



The countryside charity
Northamptonshire

Planning Application WNS/2021/1819/EIA – Site AL1 (part) – Towcester

1. Introduction

1.1 The planning application is for a hybrid employment warehousing development on land north of the Bell Plantation, Towcester; the size of the entire site for development being 32.06 hectares (79.22 acres). This is made up of two separate sites; the adjacent site being covered by planning application **WNS/2021/2168/MAO**.

1.2 The site is within close proximity of Towcester town, a market town of significant historical importance, dating back to Roman, Saxon and Medieval periods.

1.3 The applicant, DHL Real Estate Solutions, has made a number of questionable, and in some cases, misleading comments in their presentation to the public as to what the project constitutes. They claim that the scheme will *“create 1,200 much needed jobs”, will “generate significant economic benefits for the local economy and £3m in business rates, will give environmental improvements as well as providing six hectares for a new home for Towcester Town FC”*. These points will be challenged in the following relevant sections.

2. SNC Local Plan 2011-2029 requirements

2.1 The application is a cynical attempt by the applicant to gain a much larger operational site by combining the adjacent site, initially designated for mixed employment uses, as laid out in the SNC Local Plan 2011-2029. Although the applicant has placed both sites on their site plan maps, no attempt has been made to provide a master plan that includes both sites. This is in contravention of the Policy AL1 of the SNC Local Plan which states that the site should *“provide for 35 ha of mixed employment generating development together... A variety of employment types will be sought to reflect the need for diversity and resilience in the local economy as expressed in the council's economic growth strategy.”* The Local Plan states that *“an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive planning approach will be taken for the site and a masterplan must be prepared.”* No such plan has been put forward. This has been ignored by the applicant, who has also made statements to the effect that imply B8 warehousing will be placed on site 2168/MAO, the comment from the landscape architect working on behalf of the applicant states in ES Vol 2 part 1 41.00 *“it is assumed B8 land uses as per the development are implemented.”* Confirmation of the applicant's requirement for B8 warehousing on AL1 is shown on Allocation map AL1 pHp DR-4487-026REV PO1.

2.2 With regard to providing 6 ha of land for Towcester Football Club, this is for the provision of land only, with no plan for provision of finance or infrastructure, such as cycle paths and access points for users of the club facilities, as set out in the Local Plan AL1 (4a,4b). Sport England has also raised questions as to the viability of the site as a football pitch. The questions have yet to be addressed.

3. Environmental Impact

3.1 As well as being close to historic Towcester town centre, the site is also within close proximity of the grade II registered park at Easton Neston. The applicant has dismissed any need for adherence to landscape protection policies and policies that protect the setting of the historic environment. In addition, the environmental and visual impact on nearby villages such as Caldecote, is admitted by the applicant in the Planning Statement in 6.29 that *“the development will have a significant adverse impact on the landscape character of the area and on the setting of Caldecote.”* This is dismissed due to the possibility of mitigation through tree planting and earth bunding. However, the applicant’s own photowire views, using camera positions around the site show this to be impossible, if the planned maximum height of the buildings of 21.5 m is achieved. In order to shield the maximum building height at the +125 point (21.5 m), vegetation (according to the plan) would take 15 years to grow. Visual intrusion is also shown by the survey to adversely affect the villages of Duncote, the grounds of Easton Neston Park and the village of Tiffield. As well as a number of factually inaccurate statements, there are inappropriate and skewed assumptions made in favour of the applicant in the Landscape & Visual Assessment.

3.2 Flood Risk – The site is in a high flood risk area. Anglian Water commented in their Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy 17/10/2021, that: *“Development will lead to an unacceptable risk of flooding downstream.”* They have put forward a comprehensive list of provisos and necessary conditions in order for them to be able to grant planning approval.

3.3 Noise, air and light pollution

The specification of the combined sites as a B8 warehouse development will create unavoidable and unacceptable noise pollution from vehicle manoeuvring and associated machinery, as well as and light and additional air pollution on a 24-hour, year round basis. This is unacceptable in a semi-rural, market town location.

3.4 Traffic and vehicle movements

The traffic surveys show tacit attention to detail and therefore reality. They are naïve at best, and flagrantly lacking in any kind of sympathetic approach to the surrounding countryside and infrastructure. Traffic volumes are currently at a capacity at the Tove roundabout junction of the A43, so an addition of up to 400 vehicle movements, such as the 38 tonne articulated trucks used by DHL, will cause severe and unacceptable congestion around the Tove/A43 junction and A5 Watling Street,

as well as additional stress on Towcester town centre.

4. Employment potential

4.1 The claim that 1,200 “*much needed jobs*” is at odds with reality. According to the 2008 NOMIS Census survey, only 4 percent of the population of Towcester, and the surrounding South Northamptonshire area actually works in the logistics industry. The type of work, which is low paid, unskilled and insecure does not fit the employment needs of inhabitants living in South Northamptonshire, which currently has a high-proportion of self-employed entrepreneur SME business owners. There is also a shortage of workers to fill these vacancies and therefore people will be travelling to and from outlying areas, some as far as Nottingham and Leicester. This will also add to traffic density. (See 3.4)

5. Conclusion

5.1 In the opinion of CPRE Northamptonshire, planning approval should not be granted to this application, if the unique historic nature and character of Towcester is to be retained. This is a badly conceived plan and to allow planning permission would be irresponsible, as the plan takes little or no consideration or understanding for the people living in and around Towcester, the sustainability of the town or the surrounding environment.

5.3 West Northamptonshire Council must abide by the SNC Local Plan and its aims: “*To conserve the tranquillity of the natural and built environment in South Northamptonshire through high quality design that is respectful to heritage assets and their settings, biodiversity and the environmental character of the locality and the surrounding landscapes.*” (Objective 9 SNC Local Plan, Adopted 22/7 2020). WNC must also honour the objective of the SNC Local Plan that sites “*offer suitable locations for a range of new small and medium-sized business units*”. This provision would also generate the same amount of business rates income as the proposed B8 development.

5.4 Developments of this magnitude are usually considered appropriate for large scale industrial estates, such as Brackmills, Swan Valley or the M1 corridor, not a historic market town such as Towcester.

This is an unacceptable and inappropriate development which will impact negatively on Towcester for generations to come.

10/1/22 CPRE Northamptonshire