



Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 77

Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000

The Proposed Development of Land to the West of Omega South and
South of the M62 Bold, St Helens

Topic Statement

THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA

Planning Application Reference
P/2020/0061/HYBR

Planning Inspectorate Reference
APP/H4315/V/20/3265899

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Topic Statements have been prepared to inform the Secretary of State on the matters identified in the Inspector's case management notes which are not addressed in the Council's main proofs of evidence. This Topic Statement is concerned with the character and appearance of the area.

2. THE APPLICATION

- 2.1. The application is made in hybrid form. For the outline element of the scheme, matters such as appearance, layout and landscaping are reserved for determination at a later date. However, the application has been made on the basis of a series of parameters plans that include height, landscaping and layout. Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been submitted and along with a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in the Environmental Statement and a photomontages.

3. REPRESENTATIONS BY WARRINGTON COUNCIL

- 3.1 Warrington Council have made representations on 12th August 2020. Warrington Development Management Committee considered the above application and the adjacent authority consultation on 5th August 2020 and resolved to offer no objections to the application described above subject to the following requirements:
- The impact of the height of the proposed building (maximum 41metres) on the visual amenity of areas within Warrington is taken in to account in the decision making process.
 - Consideration is given to any impact on the erosion of the green buffer between the Warrington and St Helens developed areas that would result from the development.

4. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA

- 4.1 A full description of the representations is set out in the Committee Report. The main issues raised are summarised as follows:
- Visual impact to south lodge Warrington road and locals
 - Dominate the landscape due to the height.
 - The scale of this proposal is outside that of the current Omega South development.
 - The height is equivalent of a fourteen-storey office block there is no potential for screening
 - Photographs do not show what the buildings would look like in reality
 - The Site 1 building would tower above any other warehouse in the UK and would be one of the largest buildings by volume in the world. Placing a building with the height of a 12-storey office block in the flat landscape around St Helens would provide an obstruction on a scale previously seen in very few places worldwide.
 - It will be a serious visual impact from the public foot path (part of Bold Forest Park)

5. POLICY

5.1 Relevant planning policy is the following:

- St Helens Local Plan Core Strategy (2012) Policies CP 1 - Ensuring Quality; and CQL 4 – Heritage and Landscape;
- Bold Forest Action Plan (2017) Policy ENV1 - Enhancing Landscape Character;
- National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 117, 124 and 127.

6. ASSESSMENT

6.1 Paragraph 124 in the NPPF states that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work.

6.2 Paragraph 127 in the NPPF states that planning decisions should ensure that developments;

- a) function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

6.3 Paragraph 117 in the NPPF states that planning decisions should make an effective use of land, while safeguarding and improving the environment.

6.4 Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires new development to maintain or enhance the overall character and appearance of the local environment, minimise opportunity for crime and maximise natural surveillance, provide landscaping as an integral part of the development, protecting existing landscape features, and achieve a BREEAM rating of at least "very good" for non-residential development.

6.5 Core Strategy Policy CQL 4 states that the Council will protect, preserve and enhance landscape character by protecting landscape character from harmful development; enhancing the landscape character; ensuring that new development respects the significance and character of landscape character. The policy is orientated towards the historic landscape and references to protecting landscape character are in the context of protecting heritage assets.

6.6 Policy ENV1 of the Bold Forest Action Plan supports landscape enhancement by increasing tree cover. The policy refers to Core Strategy Policy CQL 4.

6.5 The character of the site is relatively flat with fields and grassland and hedgerows and low-level timber fences and pockets of woodland within and on the boundaries of the site. The land to the south, east and north of the application site is relatively open with fields and grassland. Adjacent to the east boundary of the site is Omega Industrial Park where there are large warehouses, clad in colours of grey, blue and white, with large service yards and parking areas, security fencing, cctv and external lighting. The landscape context of the site has changed substantially since the Council's Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken in 2006.

- 6.6 As the scheme is in hybrid form, only the full details of the redevelopment of the northern part of the site are known specifically, the full element, although details indicative details of height and layout have been provided for the outline.
- 6.7 Unit 1 in the full element would measure approximately 449m long x 221m at its widest with a curved apex roof which would measure 29.4m at the crown at the western end and 41.6m at the crown to the eastern end. Plantation Wood, Booth Wood and parts of Duck Wood would be retained.
- 6.8 The north west of the site would be landscaped with trees and shrubs and footpath cycle way sited through the site along with suds basins and water swales. The outline element would include the area of land labelled 'expansion land' to the east of the full element and the area of land to the south. A parameters plan has been provided indicating a minimum peripheral boundary and maximum height of 19 metres and minimum footprint of any units.
- 6.9 Large scale footprints have been used elsewhere on Omega estates although unit 1 would be the largest. The use of a mix of horizontal and vertical cladding with paler colours of white, grey and pale blue and a colour banding, would to a degree assist in breaking up the expanse of the building. There would be clear legibility throughout the site and clear lines of site. Unit 1 would be on a similar building line to the adjacent warehouse in Omega and the building(s) proposed within the outline element would be similar to the adjacent warehouses in Omega with landscape boundaries. The proposed development when viewed in isolation within an industrial context and against the backdrop of the Omega industrial site, would have similarities with the character of the area.
- 6.10 However, the proposal would result in a significant amount of established tree loss and farmland and redevelop it with one large warehouse, large areas of hard-surfacing, service and parking yards and associated equipment such as flues and petrol pumps, which would cause harm to the character of the area. The provision of landscaping and trees would soften the edges of the warehouses but not only will this landscaping take years to establish but would not assist in mitigating the view of the warehouses due to the large scale and height of the warehouses. The warehouse would look incongruous and dominant buildings in the landscape.
- 6.11 The application site for the full element would be set away from Omega with an open space of land left to be used for expansion land. The applicant has explained that there are constraints here including a watercourse and overhead electricity lines where the construction timescale for unit 1 means that these constraints cannot be dealt with in this time.
- 6.12 Within the operation statement the applicant has explained the requirement of the footprint scale and height of the main building, which is accepted. However, the photomontages clearly illustrate how visible the buildings would be within the immediate and wider setting and harm will be caused to the character of the area, which is contrary to Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy.
- 6.13 All matters are reserved for the outline element, however details of height have been provided and indicative layouts. The buildings would be set behind unit 1 and would be subordinate in height so they would be less visible from certain vantage points. However, they would still be incongruous development within the existing character of the area causing harm.
- 6.14 The proposed unit 1 would appear as incongruous features, appearing significantly larger and higher than anything else in the surrounding area. Even with care consideration given to the design of the building it would still result in significant harm

to the character of the area. The outline building(s) to a lesser degree would also appear incongruous due to the height and footprint with the rural setting upon which they would be sited and would cause a moderate harm to the character and appearance. The development is of a typical industrial design and complies with the relevant elements of the NPPF and CP1, but would harm the character of the area. This weighs against the proposed development.

8. OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ON CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

- 8.1 The design of the proposed development when viewed in isolation within an industrial context and against the backdrop of the Omega industrial site, would have similarities with the character of the area. However, the height of unit 1 is significantly higher than elsewhere and therefore harm would be caused through short and long range views. In the design context, moderate harm is caused.