega Zone 8, to justify the development proposals, as required by the Framework and UDP (Policies GB1 & GB2). In summary, the VSC case relates to:

1. An overriding need to address a 'live' occupier-led requirement that cannot be met elsewhere within the area;
2. A more general need for the provision of large-scale logistics buildings in St Helens, to meet the needs of the SuperPort, Northern Powerhouse and the objectives of the LEP and Local Authorities;
3. A lack of alternative sites that could accommodate large-scale logistics buildings within the local area;
4. A lack of alternative options, other than the provision of large-scale logistics buildings, to meet the identified need; and,
5. The economic, social and environmental benefits associated with the scheme.

9.8 It is therefore considered that VSC do exist to justify the scheme, and that these circumstances are sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt associated with the proposals (i.e. in relation to both 'inappropriateness' and 'other harm'). The proposals therefore comply with the provisions of UDP Policies S1, GB1, Core Strategy Policy CAS5 and Bold Forest AAP Policy BFP1.

### **Economic Development**

9.9 The need for the proposed development and the role it will play in supporting the economic objectives for the City Region have already been set out in Chapter 8. As such, it is not considered necessary to repeat them again, however it has been demonstrated that the development will support the planning policy objectives of St Helens Council to create a strong and stable economy in the borough (Core Strategy Policy CE1). In these circumstances, and in accordance with the Framework, significant weight should be placed on the economic growth and jobs that will be created by the proposed development.

9.10 As referred to above, to accompany this application an assessment of economic impacts has been provided within the ES (OPP Doc. 11.15), to quantify the economic implications arising from the development proposals.

9.11 As VSC have been demonstrated to justify the scheme, the development proposals comply with the requirements of the Framework, UDP (Policies GB1 & GB2), Core Strategy (Policy CAS5) and the Bold Forest AAP (Policy BFP ECON1). In addition, the proposed investment will have significant benefits for the area.

### **Design & Layout**



9.12 The development proposals have been developed following a comprehensive process of site survey, LVIA, feasibility study, design development and consultation. The Application is accompanied by two Design and Access Statements, (one for the detailed proposals and one covering the rest of the site), which explain the design principles that have been followed in arriving at the proposed scheme.

9.13 The design principles for Unit 1 can be summarised as follows:

- Provide a layout of the site that proactively responds to both by the immediate context of the site and operational requirements of the occupier;
- Provide a building of appropriate scale, shape and size to successfully achieve the required amount of internal designated storage areas with associated automated goods handling equipment and racking, with as efficient interconnection as possible, all to suit the particular needs of the occupier.
- Provide a landscaping treatment that ensures that the building form is carefully detailed and articulated, so as to provide interesting and attractive views from both the immediate and more distant surroundings.
- Provide a design appearance and palette of materials and colours that are consistent with the established employment areas adjacent to the site to provide harmony between the sites and a visual context for the development.
- Provide an access solution that will ensure safe and efficient access and egress to the new development for all forms of vehicles.

9.14 The design principles for the outline proposals can be summarised as follows:

- Flexibility is sought in order to allow for the development to be marked and 'tailored' to suit the requirements of the potential occupiers.
- Creation of a successful, leading edge commercial development which is attractive to large-floorplate occupiers, accords with the Sustainability Agenda and Secured by Design standards, demonstrates environmental best practice and satisfies the identified need for this type and scale of development in the area.
- It is envisaged that the proposed units will be a maximum of 19m in height and will be designed and sited to reduce the visual and noise impact on the surrounding areas.
- Appropriate urban design principles will be adopted to provide a consistent character and form to ensure that the development will be appropriate to its context, create a sense of place and encourage sustainable forms of travel through an appropriate access strategy.
- The development proposals will be designed and operated in a sustainable manner that will include objectives to minimise energy consumption, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the biodiversity of the site wherever possible.
- It is intended that the design and layout of the development will create a shared character identity, with buildings designed to create a strong visual focus on the

office component and to use materials and colours selected from a palette used previously across the adjacent Omega site.

- 9.15 The proposed development therefore accords with the relevant provisions of the development plan (UDP Policy ENV21, Core Strategy Policy CP1, Bold Forest AAP Policy BFP SN1 and the guidance contained within the Design & Crime SPD and Design Guidance SPD and the Framework.

### **Highways & Transport**

- 9.16 The development proposals have been designed to be as sustainable as possible from transport perspective. A Transport Assessment has been prepared to support the application proposals which has considered the following key aspects in regard to highways and transport matters.

### **Access**

- 9.17 The proposed development will facilitate connection to a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycle facilities which are provided throughout the wider Omega development and beyond. This should encourage local trips to be made on foot or by cycle. A number of pedestrian / cycle accesses will be formed to ensure that the internal transport network is comprehensively connected to the external network as well as being connected to other sustainable transport links.
- 9.18 It is proposed to divert the existing B52 service into Omega Zone 8 as part of its route, as well as provide a bus stop within the site, resulting in less than a 5-minute walking distance from all four units to access public transport.
- 9.19 It is considered that the range of proposed accesses will ensure that the development is legible by all modes of transport and that it will provide good opportunity for employees to access the site by sustainable modes of travel.

### **Workplace Travel Plan Framework**

- 9.20 It is intended that the proposed Workplace Travel Plan Framework form the basis for an initial Workplace Travel Plan which will support the proposed development. It sets out a range of measures and incentives which would be adopted at the development to promote access by sustainable travel modes. The framework is flexible enough to be implemented within a site wide travel plan covering all employers within the site if required.
- 9.21 Development of the site will provide good opportunities to promote sustainable travel patterns from the outset. The proposed development will provide the opportunity for comprehensive transport links for bus, rail, walking and cycling facilities.
- 9.22 The measures proposed for inclusion as part of the proposed development are described in detail in the following sections and are listed below;

- Creation of a TP Co-ordinator role;
- Public transport initiatives;
- Cycling initiatives;
- Pedestrian initiatives;
- A formal car sharing scheme; and
- Miscellaneous measures.

9.23 The measures proposed in the framework are intended to be flexible enough that they could form part of a wider TP for the whole of the Omega South site, or measures that could be adopted for use by the final occupiers of individual employment land uses.

#### **Development Impact (Traffic)**

9.24 The impact of the development has been identified at each of the junctions on the local study network. It can be seen that the majority of the junctions assessed are operating within capacity following the addition of traffic generated by the proposed development, as well as other committed development and development associated with the wider Omega development.

9.25 Mitigation measures have been developed for implementation at the following junction to diminish the identified impact of the proposed development:

- M62 Junction 8 – Westbound Off-Slip and Circulatory Carriageway

9.26 The proposed mitigation measures at this junction can be delivered within the existing highway boundary, within land under the control of the Highway Authority and only requires changes to road markings and lane allocation.

9.27 Furthermore, the modelling results cannot demonstrate the current operational efficiencies achieved through MOVA control, which is expected to improve journey time reliability as well as aid in queue management. Therefore, the expectation is that the junction results to be better than is being shown within the modelling as part of this assessment.

#### **Summary**

9.28 A thorough assessment has been undertaken of the proposed development and its potential impact upon the local road network. Where necessary, the requirement for improvements to the existing road and transportation conditions has been highlighted within the report.

9.29 The Transport Assessment has shown that the development site is well located in relation to the local transport network and currently enjoys a good level of accessibility by sustainable modes of transport through measures already implemented as part of the wider Omega site.

9.30 It is concluded, in transport terms, that the proposed development site is considered suitable for the development proposals.

- 9.31 The proposed development therefore accords with the relevant provisions of the Development Plan, Core Strategy Policies CIN1 & CP2 and Bold Forest AAP Policy BFP INF6, as well as the guidance contained within the Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD and the Framework.

### **Environmental Assets**

#### **Biodiversity**

- 9.32 A full assessment of likely significant effects arising from the Proposed Development upon biodiversity has been undertaken and is submitted as part of the ES (OPP DOC. 11.9 ES Vol. 1 Chapter 9). As part of this the following sensitive receptors have been identified on site:

#### **Habitat**

- Woodland and trees (including those covered by TPO's);
- Hedgerows;
- Ponds;
- Booth's Wood (LWS); and
- Whittle Brook.

#### **Species**

- Bats;
- Breeding birds;
- Brown hare; and
- Purple ramping-fumitory.

- 9.33 The assessment of biodiversity has established that the following additional mitigation measures are required and will be implemented as part of the development proposals:

- On-site habitat creation targeted for notable and protected species noted on or near to the Site, to include;
  - Native woodland/tree planting (80,639m<sup>2</sup>); pond habitat (15,742m<sup>2</sup>), species diverse, native hedgerow (9621 linear m), high-quality grassland (wetland and meadow – 91,534m<sup>2</sup>) and native aquatic planting (2,133m<sup>2</sup>).
- Off-site compensation for woodland and trees provided to meet 2:1 planting requirement or biodiversity compensation payment (subject to agreement);
- Provision of bat boxes and suitable bat habitat;
- Provision of bird boxes and suitable bird habitat;
- Provision of a CEMP: Biodiversity for detailed area of the Proposed Scheme to include (among other items);
  - Tree Protective Fencing and Root Protection Areas (RPA's);
  - Agreed Method Statements for any works required within RPA's or sensitive areas;
  - Protective fencing of sensitive receptors (where necessary);

- Fish rescue methodology when draining ponds;
  - Allocated compounds/areas for temporary storage of materials (hazardous and non-hazardous);
  - Advise for habitat removal in relation to sensitive species and habitats on and near to the Site (such as Tree Protection Order's, roosting bats, breeding birds and brown hare);
  - Provision of buffer to protect purple ramping-fumitory); and
  - The requirement for an Ecological Clerk of Works and/or Arboriculturalist or any necessary works.
- Provision of a CEMP: Biodiversity for all outline areas of the Proposed Scheme as details emerge;
  - Provision of a detailed Lighting Strategy for all areas of the Proposed Scheme as details emerge;
  - Provision of a detailed Landscape Scheme for all areas of the Proposed Scheme as details emerge.

9.34 The assessment also identifies the following enhancement opportunities that will realised as part of the development proposals:

- Improve the quality of retained ponds by reducing shading, dredging, and introducing aquatic planting);
- Bat and bird box provision within outline planning are of the Proposed Scheme;
- Enhancement of Whittle Brook via planting with native tree species and high-quality grassland. Potential to reduce siltation by introducing reed beds / coir rolls;
- Control of Himalayan balsam throughout site.

### **Landscape & Trees (LVIA)**

9.35 The Landscape Strategy is reflected in the indicative masterplan for the site and strives to balance commercial viability and development flexibility with habitat creation in equal measure.

9.36 In this regard, Zone 8 provides the opportunity to introduce significant new areas of woodland and wetland (mitigating the loss through development) as part of an overall strategy for the wider Omega, by creating a strong western boundary landscape, built upon the retained woodland blocks of Plain Plantation, Booths Wood and Duck Wood (part) and introducing a matrix of varied habitat linking all three elements around a new an accessible mini country park, which serves not only an important ecological function but at the same time establishing a significant area of accessible open space that links with Clock Face to the north west and to Ladies walk and the wider network of footpaths toward Mersey Valley Golf Club. A new combined footpath and cycleway also offers a strategic car free link into the established employment zone of Omega South and longer commuter routes into Warrington as a result.

- 9.37 The landscape focus within the current application boundary is the western “Green Wedge”, which captures much of the mitigation proposed across the wider masterplan and creates a landscape that provides a variety of habitat including woodland, ponds, hedgerow and grassland and is a focus in a substantial north south corridor that forms the western buffer to the development. Embracing Booths Wood and Local Nature Reserve as a key hub in this buffer zone.
- 9.38 A series of east west corridors, the most northern of which forms part of the current detailed application link the east and west landscape and habitat corridors and then further beyond into the wider Omega South landscape and ecological infrastructure. It is an express intention of this proposal to add to the significant works already completed on Omega south to encourage the spread of Great Crested Newt into the Zone 8 landscape, and in this, the east west linkages provide corridors through which these animals can pass.
- 9.39 A landscape corridor, linking Zone 8 with Omega south, provides a vehicle free cycle and footpath route that will form part of a wider network of footpath/ cycleways throughout the wider Omega masterplan area, however this corridor also establishes a new physical component in ecological and engineering terms in that it will incorporate new native species hedgerow, and wild flora grass areas, at the same time as introducing swales and attenuation ponds (as part of the TJM development) that will; serve both drainage and habitat enhancement roles.
- 9.40 The Landscape Strategy also identifies those established trees and landscape features that are intended to be protected and retained as part of the wider strategy, these are identified on the attached drawings, and will be retained and protected during construction works in accordance with current British Standard guidance, BS 5837 2012. Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction-Recommendations.
- 9.41 The proposed development therefore accords with the relevant provisions of the Development Plan, UDP Policies ENV12 & ENV13, Core Strategy Policies CQL1 & CQL2 and Bold Forest AAP Policy BFP ENV1, as well as the guidance contained within the Trees and Development SPD and the Framework.

### **Flood Risk & Drainage**

- 9.42 The Application Site covers an area of approximately 75.3 ha and is classified as a greenfield site. The application Site is currently used as agricultural land. The development proposals consist of the following development (major development):
- Full Planning Permission for the erection of a B8 warehouse, with ancillary offices, associated parking, infrastructure and landscaping; and
  - Outline Planning Permission for Manufacturing (B2) and Logistics (B8) development with ancillary offices and associated car parking, landscaping and infrastructure (detailed matters of appearance, layout and scale are reserved for subsequent approval).

9.43 As a result of the development proposals the proportion of the application site that is impermeable will increase to 42.1 ha.

9.44 According to the Environment Agency's flood map for planning, the Proposed Development is located within Flood Zone 1 and where the Whittle Brook currently flows through the proposed development site, there are bands of land which lie within Flood Zone 2.

#### **Surface Water Drainage**

9.45 The available ground investigation data indicates that the site is underlain glacial deposits which will preclude the use of infiltration as a means of surface water disposal.

9.46 Where practical the proposed surface water drainage will reflect the existing drainage regime. It is therefore proposed that surface water flows from the development will drain to the watercourses which pass through the Site as the primary means of surface water disposal.

9.47 In accordance with the lead local flood authority's design and technical guidance, it is proposed that peak flows leaving the site are restricted to the existing greenfield run-off rate by means of a series of SUDS features around the proposed development.

9.48 It is proposed to restrict the development surface water run-off to the Mean Annual Peak Flow Rate, Qbar. The figure for Qbar has been calculated using the Institute of Hydrology Report 124 and has been calculated as 5.8 l/s/ha.

9.49 In order to limit the rate of surface water runoff, the drainage system to each unit will incorporate various SUDS features such as swales and attenuation ponds to restrict and treat surface water run-off. These features will be used to treat, convey and store surface water runoff from impermeable areas for storm events up to and including a 1 in 100 year event plus 40% climate change.

9.50 The combination of the cascading conveyance swales, storage swales and attenuation ponds will provide a multi-stage treatment train for surface water run off to enhance the quality of surface water leaving the development site.

9.51 The SUDS features will be privately maintained by an appointed management company.

#### **Foul Water Drainage**

9.52 It is proposed to install a new foul water sewer system to serve the development site.

9.53 United Utilities has confirmed that foul will be allowed to drain to the public foul sewer network at an unrestricted rate.

9.54 A foul water pumping station will be required to service the Proposed Development.

- 9.55 The foul water pumping station and sewerage proposed in public areas will be designed and constructed in accordance with Sewers for Adoption for adoption and maintenance by United Utilities and form part of the public sewer network.
- 9.56 The below ground foul water drainage network within the site boundary will remain in private ownership and will be operated and maintained privately.

### **Conclusion**

- 9.57 It is considered that there are VSC to justify the proposed development in the Green Belt, as required by the Framework, UDP Policy GB1 and Core Strategy Policy CAS5. Consequently, these circumstances are sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt associated with the proposals (i.e. in relation to both 'inappropriateness' and 'other harm').
- 9.58 The proposed form of the development meets the requirements of UDP Policy GB 2, Core Strategy Policies CIN1 & CP2 and 'Submission Draft' Policies LP03 & LP07. The proposed investment will also have significant benefits for the wider area.
- 9.59 The proposed development also accords with the principles of the Bold Forest Park AAP and in particular of AAP policies BFP1, BFP SN1 and BFP ENV1.
- 9.60 The proposed development complies with guidance contained relevant policies in the Development Plan and emerging Local Plan and adopted SPG with regards to design and layout, highways, amenity and other environmental assets.
- 9.61 In accordance with the provisions of s38(6) of the 2004 Act planning permission should be granted for the proposed development.



## **10. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- 10.1 This Chapter considers the compliance of the proposed development with the principles of sustainable development as set out in the Framework. It demonstrates that the proposals perform a positive economic, social and environmental role and whilst the development cannot claim the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the Framework, due to its Green Belt location, it should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

### **Economic Role**

- 10.2 The proposed development will contribute to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy. In particular, the proposals will bring a number of economic benefits in terms of job creation and increased expenditure in the local economy.
- 10.3 The economic benefits associated with the development have already been outlined above and it is considered that these align well with national, regional and local policy objectives, in particular the creation of enhanced economic prosperity through creating employment opportunities for local people and providing suitable accommodation for business growth, and contributing towards a more attractive and accessible public realm.
- 10.4 The Population & Health chapter of the ES (OPP Doc. 11.15) provides a detailed assessment of the likely positive impacts of the development in this regard. More generally the wider economic benefits are also considered to include:
- Maintaining and enhancing the profile and image of Omega as a major focus for the distribution sector, and send a strong signal of investment confidence in the both St Helens and Warrington Boroughs;
  - It would build on the competitive advantages of the area for the distribution sector, including investment in the SuperPort, helping build a critical mass of such activities and encouraging further distribution investment so that the City Region remains competitive against other areas with similar facilities
  - It would contribute towards a diversified local economy in an area where the traditional sectors of mining and manufacturing have declined or stagnated and where revitalised economic growth is a key driver for the area; and,
  - It would help to grow an efficient, sustainable logistics sector in the Liverpool City Region that is necessary to maintain and support the growth of other sectors such as manufacturing and higher technology activities and building upon on the investment in the SuperPort.

### **Social Role**

- 10.5 The proposed development will support the creation of a strong, vibrant and healthy community by increasing the supply of local employment thereby helping to reduce unemployment rates in St Helens.

## Deprivation

- 10.6 St Helens is ranked as the 26th most relatively deprived authority out of 317 across England and the 12th most relatively deprived authority out of 39 within the North West Region (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019). Its relative position has deteriorated since the 2010 Index of Deprivation (51<sup>st</sup>) and 2015 Index of Deprivation (35<sup>th</sup>) most deprived area. Across all summary measures St Helens has fallen within the most relatively deprived 13% of all 317 authorities across England, meaning St Helens is relatively more deprived in 2019 than it was in 2015.
- 10.7 Overall, deprivation within St Helens remains both relatively extensive and concentrated and deprivation levels in some parts of the Borough have also worsened relative to others. The proportion of children in low income families is higher than those in England and the North West as a whole. St Helens still has levels of dependency on benefits that are above regional and national averages (Department for Work and Pensions).
- 10.8 As set out below in Table 10.1, the unemployment rate in St Helens is lower than regional and national averages. However, the economic activity and employment rates in the Borough remain relatively consistent with national averages. Economic inactivity (e.g., due to sickness) is slightly higher than the national average and pay levels in the Borough (Full Time - Gross Weekly) are also lower than elsewhere.

Table 10.1: St Helens Labour Market Indicators

Labour Market Indicators	St. Helens Borough (%)	North West (%)	England (%)
Economically active	78.7	77.1	78.9
Employment	75.6	73.9	75.6
Self-employed	6.9	9.4	10.7
Unemployment	3.5	4.0	4.1
Economic inactivity	21.3	22.9	21.1

Source: NOMIS (ONS) – rate as % of population aged 16-64 years. Period: Jul 18 – Jun 19

- 10.9 Despite relative consistency with the national statistics outlined above, the proportion of residents without any qualifications is also higher than the regional and national levels (NOMIS Jul 18 – Jun 18) at 11.6% compared to 9.1% and 7.8% respectively.
- 10.10 Some of the areas of greatest deprivation are situated within 2-3km of the Application Site. As a consequence, the employment generated by the proposed development, when combined with the new and improved pedestrian and cycle links between these areas and the site, will have a significant and positive impact on reducing deprivation in St Helens. This is

particularly the case as the lead contractor and future occupiers will have to prepare, and implement, Local Employment & Training Schemes to ensure local people gain the most from, the new job opportunities. This is seen as a significant and important social benefit of the proposed development.

### **Physical Works**

10.11 The proposals include a series of physical works and wider community benefits associated with the operation of the development, namely:

- The introduction of new and enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes through the site that will provide links with the southern areas of the St Helens urban area, via an upgraded link bridge across the M62 and multiple connection points into the existing Omega site and wider Warrington network;
- The provision of a nature conservation and woodland area ('the Green Triangle'), extending to c.4 ha in the north-west corner of the site which will be open to the public.

10.12 On this basis, the proposals will deliver substantial social benefits, which should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

### **Environmental Role**

10.13 Evidently, the proposed development will give rise to environmental impacts, however, those impacts have been identified and mitigated for, and in certain circumstances, result in net benefits to environmental conditions.

10.14 In particular, through implementation of an ecological mitigation scheme, involving landscaping enhancements integrated with the ecological habitat design, good practice construction methodologies, and the implementation of a sustainable urban drainage system, the proposed development will have a long-term positive impact on local ecological conditions.

10.15 The ES (OPP Doc 11.1 – 17) submitted with the planning application provides a full assessment of the environmental impact of the development.

### **Conclusion**

10.16 The proposed development will secure benefits to the economic and social roles with a neutral or limited adverse impact on the environmental role. As a consequence, the adverse impacts of permitting the development would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, which should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

## **11. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Planning Summary**

- 11.1 The starting point for the consideration of the Application must be whether the proposed development complies with the Development Plan. In this case the relevant policies are contained within the UDP and Core Strategy and the 'Submission Draft' Local Plan, although the latter document has no formal status at present and therefore no actual weight can be afforded to it.
- 11.2 It is considered that 'very special circumstances' exist that serve to justify the proposed development in the Green Belt, as required by the Framework, UDP Policy GB1 and Core Strategy Policy CAS5. These circumstances are considered sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt associated with the proposals (i.e. in relation to both 'inappropriateness' and 'other harm').
- 11.3 The proposed form of the development meets the requirements of the UDP [Policy GB2] and the associated investment and job creation will have significant benefits for both St Helens and Warrington Boroughs. It would accord with the objectives and locational policies of Core Strategy Policies CSS1 and CAS5.
- 11.4 The proposed development complies with guidance contained relevant policies in the UDP and Core Strategy with regards to design and layout, highways, amenity and other environmental assets.
- 11.5 In accordance with the provisions of s38(6) of the 2004 Act planning permission should be granted for the proposed development. The development plan compliance is supported by other material considerations.

### **Material Considerations**

- 11.6 There is specific need for the development, in so far as the proposals seek detailed approval for part of the site to meet a 'live' occupier led requirement for a bespoke, purpose-built development which it has been demonstrated cannot be accommodated elsewhere within the Borough
- 11.7 St Helens Council's evidence base for the emerging Local Plan identifies an urgent need for a substantial amount of logistics development (110-155ha) within St Helens. This land is needed to meet the needs of the Borough and support the economic objectives of the wider City Region. In addition, the emerging Local Plan identifies part of the application site (circa 32ha) as an employment allocation (1EA) that will contribute towards Warrington's employment land supply. The Application proposals will therefore help to meet the needs of both St Helens and Warrington Borough Council's.
- 11.8 The proposals represent sustainable development and will secure meaningful economic and social benefits whilst mitigating the potential adverse environmental impact associated with

the scheme. As a consequence, the adverse impacts of permitting the development would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Whilst the development does not meet the criteria that would lead to the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the Framework, it should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

- 11.9 The proposed development will deliver substantial employment opportunities in an area of high unemployment where economic growth and investment is greatly needed. Given the severe deprivation issues suffered by St Helens, it is considered the job creation associated with the development should be given substantial weight.

### **Conclusion**

- 11.10 As a consequence, when assessed against the provisions of S.38(6) of the 2004 Act, the considered position is that the proposals present no conflict with the Framework or Development Plan policies (because 'very special circumstances' have been demonstrated) and material considerations also weigh in favour of the development.
- 11.11 On this basis it is considered that planning permission should be granted without delay for this sustainable and much needed development.
- 11.12 For the above reasons, the Council is urged to grant planning permission for the proposed development.

## **APPENDIX 1: SITE LOCATION PLAN**

## **APPENDIX 2: PARAMETER PLAN 1 – OUTLINE AND DETAILED APPLICATION BOUNDARIES**

### **APPENDIX 3: OMEGA ZONE 8 MASTERPLAN**