

11 October 2024

Delivered by email and post

Local Plans team
Winchester City Council
City Offices
Colebrook Street
Winchester
SO23 9LJ

Ref: WELS3000

Dear Sir/Madam

LAND AT UPPER FARM, HEADBOURNE WORTHY, WINCHESTER

These representations are made on behalf of Three Maids Property LLP, and specifically in relation to their land interests at Upper Farm, north of Winchester, adjacent to the A34 Three Maids Hill junction. A location plan of this land is appended for reference at **Appendix 1**.

We welcome the opportunity to provide our comments on the Winchester District Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) 2020 - 2041 and related supporting evidence as set out below. These representations are primarily relevant to the "Creating a Vibrant Economy" chapter whilst also providing comments on Policy NE13 (Leisure and Recreation in the Countryside).

The comments provided reflect upon whether the proposed submission local plan will satisfy the tests of soundness as outlined within paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework (referred to as 'the Framework') and advises on how the new Local Plan should be amended to fully support and facilitate economic growth over the plan period.

Creating a Vibrant Economy

It is vital that the requirement for employment development to help support a vibrant local economy is addressed within the plan. This is emphasised by paragraph 20 of the Framework which states that strategic policies should make sufficient provision for employment along with other needs (including housing).

In combination with a focus on green energy and the need to de-carbonise the economy, the plan confirms that *'it is vitally important that Local Plan policies are flexible to allow for the changes that may occur and support a green and robust economy'* (para 10.5).

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Previous versions of the plan used an employment land study undertaken in April 2020. Alongside the Regulation 19 plan the Council published an **Employment Land Study (ELS) (July 2024)** carried out by Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH). We welcome this update, which represents a clear and updated picture and allows the Council to base the plan on the most up to date evidence.

The ELS considers a number of forecast based scenarios to consider the employment needs over the plan period. For industrial land (Use Class B2/B8), the conclusions are based on the average of the forecasted scenarios, which the Council and LSH consider to provide the most robust demand forecast for forecasting future employment needs. The report also takes into account the completions trend which the Council and LSH also consider to provide a robust basis for future industrial land requirements.

In our view completions data is not a reasonable or robust basis upon which to consider future need and does not represent a justified approach to plan making in accordance with the Framework. Completions data does not take into account actual need and is reflective of a land use which has been constrained by previous local plan policies.

Of particular note, the conclusions that the demand for warehouse and logistics space is predominantly focussed at the smaller end of the B8 market is not reflective of the demand from operators within the market. The past evidence / trend of small units is a result of that being all that has been released through the plan making process. In essence the adopted Local Plan has constrained supply and has not provided sufficient flexibility to accommodate changes within the market.

The conclusions of the ELS are that there is a total overall need of between 27.6ha – 38.9 ha of employment land but that there is a supply of 50ha which exceeds the need. This is based wholly upon an approach of re-confirming the existing development plan allocations. For employment these are Bushfield Camp (Policy W5) and Winnall (Policy W6) as well as employment provision within the allocation at St. John Moore Barracks (Policy W2) and the ongoing development of the urban extension at Kings Barton (Policy W1). However, any provision will be part of and ancillary to the main residential uses of both sites. In addition, no consideration has been given to whether these sites are actually deliverable owing to the fact they remained a carried over local plan allocation. The plan makes no reference nor considers the importance of economic growth in the rural proportion of the District to the overall economy of the area.

Similarly, the proposed mixed use allocations in the city centre redevelopment sites at Central Winchester and Station Approach and (Policy W7 and W8 respectively) are likely to provide some employment provision, but will be more focussed on retail, leisure and office uses. Storage and distribution (B8) and industrial (B8) uses will not be acceptable in these locations.

No new employment allocations are proposed and the Integrated Impact Assessment shows that the Council has not considered any alternatives than their approach of carrying forward existing undelivered allocations. This does not meet the requirements of the SEA/SA Regulations Schedule 2(8) which requires an “assessment of reasonable alternatives” and the identification of the “reasons for selecting the alternatives tested in the light of the others available.” In *Ashdown Forest Economic Development LLP v SSCLG and Wealden DC* [2014] EWHC 406 (Admin), Mr Justice Sales held (at paragraph 97) that the plan-maker should be aware “The court will be alert to scrutinise its choices regarding reasonable alternatives to ensure that it is not seeking to avoid that obligation by saying that there are no reasonable alternatives or by improperly limiting the range of such alternatives which is identified.”

At present this is considered a legal failure with the plan.

Proposed Policy E5 of the Plan confirms that employment development will be supported within the defined settlement boundaries. In the absence of additional confirmed allocations, it is highly unlikely that this would deliver anything more than smaller scale employment as part of redevelopment of existing employment sites.

We have particular concerns in relation to the allocations as set out below.

Bushfield Camp

Policy W5 of the proposed submission Local Plan identifies Bushfield Camp for 20 hectares of employment provision, specifically for *'high quality flexible business and employment space, an innovation hub and creative industries'*

Bushfield Camp is a long-standing allocation that was originally identified for development potential within the 1997 Bushfield Camp Study and subsequently allocated for employment within the adopted Core Strategy 2013 (Policy WT3). The allocation recognised the landscape sensitivity of the site adjacent to the Local Gap, South Downs National Park and River Itchen SSSI, and the need to contain development that the previously developed land area only.

Despite the allocation being made over 10 years ago, there has been no movement on the site until an outline planning application was submitted in October 2023. The application is for a knowledge quarter comprising 96,500 sqm (less than 10 ha) comprising flexible uses within Use Classes E and F, it does not include any form of B2 and B8 uses. The application does not accord with the allocation within the proposed submission local plan.

We would argue that this does not meet the requirements of the Framework at paragraph 126 which states that:

"126. Planning policies and decisions need to reflect changes in the demand for land. They should be informed by regular reviews of both the land allocated for development in plans, and of land availability. Where the local planning authority considers there to be no reasonable prospect of an application coming forward for the use allocated in a plan:

a) it should, as part of plan updates, reallocate the land for a more deliverable use that can help to address identified needs (or, if appropriate, deallocate a site which is undeveloped); and

b) in the interim, prior to updating the plan, applications for alternative uses on the land should be supported, where the proposed use would contribute to meeting an unmet need for development in the area."

The Local Plan should be updated to reflect the actual uses coming forward through the outline planning permission, with the shortfall this creates in B2/B8 development within the plan re-allocated elsewhere. We are also concerned with the narrow focus of the employment type for this location, particularly with the difficulties abounding in the tertiary education market.

Winnall

The primary purpose of the allocation at Winnall (Policy W6) is to safeguard the existing industrial premises within the Estate, recognising its scale and significance to the Winchester economy. Whilst the proposed policy allows for redevelopment, a review of the Council's online planning register shows that

there has been very limited applications within the existing industrial area and thus the contribution that this site will make to meeting the identified employment needs is questionable.

Other

The proposed submission local plan identifies a number of other sites which would also contribute to employment needs, including Kings Barton and the regeneration areas of Central Winchester and Station Approach. None of these have the land available to meet the large scale employment needs and to address the type of demand from operators.

In conclusion on this point, whilst we are supportive of policies that seek to encourage economic development and diversification, the omission of any new employment allocations will not genuinely deliver the new employment floorspace required. The plan merely carries forward allocations which have failed to do so since their adoption over 10 years ago which is not justified nor effective.

For a plan to be found sound Paragraph 35 of the Framework is clear that it must be justified taking into account the reasonable alternatives and based on proportionate evidence. Whilst the Council appear to have considered alternatives in respect of the provision of housing, they have not done the same for employment land.

It is imperative that to meet the employment needs the Council allocates new sites which are available and suitable for employment development in sustainable locations with good access to the strategic highways network.

Leisure and Recreation

Proposed Policy NE13 sets out a positive policy position for the development of new leisure and recreational facilities outside of defined settlement boundaries where a countryside location is necessary, where it is the expansion of established facilities or where it is for the use of land for leisure and recreational activities. We fully support this policy, which appears to recognise that to meet the sport and leisure needs of the existing and future population of Winchester there is a need for development outside of the existing settlement boundaries. We note, however, that this positively prepared policy is not echoed in the Strategic Policy SP3 and suggest that the following should be added to that policy:

“viii. Recreational and Leisure uses and development in line with policy NE13”

We are however concerned that the proposed submission local plan provides no other policies in relation to sport or leisure facilities despite the clear strategic objective of healthy, prosperous communities and the Framework’s guidance that policies should enable and support healthy lifestyles.

Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

Hampshire County Council is the Local Highways Authority with responsibility for the road network across the district (apart from the M3 and A34). We understand that they are currently in the process of preparing the Local Transport Plan 4 but that it will be clear that development should be consistent with and contribute to adopted transport strategies such as the Winchester Movement Strategy. Priority 1 of the strategy is to reduce city centre traffic, including the introduction of more out of centre park and ride options.

At present the only option being put forward for the north of Winchester through the proposed submission local plan is a 200 space Park and Ride at Kings Barton and a large facility at St John Moore Barracks. Both would come forward within the wider allocations for residential development.

We are concerned that this does not address the current need identified for new park and ride facilities as it will not come forward until the later stages of the plan, towards the end of the developments lifespan. Our clients site would offer an opportunity to deliver a park and ride immediately in a location adjacent to the strategic network and in a key location for easy access into Winchester city.

Land at Upper Farm, Headbourne Worthy

Our client's site lies adjacent to the A34 "Three Maids Hill" interchange. The A34 connects the Midlands with the M3 / M27 and the international ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. The site comprises a number of existing and former uses, including a Motocross track with associated earth bunds, plant, equipment and buildings as granted under planning permission 11/01233/FUL and a waste management facility (Winchester District application ref. 23/02126/HCS) which was approved this year. The permissions both include several structures used for offices, staff facilities and storage. The site comprises previously developed land as defined in Annex 2 of the Framework. It is contained on all sides by a substantial earth bunding and landscaping.

The immediate context of the site comprises commercial and leisure uses including the Winchester Golf Academy and restaurant, some small business units and training kennels. This wider landscape containment is recognised in in both the SHELAA and IIRA assessment.

More widely, on the opposite side of the A34 is new anaerobic digestion facility and as solar farm, which provides a built environment context on this part of the A34, adjacent to the Three Maids Junction.

Appendix 2 includes drone photographs showing the juxtaposition of the site with the surrounding land uses and in particular those on the other side of the A34.

Development Opportunity

The site offers a unique opportunity to deliver a park and ride facility to the north of Winchester, on the Andover Road, in the short term, addressing the urgent need for additional capacity and to meet the priorities of the Movement Strategy.

It could also deliver commercial and industrial development on the edge of Winchester to support the needs of the District, which is not being met by the proposed carry forward of previous allocations with no certainty of delivery and which already appear to be creating a shortfall vs anticipated floorspace.

Suitable access can be provided on to the A34 by way of an additional roundabout close to the existing roundabout serving the southbound exit/entrance slip road, utilising land within our client's control or owned by Highways England. This would ensure all vehicles were able to access the A34 without the need to utilise the adjacent road network.

With regard to climate change, the site has significant opportunity to contribute to these objectives through the use of sustainable construction and operation techniques and features such as on-site renewables, green roofs and electric vehicle charging. In addition, given the existing use of the site, the retention of the woodland and boundary vegetation, combined with the opportunity of providing new amenity space for employees and tree-lined access routes, should secure bio-diversity enhancement on site.

Conclusions

As currently prepared the proposed submission local plan does not, in our view, address and fully meet the employment needs of the District and no alternative options have been presented to ensure that the tests of soundness in respect of a plan being justified can be met. The Council is instead relying on carrying forward allocations from previous plans which are yet to deliver any development and which, in the case of John Moore Barracks is not even certain of being made available by the Ministry of Defence and in the case of Bushfield Camp is proposed less than half of the floorspace being allocated by the Plan. This calls into question whether the plan is realistic and justified.

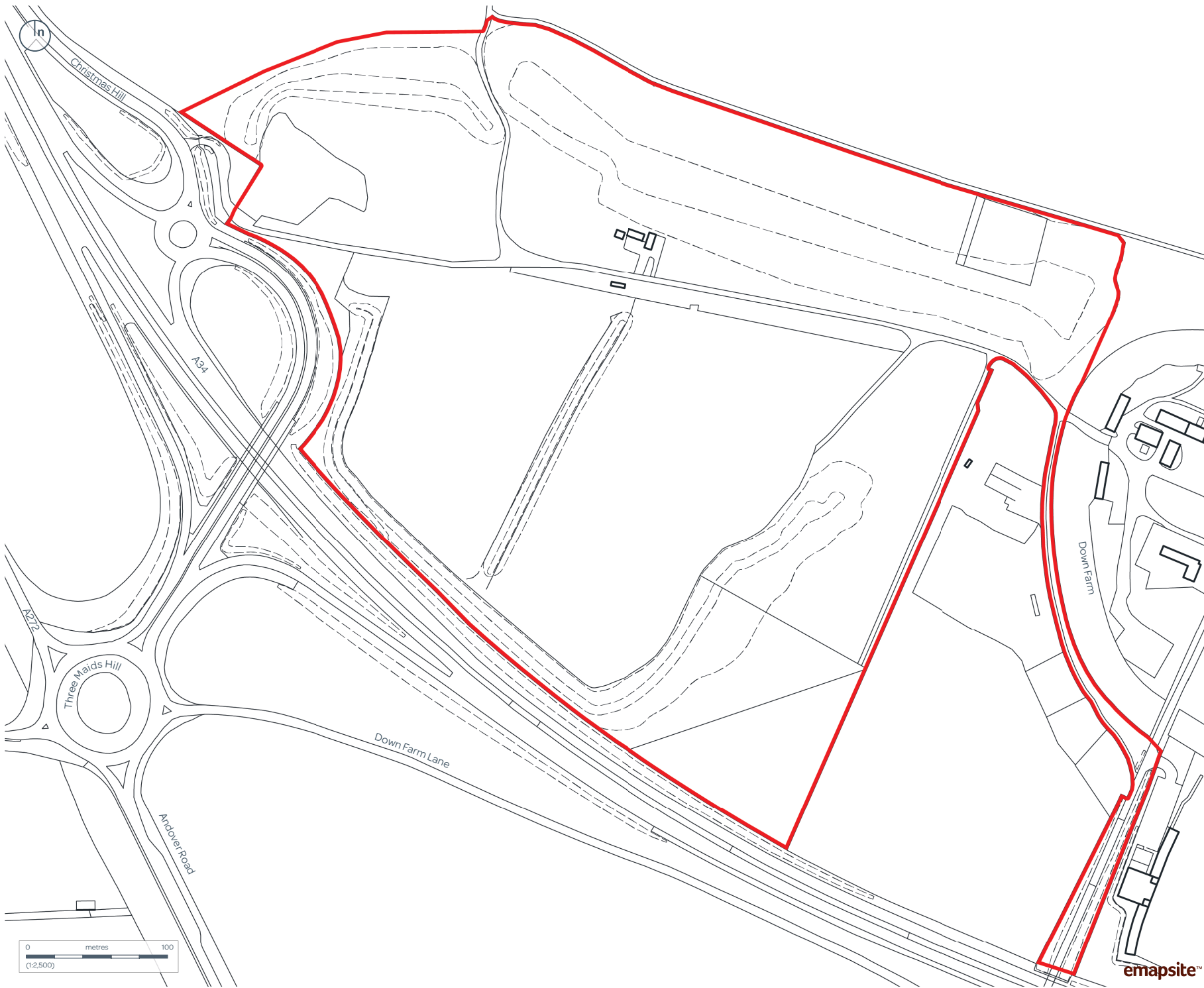
Our clients site, which is previously developed, suitable and available represents a real and immediate solution to meeting the Council's needs and should be included for allocation within the plan when submitted for examination.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the potential of our clients land interests and the positive contribution it can make to meeting employment need within the authority at the soonest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Sara Dutfield
Director, Head of Planning South East

Appendix 1



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KEY
 Site Boundary

CLIENT: _____
Meyrick Estates

PROJECT: _____
Upper Farm, Winchester

DRAWING: _____
Location

PROJECT NUMBER: _____
MEYS3000

DRAWING NUMBER: **1000** CHECKED BY: _____
 NH / CD

REVISION: **A** STATUS: _____
 Draft

DATE: **Nov 2022** SCALE: _____
 1:2500 @ A3

emapsite™

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Appendix 2



