

TRAFFORD CORE STRATEGY

Use of the Davenport Green Site

Comments submitted for consideration by the Inspector prior to closure of the formal Hearing sessions

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Comments on Trafford Core Strategy – 7 July 2011

Introduction

It has been reported recently in the Press (Sale & Altrincham Advertiser, 29 June 2011, p. 22) that, “Council leaders had intended to class Davenport Green in Hale Barns as green belt land, as it once was under a council blueprint. But this move was resisted by the executive in case of ‘development opportunities’”. The Core Strategy, as amplified in Trafford Council’s response to the planning policy changes announced in the 2011 Budget, dated 9 May 2011 (CD 12.83), has now, therefore, become unsound. This is because the principal tests of ‘soundness’ are no longer satisfied with respect to proposed Policy R4.

It is apparent that the reported executive decision is not properly evidence-based. Trafford’s Core Strategy should, as Manchester City Council have observed, “ensure that it relates clearly to the evidence base” (CD12.42.2), rather than being developed, apparently at short notice, in response to perceived commercial pressure (para 3.27, CD 12.83 and para 3.30, CD 12.83) and in the context of real or imagined threats of legal challenge (paras 4.6, 4.12 and 4.26, CD 12.83).

Discussion

As noted by Trafford Council (para 24.11, CD 6.2.1), “the exceptional circumstances required to be demonstrated under para 2.7 (of PPG2) in order to justify the removal of land from the Green Belt existed only in respect of this very specific development proposal that the inspector considered met a particular economic need that was not able to be met on alternative sites”. Also, as confirmed by Trafford Council (para 5.5.2, CD 12.35.5), “there is no continuing justification for the relaxation of Green Belt policies in relation to this site, as no proposal (*that is compliant with the planning conditions* – my words) has been forthcoming”. In view of its latest position, as reported in the Press, Trafford Council is now ignoring its own evidence with regard to land use at Davenport Green (para 3.34, CD 12.83) and the evidence of Manchester City Council that was collected during its Core Strategy development process.

The results of the Manchester City Council Core Strategy community consultation reported that, “the first option for taking forward development at the Airport (retaining the Airport within the Greenbelt and not altering the

Airport Operational Area) was the preferred option for people who gave a view on this topic” (p. 11, “Manchester Core Strategy Development Plan Document Consultation Statement” – February 2011).

The proposed expansion of Manchester Airport is not an exceptional circumstance, as the apparent need for proposed expansion is simply a unilateral view expressed by Manchester City Council, which ignores Community Consultation (p. 11, “Manchester Core Strategy Development Plan Document Consultation Statement” – February 2011) and which simply asserts, without any meaningful evidence, that expansion is “necessary and exceptional”. Neither of these propositions is evidence-based or justified and they are therefore unsound and should not be used by Trafford Council in any of its deliberations with regard to land use at Davenport Green.

In addition, Manchester City Council recognises that, “global rates of air traffic are unsustainable in the long term” (para 2.35, “Refining Options for the Core Strategy”) and that, on the advice of its consultants, one of the least sustainable sites is Manchester Airport (Para 10.51, “Manchester Core Sustainability Appraisal Report”), so, on Manchester City Council’s own admission, this part of Manchester’s proposed Core Strategy is unsustainable and, therefore, unsound and should not be used as a basis for land use planning in Trafford. There is no reason, therefore, why Trafford Council should take a different view in this regard.

If RLAM’s assertion that a key element of the 2011 Budget is the Government’s introduction of a new presumption in favour of sustainable development (para 3.9, CD 12.83), it follows that any development of the Davenport Green site should be sustainable. As Manchester City Council is aware that any such development at this site would not be sustainable, it follows that this perceived presumption should not be applied by Trafford Council to land at Davenport Green.

RLAM’s current proposal (para. 3.23, CD 12.83) introduces several new proposed uses, one of which is “c.14% Use Class C1 (hotel)”. This was never part of Trafford’s proposed approved use and, as things stand, could not be permitted. If the site were to revert to Green Belt status, as proposed by Trafford Council in CD 6.2.1, obviously not even “100% Use Class B1 (offices, R&D, light industry)” would be permitted, so it is unclear why the Council should see fit to entertain this particular proposed change of use, at this late stage.

On Trafford Council’s own admission, there is no evidence that any development of land at Davenport Green, by, or on behalf of Trafford Council, would be beneficial to Trafford Borough (para 3.34, CD 12.83). Nor is there any evidence that this land would be appropriate for any airport expansion, as Manchester City Council has not only admitted that any such development is not what the inhabitants of Manchester would want, but that any such development, if it were to take place, would, in fact, be unsustainable.

A key element of the 2011 Budget, which was the Government's intention to introduce a presumption in favour of sustainable development is not met by the Davenport Green site. This is confirmed by both Trafford Council and Manchester City Council. The absence of any demonstrable benefit to Trafford (para 3.34, CD 12.83) and the admitted fact on the part of both Trafford Council and Manchester City Council that any development at this site would be unsustainable suggests that the recently-reported and seemingly-arbitrary position of Trafford Council Executive is untenable.

In amongst some perceived threats regarding legal challenge, as discussed by DTZ (paras 4.6, 4.12 and 4.26, CD 12.83), RLAM's latest submissions discuss the possibility of there being an hotel on the Davenport Green site. This is in clear contravention of the purpose for which this land was released, namely "*development of high quality, prestige sites for modern, major international headquarter business activities*" (page 64 CD 12.18).

In "Davenport Green – further information required (as sent on 22nd April 2011)" (electronic page 26, CD12.83), it is stated, presumably in relation to "Evidence Required for the Designation of a Strategic Site" that, "RLAM would need to demonstrate that the proposal could fulfil some essential qualitative need i.e. that it was providing space for a key employment sector such as advanced manufacturing, etc". This appears to be a mistaken view as the land is currently designated for the "*development of high quality, prestige sites for modern, major international headquarter business activities*" and no other purpose.

Conclusions

To quote Trafford Council in its Core Strategy (para 24.17, CD 6.2.1), "the site, located within the Timperley wedge, is strategically placed to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. Its return to Green Belt status would prevent Newall Green and Well Green/Hale/Hale Barns from merging into one another. The Green Belt protection afforded to this site in the past (and which has effectively continued due to the UDP Inspector's decision to remove the site from the Green Belt, for limited specified purposes) has continued to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, and protected it's (sic) rural character". Because the Green Belt is, "very narrow at this location" (para. 5.10, CD 12.83), Trafford recognise that there is, "a good case for returning the Davenport Green site to Green Belt, as it was in 1996". In view of the fact that any other proposed change of use would subvert both the current designation and a Green Belt designation it is anticipated, therefore, that any other proposed change of use would be resisted by Trafford Council and discouraged by the Inspector.

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