

**Andover Business Park,
Monxton Road,
Andover**

Landscape Objections
to Planning Application
(Ref: 07/01951/OUTN)

**Prepared on behalf of
The 'STOP' Alliance**

By:
Allen Pyke Associates
Landscape & Urban
Design Consultants

November 2008

ANDOVER AIRFIELD BUSINESS PARK

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIONS TO THE PLANNING APPLICATION (Ref 07/0195/OUTN) FOR THE FORMER AIRFIELD AT MONXTON ROAD, ANDOVER PREPARED ON BEHALF OF THE 'STOP' ALLIANCE

I. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Allen Pyke Associates, an independent landscape and urban design practice specialising in landscape character and visual impact assessment. The author, David Allen, is Managing Director of the company and is a chartered landscape architect. He has over 25 years experience in the appraisal, planning and implementation of large scale landscape schemes for public and private sector clients. These include motorways and trunk roads, major urban extensions, airports, business parks, distribution warehouses, supermarkets, hospitals and educational facilities.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Review the scheme proposals in terms of the Test Valley Local Plan policies.
- Review the adequacy of the landscape chapter of the Environmental Statement submitted in support of the scheme.
- Establish the landscape and visual grounds for objecting to the planning application.

These grounds may be summarised as follows:

1. The scale, height, massing and layout of the proposals do not comply with Test Valley Local Plan Policy and their 'Landscape Assessment Guidance'. The scheme will be detrimental to both the wider landscape character and setting of the Local Gap. Furthermore, the inability to include the essential mitigation screening within the Local Plan allocation boundary represents an over-development of the site. The proposals are contrary to Policies SET 03, SET 05, DES 01, DES 02, DES 03, DES 05, DES 06, DES 07, AND 04.1 & AND 04.2.
2. The mitigation proposals are insufficient to safeguard the residential amenity of neighbouring properties and are contrary to Policies AME 01 & AME 03.
3. The visual effects of the development have not been fully assessed in the Environmental Statement. The scheme layout does not provide space for adequate mitigation to reduce the effects of the night time lighting and the reduced screening of existing and proposed surrounding vegetation in winter months is contrary to Policies DES 01, AND 04.1 & AND 04.2

2. LANDSCAPE CONTEXT & SCHEME PROPOSALS

Setting

The Business Park lies on part of the former Andover Airfield and for many years has been in agricultural use. The site is located immediately to the south of the A303 Trunk Road, which

creates a strong physical and visual barrier between Andover and the open undulating countryside to the south.

The 100 Acre Junction on the A303 is on a ridgeline with levels around 90m at the Monxton Road/site entrance. From this point the land falls steadily southwards to 74 metres on the Red Post Lane boundary and allows extensive rural views westwards to Quarley Hill and Perham Down on the edge of Salisbury Plain.

Abutting the site is the Ministry of Defence DLO facility and to the south the Monxton Road. This site contains a range of office and storage buildings of different institution styles and periods with heights of 1 to 3 storeys. Views of the proposed development site would only be possible through wider gaps between these buildings.

Red Post Lane runs along the shortest length of the application site boundary where 5 properties have direct views of the proposed development area. The Lane is flanked by clipped native hedgerows that generally contain views as the road moves northwards towards the A303. Extensive open views of the site and surrounding landscape are obtained at a small number of field gates and gaps in the hedgerow.

Beyond the site, the highway planting around the 100 Acre junction screens the urban fringe to Andover with only parts of a Hotel and the Euronics warehouse in the Portway Industrial Estate being visible above the treed skyline. Beside the trunk road are the old A342 Weyhill Road and Penton Corner where a number of dwellings have views across the site and the wider countryside.

The A303 is in cutting through the grade-separated junction but to the west of the slip roads it runs on a long embankment before crossing Red Post Lane. Carriageway levels by the slips are around 84.5m, and 90m at the bridge. Vegetation along the road embankment is variable and provides differing amounts of screening. Around the disused service station the planting is dense but the single line of hawthorn hedging opposite Weyhill Road and intermittent planting on road bridge embankment provide little localised screening of the site, particularly in winter months when the deciduous vegetation is without leaf.

Scheme Proposals

Full details are provided of the Unit 4 Distribution Warehouse, parking, bunding and planting as part of a full planning application. Other parts of the Business Park are for an outline application and indicative only.

The proposed 'mega-shed' is massive in every regard. Its footprint is 550m long by 123m wide – sufficient area to cover 10 adult sized football pitches. The area of 6.765 hectares could accommodate a 250-300 unit residential estate if the land were to be used for housing. The two lorry parks and loading areas also cover a similar area. The structure is 18.37 metres high – the equivalent of a 5/6 storey building. It would take approximately 15 minutes to walk, at an average pace, the length of the building.

To provide a flat level surface across the Unit 4 site on the 77.0 metre contour substantial excavation is needed in the northern half of the site to provide up to 3.0 metres of fill to the south and bunding along the north-western and Red Post Lane boundaries. The bunds are not proposed to be of uniform height or width. Along the (western) field boundary the northern end of the bund

is 55 metres wide and up to 10 metres above the level of the service yard but still, at its highest point, would be 2 metres below the top of the warehouse roof. Along the southern third of the building the bund is almost inconsequential, ranging in width from only 20 to 30 metres and rising to between 0 and 3 metres above the service yard. This section of the site will already be raised by 2 to 3 metres to level gradients and will accentuate the exposed 18m high face of the building as well as allow views of many of the 4.0 metre high delivery lorries stacked in the parking and loading bays.

The 60 metre wide and 8 metre height bund along Red Post Lane will form an intrusive element on the lane but will not provide any meaningful screening from adjacent properties where units 4 and 5 will be prominent. For the houses at the southern end of the lane there will also be views into the central part of the proposed business park.

The landscape scheme provides an attractive and appropriate range of native trees and hedgerow mix species. However, the mixes are predominately hedgerow and thicket mixes with ultimately heights of between 3 and 6 metres. The shrubs will be planted as 'whips' at heights of between 300mm and 600mm and are unlikely to have any significant visual effect for at least 3 years, and are unlikely to reach their mature height until the 7th year and onwards.

The tree and thicket mix used on the tops of the bunds contain 20% tree species – in terms of the total bund area this represents less than 10% of the overall plant stock. Tree species, even if planted as 'standards' rather than 'whips', will still take 12 to 15 years to reach a mature size.

Goodmans (and their operating division Arlington Estates) give high regard to the appearance of the landscape in their business parks. However, the establishment of planting on bunds and embankments is inherently more problematic because of the microclimate on the slopes and reduced availability of water. Establishment periods can as a result be significantly longer. Furthermore, 80% of the proposed planting will be deciduous and lose its leaves in winter.

Design

The design of Unit 4 is not typical of large-scale distribution warehouses. Architectural styles are a matter of taste, which can change over time. Such structures are usually monolithic in form with a simple straight profile, while external cladding and coloured finishes have more variation. The level of impact a 'mega-shed' creates depends on main factors:

- Topographical features/ skyline.
- Weather conditions.
- Proximity to the building.
- Lighting.

If a building is visible and breaks the skyline it will inevitably have a detrimental impact on the setting. In bright and sunny conditions a large building will be more prominent in views and an unusual building style may draw attention to the structure. The closer to buildings to surrounding properties the greater the level of visual obstruction and impact is likely to be.

Night Time Lighting

The repetitive barrel-vaulted roof of Unit 4 will be visible over a wide part of the countryside south of Andover. The large elliptical clerestory windows will provide natural daylight into the building but at night the internal lighting will be seen through these windows and will draw attention to the building and emphasise its height and length.

Distribution Warehouses operating over a 24 hour period generally need higher levels of external lighting than most urban areas for safety reasons. The Building Services Design preliminary lighting drawing (07620/E/201 PI) provides an indication of the types of columns, fitting and luminance levels.

The brightness created by the lighting (lux levels) will determine the ambient light levels over a site and the higher the lux values the greater the glare the development may generate. Modern high pressure sodium (SON-T) bulbs allow lantern designs with directional optics to minimize spillage. However, the more powerful the bulb the greater the reflection of light from lamp posts and adjacent surfaces, which can in dark rural areas be visible over long distances. The height of light columns and their positioning, particularly on building faces, can increase visibility and the night-time 'glow' from reflected light created over a large commercial facility.

By way of comparison:

Urban residential streets have light columns of 5 to 6 metres in height with average lux (brightness) levels at 7.5 to 10 lux. A major urban road would have 8 metre columns, a motorway 10 or 12 metre columns. Well lit areas like supermarkets, which often operate over 24 hours, would have 6 metre columns and 25 to 30 average lux levels. In a rural car park levels would reduce to 15 lux.

The suggested columns and lux levels for the business park from the BSD drawing are:

- Column heights - 8 or 12 metres

Lux levels:

- Car Parks - 34 lux
- Lorry Bays - 43 lux
- Loading Bays - 51 lux
- Link Roads - 35 lux
- Site Entrance - 46 lux

Given the rural fringe location and general darkness of the skies in the surrounding countryside the lighting in the business park is likely to be highly intrusive on the setting, local residents and travellers on the A303.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EFFECTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

Before adoption of the new Local Plan in 2006 a large proportion of the site was outside the settlement boundary and included within a Strategic Gap designation. Movement of this boundary was specifically to accommodate an enlarged Business Park to include warehouse and distribution uses. Despite this change the planning application boundary has subsequently been extended by a

further 3 hectares into the newly defined Andover/ Weyhill Local Gap. A fundamental objective of **Policy SET 05** is to maintain the sense of ‘openness’ across the gap. The scale, height, massing and positioning of Unit 4, despite the boundary treatments, will diminish the perception of the gap. Policy states that:

The Council will not permit ‘**development on the edges of settlements which will physically reduce the extent of the gaps and with development elsewhere within the gaps which could reduce the visual separation of settlements**’.

In addition, more than half of the site was regarded, prior to 2006, as being part of the countryside, and the 3ha extension is still part of the designated countryside. The landscape strategy and guidelines for new development in countryside and on the edge of settlement boundaries is set out in the Council’s ‘Test Valley Community Landscape Policy’. Governmental Guidance in PPS7 gives great weight to using Landscape Assessments in a criteria based approach to determining planning applications and the designation of the landscape.

The proposed development will not fulfil successfully any of the following aims for the ‘Thruxton & Danebury Chalk Downland Character Area’ (LCA 10C) that applies to the rural area around the site:

“Landscape Distinctiveness:

- **Maintain sense of remoteness and tranquillity.**
- **Protect significant open vistas from visual intrusion.**
- **Protect and enhance views to valued local landscape features**
-

Built Developments:

- **Development to respond to the local characteristics of the landscape.**
- **Opportunities to be sought to restore local landscape features and create a stronger landscape structure within the settlement edge of Andover.**
- **Maintain the historic integrity of the existing settlement pattern.**
- **Seek opportunities to enhance roadside planting and minimise visual and noise intrusion.**
- **Avoid intrusive development of tall and large structures except where they can be successfully integrated into the landscape.**
- **Seek to minimise the visual intrusion and suburbanising effect arising from highway infrastructure”.**

Policy SET 03 sets out the type of buildings in the countryside that would be exempt from the general policy of restraint only, in terms of commercial development there is only one category:

“Sensitive small-scale redevelopment or expansion of existing employment sites.”

This is reinforced in National guideline PPS1:

“All development in rural areas should be well designed and inclusive, in keeping and scale with it’s location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness”.

The proposals are contrary to **Policy DES 01**, which states:

“Development will not be permitted where it would detract from the local landscape due to the inclusion of unnatural landscape features, such as artificial bunds, or except in the case of landmark buildings breaking skylines or ridgelines”.

Unit 4 is an extremely large commercial warehouse, not a landmark building. This is recognized by the belated introduction of bunding, which still fails to provide an effective long-term screen around the western and southern boundaries. In terms of **Policy DES 01** the proposals:

- a. Cannot be accommodated without detriment to the distinctive landscape qualities of the area.
- b. The visual impact is not in keeping with local character.
- c. There is insufficient landscaping to enable the development to be integrated successfully into the local environment.

Similarly with **Policy DES 02**. The development is unable to:

- a. Respond positively to the character and appearance of the surrounding townscape or settlement.
- b. Prevent the loss of open areas that contributes to the character of the area.
- c. Prevent the disruption of a view from a public place, which forms part of the distinctive character of an area (as at the 100 Acre road junction).

The scheme will not maintain the local rural character of the A303 as required by **Policy DES 03**. Furthermore, the proposed improvements to the 100 Acre Junction to accommodate the increased lorry movements will increase the urbanization and visibility of the ridgeline interchange.

For **Policy DES 05** the siting of Units 4 and 5 could not be more detrimental to residential properties on the edge of the adjoining settlements to the north and south of the A303.

The scale, height and massing is contrary to **Policy DES 06**. Unit 4 will:

- a. Not be in scale with any other building in the immediate vicinity
- b. Interrupt important views into the countryside from the urban edge.

In terms of **Policy DES 07** it is accepted that the appearance and detailing of all buildings in the proposed development will be to a high standard. However, it is not the intention of the Council or the developer to make Unit 4 a landmark building. The unusual architectural treatment and landscape treatments have been designed specifically to make less severe the impact of such a massive single structure.

Policies AND 04.1 and AND 04.2 are specific to the site. The proposed ‘organic’ bunds do not reflect the landscape treatments around other commercial properties visible from the development area. The landscape mitigation treatments will reduce rather than ‘**minimise**’ visual intrusion.

The visual effects of the scheme on countryside and residential amenity will all be long-term, negative and contrary to previously mentioned **Policies SET 03, DES 01, AND 04.1 and AND 04.2**.

Environment Statement

In assessing the effects of a new development, the ES should adopt a 'precautionary approach' to the assessment and establish the worst case in the grading of impacts. The landscape appraisal gives no regard to the effects on winter views when the screen created by deciduous trees and hedgerow will be reduced or lost completely. None of the photomontages show the winter scene.

Residential Amenity

The proposals around the northern, western and southern boundaries will not safeguard the residential amenity of local residents close to the site boundary. **(Policy AME 01)** The proposed bunding is poorly placed in relation to these properties or insufficient to prevent views of the perimeter Units 4 and 5 and some internal parts of the Business Park. They are also out of character and scale with the properties along Red Post Lane and will adversely affect the aspect from these dwellings as well as the lane.

Night time lighting **(Policy AME 03)** will have a very substantial impact on neighbouring properties and an extensive part of the surrounding countryside because of the 24 hour operation and the need for light levels to be significantly above average urban levels. While the use of directional lanterns will reduce the amount of scatter and spillage, the intensity of the lighting and placing of the fittings on tall columns and upper parts of the tall buildings will create higher amounts of glare and reflected light.

The edge-of-settlement location of the Business Park means lighting is more likely to create a stark and detrimental contrast with the dark night skies across the surrounding countryside and A303 corridor. The sky glow created will be visible over a wide area and include neighbouring rural settlements that do not have a direct view of the site.

It is suggested in the ES (Appendix 5, 27 & 28) that the effects during construction and at the end of year 15 will 'not exceed minor adverse'. This statement fails to accept that Unit 4 and the loading bays will always be visible from neighbouring properties and the adjacent landscape throughout the year. The loading bay lights have the highest lux levels of all the exterior lighting on the site. They would also be placed high on the building façade and even with the most advanced optical technology will not avoid some spillage and will result in higher impacts than generally predicted. No account appears to be taken of the internal lighting emitting from the high arching windows in Unit 4.

An inadequate short reference is made to the lighting (7.79) which is dismissed in a single sentence:

“The effect of new lighting on these areas [properties around the site] would be minimised by the sensitive layout of the Proposed Development, the use of low lanterns, and mitigation measures proposed, including the woodland planting along both boundaries” [Red Post Lane and the long field boundary].

ES Appendix 5 also provides a generic overview of national guidance on lighting and assessment methodology. It does not take any account of the lighting engineer's (BSD) preliminary proposals and the actual levels of lighting likely to be generated.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. The development proposals do not provide adequate landscape mitigation within the recently increased business park boundary defined in the Local Plan. Mitigation treatments can only be achieved by extending the Business Park a further 3 hectares beyond the settlement boundary but the proposed bunding and planting will still not prevent long term detrimental impacts on residential amenity and the landscape setting.
2. The extension of the scheme beyond the settlement boundary into a designated Local Gap means the application must also be judged in relation to the impacts on the Local Plan 'Countryside' and 'Local Gap' policies.
3. The proposals are contrary to 12 Local Plan policies designed to protect landscape character, visual impact, local distinctiveness and residential amenity - they included 2 policies specifically designed for future development of the Business Park.
4. The Environmental Assessment gives inadequate recognition to the effect of night time lighting or the reduced screening provided by the predominately deciduous vegetation in the surrounding landscape and the proposed planting within the development during the winter months.
5. The Unit 4 Distribution Warehouse is poorly sited beside the north-western boundary of the Business Park. Its scale, height and massing is highly detrimental to the amenity of neighbouring properties overlooking the site and is an inappropriate development in the context of the adjacent sensitive and predominately rural setting.
6. It will take many years for the proposed planting to have any significant screening effect and this will be reduced in the winter months. The undulating design and low profile of the bunds and positioning of the tree planting means that a large part of Units 4 and 5 will always be visible throughout the year from adjacent properties, the A303 and the wider landscape.