

5. Consideration of Alternatives and Design Evolution

Introduction

- 5.1 Paragraph 2, Part I of Schedule 4 of the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations 2011 requires the Applicant to provide details of the main alternatives considered.
- 5.2 The form of Development proposed has been influenced by a range of factors including location, surrounding uses, responses from statutory consultees and stakeholders and, environmental and other policy related considerations.
- 5.3 This chapter reviews the various design, use and siting options explored and the reasoning for the selection of the preferred development option that forms the subject of assessment within this ES.
- 5.4 This chapter is arranged as follows:
- Consideration of the ‘do nothing’ alternative where the Development is not progressed;
 - Consideration of alternative locations for the Development;
 - Consideration of the alternative uses for the Site assessed; and
 - Consideration of alternative designs for the Development in the context of design evolution.

Consideration of the “Do nothing” Alternative

- 5.5 The Development involves the residential and employment development, together with various elements of physical, social and environmental infrastructure, of 15.58 hectares of land located to the east and west of the existing Blythe Business Park in Cresswell. The residential element of the Development includes ancillary supporting uses including a shop, community building and public open space. A new footpath is also proposed through Cresswell as part of the Development. This will be secured through a separate Section 278 agreement.
- 5.6 The “Do Nothing” scenario refers to the option of leaving the Site in its current state. This would leave the Site in agricultural use and also in part, as previously developed land.
- 5.7 The “Do Nothing” scenario has been discounted because the Site is considered to represent a sustainable and appropriate location to assist in meeting the District’s objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing and also the area’s future employment needs.

- 5.8 The Council's most recently published Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) covers the period of 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013. In July 2014, a separate Housing Land Supply Schedule was published which identifies that the Council has (with the inclusion of a 20% buffer) a housing land supply of 2.17 years, equating to a shortfall of 1,116 dwellings against a 5 year housing land supply target. The Development will contribute towards the District's 5 year housing land supply which as explained above the Council currently does not have. The Development will also provide affordable housing (33%). Past development rates of affordable housing across the District have been well below the levels identified as being needed.
- 5.9 In terms of employment land, the Council's most recent monitoring report identifies that whilst it is considered that there is sufficient employment land in numerical terms to meet future requirements to 2026, much of this land is either constrained, is not currently available or, is unsuitable. The Development will therefore contribute towards improving the quantity and the quality of existing employment land supply to assist in the delivery of new employment development to meet future needs.
- 5.10 These matters are considered further in the Planning Statement also submitted to accompany the outline planning application.

Consideration of Alternative Sites

- 5.11 The Site forms an extension to existing areas of built development, namely the existing village of Cresswell and the existing Blythe Business Park. The elevated railway line forms a strong barrier to the northern edge of the existing Business Park. Locating development to the north of the railway would mean a physical separation between any new development and the existing Business Park and Village. Sites elsewhere in the general area of Cresswell would also likely lead to a greater dispersal of built development in comparison to the proposed Site.
- 5.12 The existing Blythe Business Park is very well occupied and there is good demand for additional space, including from existing occupiers who want to stay in this location, which cannot be accommodated within the existing Business Park. This supports the identification of any new employment land which is well related and physically linked to the existing Business Park.
- 5.13 In terms of the proposed juxtaposition of uses as part of the Development, the inclusion of residential (rather than new employment) on land between the existing Cresswell Village and the existing Blythe Business Park has been selected as the preferred option as this helps to provide a 'buffer' between existing residents and employment.
- 5.14 The consideration of alternative locations elsewhere in and around Cresswell has therefore been discounted.

Consideration of Alternative Uses

- 5.15 The starting point for the consideration of alternative options for the Site was the site analysis process. This is set out in the Design and Access Statement submitted as a standalone document to accompany the planning application. It considers the constraints and sets the key objectives and land use principles for the Site. This analysis

process identified the environmental and other site constraints and opportunities, which have informed the final form of Development proposed. A detailed review of various evidence base documents has also been carried out to help to inform the land use components of the Development.

- 5.16 The Proposals have been through various iterations before arriving at the current scheme. That said, given the: acknowledged need for additional housing development and the need to enhance the supply of deliverable employment land opportunities to meet future needs; and the nature and juxtaposition of adjacent employment and residential uses, the most appropriate land use option is for a residential and employment-led scheme. A planning application has been submitted previously for a gas-fired 1,000 megawatt power station at the Site although these proposals were withdrawn in 2011.
- 5.17 A range of complementary alternative uses and supporting social infrastructure, such as community uses and local retail opportunities, have been considered and included in the residential element of the scheme. Excluding such uses was discounted on the grounds that this would adversely impact on the level of sustainability benefits able to be generated by the Development.
- 5.18 Thus, it is considered that the residential and employment-led use of the Site is the most appropriate.

Consideration of Alternative Designs

- 5.19 Design options have been based on the Site analysis, local planning policy context, local knowledge, consultation responses, sustainable design principles and the consideration of Development deliverability and viability.
- 5.20 The design of the Development has undergone a process of refining design iterations as opposed to significant redesigning, albeit that certain revisions to the Site boundary have also been considered as part of this process. The final Site boundary selected is considered to represent the most sustainable option. The parameter plans which define the outline planning application have been designed taking into account the existing environmental constraints at the Site.
- 5.21 The design evolution is documented in the Design and Access Statement submitted to accompany the outline planning application. The key Site factors and principles influencing the final design of the Development are briefly summarised in **Table 5.1** overleaf.

Table 5.1: Key Site Factors and Principles Influencing Alternative Designs

Factor	Commentary
Adjoining Land Uses	<p>The two aspects of the proposed development have been considered in relation to the adjoining land uses.</p> <p>The employment element of the scheme has been proposed to the east of the existing business park, away from residential properties, in order to reduce any impacts on the existing community from business activities.</p> <p>The proposed residential units have been located to the west of the existing business park and therefore sit at the centre of the settlement of Cresswell, adjacent to existing residential properties. This would allow for the community elements of proposed scheme to be centrally located and accessible to both existing and new residents.</p>
Landscape Setting and Topography	<p>The site does not lie within, or in close proximity to, any designated landscapes. The site has a weak relationship with its surrounding landscape due to its position within a valley which serves to enclose views.</p> <p>The site is located within close proximity of light industry, major transport routes and pylon lines which have altered the rural landscape character; the proposed development is considered within the context of the surrounding existing uses.</p> <p>Significant visual effects would be confined to local residential properties and users of local rights of way. Visual effects on neighbouring properties are typical of any infill development of this nature.</p> <p>Vegetative screening is proposed to the south of the employment element of the scheme in order to mitigate against any adverse impacts of the proposed employment buildings on the visual landscape.</p>
Ecology and Nature Conservation	<p>The Phase 1 Extended Habitat survey completed in support of this application has identified a number of ecological / biodiversity features; these have significantly influenced the end design of the scheme.</p> <p>An 8m buffer is proposed along the river Blithe to ensure that its ecological value is retained and protected. Areas of open space have also been strategically located to ensure the protection of existing features such as trees.</p>
Flood Risk	<p>Parts of the site are constrained as a consequence of their location in flood risk zones 2 and 3. The illustrative masterplan (included at Appendix 11.4) and parameter plans have taken flood risk into consideration and as a consequence the development located within the flood risk zone is limited to community uses, open space and parking.</p>
Site Infrastructure and Access	<p>Following an in depth transport assessment, it was concluded that there was only one possible site access option for the scheme, and this has limited the options for alternative design in this respect.</p> <p>The site access, which comprises a three arm roundabout off Sandon Road, is submitted for approval.</p>

Summary

5.22 Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations 2011 requires applications to provide an outline of the main alternative approaches to the Proposed Development that have been considered and the reasons for the eventual choice. These are broken down into the following categories and justification is provided for the rejection of each alternative:

- **The ‘do nothing’ scenario:** this is considered unacceptable as this would represent a missed opportunity to make a significant contribution to the area’s five year housing land supply, future housing needs more generally and also in helping to deliver future employment needs.
- **Alternative Sites:** the decision to focus the Development in this location has been influenced by the existing development adjacent to the Site and the desirability to seek to focus development in a single location rather than the alternative which would be to provide for a more dispersed pattern of development.
- **Alternative Uses:** a residential and employment-led development fit with adjoining uses is the only use option able to meet the acknowledged need for additional housing and better quality employment land in the District. A range of alternative ancillary uses have also been assessed and included within the residential element of the Development to contribute to its sustainability credentials.
- **Alternative Designs:** a number of design iterations have been identified and systematically assessed against a range of criteria/objectives. Through this process, a preferred design/layout option has been reflected in the various parameter plans prepared and appropriately tested in the subsequent chapters of this ES.