

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 78)

Appeal in relation to: Swindon Science Park

Appellant: Wasdell Properties Limited

Rebuttal of

Alternative Site Assessment Proof of Evidence

James Gregory FRICS

Local Planning Authority reference: S/OUT/18/1943

Planning Inspectorate reference: APP/U3935/W/21/3269667

May 2021

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Our Ref: 87514

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 In this rebuttal proof I will respond to matters raised in the Proof of Evidence submitted on behalf of Swindon Borough Council in respect of Swindon's Economic Growth.

1.2 I have concentrated on the main points at issue, and have not responded on every point in dispute. If I fail to respond to a particular point, or otherwise fail to mention it, it should not be assumed that I agree with it.

1.3 In this rebuttal, I respond to the evidence of David Dewart at Swindon Borough Council.

2.0 Rebuttal

2.1

2.1.1 In response to paragraph 2.5, Mr Dewart states "taking into account commitments and existing allocations such as Kimmerfields, NEV and Wichelstowe, The Employment Land Review (CD1-2) demonstrates that there is sufficient land in quantitative terms to meet the forecast requirements to 2036".

2.1.2 This may be the case if all land allocations are added together but does not detract from the point that there are no other suitable deliverable and available sites that are of sufficient size to accommodate the Appellant's requirements. Kimmerfields in the town centre is much too small and is being promoted by SBC for its new Cultural Quarter. The NEV and Wichelstowe have already been commented on in the Alternative Site Assessment (sites 7&8 and 10 respectively) and further updated comment is made in section 5.6 of my Proof of Evidence.

2.2

2.2.1 In response to paragraph 2.6, Mr Dewart refers to "the most recent Council employment land survey from December 2020 shows that "on the ground", a range of vacant sites and buildings exist in the Borough".

2.2.2 I would expect there to be a range of commercial opportunities but the vast majority of the contents of the schedule highlighted as Appendix 1 are far too small and irrelevant to this Case. Many entries are for small office suites or industrial units.

2.2.3 I have examined the list at Appendix 1 in detail and make the following comments in respect of some of the larger ones.

2.2.3.1 "Dorcan Industrial Estate Plot B" is Phase 2 of the scheme known as Ignition. Phase 1 comprises 7 new warehouses ranging from 20-70,000 sq ft and Phase 2 is being promoted for either a single building of 195,000 or further units as per Phase 1. The site, being landlocked and circa 9 acres, is of insufficient size for the Appellant.

2.2.3.2 “Groundwell Industrial Estate Offices at Network Rail” is a refurbished warehouse with circa 10% offices most recently occupied by Network Rail. It is too small.

2.2.3.3 “Symmetry Park - Areas A & B”. These are referred to within site 10 of the Alternative Site Assessment and section 5.6 of my Proof of Evidence. Area A is Great Stall East which has secured a planning permission for residential use. Area B is the site now occupied by the new 2.3m sq ft Amazon building which is under construction.

2.2.3.4 “Ward – Central”. The two entries “Land at Kimmerfields” and “Union Square” are one and the same. Union Square was the previously used marketing name for the area now known as Kimmerfields. The original masterplan showed plans for offices of circa 700,000 sq ft in the town centre. This is subsequently being reviewed to provide a significant amount of residential use as well as the proposed Cultural Quarter to include a theatre, art gallery and similar uses. Furthermore, Zurich’s flagship 100,000 sq ft pre let office building is currently under construction.

2.2.3.5 “Ward – Wroughton & Wichelstowe”. These are referred to within sites 7 & 8 of the Alternative Site Assessment. The proposed commercial element of this development is too small for the Appellant’s requirements and furthermore the land is to be dissected by the new road and tunnel under the M4 providing access to the commercial land and the expansion of the residential uses. There are also protected hedgerows making the opportunity even more compromised for large scale development.

2.2.4 Since the preparation of this list (referred to as “extract from the Swindon Employment Land Monitoring Survey December 2020), a number of new opportunities have come to the market but none are of sufficient size to meet the Appellants needs. For example, SN200 at Cheney Manor – 205,571 sq ft on 8.62 acres, TS Tech site at Blackworth Industrial Estate – 205,182 sq ft on 8.6 acres, Metro Building at Groundwell – 106,000 sq ft, Unit 103 Cheney Manor – 98,643 sq ft on 4.16 acres and Unit 3 Hunts Rise at South Marston – 138,956 sq ft.

2.3

2.3.1 In response to paragraph 2.23, Mr Dewart says “Panattoni has stated that they will make the site available for the expansion of local businesses from Spring 2022”.

2.3.2 I refer to section 5.4.3 of my Proof of Evidence where I state “I have spoken to the Development Director at Panattoni with responsibility for the site. He has confirmed that they are working on an overall masterplan and are hoping to submit an outline planning application in October/November 2021 for B8 (warehousing & distribution) and B2 (general industrial) uses. Panattoni are hopeful of receiving a positive planning consent in March 2022”. I further state in paragraph 5.4.5 that “I am advised that Panattoni are not interested

in discussing freehold sales of any parts of the land but are seeking to retain ownership and control of the whole site. They are welcoming discussions of a leasehold nature and are already talking to a number of potential occupiers”.

- 2.3.3 This means the former Honda site, featured as site 12 in the Alternative Site Assessment, is unsuitable for the Appellant’s requirements.

2.4

- 2.4.1 In paragraph 2.24, Mr Dewart states “Nationwide Building Society announced that they would be closing three of their Swindon office buildings (two buildings at Windmill Hill Business Park and Wakefield House). The decision was based on a review of workspace needs following the desire for the majority of staff to continue to work from home post pandemic. Other Swindon businesses are conducting similar reviews, which are likely to lead to a rationalisation of their workspace needs”.

- 2.4.2 The above point has no relevance to the Appellant’s business as Nationwide operates a purely office based administrative function in these buildings. A change in working practice for them, and other office occupiers, is not comparable with the working practices of the Appellant who requires large scale alternative accommodation.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 I reiterate there are no available alternative sites of 35 hectares in Swindon or the immediate environs suitable to accommodate the proposed Swindon Science Park.
- 3.2 The proposed development of Swindon Science Park at Inlands Farm represents the only realistic option of facilitating major expansion of the Appellant’s business whilst enhancing the offer of commercial property to pharmaceutical led businesses within an appropriate low density environment.