

Omega Public inquiry Speech

The Omega Development proposed by the applicant and Supported by the planning committee of St.Helens Council is in need of further scrutiny and analysis; this inquiry will provide this and deliver a verdict weighted on evidence alone. St.Helens Councils planning committee did not fully scrutinise the proposed development instead they spent more time attacking objectors to the proposal and bending over backwards to please the applicant. This reached a nadir when the deputy leader of St.Helens Council offered more land within St.Helens to the applicant to aid the expansion of their business,

The report from Melanie Hale the Planning officer detailed two and a half pages of harm that will be caused by this development. This is detailed in the report given to members of St.Helens MBC planning committee.

The Secretary of State wants further analysis of the very special circumstances. This is desperately needed.

Chapter 6 of the NPPF Paragraph 80

Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. **The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.**

St Helens as a borough developed around the production of glass and mining of coal. The Local authority has decided that its strength lies in the logistics sector. I would contend that this is not a strength of St.Helens, and does not counter the considerable weaknesses in our local economy.

The number of employees working at Logistics sites has been trending downwards as automated processes take over from labour. The council have accepted an inflated jobs figure to claim very special circumstances.

The Florida Farm north development that was approved in 2017 promised 2500 jobs and the applicant a Mr Keith Wilson of Bericote promised 5000 jobs at the planning committee stage. The then chair of the Planning committee stated this development would rejuvenate the town centre. In the end 320 jobs materialised and St Helens town centre continues to decline.

The applicant is promising over 1100 jobs at Unit 1 this is despite the applicant agreeing a deal with Witron worth £70 million pound to provide the automated processing machinery for the site. Units 2,3 and 4 are speculative.

The applicant has a similar site as proposed for the Bold Forest Park Area at Amesbury in Wiltshire. The pay rates for the available jobs are at the NMW. I suspect that there is a lot of churn in employee numbers at that site.

The weakness that St.Helens needs to counter is the level of deprivation within the borough, there is little evidence that the NMW jobs on offer would make a dent. I also contend that the job numbers are inflated.

The benefits of the proposal are to the benefit of the applicant and the authority that would receive £3.5 million in business rates.

In the logistics and warehousing sector job numbers are going down and as a result this does not meet the requirement to address the challenges of the future. There will be minimal impact on deprivation figures as a result of this development, the jobs will not materialise and the wage rates available to the majority will be of the NMW.

St. Helens Council have settled upon a plan of low wage, precarious employment in a sector that is automating and reducing their labour requirement at great pace. This is not a sustainable plan for the borough.

St. Helens Council desire to be a logistics hub is based on an envy of Warrington, a new town on the motorway, getting the business rates from big sheds. Wanting to keep up with the Jones in this instance is short-sighted and myopic.

It is not sustainable, does not take into account local business need and wider opportunities for development.

This Plan runs counter to the Bold Forest Area Action Plan.

Bold is a semi-rural area and this is truer now than in the recent past following the closure of Sutton Manor Colliery in 1989. The former Colliery site is now a tourist attraction featuring the Dream, a half a million pound artwork installed ten years ago. St Helens Council have effectively ignored their policies for the Bold Forest Park Area and the needs of the rural economy by supporting this development. This project is counter to the plan to develop Bold ward as a site for heritage and tourism. Bold Ward should be part of the councils tourism and heritage strategy. They have failed to invest in the Bold Forest Area Action Plan.

There are no very special circumstances. Unless you consider the inflated Job numbers provided by the applicant to be valid. If you consider that a small number of NMW jobs are worth destroying the bold Forest Park Area. The benefits accrue to the applicant that will gain a site with 4 units, three are speculative and will be sold for a profit in the tens of millions pound margins.

That this application runs counter to Chapter 13 of the NPPF is beyond a doubt. The Council planning officer, Melanie Hale, detailed 2 and a half pages of harm to the green belt.

Is this application consistent with building a strong competitive economy for St. Helens?

I would suggest that the job numbers are inflated.

That much of the employment for local residents is of a low wage and low skill nature

Can and Should St. Helens strive for better employment that is sustainable and future proofed?

On to Productivity: Logistics is a cost and does not add any value unlike manufacturing and research

Have St. Helens Council failed to build a visitor economy based on the Bold Forest Park Action Plan? I contend they have given up on it.

This application does not meet the needs of my residents or the need to build a stronger economy for the borough.