Land north of Towcester – Additional Information

The owners of the land to the north of Towcester have collaborated to provide a site submission for mixed uses over an area of approximately 43 hectares (106 acres).

This is in response to the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2A) Options Consultation Document and Questions (April 2016) and Call for Sites. A plan is also included in this submission. The site submission is outlined in red, with indicative land uses identified.

The land is located to the north of the Towcester Road/A43 junction. It is bounded by the A5 to the west and the A43 to the south.

This offers the opportunity to provide employment space at a strategic and accessible site, matched by associated housing. This would be supported, where necessary, by community facilities and open space.

The landowners would be willing to consider development of only part of the site.

Existing uses

The land is predominantly arable.

The land closest to the roundabout junction is known as The Bell Plantation and is mainly used as a garden centre with ancillary activities including a children’s day nursery. A recent planning application (S/2015/2839/MAF) has been approved for a new building to house a veterinary surgery and offices for the garden centre.

The site falls within a SSSI Impact Zone and is also a surface water Nitrate Vulnerable Zone.

There are no known historic or landscape designations.

No archaeological investigations have been undertaken.

West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (WNJCS)

The WNJCS sees Towcester as an important rural town which supports the wider West Northamptonshire economy:

“Towcester will have a successful historic town centre that is the focus of its rural catchment. The town will retain its visual and physical connections to the landscape through Easton Neston Park, nearby watermeadows and Towcester Racecourse. It will provide a diverse economy based on high technology, tourism and leisure.” (WNJCS; p19)

This requires the necessary infrastructure and employment, coupled with housing. Whilst keeping at the forefront the importance of the town centres, the JCS also acknowledges the importance to the area of its location and connections, whilst seeing the opportunities for enhancing the economy.

Objectives 8 and 9 recognise this, and expect the economic advantage to be strengthened through transport links and proximity to London and Birmingham; and also will support and expect development of specialist employment clusters and business development focussed on a low carbon economy. (WNJCS; p21).
Policy S7 recognises that new jobs will be needed to balance the increase in homes to ensure that the local economy remains strong. The provision allowed for is a minimum net increase of 28,500 jobs between 2008-2029.

The strategic locations have been identified by the JCS and are set out in Policy S8 and E1. There are four areas where employment in South Northamptonshire are identified. This includes: “Local employment provision within sustainable urban extensions as set out in the sustainable urban extension policies…” [WNJCS; Policy S8, P47].

**South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2A**

The suggested objectives (p12) of the Local Plan recognise that new employment opportunities should exist in both rural and urban areas.

Section 10 discusses Economic Advantage. This section considers the options for additional new sites for ‘non-strategic’ employment sites. This includes Towcester, being one of the two market towns.

Section 11 confirms that part 2A of the Local Plan will also consider ways to deliver improved provision of open space, sport, recreation and cultural facilities. The deliverability of this type of development is difficult due to land values and the difficulty with securing community and leisure provisions.

Section 12 discusses the SHELAA (Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment), indicating that the current consultation includes a call for sites.

**South Northamptonshire Local Economic Assessment (June 2013)**

Much of the local plan formation has been based on assessments provided for South Northamptonshire. GVA Grimley carried out an assessment in 2013, where its main findings have been discussed and reviewed.

There are a number of opportunities, with the main challenge being seen as “…to increase the number of jobs available in the District, so that the resident population can remain in the District for work. This will help retain spending in the District and improve the viability of its towns and villages. However this needs to be achieved in the context of retaining South Northamptonshire’s quality of life offer and not trying to replicate the larger economic centres nearby.” (GVA [2013: 44]).

In their SWOT analysis, GVA noted seven opportunities, including:

- Towcester and Brackley have the potential to provide significant housing and associate employment, leisure and civic benefits;
- Ensure sufficient employment land is available to meet growth through maximising development opportunities
- Choice of Stock and business locations

**2015 Business Survey – South Northamptonshire (BMG Research)**

This survey updates and supports the GVA report. Its main findings were:

- The location is good for business
The area has high ratings for other reasons such as attractiveness of the surroundings, education, road network and skilled staff.
Businesses would expand and stay in the area if the premises were available.
Business performance is good and is generally positive.
Constraints to business growth are regulations/red tape and the general economic climate.

**Towcester Masterplan (2011)**

The Towcester Masterplan includes the following aims (p12):

- Ensure that growth up to 2026 and beyond is properly planned and coordinated
- Secure sustainable growth that respects the urban and rural landscape
- Create a competitive town that builds strong local businesses and has close links with the employment opportunities generated at Silverstone
- Secure sustainable transport
- Provide good housing choices and build safe neighbourhoods
- Identify potential development land uses for key sites and the key physical and social infrastructure required.

The Masterplan identifies some of the land along the A45 as ‘green edge’, however it is also noted that there is the opportunity to strengthen the leisure and community facilities at the rugby club.

The Masterplan has identified the area as T1, ‘Northern Gateway’ with future functions for the economy. This forms part of the Tove Valley Business park and there are already existing uses for retail and employment. The location is identified as the east of the A5/A43 junction.

The Masterplan sees this area as offering “…opportunities…for creating a sense of arrival to attract people off the A43 an into the town…” (p30).

This identifies suitable employment uses as:

- Commercial offices
- Light Industrial
- High-tech Industrial

and these should be a range of sizes.

The Masterplan also identifies the area as an ideal location for a joint emergency services facility.

**Proposed site allocation/site development**

The proposed site herewith suggests the land uses which complement the findings of JCS and the business reports. It is considered that a mixed use site which provides both residential and employment uses would provide for the options for businesses to relocate, expand and also stay in the area. The provision of housing will also provide for space for employees, thus helping to retain the needed skill-set in the District.

It is proposed that a site of this size, with a suitable masterplan, would be able to deliver a mixed use development which supports the residents, employees and community.

It is considered that there are a number of advantages of the site as submitted:
It is accessible to the existing and proposed labour supply
Access via public transport to the site can be provided
The site has good access and transport links for commercial vehicles
The site has the capability for road network improvements, adding to the links to the nearby M1 and M40, London and Birmingham.
The site has the capability to improve junction improvements and local highways improvements along the A5 and A43.
Although the site is not within the immediate built-up limits of Towcester, it relates to land which is immediately adjacent to the A5 and A43.
The existing garden centre and proposed veterinary practice provide a suitable site to expand for additional retail/commercial and community uses. These can be complemented through the addition of new business premises, residential and community facilities.
The development of this site provides the opportunity to strengthen transport links and improve sustainable travel methods.
The proposed site, if developed, would not have any harmful effects on nearby residents, being located adjacent to the motorway and away from residential developments.
Any planning application would take into account the historic and natural environment by making the necessary research and taking into account any findings.

Deliverability

Each of the landowners has confirmed their consent for this land to be put forward as part of South Northamptonshire District Council’s current call for sites.

Working with each land owner, a business model will be devised to ensure a smooth transition through planning to delivery.

It is entirely realistic that the site could be delivered well within the Local Plan Period.

Summary

1. Additional housing needs to be supported by additional employment-generating development, and the submitted site represents a realistic option for providing a visible, sustainable and sizeable area of significant employment use.
2. There is a need for additional community facilities. With the creation of a mixed use site, this could be provided via the delivery of housing.
3. The allocation of all or part of this land is in line with the aspirations of the Towcester Masterplan as well as the findings of the business studies and the visions of the Joint Core Strategy.
4. The site is realistically deliverable.

Fisher German LLP
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