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Dealt with by: Mr J Copestake

Direct Dial: 01538 395400

Our Ref: ***SMD/2023/0293***

Your Ref:

Date: 30th August 2023

Mr S. Drury
RPS Consulting UK & Ireland
4th Floor
1 Newhall St
Birmingham
B3 3NH

BY EMAIL

Dear Mr Drury

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Screening Opinion in relation to Application SMD/2022/0577 for Hill Helicopters on land at Blythe Business Park, Creswell.

I refer to your letter dated 31st May 2023 in connection with the above proposal and your request therein for a Screening opinion under regulation 6 (1) of the above Regulations as to whether the proposal is EIA development requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement.

The proposal is for: change of use of land and provision of hardstanding, helipads, balancing pond, visitor car park, security fencing, landscaping and additional tree planting (in connection with adjacent helicopter manufacturing plant currently being determined).

The Proposed Development is of a type listed in Schedule 2 and falls in Class 10 'Infrastructure Projects', Subsections (a) 'Industrial estate projects' and (e) 'Construction of airfields'. The EIA Regulations identify a series of thresholds for Schedule 2 projects to assist with establishing whether the potential for significant environmental effects exists such that an EIA would be required. The EIA Regulations state that for (a) an EIA may be required for developments where the area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectares and for (e) where the development involves extension to a runway, or where the area exceeds 1ha. The Site area exceeds this thresholds and includes the creation of helipads. The Proposed Development therefore constitutes a Schedule 2 development and this screening assessment has been prepared to determine whether the Proposed Development would be likely to result in significant environmental effects which would trigger the need for EIA.

In preparing this screening opinion the LPA has had regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations. The LPA has also had regard to the Indicative thresholds and criteria set out in the Planning Practice Guidance. The LPA has used the recommended Screening Matrix to prepare this opinion and this letter should be read in conjunction with that matrix.

Characteristics of the Development

The site would extend to 7.68ha which clearly exceeds the related 0.5ha and 1ha thresholds and therefore is classed as Schedule 2 development.

The proposed development is immediately adjacent to and indeed partially overlaps with land which has outline permission for: 168 dwellings; 33.5ha of B1/B2/B8; and, a shop, with other ancillary development. This outline application was considered EIA development, with an ES prepared for: landscape and visual impact; socio-economic; traffic and transportation; flood risk and drainage; ground conditions; dust and air quality; noise and vibration; and, ecology. As detailed in the accompanying matrix and later in this response, the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant effects relating to: ecology; noise; and, human health. These impacts have the potential to also impact upon and be influenced by those same impacts arising from the adjacent development.

This site is grade 3 agricultural land (with the adjoining outline site being 3/4) and therefore the development is not considered to have any significant effects in that regard.

Waste arising from the construction and operation phases is not considered likely to give rise to significant effects. Waste arising from the construction phase will be controlled via a CEMP and site waste management plan, secured via planning condition.

The noise impacts of the operation of the site could be significant, both in intensity and duration. Whilst not located in a sensitive area, the site is close to dwellings and habitats for nesting birds. It is considered that the noise impacts could give rise to significant effects, including significant effects to human health.

No other pollution or nuisances are considered likely to give rise to significant effects.

It is not considered that there would be any risk of major accidents or disasters. It is assumed that the operation of helicopters will be carried out in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Location of the Development

The existing land use is agricultural (Grade 3)

There are no known natural resources on the site that can be extracted and as such the site is not environmentally sensitive in this regard.

The development may impact upon the Blythe River wildlife corridor. It is not otherwise considered likely that there would be impact upon coastal zones, mountain or forest areas, densely populated areas or landscapes of historic, cultural or archaeological significance. Whilst the site is 350m from Grade II Listed buildings at St Mary's and Westgate Farm, and 600m from Scheduled Monument at Paynsley Hall, given the intervening distances, significant effects are not considered likely.

Characteristics of the Potential Impact

This assessment considers:

(a) The magnitude and spatial extent of the impact;

(b) The nature of the impact;
(c) The transboundary nature of the impact;
(d) The intensity and complexity of the impact;
(e) The probability of the impact;
(f) The expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
(g) The cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development; and,
(h) The possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

The transboundary impacts of are considered to have two elements. Firstly, with the adjacent associated approved development. Secondly, those impacts arising from the operation of helicopters on and around the site.

The nature of the impact is considered to relate to the likely significant effects, those being: noise; human health; and, ecology. The magnitude, spatial extent onset, duration and frequency are unknown at this stage due to limit precise information about the operation of helicopters. A scenario whereby many flights move to and from the site could give rise to significant, intense effects over a large area. Even where helicopter operation was at a low level, the probability of impact is high, due to the sensitivity of humans and wildlife to these types of noise impacts.

Whilst the applicant has indicated that impacts are likely to be reduced by: controlling the number of flights; and, the use of new technology reducing operation noise levels, these claims are not adequately evidenced and reliable at this stage. Therefore, it is not considered likely that the likely significant impacts could be reduced so as to no longer be considered significant.

Furthermore, impacts arising from the use of land which is considered suitable habitat for priority farmland ground nesting and wintering birds, cannot be likely be reduced. This opinion is based upon the response from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (the consultee for ecology), in which it is noted that suitably located, sized and characterised land is limited or not available for mitigating that lost.

Conclusion

For the reasons above it is considered that the development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. Those effects are considered to relate to likely significant effects on: noise; human health; and, ecology. **Therefore, it is considered that the proposal SMD/2022/0577 warrants the submission of an EIA as required by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017**.

Yours sincerely

X B.J. Haywood

Signed by: Ben Haywood

Head of Development Services