

# **Proof of evidence of DOUGLAS BISSET (for the Applicants) on HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION**

Call-in by the Secretary of State of an application made by  
Omega St Helens Limited / TJ Morris Limited

Land To The West Of Omega South & South Of The M62,  
Bold, St Helens

LPA REF: P/2020/0061/HYBR

PINS REF: APP/H4315/V/20/3265899

**CD38.2**

**March 2021**

## **1 Statement of Experience**

### **1.1 Personal Qualifications**

- 1.1.1 My name is Douglas Bisset. I hold the degree of Bachelor of Engineering in Civil and Transportation Engineering, from Napier University Edinburgh. I am a Chartered Transport planning Professional, a chartered member of the Institute of Logistics and Transport, a member of the Institution of Highways and Transportation and a member of the Transport Planning Society.
- 1.1.2 I am employed as a Technical Director of WSP UK Limited, part of WSP Global Inc. I have been employed by WSP since 2000. WSP Global Inc. is an international multi-disciplinary consultancy with more than 47,000 staff worldwide.
- 1.1.3 I am currently a Technical Director responsible for WSP's traffic and transportation capabilities in Scotland, providing professional advice to both private developers and local authorities regarding the traffic and transportation implications of development proposals.
- 1.1.4 I have twenty-nine years' experience in preparing development masterplans, giving consideration to traffic and transportation related issues, and in preparing Transport Assessments for development proposals, throughout the UK.
- 1.1.5 I have been involved in the traffic and transportation aspects of the wider Omega Warrington site since 2003, producing Transport Assessment reports, technical notes, outline drawings and analysis to support the evolving development over the last 17 years. I led the traffic and transportation aspects of the Omega West (Omega Zone 8) development proposals, located within St Helen's Borough Council's administrative boundary, from initial concept through to Transport Assessment scoping discussions, the production of the Transport Assessment report and the further technical notes and analysis undertaken post-submission of the hybrid planning application P/2020/0061/HYBR. I have visited the site on numerous occasions and am familiar with the site and surrounding area.

## 1.2 Scope of Evidence

- 1.2.1 I have been instructed to appear on behalf of the applicants, Omega St Helens Limited and T J Morris Limited, to provide expert evidence on highways and transportation matters in relation to the hybrid planning application P/2020/0061/HYBR for B8 logistics and B2 manufacturing development on land to the west of Omega South and South of the M62, St Helens, generally referred to as Omega Zone 8 or Omega West.
- 1.2.2 In my evidence I will provide my assessment of highways and transportation matters for the subject site, together with a summary of my involvement from initial scoping discussions with the relevant highways authorities, through to St Helen's Borough Council recommending the grant of planning permission subject to conditions and the completion of an agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 1.2.3 I will set out my position in relation to the question raised in the Inspector's pre-conference note circulated on 4 March 2021:  
*"The effect of the proposal on:...*
- *The highway network and how the development can contribute to meeting sustainable transport objectives"*
- 1.2.4 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this called-in planning application reference APP/H4315/V/20/3265899 in this proof of evidence is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the Code of Conduct of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## **2. Highways and Transportation**

### **2.1 Involvement in Application**

- 2.1.1 I undertook a Transport Assessment scoping meeting with highways officers of St Helens Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council and consultants acting on behalf of Highways England on 15 May 2019.
- 2.1.2 I prepared an initial Transport Assessment scoping note [CD33.33, page 3], based on the 15 May meeting, dated 27 May 2019. I undertook a site visit to inform the Transport Assessment study on 11 June 2019.
- 2.1.3 The scoping note discussed the three concurrent Omega applications and the methodology for assessment. A key component of the Omega applications was the concept and agreement that the traffic analyses for the planning applications would be framed against a baseline of currently consented Omega development. The currently consented Omega development (originally granted in 2007) included a significant component of B1 office development, which has never been built out due to a lack of market demand. Subsequent planning applications (post 2007) have involved, as part of their highways assessment, an element of trip offsetting. In essence, this has meant relinquishing part of the permitted B1 office consent and replacing it with a comparable floorspace of a differing land use, ensuring that the trip generation characteristics of the proposed development are comparable with those of the B1 development being relinquished. In my experience, this is a recognised and accepted approach for dealing with extant commitments in conjunction with the assessment of subsequent revised proposals.
- 2.1.4 This trip offsetting approach has been accepted by the Highway Authorities (including Warrington Borough Council and Highways England) for Omega planning applications post 2007 and was accepted by St Helens Council for the Omega Zone 8 application.
- 2.1.5 The scoping note set out the agreed study network for the traffic impact analysis within the Transport Assessment; the time periods and for new traffic surveys for the study network, in a neutral month; the network assessment methodology using standard industry recognised software packages and the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges for analysis of the motorway slip roads at the M62 Junction 8. The

impact analysis was undertaken in a sequential manner, building on each Omega application, culminating in analysis of the Omega Zone 8 traffic generation.

- 2.1.6 The Omega Zone 8 trip rate characteristics were derived from up to date surveys of existing applicable development currently operating within the Omega site. It was agreed with the three highways authorities that this would give the most representative and accurate trip generation for the proposed development, based on similar adjacent uses and operations.
- 2.1.7 The Omega Zone 8 trip distribution patterns were agreed to be based on data from employee travel plan surveys within Omega for car trips and based on a logical routing to the M62 motorway for heavy goods vehicle trips.
- 2.1.8 The Omega Zone 8 sustainable travel provision involved investigating pedestrian facilities, cycle facilities and public transport provision. It was agreed to be built upon the existing infrastructure throughout the existing Omega site. It was also agreed to provide a Framework Travel Plan within the Transport Assessment identifying measures that could be implemented to reduce dependency on the private car, together with the method for reviewing, managing, implementing and promoting sustainable travel initiatives for the subject site. The workplace travel plan, contained within the submitted Transport Assessment, set out the role of the travel plan co-ordinator; public transport, cycling and pedestrian initiatives; car sharing; staff induction pack and miscellaneous staff initiatives.
- 2.1.9 Comments and clarifications were received on the submitted Transport Assessment scoping note from the three highway authorities between 28 May 2019 and 14 June 2019 [CD33.33, Appendix A, pages 8 to 26]. I prepared a Scoping Note Clarification/Update dated 21 June 2019 [CD33.33, Appendix A, pages 27 to 30], in relation to the comments from the three highway authorities. The scoping correspondence is included at Appendix A within the submitted Transport Assessment report [CD33.33, Appendix A, pages 3 to 39].
- 2.1.10 I led the preparation of the Transport Assessment report for the subject site dated 12 December 2019 [CD33.32], based on the agreed Transport Assessment scope and scoping clarifications note.

- 2.1.11 The submitted Transport Assessment concluded that mitigation was required at M62 Junction 8 westbound off-slip road and circulatory carriageway, to accommodate the proposed development (WSP drawing reference 11191042\_SK326 [CD43.29]). The mitigation measures can be delivered within the existing highway boundary and within land under control of the highway authority. The Transport Assessment demonstrated 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.
- 2.1.12 The submitted Transport Assessment was reviewed by the three highway authorities, and further technical notes and supporting analysis (referenced below) were prepared by me and my team to address matters raised through the planning submission review process.
- 2.1.13 I led the preparation of a Technical Note dated 13 March 2020 [CD43.28], seeking to address matters raised by Highways England, including providing additional information to assist in the review process; the correction of some arithmetical anomalies within the complex technical calculations comprising the spreadsheet model build-up of development traffic flows and clarifications in relation to growth factors, committed development traffic, and lane assignment within the M62 Junction 8 traffic model.
- 2.1.14 WSP provided input to a response to matters raised by consultants acting on behalf of St Helens Borough Council dated 14 April 2020 [CD34.71, CD34.72 and CD 34.73]. The response, co-ordinated by the Omega project planning consultant, included additional information in relation to: the St Helens Core Strategy Local Plan; the ten-year future assessment test for M62 Junction 8 in accordance with Policy CP2 of St Helen's Core Strategy Local Plan; sustainable travel mode share information for the existing Omega site; confirmation of commitments to public transport provision; clarifications in relation to future occupier travel plans; swept path assessments; model calibration information; clarifications in relation to growth factors and provision of the full spreadsheet model showing the build-up of development traffic flows

- 2.1.15 Consultants on behalf of Highways England issued a second audit note dated 28 March 2020 [CD43.58], seeking further clarification following WSP's Technical Note of 13 March 2020. I led the preparation of a Technical Note dated 27 April 2020 [CD43.57], seeking to address further matters raised by Highways England in relation to the modelling of M62 Junction 8. At the same time, in relation to the Omega Phase 4-7 Planning Application within the Warrington Borough Council area, similar comments were raised. As a consequence of this further technical work, WSP proposed additional mitigation to address Highways England's concerns on how traffic lanes would be used on the circulatory carriageway of the grade separated junction. The additional mitigation involved widening on Skyline Drive (the access to the Omega site directly from M62 Junction 8) to provide two full lanes in either direction (WSP drawing reference 11191042\_SK329) [CD43.30]. The proposed mitigation has now been delivered on Skyline Drive within land under control of the applicants.
- 2.1.16 WSP prepared a Technical Note dated 20 May 2020 [CD33.34], superseding the 27 April Technical Note, seeking to address the matters raised by Highways England in their audit note of 28 March 2020. This Technical Note (20 May 2020) provided further information and clarification on the M62 Junction 8 traffic model and how traffic would use the lanes of the circulatory carriageway. The conclusion of the Technical Note did not alter the mitigation for Skyline Drive as outlined in WSP's 27 April Technical Note.
- 2.1.17 Highways England provided a highway consultee response to St Helen's Borough Council dated 28 May 2020 [CD34.35], confirming that all outstanding points had been addressed to allow a suitable understanding of the impact of the development on the strategic road network. The consultee response concluded recommending that conditions should be attached to any planning permission that may be granted. Highways England provided a revised highway consultee response to St Helens Borough Council dated 20 October 2020 [CD34.28], as a consequence of further information submitted by the applicant in relation to ongoing work with the Omega south site. The consultee response was the same as that dated 28 May 2020, with a minor amendment to the wording of a recommended planning condition 3 in relation to the provision of a boundary fence, and the removal of a recommended condition 5

in relation to the provision of a risk assessment prior to earthworks adjacent to the M62.

2.1.18 Consultants acting on behalf of St Helen's Borough Council provided a highways consultee response dated 21 July 2020 [CD34.60], recommending no objection subject to conditions.

2.1.19 Warrington Borough Council provided a highways consultee response to St Helen's Borough Council dated 12 August 2020 [CD34.58], recommending no objection subject to conditions.

2.1.20 St Helen's Borough Council officer report to the Planning Committee dated 27 October 2020 [CD35.1] recommended the grant of planning permission subject to conditions and the completion of an agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

## **2.2 Policy Alignment**

2.2.1 Relevant Transport Policy was reviewed as part of the submitted Transport Assessment and subsequent technical submissions for the subject site, including national and local policy.

2.2.2 It is my view that the proposed development aligns with the transport objectives within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) [CD1.1]. The Transport Assessment has considered access by sustainable modes of transport and promoted enhancements to those networks to encourage access by walking, cycling and public transport. The traffic impact of the proposed development has been assessed and cost-effective mitigation has been developed to limit the significance of those impacts. A framework travel plan has been prepared for the subject site and this will be implemented by the occupiers of the proposed development to promote and encourage alternative modes of transport to the single occupancy car.

2.2.3 The subject site is located within the administrative boundary of St Helens Council area. However, access is to be taken via Warrington Borough Council's road network as an extension of the current Omega development located within Warrington Borough Council's administrative boundary. As such, consideration was given to relevant transport policy for both Local Authorities.



2.2.4 Within the Warrington Borough Council area, under the Local Transport Plan 3 [CD43.31] (current at the time of preparing the Transport Assessment) the relevant policies focus on promoting active modes of travel and implementing travel plans for new development. Local Transport Plan 4 [CD43.32] was adopted in December 2019 and contains policies on: promoting active travel; smarter travel choices; public transport; road safety; cleaner fuels; highway asset management; network management and freight management. It is considered that the proposed development aligns with the Local Transport Plan policies in promoting active travel opportunities for the subject site, implementing travel plans to promote sustainable travel opportunities including walking, cycling and public transport; and routing freight traffic that does not serve the town centre away from the town centre.

2.2.5 Within St Helens Council Area, the relevant policy document is the St Helens Core Strategy Local Plan (2012) [CD2.2]. I am aware that under the current adopted plan, the site is located within the Green Belt and not identified for development. However, it is noted that the site is proposed to be allocated for development in the emerging plan. Whilst principally a planning, rather than transport, matter I note that the currently adopted plan is nearly a decade old and (as other witnesses explain) could not appropriately envisage the demand and uptake of large floorplate B8 development, which has emerged as a consequence of significant economic changes, particularly in the north west region since the 2008-2014 economic recession.

2.2.6 It is considered that the proposed development supports the aims of Policy CP2, ensuring a choice in mode of travel and providing good access to a road designated as a Freight Priority Route.

## **2.3 The effect of the proposal on the highway network and how the development can contribute to meeting sustainable transport objectives**

2.3.1 The submitted Transport Assessment has demonstrated the effect of the proposed development on the highway network and mitigation measures have been developed to ensure that the development can be appropriately accommodated. The Transport Assessment and mitigation measures have been considered in detail and agreed with all three highways authorities (St Helens Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council and Highways England) and there are suitable planning conditions in place to regulate the development.

- 2.3.2 The development builds upon the successful existing sustainable travel initiatives delivered within the wider Omega site. The Omega site currently provides extensive pedestrian and cycle routes throughout, connecting to the established external sustainable travel networks. The site benefits from existing public transport services in the form of Warrington no.13 and the bespoke Omega B52 bus services. The Omega site has embedded travel planning and initiatives are co-ordinated by Warrington Borough Council, to promote sustainable travel opportunities.
- 2.3.3 The proposed Omega Zone 8 development will contribute to meeting sustainable travel objectives as follows:
- The provision of pedestrian and cycle routes throughout the development site connecting to the existing established networks, secured by planning condition;
  - The provision of a new bus stop and shelter infrastructure within the site ensuring that all development is within 400m of public transport provision, secured by planning condition;
  - A financial contribution to extend existing bus services both within Warrington and St Helens, ensuring the site can be effectively accessed by public transport, secured through a S.106 Agreement;
  - The implementation of travel plans for the occupiers of the development, secured by planning condition;
  - A financial contribution to fund the co-ordination of travel planning initiatives, secured through a S.106 Agreement;
- 2.3.4 I have prepared a high level bus route assessment plan [CD43.33], showing the Omega West site overlaid with three existing bus routes (services 39, 39A and 141) within St Helens which run closest to the subject site, together with the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019. The plan shows how these routes currently serve the various areas of St Helens. I have included two potential bus routes from the Omega West site to the centre of St Helens to show how the public transport contribution secured through the Section 106 Agreement could be deployed and best serve areas identified within the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The two potential routes connect into the existing bus routes, providing the potential to interchange between services.

2.3.5 In my experience, for the wider Omega site, it has been for the public transport officer within the Council to determine the most appropriate service, routing and timetable as they are best placed to determine best value for money. It is my view that it would be for St Helens Council, Mersey Travel and the relevant bus operators to decide on the best route to serve the most people within St Helens.

## **2.4 Planning Conditions**

2.4.1 The relevant highways conditions for the subject site are conditions 15 to 26 ([CD35.1], pages 192 to 193) for the detailed planning application and conditions 84 to 91 (pages 206 to 207) for the outline application.

2.4.2 Planning condition 19 requires a travel plan to be submitted prior to the occupation of Unit 1. A framework travel plan was submitted as part of the transport assessment, outlining the range of initiatives/measures to be considered as part of a full/operational Travel Plan for the proposed development and the method for reviewing, managing, implementing, reporting and updating the full/operational travel plan.

2.4.3 The wider Omega site has successfully delivered travel planning initiatives through an established travel planning process, with the travel plan co-ordinator role being undertaken by Warrington Borough Council. The Omega site benefits from the successful implementation of the B52 bus service, initially funded by Omega Warrington Limited, which provides a bespoke timetable to tie in with the shift changeover times of the many Logistics operations within the Omega site. In addition, there are substantial walking and cycling routes within the Omega site, connecting to the wider sustainable travel network, ensuring there are opportunities for travel by a choice of sustainable modes. Site occupiers have provided secure cycle parking, lockers and changing facilities to encourage sustainable travel, together with commitments to undertake staff travel surveys and provide the results to Warrington Borough Council, in order that initiatives can be refined and tailored to the needs of staff. The Omega Zone 8 development Section 106 Agreement includes a travel plan contribution payable to Warrington Borough Council to fund the co-ordination of travel planning for the development and alignment with the existing Omega travel plan. It is my view that it would be beneficial for St Helens Council to be party to this Agreement, given the location of the site within their administrative boundary.

- 2.4.4 In order to prepare a full travel plan for Omega Zone 8 Unit 1, staff travel surveys will be required after the development is opened to understand staff travel patterns and mode of travel. The survey will provide baseline information and are usually undertaken within six months of a development opening. These surveys are then used to inform the travel plan initiatives that would be most effective in encouraging sustainable travel and reducing the dependency upon the private car.
- 2.4.5 It is my view that planning Condition 19 could be more appropriately re-worded, reflecting Planning Condition 88, to address the practicalities of gaining appropriate baseline data prior to the Unit 1 development opening.
- 2.4.6 I am satisfied with the remainder of the highways planning conditions.