

Defend our Environment and Reject Giant warehouses in the Countryside

On 3rd September 2019 you are being asked to approve an application by IMP developers for a huge



warehouse site in the countryside between Appleby Magna, Chilcote and No Man's Heath. The buildings are enormous. The site is many times larger than the Amazon warehouse at Ellistown. It dwarfs the neighbouring villages. One shed is similar in size to the village centre of Appleby Magna – the largest settlement in the area. They will be the height of a 7 storey building.

Is this an appropriate countryside gateway to the National Forest?

You have an up to date Local Plan which officers agree is the basis for determining this application (Report para 5.1.1). They agree that this site is in countryside not designated for development (p. 5.1.6).

As such it can only be permitted in very limited circumstances as set out in policy Ec2.2 and S3. Before you decide your position consider the following questions:

Are you happy that 'demand' is assessed solely on the basis of the applicant's statements?

The report says that the applicant has demonstrated demand in that they have named clients for parts of the site (p. 5.1.12). The report says there is no shortfall in sites available for such large warehouses (p. 5.1.13). It refers to Leicestershire Strategic Distribution Study as evidence of potential longer-term need, but this report says that greenfield sites should be a last resort after sites with rail and other transport facilities, and satellite sites associated with them. One such site is the East Midlands Gateway next to the airport which has significant vacancies currently. The National Planning Policy Framework also prioritizes brownfield sites. Your officer's report has made no independent assessment of alternatives, particularly not of EM gateway (section 5.3 just repeats the applicant's claims).

Developers might like to create yet another site on cheap agricultural land, but do you want to set this precedent which could be used on sites all over the District and could undermine the viability of your existing provision?

Are you convinced that this development will bring jobs and other economic benefits to North West Leicestershire?

Jaguar Land Rover's strategy is to consolidate their existing warehouse sites across the Midlands. They have also announced 4,500 job losses. This suggests that jobs created on this new site will be moving from elsewhere and will be primarily taken up by existing employees living a long distance away.

Does this sound like the scale of local job gain claimed in the report presented to you? (p. 5.4.4)

Do you believe this site is "accessible by a choice of means of transport, including sustainable transport modes" as required by Local Plan Policies Ec2.2a, S3 (vi) and national policies?

The site has no rail link and no plans for one. This is a proposed distribution centre, moving goods into and out of the site to elsewhere in the UK and abroad. This will all be done by unsustainable HGV traffic. The site currently has no public transport and relies on over 2,000 car journeys for staff to get to work. The applicants say they will discuss the provision of 2 bus routes for employees (at least one, and possibly both, serving locations outside the District). It is accepted that most employees will come by car. No one who knows the site would believe they would arrive on foot or by bicycle. There is no mention of this in the climate change section of the report (section 5.15) although car journeys are acknowledged as a major contributor to CO2 emissions in the District, and nationally.

Does the vague proposal, described at para 5.11.7, sound like it will provide a range of sustainable transport as required by Local Plan Policies?

Will this development “safeguard and enhance” the appearance and character of the landscape as required by Local Plan Policy S3 (i)?

The site is agricultural land – around 60% of it is the Best and Most Versatile land (p. 5.9.1). This is about 58 hectares. The report from your officer says that the loss of 20 hectares is normally considered significant and the *applicants* say that this change in land use constitutes a “**major adverse**” effect (p. 5.5.6). The Landscape Character is nationally defined as ‘Mease / Sence Lowlands’. This is defined as a “gentle rolling agricultural landscape” ... “which retain a rural, remote character, with small villages, red brick farmsteads and occasional historic parkland and country houses” (Natural England website). The *applicants* say that the development will have a “**major adverse**” effect on Landscape character (p. 5.5.6). The District Council’s consultant says that there would be “some very significant and permanent adverse effects on local landscape character” and that “the proposed development and proposed buildings are of a very large scale, and would appear incongruous in the local landscape setting” (p. 5.5.16). The applicants have proposed land mounds (7 m high) to partially mask the impact – but this in itself changes the landscape. Historic buildings on the site will also be lost when development is complete, contrary to the recommendations of the Conservation Officer (p. 5.8.24)

Does the report's claim of ‘safeguarding’ (5.5.19) convince you? Is there any credible evidence for ‘enhancement’ as required by policy?

Will this proposal undermine the “open undeveloped character between nearby settlements ... through development on isolated sites on land divorced from settlement boundaries” contrary to Local Plan Policy S3 (ii)?

A development far larger than the largest settlement (Appleby Magna) and completely overwhelming the size of its nearby settlements (Stretton en le field, Chilcote and No Man’s Heath) must undermine the open character of the land between these settlements – particularly where their character is defined as small villages in a remote rural landscape. It is visible from all the neighbouring settlements and is assessed by the applicant as adverse for residents (p. 5.5.7). The report claims that the impact on the physical and perceived separation of settlements is unaffected (5.5.20) which we would contest. Nowhere in the report is there consideration of the impact of this development on the character of the undeveloped land between settlements as required by this policy.

Are you comfortable that the report does not address this policy requirement? What will this mean for any future applications in this area of countryside?

What is the appropriate test for this application - the Local Plan or the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)?

NPPF para 12 says “The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory

status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan ... permission should not usually be granted". The NWL Local Plan is up to date, and this application is in conflict with its policies for development in the countryside - *even if demand is established* - in relation to

1. modes of sustainable transport;
2. not safeguarding and enhancing the appearance and character of the landscape; and
3. not protecting the open and undeveloped character between settlements.

It is therefore misleading for the report to offer an overall assessment at 5.18 in terms of economic, social and environment objectives. This is not the basis for decision which should instead be its conformity with the local plan. This unnecessary overall assessment is also unbalanced. In 15.18.4 the report says economic objectives are delivered through any jobs that might result. In 15.8.5 the social assessment promotes "recreational routes" within the site – without giving any explanation of why anyone who lives in the countryside would see it as a benefit to have a new opportunity to walk or cycle around an industrial site. In 15.8.7 the report accepts that there would be negative environmental impacts but concludes that these "would be acceptable". No basis is given for this conclusion. Reference is made to mitigation and to "its contribution towards protecting and enhancing the built and historic environment". No explanation or justification is made for this statement. The NPPF says that these 3 dimensions are "interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways" (para 8). As such there is no basis in planning policy for approving an application just because it has some economic benefits.

Are you convinced that the application is being assessed against the correct criteria and in a balanced way?

If you have any concerns about the answers to the questions raised here, you should not approve this application. As a minimum you should defer the decision about this application until these questions are answered in a satisfactory way. This should include the District commissioning an independent full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the proposals. This should engage with Parish Councils and local groups over their concerns about the impact on landscape and other environmental issues.

This application has generated an unprecedented level of opposition including from 3 MPs, a neighbouring Council, 16 Parish Councils and 431 local residents. This application should not be rushed through at a week's notice to objectors. Local people deserve better from their elected representatives.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

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