

Employment Land Report — Aldi, Cheadle



Introduction

To set the context of the application proposals, in the first instance, the current use site should be considered. The site is currently vacant having previously been owner-occupied by Industrial Agricultural Engineering (IAE), manufacturers of livestock handling equipment, equestrian stabling, steel fencing and shelters. The Company employs over 500 people mainly at their premises in Stoke. The Cheadle site employed approximately 40 people, the majority of whom now work from the Stoke site.

Prior to 2017, the business identified a need to expand. It was not feasible to do this at the Cheadle site. Land was available adjacent to their Stoke premises and the operations previously undertaken in Cheadle have moved as part of the expansion to a new 189,000sqft building where the whole industrial process can be undertaken under one roof. Previously products had to be transported between sites for final powder coating and therefore the consolidation of the business has also reduced the need for heavy goods vehicle to transport goods between the two sites. There was no possibility of expanding their existing premises in Cheadle to accommodate this, so the choice was made to expand the Stoke premises instead. A planning application was made in January 2017, and approval granted in July 2017. Enabling works started in July 2019.

The Proposals

The proposals represent an opportunity to ensure the site is bought back into an economically viable use. 40 local jobs will be created as part of the new development opportunity. Aldi are not currently represented in the area, and they are willing to sign up to a Local Labour agreement (supported by para 7.33 of Local Plan). Aldi will want to employ local people as standard practice as this provides a benefit in how the store operates; employees can get to work whatever the weather and the store becomes a community hub where people want to shop if they recognise those working there.

Retail development falls within Class E which covers commercial, business and service uses. It has been well established that retail jobs are 'real' jobs and are a material benefit in planning terms.

Local Plan Policy

The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted in September 2020.

The site is not allocated for employment uses; the site is unallocated on the local plan proposals map.

The glossary to the Plan notes that 'economic development' includes town centre uses. It is acknowledged that aside from employment policy, any planning application for retail uses would also be required to pass the retail policy test. This has been demonstrated within the Planning & Retail Statement, with Policy Officers stating no objections on retail policy grounds.

Local Plan Policy seeks to protect the loss of employment land to non-employment generating uses. It is understandable that The Local Planning Authority need to ensure that there is a supply of land for jobs. Paragraph 7.38 states *Schemes proposing changes of use amongst 'employment' uses (as defined in this policy) but that do not result in the net loss of employment floorspace, will be assessed on their merits against wider policies including SS4.* Policy SS4 (of the Core Strategy) relates to housing development and is therefore not relevant in this case; a change of use to another form of development that creates employment.

Policy E3 relates to Existing Employment Areas, Premises and Allocations. Criteria is set out for redevelopment of these sites to non-employment uses. As emphasised above, the proposals will secure 40 new jobs for the site. Although not directly relevant (as there is no loss in employment), criteria 'C' discusses *'substantial planning benefits for non-employment uses which would outweigh the loss of the site for employment use.'* In this case, the proposal should be considered in the context of the wider benefits of the proposal that would outweigh the loss of the traditional B Class employment use.

- a) the site is currently vacant with no job opportunities,
- b) the proposal will introduce 40 new jobs paid above Living Wage,
- c) training opportunities,

- d) there is a clear need for retail choice and competition within the catchment area,
- e) the catchment area does not currently have a discount retailer. At the onset of a cost-of-living crisis, the proposal will enable access to cheaper shopping,
- f) reduction in the need to travel,
- g) redevelopment and regeneration of the site.

The Council is in the process of producing a Developer Contributions DPD with comments on the Issues and Options paper due April 2022. Paragraph 3.34 demonstrates that an appropriate mechanism for delivering sustainable economic growth and maximising employment opportunities is through a Training and Employment Management Plan. Aldi can agree to a planning condition to secure this. Examples can be provided where this has been carried out previously.

Employment Land Availability

Planning Potential accept that there is little employment land available within Cheadle. The draw of Stoke-on-Trent as a more industrialised town with a larger population compared with the more rural nature of Cheadle and surrounding area would mean that businesses would find more opportunities within Stoke and as a result demand and supply there is greater.

Land is allocated under Policy EM1 – Land North of New Haden Road. This is a 4.27ha site that does not benefit from planning permission of have an application submitted to date.

Aldi Employment Benefits

Aldi were placed 5th in the Times Top 100 Best Graduate Employers for 2021, they were also placed 70th in the top 200 most desirable employers in the UK to work in the 2021/22 School Leaver 200. They run an Apprenticeship Scheme and offer a full training package to all employees.

Starting salary for employees outside of London is £10.50 an hour rising to £11.40 per hour. The starting wage is 60p an hour above Living Wage. Store Managers can earn up to £63,245. As well as this, the Company a host of benefits including healthcare, parental leave, and lifestyle perks.

Conclusion

The application site is currently vacant and does not benefit from any employment opportunities. On balance, the application proposals offer an opportunity to secure jobs at the same time as providing other economic material benefits. The support for the application demonstrates that there is a need to expand retail choice and competition in the area.

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