

Comments of Trafford Green Party relating to the consultation Core Strategy

Davenport Green

Without detailed knowledge of the whole history of Davenport Green, it would appear that the area was originally Green Belt, but that planning permission was given for a commercial development, presumably on the basis that other considerations outweighed the presumption against inappropriate development, and that there were therefore very special circumstances. Since the development did not take place and the very special circumstances therefore no longer apply, there is absolutely no doubt that the site should revert to Green Belt – as was apparently the view of the Council until relatively recently. There is no justification for “upgrading” the site to a new “Countryside” designation. The site continues to fulfil all the Green belt criteria, as it did before, and Green Belt is a national policy with a strong presumption against development. It is noteworthy that the Government’s draft NPPF continues the policy of Green Belts virtually unchanged. The local “Countryside policy does not have the same standing, and to create a special policy for Davenport Green within this category, relating to “very high quality” development only is meaningless. All development should be of high quality. We would urge the Council to continue to maintain its original stance that the site should revert to its Green Belt status.

The RLAM report would, of course, stress the positives of developing the area with a high end of the market commercial development. Trafford Green Party would have few concerns about the conversion of part of the area into a rural park, but the development of the rest of the site would fly in the face of all reasonable argument. We are concerned that there are a considerable number of occasions where the word “nevertheless” is used to back away from overwhelming negative effects of the development of the area and lead to a conclusion that is not supported by any reasoned evidence.

In particular, the Council rightly points out that Davenport Green is not close to any deprived areas of the Borough, nor is it easily accessible from any of these areas. The addition of two new bus services to link Davenport Green to Altrincham transport interchange and Manchester Airport will not alter this situation in any meaningful way. The development would no doubt result in a number of temporary construction jobs, but there can be no guarantee that these would be taken up by local people (especially if they cannot easily get there except by car), whilst a prestige high-tech commercial area will be unlikely to provide many permanent jobs for those local people most in need. We accept that the site is close to Wythenshawe, which itself has issues of deprivation, but it would appear that Manchester City Council has its own plans for generating employment for these people within the City itself.

Davenport Green is fundamentally an unsustainable location which will, despite what RLAM may claim, attract large numbers of car-based commuting trips, with negative implications for air quality and congestion. Attempting to justify this by saying that bus services could be re-routed via Wythenshawe Hospital is a red herring – since if there is currently a need for this then it should be done, with or without the Davenport Green development.

Furthermore, the Council’s own analysis indicates that there is enough land for employment generating development without the need to release land in an unsustainable location. There can be no guarantees that the land will ever be developed (despite what RLAM may claim), and even if a need could be proved that this was the only suitable site at some unspecified time in the future, it is debatable whether long-term, guaranteed new bus services would follow without substantial public subsidy. The fact that it may have new pedestrian links created is neither here nor there given the distance of the site from any significant residential areas.

The Council appears to accept that development of the site is unsustainable; that it is distant from the parts of the Borough where there is greatest need of employment; that it is likely to have a negative impact on air quality, and that it would result in the loss of a greenfield site in the countryside. In addition, we would add that it would have very limited impact on jobs for local people, that it would have no positive impacts on reducing poverty or social exclusion in the most disadvantaged wards in the Borough, and that there is, in any case, no clear evidence that the site would be developed, even in the long term. On this basis, the site should revert to Green Belt and any attempt to develop it in the future should be subject to Green Belt policy where the potential developers would need to prove very special circumstances. The current proposal is too vague and implies that the site is available to the right kind of development. This undermines the principle behind policy R4.

In conclusion, for the Council to accept the significant negative implications of the proposal and then conclude that the site could be developed for a specific type of development is irrational, given that there is no hard evidence to support the conclusion. There may be vague intentions provided by RLAM, relating to training, public transport and prestige, but these are not good enough and give insufficient certainty to justify the site being excluded from Green Belt designation.