

**Newark and Sherwood District Council
Site Allocations and Development Management DPD Examination in Public**

Day 4
18 December 2012

Statement on behalf of NSK Europe Ltd – Site at Northern Road, Newark

Introduction

1. This statement has been made on behalf of NSK Europe Ltd in respect of the site at Northern Road, Newark, which is recommended for allocation in the Site Allocations Plan under Site Ref: NUA/MU/3.
2. This statement relates to the Inspector's Examination Agenda Matter 5 which raises the following questions in respect of Site NUA/MU/3
 - The Plan relies on one site (NUA/MU/3) for most of its new retail floor space to be provided towards the latter part of the Plan period. What happens if it cannot be delivered - is the plan flexible enough to cope with this? Is this the best approach to deliver retail development in the area? Is the boundary of the site appropriate? Is there sufficient clarity in the wording of the policy to guide future development within the suggested timescale? Is there a better, more readily available site which would give greater certainty to the delivery of retail floor space?

Reliance on the site

3. The GVA Grimley 'Newark and Sherwood Retail and Town Centres Study' identifies that future retail need in Newark is based on meeting comparison good retail requirements, and preventing the leakage of bulky goods retail trade out of Newark. It also identifies that existing out-of-centre retail warehouse provision at Beacon Hill Retail Park i.e. B&Q and Topps Tiles is in close proximity to Newark town centre.
4. The bulky goods retail model relies heavily on clustering together in locations where critical mass can be achieved. Not only do bulky goods customers want low prices and easy access to retailers at the one location, they also demand parking facilities so they can travel by car and transport goods home themselves. Without this critical mass and without suitable access and segregated vehicle movements, trade will continue to be lost to other centres.
5. Consideration to public safety is of primary importance in all bulky goods retail developments. Customer transport needs plus the regular goods transport, loading and unloading requirements mean infrastructure must be designed around constant , segregated, large as well as smaller vehicle use.
6. As such it is not a case of the plan relying on one site, it is a case of one site being the most suitable and deliverable format to provide for the specific type and nature of retail provision identified through the plan period.

What happens if it cannot be delivered - is the plan flexible enough to cope with this?

7. Over a period of ten years, NSK has engaged with the Council over its requirement to relocate to a purpose built, clean production, manufacturing plant. NSK Europe Ltd is one of Newark's biggest employers and a key manufacturer of high tech, precision engineered components. It has a growing research and development arm, taking advantage of the town's ability to attract and retain a highly skilled labour force of engineers.
8. In recent year, much of the more standard manufacture has moved overseas, while the site retains a built legacy of heavy manufacturing production from a different century. The factory buildings have been maintained, but are unsuited to current manufacturing needs; are a significant maintenance liability; are unsightly; are underutilised; and, have poor circulation space. As such, much of the site is quantitatively and qualitatively defunct and cannot operate with total efficiency. The work taking place in part of the site today has the potential to employ more people within significantly smaller floorspace and within much more energy efficient buildings. NSK are fully committed to Newark in the long-term. Their requirement and relocation programme is to secure a suitable (green/brown-field) site elsewhere Newark and construct a purpose-built operation, funded through the release of the Northern Road works for mixed use re-development. Re-location could see early development within one of the SUE employment areas.
9. The search for a suitable site, which remains fully accessible to existing employees, is ongoing and the attached report from Roger Davis of Geo Hallam sets out details of the instruction and search. Matters are progressing well.
10. The inspector will appreciate that there are however issues of business security, continuity and confidentiality which impact on the level of information that NSK are able to put in the public domain at this stage. I would seek to emphasise that the absence of a definitive, submitted timetable for the relocation of the works should not be read as a lack of a programme, commitment or deliverability on the part of NSK but relates simply to legitimate business sensitivity. It would be inappropriate to 'set hares running' at this stage, when formal decision making and strategic management needs to be taken at executive board level. To make specific announcements on timescales in advance of both the inspector's own report and executive board decisions could undermine confidence and would be wholly inappropriate. However, it is a matter of fact and record that the European Legal Director is specifically tasked with driving this process forward and identifying a potential new Newark site for a new manufacturing plant.
11. It is also a matter of fact that we have been actively and continuously engaged with the promotion of the site since 2005. On behalf of NSK, we have made submissions at every single stage of the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPD consultation and examination. We provided significant evidence to the Core Strategy Examination in Public on behalf of NSK and have been actively engaged with senior officers in identifying and bring the site forward.
12. In respect of delivery, it is recognised that the comparison goods capacity increase to 4,911 sq m net by 2019, 15,040 sq m net by 2024 and 18,459 sq m net by 2026 is skewed towards the latter half of the plan period. As such, while, the relocation of the NSK site will not be instant, there is no risk to the delivery of the bulky goods retail element of the scheme within a reasonable timeframe and well within the plan period. It is also noted that this capacity is predicated on the wider growth of Newark and is about future proofing the plan, not about providing for an urgent requirement.
13. We recognise that it is as easy to promise delivery as it is to refute the delivery potential of a site. However, all of the evidence presented over the last 7 years of

active promotion by NSK gives a clear demonstration of the significant time, resource and financial commitment that the company has made to this process. It has been clearly demonstrated that a commercially deliverable scheme can be achieved on the site and that there are no physical or land ownership constraints that would prevent delivery over the next 14 years. The inspector can be as assured as it is possible to be that the policy and development will be implemented.

14. Attached to this statement are two indicative masterplans which demonstrate the delivery potential of the site with and without the redevelopment of the existing retail park. These plans have been independently reviewed by commercial agents and bulky goods retail professionals and have been confirmed to be deliverable.
15. Further, the site is currently underutilised and there is the option and opportunity to release parts of the site on a phased basis enabling the retail need to be delivered as required.
16. In the highly unlikely event that the required bulky goods retail provision cannot be delivered on the site, Policy DM11 provides an NPPF and practice guide compliant policy which would allow for delivery on suitable alternative site(s) in accordance with the CS hierarchy. As submitted, the DPD provides sufficient flexibility to ensure that retail needs can be met as a minimum, while aiming for significant regeneration and economic growth benefits.

Is this the best approach to deliver retail development

17. The site is not at risk from flooding and highway assessments and ground conditions reports have been carried out as part of the promotion and submitted to the Council as part of the evidence base. In short, there are no significant physical constraints to the development of the site and no constraints that cannot be readily mitigated. No significant constraints were identified by the assessment of the site against the criteria contained within Spatial Policy 9.
18. The GVA Grimley 'Newark and Sherwood Retail and Town Centres Study' 2010 identifies that existing out-of-centre retail warehouse provision at Beacon Hill Retail Park i.e. B&Q and Topps Tiles is in close proximity to Newark town centre. As such, it is recognised that there is already a focus for bulky goods retail directly adjoining the NSK site, and that it is provided in a suitable and accessible location.
19. Taking into account the scale of provision needed to retain bulky good spend within the District over the plan period and the need to concentrate provision in the interests of marketability, retailer preference, sustainability and linked trips, there are no sequentially preferable sites that are suitable and available within or on the edge of the town centre. Further, there is no risk to the vitality or viability of the town centre through the allocation as drafted. It is entirely appropriate that the Council should *'enhance the provision of bulky goods through the development plan process to "claw-back" this expenditure, but without any detrimental impact on Newark town centre.'*
20. As a strategic site and a key element of delivering the overall development and growth strategy for the town it is important to understand the regeneration context of the Northern Road site in considering its future as a genuine mixed use opportunity.
21. A key element of the Core Strategy is to deliver regeneration. Quite simply, the allocation of the Northern Road site has real potential to generate significant regeneration, the positive impacts of which are long term and widespread. It will deliver the potential for one of the town's biggest and oldest employers to secure its

future, to expand in the town and to deliver significant multi-skilled job opportunities. It has the potential to regenerate a large area of mostly poor quality, unsightly and outdated industrial buildings as part of a comprehensive redevelopment. It has the potential to deliver new jobs in retail, business and manufacturing in one of the most deprived wards of the town. It has the potential to deliver, high quality, sustainably located residential opportunities within a walkable neighbourhood. And, it has the potential to do all of this in a genuine gateway location, next to the town's mainline railway station (within an hour and 30 minutes of London) and adjoining the town's main employment location. Alternative sites cannot deliver the direct regeneration benefits over the long term, the potential for economic growth or the scale of complementary retail uses. As a central tenet of the Core Strategy, the need to maximise the regeneration benefits of site allocation, weigh heavily in favour of the Northern Road site allocation. The allocation has the potential to deliver economic growth that is much greater than the sum of its parts.

22. With reference back to Strategic Objective 5, site NUA/MU/3 has the clear potential to assist directly in the delivery of the objective through regeneration and reinvestment. No other site considered has similar potential. If the Core Strategy and subsequent Site Allocations document are to be tools for the positive delivery of benefit to the community of Newark and Sherwood, they must seek to maximise the potential benefits of development and be realistically aspirational.
23. The locational advantage of the Northern Road site is that it already contains both employment and bulky goods retail. The proposed mixed use development will result in a unique opportunity for providing sustainable pedestrian and cycle links, from the developed area, directly into the heart of the town, neighbouring employment land and to Northgate Station. Northgate Station is situated within easy walking distance. Direct trains to London take less than 1.5 hours, and direct trains to Newcastle take less than 2 hours. Bus services 1, 1A, S7L and 87 run very frequently from directly outside the site into the town centre with further connecting routes. The potential to provide a pedestrian foot bridge across the railway puts the edge of the site within 625m of the town centre. This is well within the suggested 800m 'preferred maximum' walking distance to a town centre set out in the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) publication 'Providing for Journeys on Foot' (2001) .

Is the boundary of the site appropriate?

24. We note that the allocation includes only the NSK landholding, and does not include the adjacent land to the south comprising of the Abbot and Co works, and the B&Q retail site on the corner of Northern Road and Beacon Hill. We have confirmation from the owner of the Abbot and Co works and other adjoining landowners that they would wish to see adjoining land included as part of a deliverable mixed use redevelopment of the NSK works. Given the mixed use nature of the adjoining land uses, and the potential added benefit in securing a comprehensive mixed use redevelopment of the site, we believe it would be to the wider regeneration benefit of the town to include the adjoining land. We would add however that delivery of the allocation is not reliant on third party land.

Is there a better, more readily available site which would give greater certainty to the delivery of retail floor space?

25. We would note that it is not the purpose of the examination to identify whether there are better alternative sites, but to assess whether the sites proposed are sound including when assessed against reasonable alternatives.

26. The issue of whether there might be an alternative site has been soundly and fully examined by the Council generally through the Allocation DPD process and specifically through the Additional Sites Consultation Paper March – May 2012. This document assessed 'reasonable alternatives' that had been submitted late in the process. In particular, site reference 2 at Northgate was considered by the Council and subsequently rejected following assessment and public consultation.
27. The Northgate site is the subject of an unresolved planning appeal which proposes 2,215 sq m of unrestricted A1 retail floorspace as part of a speculative scheme of which 1,375 sq m is for convenience retail. The application states that there are 'no committed occupiers'. Submissions to the appeal question the deliverability and suitability of the scheme, which does not segregate service vehicle and customer vehicle movements.
28. The site is identified for allocation as a housing site within the document following a previous grant of planning permission. I understand that there are viability issues relating to the immediate development of the site for housing, hence the current application for speculative retail use, including convenience retail. It is not clear whether the site is unviable if the convenience retail is omitted although it is noted that the Council's retail evidence states that any minor additional convenience retail requirements over the plan period can be met in small scale formats spread through the district.
29. The North Gate site an out of centre location by definition. While the current application describes the site as operating as an edge of centre site, there is no such distinction in planning policy and one out-of-centre site cannot be more sequentially preferable than another. In actual fact, the site is 175m beyond what could be considered as an edge of centre location. As such the site has no locational advantage by definition over NUA/MU/3
30. The North Gate site lies directly adjoining a Conservation Area, which is sensitive to redevelopment on its periphery. Bulky goods retail developments necessitate a large scale format, linear form and circulation and parking provision that does not readily site well in a historic context. The potential for harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is palpable.
31. The extant residential consent for the North Gate site is an appropriate and contextually sensitive development proposal. It will serve to contribute good quality housing in an area of recognised housing need. It has been accounted for in the overall balance of supply in preparing both the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations draft and its loss as a housing site will undermine future delivery of the District's housing growth requirement. It is of little surprise that the site is not currently viable in view of both the flood risk mitigation and the current housing market.
32. In respect of delivery, it is recognised that the level of retail growth provided for in the plan is both skewed to the latter part of the plan period and is predicated on the significant growth of Newark identified through the Core Strategy. There is no imperative to deliver the retail element proposed early in the plan. As such the availability of the Northgate site is of no advantage.