

Planning Application: Florida Farm North Response to Issues Raised August 2016

Following an extensive consultation programme, we have now finalised our plans and submitted the planning application for our proposals on this site. These proposals are for a 37 ha extension to the existing Haydock Industrial Estate to provide new industrial and distribution warehouses totalling up to 135,000 m² along with all associated infrastructure, including a new highways access from the A580 East Lancs Road which will also serve the adjacent industrial estate along with large landscaping and ecological areas. The £150 million development will generate significant economic and social benefits, including at least 2,500 new permanent jobs which will be targeted locally and over £2 million per annum in business rate revenue for St Helens Council. We are aware that a number of questions have been raised about our proposals which we respond to below.

Why is this development being proposed for land which is currently classed as Green Belt?

There is a clear need for this kind of development within St Helens to satisfy the Council's requirement to provide employment and deliver buildings for companies who want to locate here. Our preference would always be to develop brownfield sites for this kind of development but unfortunately there simply aren't any of these sites that could accommodate the proposals. We have therefore been forced to look at Green Belt sites and believe that this one is the most suitable. If Bericote were not proposing to develop this site, it is likely that somebody else would be.

Over £1 billion of investment in the Liverpool City Region's port and logistics assets is underway which is expected to transform the logistics sector throughout the whole region. However, without a sufficient supply of land for development the economic potential of the City Region will not be fulfilled. Market analysis carried out by the Liverpool City Region LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) identified a net requirement for 634 ha of land for logistics and manufacturing over the next 20 years but at the same time concluded that there is a severe lack of available and deliverable sites.

St Helens has a critical role to play in logistics within the City Region due to its strategic location between the new Liverpool 2 container terminal and the national motorway network. Since the St Helens Core Strategy was adopted in 2012, the Council have undertaken further research to inform the Local Plan process which demonstrates the need for 177 – 241 ha of land to be made available for employment uses over the next 20 years, of which 100-130 ha is for logistics uses. There is no choice other than to remove sites from the Green Belt to satisfy this requirement. Sites in close proximity to the M6 and an extension to the existing Haydock Industrial Estate are identified as the most preferable locations for development.

Florida Farm North is ideally placed for logistics development, fronting the A580 dual carriageway, only 1.5 miles to junction 23 of the M6 motorway and adjacent to the existing Haydock Industrial Estate.

What impact will the development have on traffic on the highway network?

A full Transport Assessment has been completed which has been submitted as part of the planning application. Traffic surveys were initially carried out in order to understand the existing traffic flows on the surrounding road network. The proposed development was then modelled using standard assumptions but supplemented with an additional survey recently carried out at the Omega development in Warrington. In summary, the development will have a minimal impact on the highways and junctions close to the development including junction 23 of the M6 (Haydock Island) throughout the 24-hour period. Further, during the morning and evening peak hours, the impact will be negligible and largely unnoticeable. This is because shift start times for facilities of this type tend to be 6am, 2pm and 10pm and shift workers will usually arrive just ahead of their shift start time or leave just after their shift end time. At these times, levels of background traffic tend to be quite low. Also, operators actively manage deliveries to ensure that HGVs leaving and arriving at the site would not be focussed in the peak hours either with these trips tending to be staggered throughout the 24-hour period to avoid potential costly delays.

During the consultation process, we were made aware of traffic, particularly HGVs using Liverpool Road and Millfield Lane in order to access junction 24 of the M6 and the congestion and other problems this is creating. We have therefore committed to ensure that all HGVs from our site will be required to use only the A580 East Lancs Road to reach the M6. This commitment will be agreed between the Council and the operators as part of a HGV Delivery Management Plan in order to comply with a specific planning condition. This Delivery Management Plan would also ensure that HGVs do not park off-site elsewhere on the highways network awaiting access into the site.

We believe a significant element of our proposals is the new all-ways traffic light access at Haydock Lane. This will have a number of benefits. Firstly, it will provide all-ways access for existing occupiers of the western end of the industrial estate, taking congestion away from the current access point via the Piele Road underpass. Secondly, it will stop vehicles using the southern, residential end of Haydock Lane to perform unsafe 'U' turn manoeuvres as happens currently as they will simply be able to turn right at the traffic lights instead. Finally, it will provide safe crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists across the A580 East Lancs which is currently a safety concern. With these improvements and our commitment to provide a number of footpaths and cycleways within the site, we believe the proposed buildings will be very accessible for workers who do not commute to work via car. In fact, workers will be encouraged to use more sustainable forms of transport to get to work through the implementation of a Travel Plan which again will be controlled through a planning condition.

What impact will the development have on views in the surrounding area?

A fundamental design element of the scheme has been to screen the buildings as much as possible from the surrounding areas. Firstly, earthworks techniques will be used to lower the buildings into the site as much as possible. Secondly, large earth mounds will be constructed along all of the site boundaries which will then be planted with trees, including a number of semi-mature trees. Photomontages of the completed development have been submitted as part of the planning application which shows how effective this screening will be. As the trees become established after a few years, the buildings will be virtually hidden from a number of viewpoints on the A580 East Lancs Road and Liverpool Road.

What impact will the development have on wildlife on the site?

Currently, over 90% of the site is used for arable farming. Other than the public footpath that runs along the eastern boundary, the site is private property and is not accessible to the public. A comprehensive set of survey work has been carried out as part of the planning application which determined that the majority of the site is of limited ecological value. The proposals provide for the retention of the woodland area at the south west corner of the site which will be enhanced through the addition of new woodland planting, grassland and wetland habitats which will increase the biodiversity of the site. This new 2.5 ha ecological area will be actively managed and made accessible to the public to enjoy the various different environments.

As described above, new landscape corridors with tree planting will be created around the perimeter of the site and along with new balancing ponds will total 9 ha meaning that total 'green' areas within the completed development will be over 25% of the total site area. The proposals will necessitate the felling of a small number of trees. However, this will be more than offset by the planting of over 25,000 new shrubs and trees through the site. These proposals will ensure that species of wildlife currently using the site will continue to thrive plus these new ecological areas should also encourage other species from the wider area into the site. A full ecological assessment accompanies the planning application.

What impact will the development have on Noise in the area?

A full assessment of the expected impact of the development on noise is included within the planning application. The analysis is based upon background noise being measured at several locations around the site over a five-day period. From the outset, the desire to mitigate noise impacts has resulted in a number of elements being designed into the proposals, most notably large landscaped mounds around the perimeter of the site, acoustic fences around some parts of the service yards and enclosed service roads where they are in close proximity to residences on Liverpool Road.

A proposed Construction Method Statement and a Construction Environmental Management Plan have been included with the planning application, both of which will be implemented during the construction phase of the development. They include a number of ways to mitigate against noise and vibration. During the operational phase and given the physical measures described above, the development will have a negligible effect on noise at nearby properties and in the surrounding area.

What impact will the development have on Air Quality in the area?

A full assessment of the expected impact of the development on air quality is included within the planning application. For the construction phase of the development, dust control and exhaust emissions mitigation measures will be implemented to ensure that there will be no significant impacts during this phase. Once the buildings are completed and operating, the effects on air quality will not change significantly from existing conditions and will be within the UK Air Quality Objectives.

What impact will the development have on Flooding in the area?

A Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared which accompanies the planning application. Virtually all of the site is within Flood Zone 1 (lowest category of flooding risk) aside from a small area in the south east corner which is classed as Flood Zone 2 (medium risk). However, no buildings are proposed within this area, so the risk to the development itself is low.

Potential impacts from the development relate primarily to the increased surface water runoff due to the new hard-surfaced areas created by the buildings, service yards, car parking areas and internal roads. However, the onsite Sustainable Drainage Systems (balancing ponds) have been designed to ensure that surface water runoff will be restricted to greenfield runoff rates equivalent and thus will not increase flood risk to adjoining land. In fact, because we were made aware of the flooding which has previously occurred downstream in Blackbrook, we have increased storage capacity within the system to actually benefit the situation downstream during extreme storm events. In technical terms, current surface water runoff rates from the site could in extreme events (1 in 100 year storm) be up to 303 litres per second. Our proposed system will limit this to a reduced runoff rate of 146 litres per second and provide additional storage on the site to achieve this reduced rate. The surface water runoff from the site will effectively be discharged into the network over a longer period reducing the likelihood of flooding downstream.

How many jobs will the development create and how can they be targeted locally?

The proposals will result in delivering over 400 construction jobs during the development period and then 2,500 permanent jobs once the buildings are operational. Specific operators for these buildings have not yet been named so these figures are based on widely accepted averages within this sector. However, based on other developments we have completed recently, actual employment levels delivered could be significantly higher. For example, earlier this year Bericote completed the construction of a 53,000 m² development for Ocado in Erith in South East London delivering 3,500 jobs.

There are also a lot of misconceptions about jobs that are created in the logistics industry. As is described in more detail in our planning application, jobs in this sector are both likely to be higher paid and less likely to be part-time than the national average. In facilities of this size, there is also a lot of variety in the types of jobs that are available and the skills required, including warehouse operatives, drivers, administrative staff, engineers and management positions. It is worth noting that the proposals include up to 10,000 m² of offices included within the warehouses which gives some idea of the number of office-based roles that will be created.

It is true to say that the jobs cannot be guaranteed to be given to local people and ultimately the occupiers of the buildings will decide who to employ. However, as part of the planning application we have submitted a Local Employment Strategy which describes how we and the occupiers of the buildings will work with local partners such as St Helens College to give the first 'opportunity' to local people to secure these jobs. This will include events such as jobs fairs which will be held locally. We have also committed to help give local suppliers and sub-contractors the opportunity to put themselves forward to work on the construction of the site by putting on supplier events within the town. This commitment to the Local Employment Strategy will be ensured through a planning condition requiring the specific measures to be agreed by the Council before the site can be developed and operated.

Further detail on all of these issues and anything else not covered here can be found within the planning application submission which will shortly be publicly available on the Council website.