

Bold Parish Council

Evidence to the Secretary of State Inquiry into Development

P/2020/0061/HYBR OMEGA 8

Introduction :-

Bold Parish Council represents a population of some 3000 people on the southern border of the conurbation of St Helens. In common with the rest of the local area Bold parish has a strong history of coal mining.

The first coal mines were sunk in the area in the 16th century on small scale but became a major industry in the late 17th early 18th century with the advent of the industrial revolution. The last coal mine in the area ceased operation in 1991. The industry left a scarred landscape of colliery buildings and waste tips

In the intervening years the area has seen remedial work and the development of forest parks linked by bridleways and footpaths. The local population are justly proud and protective of the environmental improvements we have seen in the area. We are grateful that previous local administrations have had the vision and foresight to radically improve a previously ravaged area.

It is extremely disappointing that the current administration feels it necessary to allow further environmental destruction to the area. Especially in light of the Borough councils declared stand on the environment and climate change.

In the 2019 parish elections the parish saw a high turn out over 30% of voters in the parish casting their ballot. All those candidates standing on a platform of saving the Greenbelt were elected with a large majority, taking 91% of the overall vote. A clear mandate from the local population of their wish to retain the rural nature of the parish and its surrounds.

In support of the local community the Parish Council are opposed to the development and concerned about the damage to the landscape and the environment. Damage which is clearly acknowledged by most observers of this proposal.

Siting:-

The site assessment study carried out for this development was constrained by the size requirement identified by the developer. Disaggregation of the facility being ruled out at an early stage on the basis of financial viability. It is clear that the criteria for the development was to maximise the profitability and not to reduce environmental impact. Also evidenced by the fact that of the seven key criteria for siting, environmental constraints were the last criteria to be considered. Indeed we were appalled that the supplementary assessment discounted protection of the countryside.

Under NPPF section 11 developments should utilise Brownfield sites and underutilised land as much as possible since St Helens did not in 2015 nor currently have a complete Brownfield register the site assessment study could not therefore have been exhaustive.

We would question why the site assessment was restricted to St Helens and Warrington. We are puzzled by the statement in paragraph 8.54 of the **Alternative Sites Case** “ to serve St Helens and Warrington” when clearly the building is intended to serve a much larger geographical area. We are aware of at least one site in close proximity at the former Cronton colliery being developed as the Tritax Symmetry Park which meets the key criteria avoids destruction of Greenbelt and has a direct connection to the road network including motorway access.

Staffing:-

We also consider the single site option is indicative of a requirement to minimise staffing levels and to increase the level of automation. We are concerned that this indicates that staffing levels and the economic benefits claimed for the proposals are overstated.

Initial justification for the development of this site was increased demand for employment land for Warrington Borough Council as outlined in their local plan. This plan is still in draft form and approval has been delayed and it is now subject to a number of amendments. Further developments on the Omega and Gemini sites would suggest that employment needs for Warrington are reduced. Warrington Borough Council have subsequently claimed a lack of consultation regarding this development. A number of B8 logistics units on the Omega site have remained vacant for extended periods. Initial announcements regarding the Omega development claimed the site would create 24,000 jobs. Currently it employs in the region of 6000. Many of the jobs are redeployment from other sites in the area.

Contrary to assertions by the planning authority we do not believe that recruitment can be restricted to people residing in St Helens; apart from being poor commercial practice to restrict the recruitment catchment population, it is likely to be challenged under human rights and employment discrimination legislation.

Similarly there is no clear statement from the developer regarding the future of the current logistics facilities at Gillmoss. We are concerned that the current facilities would be abandoned if the development at Omega where to take place. With the effects on the local economy and staff this would entail.

Traffic:-

Both our own and neighbouring parish councils have expressed grave concerns regarding increased traffic using Junction 8 of the M62. This serves a vast number of commercial outlets and residential areas. Whilst this has been the subject of extensive improvements to deal with long standing traffic blockages at peak times the addition of this and other developments on the Omega site, the adjoining Gemini retail park and further residential

additions to an already well-developed site, give rise to grave concerns regarding its continued ability to deal with anticipated traffic loads.

Additionally problems on the motorway network are a frequent occurrence in this locality since it is a convergence point for 3 major motorways (M6, M56 and M62) the surrounding roads and infrastructure are not capable of relieving any problems. Much of the remaining roads in the area have changed little in the last 100 years. Most roads are narrow and pass-through residential areas. The nearest village Burtonwood has imposed an HGV ban which is regularly flaunted and residents regularly express concern at the number of vehicles now passing through the village. Major traffic calming and speed restrictions have been introduced in the village. We have had no evidence of any commitment from the developer to mitigate the impact on the local infrastructure.

We are aware that the Home Bargains transport fleet comprises some of the largest vehicles currently on the roads.

In our experience other logistics developments locally have a lack of on-site parking for vehicles delivering to site. The lack of rest room facilities for drivers waiting to deliver to site, often for extended periods, creates a major nuisance in the surrounding area .

The development does not enhance current policy to increase walking and cycling provision. Particularly in the winter this would be an unappealing option for employees and the current route over the motorway would preclude disabled access.

Air Pollution :-

Linked to the increasing traffic density, Warrington air quality close to this site suffers nitrogen oxide levels which exceed National levels.

In 2017, 4.1% of all deaths were attributable to man-made particulate pollution, equivalent to 95 premature deaths locally.

No figures are available for the area on the health impact of nitrogen dioxide exposure but by extrapolating from national figures it is estimated that premature deaths from poor air quality are equivalent to approximately 130 to 145 annually.

The proximity of the site to residential areas and a large school complex is concerning with the most severe effects of poor air quality affecting the most vulnerable in society including children and older people.

Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure good air quality a responsibility strengthened by the Clean air strategy (2019) and the more recent Environment Bill. The continued increase and concentration of road transport logistics in a small geographical area is unlikely to contribute to addressing this issue. Local people particularly our children and those with health conditions will continue to suffer the health impact of poor air quality.

Environment and Visual Impact

The Parish Council are concerned that this proposal will be severely detrimental to the local environment and will have a major visual impact on the area. The destruction of 18 acres of established woodland, the disruption and loss of habitat are unacceptable. Proposals to mitigate the environmental vandalism are minimal. Recent experience in St Helens Borough would indicate little incentive for developers to replace environmental damage. The local planning authority have no power to enforce this once development has taken place.

At 97 feet high and a floor space of 205,000 square meters this is a truly gigantic construction it will have a major visual impact on the surrounding area. It is not clear that the planning authority completed a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment. Photographs used by the developer to illustrate the visual impact and the developers own planning document Opp. Doc11.38 show that this will dominate the view over a large part of the local area. In particular the site of the Clock face Country park will be overshadowed by the building. Our concern is the loss of the visual amenity for this local recreational area.

We have further concerns regarding the effect of light pollution on the local area. Existing light levels on the Omega site are excessive. This further development operating on a full 24-hour, 7-day basis would add significantly to light levels with a detrimental effect on a number of residential properties in the area. The presence of anthropogenic and artificial light even carefully controlled is known to alter natural conditions and is blamed for compromising health, disrupting ecosystems and spoiling aesthetic environments. As well as disruption to wildlife, recent studies have indicated links to breast cancer.

Greenbelt:-

The development is entirely sited on Greenbelt contrary to the NPPF which attaches significant importance to the protection of Greenbelt Land.

Development of the site would compromise all Greenbelt criteria :-

1. It would increase urban sprawl.
2. it would significantly erode separation between St Helens and Warrington.

(Also bearing in mind that both Warrington and St Helens planning authorities have identified further employment land development to the north of the M62.)

3. It would encroach into a large area of open countryside.
4. The site is close to a number of buildings of historic interest.
- 5, It would not assist in urban regeneration.

We do not believe that special circumstances exist to allow development on Green Belt.

Bold Forest Area Action Plan

The Parish council are concerned that this development runs counter to the Bold Forest Action Plan adopted by St Helens Council in 2017. This plan sets out to protect our rural environment to stimulate the local economy, preserve local heritage sites, encourage leisure pursuits and tourism. We believe that this development would be to the detriment of the forest park and significantly reduce its appeal to visitors. This would reduce the possibility of developing a diverse range of leisure activities boosting the local economy and enhancing healthy lifestyles.

In conclusion Bold Parish Council does not feel that the economic benefits assumed for this development outweigh the significant damage to the rural environment. We believe that the employment figures quoted by the developer are grossly overstated. Experience would indicate that staffing and economic benefits assumed at the planning stage are unlikely to materialise. Once a development is approved there appears to be little or no recourse for the planning authority should the benefits not be delivered.

We also believe that should this development be approved then further encroachment into the Greenbelt is inevitable it is on record that during the planning committee hearing, considering this development, a member of the planning committee invited the developer to submit proposals for another similar development.

The proposal received over 120 objections and as a Parish council we have been overwhelmed by the level of concern expressed to us by local residents. On behalf of the local people of Bold Parish we request that this planning proposal be refused.

