

Written Statement

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Examination

Matter SC1: Development Frameworks, Strategy for Rural Area, and Omission Sites

Client: Volac International

Site: Land off Fisher's Lane, Orwell

Rep ID No.: 59744

1.4Q Orwell

i. Development Framework boundary

Should the development framework boundary be extended to include land at the Volac International site and land to the east?

Introduction

1. This Written Statement has been prepared on behalf of Volac International, in respect of land off Fisher's Lane in Orwell. This Statement relates to undesignated land adjacent to its existing premises at Fisher's Lane in Orwell. This Statement is focussed on the development framework boundary around Orwell in the vicinity of Volac's existing site. The representations submitted to the draft Local Plan in October 2013 on behalf of Volac remain valid.
2. Volac is involved in the manufacture and supply of high performance nutrition products. Volac wishes to extend its existing site onto neighbouring land. The neighbouring land is currently located outside the village development framework boundary for Orwell. The site is promoted as an extension to the existing employment use on site with associated amendments to the development framework boundary; Volac intends to remain on site but anticipates requiring additional floorspace and car parking to further expand its operations and to accommodate growing staff numbers. The provision of additional car parking would improve the current situation where staff that cannot park on-site use available public car parking spaces elsewhere in the village, which reduces the number of spaces for residents and visitors. At this stage, there are no firm proposals for the site, but Volac plans to expand during the plan period and is seeking amendments to policy to allow that to happen. A summary of Volac's growth aspirations are set out below. Volac employs a large number of local persons, is committed to Orwell as a business location, supports local businesses including the village shop and public house, but needs to grow to achieve its full potential as a local employer.
3. Policy E/13 (New Employment Development on the Edges of Villages) of SCLP is quite onerous, and there is no guarantee of the outcome if Volac submitted an application to expand its operation into the adjoining field against this policy. It should not be necessary for established Cambridge businesses operating in the high-technology and research and development sectors to demonstrate a business case or assess the availability of other sites before being allowed to expand. Policy E/12 (New Employment Development in Villages) is more supportive

of employment development within the village framework boundary; hence the request to amend the framework boundary in Orwell. Policy E/9 (Promotion of Clusters) relates to employment clusters which are a specialism of the Cambridge area. Volac would fall within the category (d) high technology manufacturing uses and category (g) research and development uses. As such, Volac is involved in the type of uses that need to be located in the Cambridge area.

4. In summary, the submitted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (SCLP) is unsound unless the framework boundary is amended to enable Volac International to expand its existing business premises at land off Fisher's Lane in Volac. There are no constraints to development at the site; the findings of the Council's landscape assessment and assessment of highway access and safety are not robust.

Constraints

5. The site was assessed in the Assessment of Employment Sites report (Site Ref. EM8) - [Doc Ref. RD/Sub/SC/060 - see Draft Final Sustainability Appraisal Annex A Appendix 7: Site Assessments of Employment and Retail Sites]. The report was prepared by the Council to identify potential constraints and the suitability of sites, in order to determine whether they should be allocated for development in draft SCLP. The assessment raised concerns about the visual impact of development at the site including the parks and gardens at Wimpole Hall, biodiversity, and safe highway access. We disagree with the findings of the assessment. A Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (prepared by Richard Morrish Associates Ltd) and an Access and Accessibility Report (prepared by WSP) have been undertaken to determine the impact of these two matters – both reports are submitted with these representations. The ecological potential of the site will need to be determined, but it is unlikely that the site is of such high quality that this matter would prevent any development from taking place at the site.
6. The Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment concludes that existing vegetation helps to enclose the site, and would retain the rural character of the setting and mitigate views of any development. If development as envisaged was allowed to come forward on this site the magnitude of landscape change is anticipated to be low and the significance of those changes is likely to be slight. Wimpole Hall and its grounds are not visible from the site, and as such any impact on the character and setting of the historic park and garden would be minimal. It is recommended that the boundary vegetation is retained, and that additional planting is used to fill in the gaps in the existing vegetation, and that the existing trees within the site are retained including the large ash tree. New hedges with hedge trees should be planted along the eastern boundary to minimise landscape impact. Therefore, there would be minimal impact on the landscape and rural character of the area.
7. The Access and Accessibility Report assessed highway safety and capacity for additional development at the site, and the likely accessibility to the site by car and non-car modes of transport. It concluded that adequate junction visibility exists at the site access. There have been no accidents recorded at the site recently, and therefore there are no road safety

concerns at the site. The existing access arrangements to the site would be sufficient to accommodate the likely increase in vehicle movements to the site associated with additional development, and therefore highway capacity exists at the site access and the A603 / Fisher's Lane junction. While the existing access arrangements are suitable, Volac is considering moving the current site access further along Fisher's Lane and away from the A603 junction. The site has good walking and cycling connections with residential areas in Orwell and with surrounding villages. The existing car parking demand is accommodated within the site, and additional car parking required to support further development at the site could be accommodated within the expanded site area.

8. On this basis the assessment of the site in the Council's Assessment of Employment Sites report is not robust, which means that the decision not to amend the framework boundary at the site is not justified and is unsound. Any development at the site would include additional landscaping at the boundary to mitigate any potential impacts on the surrounding area. When Volac extended its existing building a landscape strategy was delivered as part of that development, including planting at the site boundary and within the site itself, and a similar requirement would be appropriate for development at the extended site.

Parking Need

9. The car parking arrangements within the existing site are not sufficient for current staffing levels, and would clearly not meet needs in the future if staff numbers increased if as planned the business grows. The tightly drawn framework boundary in the vicinity of Volac's existing buildings limits the opportunity for additional car parking to be provided. The staff that cannot park on-site use available public car parking spaces elsewhere in the village, which reduces the number of spaces for residents and visitors. The Parish Council and local residents are understandably unhappy about the parking situation. The Parish Council wants the car parks in the village to be available for local residents and visitors, rather than used by Volac staff. It would be a material improvement to the village if Volac could accommodate its own parking needs on site. Volac allows people to use its car park at weekends for events in the village, and would continue to do this if additional car parking is provided at the site.

Business Need

10. The NPPF seeks to provide support for economic growth and employment development. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF identifies the three dimensions to sustainable development, one of which is an economic strand. The economic strand of sustainable development states: *"economic role - contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;..."*. Paragraph 17 sets out the core principles of planning, which includes supporting economic development. It states that decisions on plan-making should *"...proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs...."*

11. Section 1 of the NPPF seeks to support a strong competitive economy. Paragraph 19 expects the planning system to encourage sustainable growth and not impede it, and states that: *“significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system”*. Paragraph 20 goes on to state that: *“...local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st century”*. Paragraph 21 expects planning policies to include some flexibility to account for unanticipated changes to business sectors. Bullet Point No.3 of Paragraph 21 states:

“support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances;”
12. Paragraph 160 expects support to be provided to business, and expects local planning authorities to *“have a clear understanding of business needs within the economic markets operating in and across their area”*. In the case of Cambridge, the employment market includes high-technology manufacturing, and research and development businesses. Paragraph 160 goes on to state that local planning authorities should *“...work closely with the business community to understand their changing needs and identify and address barriers to investment, including a lack of housing, infrastructure or viability.”*
13. There is clear support from national policy for economic development. Volac is a successful local business, involved in the high technology manufacturing and research and development sectors. Volac is involved in the type of uses that need to be located in the Cambridge area.
14. Volac has an aspiration to grow during the plan period. The company has been based in Orwell since it was founded in 1970 and the vision driving the company forward has remained broadly unchanged. This vision is
 - To produce and market the best dairy nutrition products globally, bringing proven nutritional benefits to farmers and consumers
 - To be recognised for our leadership in creating a sustainable healthy future for people, animals and the planet
 - To operate in a way that optimises the use of precious resources, working with others in a way that positively impacts the communities we touch
15. This vision is well aligned with being based in Orwell and it continues to work well. From a small start-up, company it has grown by 2016 to have sales in excess of £200m. The 5 year plan shows continued growth with sales in excess of £500m by 2022.
16. The company has also diversified internationally with 50:50 joint ventures with European and Asian partners. As the company has grown the role of the site in Orwell has evolved to the benefit of the company and the community. Initially goods were despatched from the site via trucks but now the site is purely a “head office” site with many staff employed from Orwell and local villages. The challenge Volac face in Orwell is being able to have a site which is of a size to be capable of “hosting” the head office of a successful multi-national company. Volac

can be flexible in the roles that are based at Orwell, but there is a critical mass of functions which need to be at the head office location including Directors, Innovation, Technical, Marketing, Finance and IT.

17. Volac intend to grow during the plan period and to retain its head office function in Orwell. However, if the development framework boundary is not amended then Volac will need to decide whether to relocate or limit the companies growth potential.
18. In conclusion, and taking into account the above circumstances, the growth of Volac should be supported. A more positive approach would be to amend the development framework boundary to enable additional development for the growth of Volac to be delivered during the plan period. The decision to not amend the village framework boundary around Orwell, including land in the vicinity of Volac, is unsound because it is not positively prepared and is not consistent with national guidance particularly in respect of the lack of support for economic growth. The villages in South Cambridgeshire should contain a variety of uses including employment, and the retention of existing employment uses in villages should be encouraged.

Sustainability of Orwell

19. Orwell is defined as a Group Village in the settlement hierarchy. It contains a range of services and facilities, including a primary school, village shop and public house. There is a bus route through the village, and there are other bus services on the A603 Cambridge Road. Volac is the main employment site in the village, and is accessible from the village via pedestrian footway. Volac staff use the shop and village public house, which will almost certainly contribute to the overall viability of those businesses.

Requested Change

20. We request that the development framework boundary around Orwell is reviewed so that Volac can expand its existing operation into neighbouring land - Site Ref. EM8 in Assessment of Employment Sites Report. The development framework boundary in Orwell should be amended to include land to the east of the Volac International site off Fisher's Lane. The site would be suitable for Class B1 uses including additional car parking.

Carter Jonas – 5th May 2017