HALLAM LAND MANAGEMENT

LAND SOUTH OF A507 AND WEST OF BUNTINGFORD

PLANNING STATEMENT

JUNE 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hallam Land Management is proposing an employment development on 13.28ha to the south of the A507 at Buntingford. The Site is to the west of the A10 and currently in agricultural use.

Outline planning permission is sought (with all matters reserved except for access) for flexible use B2, B8, E(c) and E(g), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure, including a new access from the A507.

The application Site falls in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, where the proposed employment development is restricted by Policy GBR2. However, material considerations including the submitted Employment Needs Assessment strongly indicate that planning permission should be granted, in view of a significant and immediate need for additional employment floorspace.

This need arises from much higher forecasts of job growth than accounted for in the preparation of the Local Plan, which translates into an additional 478,000 sqm of employment floorspace over the plan period. This is a District Wide requirement identified after the current Local Plan was adopted.

There is a compelling case for that employment land requirement to be located at Buntingford, to address previous acknowledged shortfalls in employment land provision, and the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot within the town. The proposed employment development would help to stem existing levels of out-commuting and provide local residents with greater choice in where to work.

The proposals are fully described in the submitted plans and Design and Access Statement, and the submitted Land Use Components Plan sets the framework for detailed design. The application includes a full suite of technical documents assessing the proposal against the relevant legislation and policy requirements.

Although they are still at outline stage, with matters such as layout and design reserved for future discussion and agreement, mitigation has been incorporated into the scheme and will be carried forward into the detailed design.

This will ensure that the development will make a positive contribution to Buntingford and the local community, without any harm outweighing those benefits.

The Planning Statement assesses the proposed development against the policies of the Local Plan and material considerations. The site is beyond the existing built up area of Buntingford but is shown to be sustainable development in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework. In view of the pressing need for additional employment floorspace, the various social, economic and environmental benefits of the proposed development outweigh any harm that would be caused.

The proposals provide for improved pedestrian, cycle and public transport links that will benefit the local community. There are no technical reasons or material considerations why planning permission should not be granted. The Council is therefore respectfully invited to grant planning permission.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

1.1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by Marrons on behalf of Hallam Land Management ('the Applicant') and forms part of a planning application to develop land south of the A507 and West of Buntingford for employment uses.

1.1.2. The East Herts District Plan (adopted 2018) identifies Buntingford as a market town and key location for both employment and residential growth. This Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed development will help to address a substantial deficiency in employment land provision at Buntingford.

1.1.3. The Site measures circa 13.28ha as shown on the submitted Site Location Plan. Outline planning permission is sought for the proposed development. The proposed description of development is as follows:

"Outline planning application for development of employment land (flexible use B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from A507, with all matters reserved save for access."

1.1.4. All matters are reserved except for access, which would be taken from the A507 Baldock Road. Detailed access drawings are submitted for approval as part of the planning application.

1.1.5. The emerging proposals have been subject to engagement with the local community and elected representatives. The feedback received and its role in shaping the emerging scheme is summarised in the Statement of Community Involvement.

1.1.6. The Applicant is also promoting land to the north of the site for a residential led development, which is the subject of a separate planning application submission (LPA reference 3/24/0966/OUT). The two sets of proposals do not rely on each other for infrastructure or mitigation works and are able to come forward independently of one another.

1.2. Purpose of this Statement

1.2.1. This Statement assesses the proposed development against the development plan, comprising the East Herts District Plan and the made Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (2017). It also has regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework', December 2023) and other material considerations.

1.2.2. This Report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** provides an overview of the Site, its characteristics and context, including relevant planning history.
- **Section 3** sets out the detailed description of development for which outline planning permission is sought.
- **Section 4** demonstrates how the proposals accord with the statutory development plan.
- **Section 5** addresses material considerations.
- **Section 6** provides draft heads of terms for a Section 106 Agreement.
- **Section 7** sets out conclusions.

1.2.3. The Statement should be read alongside the suite of documents submitted as part of the planning application, including the Design and Access Statement (DAS). A full list of documents is included within the covering letter to the application.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION, CHARACTERISTICS AND PLANNING HISTORY

2.1 Location and Characteristics

2.1.1 The Site and its characteristics are descried in detail within the DAS. The relevant matters for the purpose of this Planning Statement are:

- The Site comprises circa 13.28ha south of the A507 Baldock Road and west of Buntingford. Most of the land is in agricultural use and comprises a large arable field to the south of the road.

- The red line boundary includes land for proposed access works, including a small part of the opposite field north of the A507; and south of the A507, the northern tip of the adjoining field and highway to the west for visibility splays and other highway improvements.

- To the north there is further agricultural land and the Buntingford Business Park and Tire Hill woodland beyond. The agricultural land is promoted by the applicant separately for a residential-led development including a mixed use local centre, first school and associated green infrastructure (LPA reference 3/24/0966/OUT).

- To the east is the A10 and the Buntingford built up area beyond. There is a small area of woodland (circa 1.3ha) known as 'The Thicket' at part of the southern boundary and further agricultural land that separates the site from the village of Aspenden further south.

- Further agricultural land adjoins the western site boundary. Thistley Vale Brook is further west and then How Green Farm, residential dwellings and an industrial estate. The village of Throcking lies to the north west.

- A crest runs the centre of the site before levels begin to fall in a south-westerly direction towards the Brook and to the north east towards the A10 and Buntingford built up area. The high point within the site is circa 125.5mAOD at the crest, falling to low points of circa 115mAOD at the north eastern boundary

and 105mAOD at the western boundary respectively.

- The site is wholly within Flood Zone 1, which is land categorised as being at the lowest risk of flooding from rivers and sea. The site is not designated for its landscape or environmental value and is not within the mitigation buffer zone for any Special Protection Areas or Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The submitted Agricultural Land Classification Report confirms the site is a mixture of Grade 2 and subgrade 3a agricultural land.

- There are no heritage assets on, or adjacent to the site. The Buntingford Conservation Area is focused on the existing settlement to the east and there is a Conservation Area at Aspenden to the south. Listed buildings within 1km include the Parish Church of St Mary to the south (Grade I listed). The other Listed Buildings nearby are either Grade II or Grade II*.

- There are no Public Rights of Way (PROW) within the site but there are routes to the north, beyond the A507 Baldock Road, and to the south west.

2.1.2 In summary, the site is not designated for its environmental or landscape value and has few features of interest within it.

2.2 Planning History

2.2.1 The District Council's online planning register does not identify any planning application history for the site.

2.3 EIA Screening

2.3.1 A formal request for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion was submitted to the Council in December 2023 (reference 3/23/2350/SCREEN).

2.3.2 The proposed development subject to the EIA Screening Request included the proposed employment development alongside a solar farm on circa 9.45ha of land to the west of the site.

2.3.3 The Council issued its formal Screening Opinion on 5th January 2024 confirming that, in its opinion, EIA was not required for a development comprising the employment and solar fam.

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The proposal is to develop the site for employment uses with all associated infrastructure and areas of public open space and associated infrastructure works.

3.1.2 Outline permission is sought, with all matters reserved except for access. The application therefore seeks to establish the nature and scale of development, the key elements of which are set out below.

3.2 Key Elements of the Proposed Scheme

3.2.1 The proposal is described within the DAS and on the submitted drawings, including the Land Use Components Plan. The matters relevant to this Statement are:

- The Site is to be developed for an employment zone, the extent of which is shown on the submitted Land Use Components Plan.
- The employment land comprises circa 4.71ha, providing up to 27,420 sq m of floorspace in a mix of uses (Use Class B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)).
- The proposed development includes circa 6.31ha of informal open space. The open space would create a buffer around the proposed employment zone.
- Vehicular access into the site (for which detailed planning permission is sought) will be from the A507 Baldock Road at the northern site boundary.
- All associated infrastructure, including internal estate roads, sustainable urban drainage feature and provision for a potential foul water pumping station (if required).

3.2.2 Whilst the layout of the proposed development is a reserved matter, the submitted Illustrative Masterplan shows one way in which the quantum of development proposed could be accommodated on the site.

3.2.3 The Land Use Components Plan has been informed by the technical studies carried out to date. Further survey and design work will be undertaken to inform detailed

reserved matters submissions following any grant of outline planning permission.

4. PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.1.2 The development plan comprises the East Herts District Plan, which covers the period 2011-2033; and the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan which was formally made in May 2017 and covers the period 2014-2031.

4.1.3 Both plans aim to deliver sustainable development according to the economic, social and environmental roles of the planning system and are committed to a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

4.1.4 Policy INT1 confirms the District Council will work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible. Applications that accord with the development plan will be approved without delay.

4.1.5 The following assessment of the proposed development against the planning policies draws on the Design and Access Statement and should be read alongside this and the technical reports submitted with the application.

4.2 Economic Development Polices

4.2.1 Policy DPS1 (Housing Employment and Retail Growth) states the Council will maximise opportunities for job growth, with the aim of achieving a minimum of 10,800 new jobs in the District up to 2033. This includes making provision for 19-20ha of new employment land (B1/B2/B8 uses).

4.2.2 Policy DPS2 (The Development Strategy 2011-2033) aims to deliver sustainable development in accordance with a hierarchy of sites, with a focus on the built up areas of market towns, including Buntingford. However, the site is not allocated, and the employment proposal does not fall within any of the limited categories of development that Policy GBR2 (Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt) supports.

4.2.3 However, in this case there are material considerations that weigh strongly in support of planning permission being granted, due to a material change in circumstances since the formulation and adoption of the development plan. In particular, there is now a more significant need for employment floorspace and a reduction in the amount of industrial land at Buntingford since the plan was adopted. This is an important material consideration.

4.2.4 In explanation, the District Plan acknowledges that East Herts is not a self-contained economy and highlights levels of out-commuting to adjacent urban centres and Stansted Airport as an important aspect of the area. The Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan also recognises a significant imbalance between economic active residents and employment opportunities. It highlights, amongst other things, the need for small scale B1 flexible serviced office accommodation, larger multi-let floor space development, and encouraging businesses to form a "hub" or "cluster" to reap the benefits of close proximity to each other.

4.2.5 At Buntingford, the District Plan seeks to maintain and improve the current employment provision. As part of its strategy, the Plan allocates 3ha north of Buntingford Business Park as an extension to the existing Employment Area (Policy BUNT3 – Employment Land in Buntingford). It also seeks to retain existing Employment Areas (Policy ED1 – Employment).

4.2.6 This was in recognition of loss of employment in Buntingford had occurred in the years prior to the plan being adopted. However, as set out in the submitted Employment Needs Assessment, since both policy documents were prepared, and on top of the previous loss of employment, there have been further losses in the form of the Sainsbury's Distribution Depot site at Buntingford.

4.2.7 In the period since the Local Plan was adopted, this site has been redeveloped as a First School, and is no longer available for employment use. This has impacted the availability of employment land locally. Valuation Office data confirms that the level of industrial floorspace within Buntingford has dropped significantly over the period 2011-2021 as a result. Indeed, this loss at Buntingford accounts for most of the fall in industrial floorspace across the District.

4.2.8 Economic forecasts by the East of England Forecasting model also now forecast a higher level of job growth over the period 2011-2031 than at the time the District Plan was being prepared. The shortfall is significant, whereas the District Plan provides for job growth of +10,800, the latest East of England Forecasting Model forecasts job growth of +38,000. The result is that an in employment floorspace of 478,000 sq.m is required.

4.2.9 All of the above points to a clear requirement for additional employment floorspace across East Herts, and at Buntingford, to meet growing employment demand. The need for further employment floorspace at Buntingford is compelling; to address acknowledged shortfalls in employment land provision; help stem the acknowledged high levels of out-commuting; and to provide greater choice to local residents in where to work.

4.2.10 The circa 4.71ha of employment land within the proposed development will provide up to 27,420 sq m of employment floorspace in a mix of employment uses (Use Class B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)) towards the identified need. Based on mid-point of employment densities of approximately 47 sq m per employee (light industrial NIA job density), and assuming an equivalent net internal area totalling approximately 21,936 (80% NIA to GEA), the development will likely create circa 467 gross direct (on-site) jobs.

4.2.11 This level of job creation at Buntingford will help to offset the increased levels of out-commuting experienced since 2011. Whilst it cannot be confirmed that these jobs will be taken by Buntingford residents, as the Buntingford Employment Study, the availability of local employment opportunities is particularly important to those wishing to work part time; those with lower skills; and those in lower paid work. It also follows that growth at Buntingford will support retail and service businesses in the town centre, particularly if the workers are not already Buntingford residents.

4.2.12 Given the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot, the proposed development would complement the existing employment site allocation to the north of Buntingford Business Park (BUNT3). As the Council's Buntingford Employment Study demonstrates, a multi-site approach is required to address the extent of employment land shortfall within the town both as a result of the Depot closure, and increased job growth forecasts.

4.2.13 Policy ED1 (Employment) states that the provision of new employment uses will be supported in principle, where they are in a suitable location where access can be achieved by a choice of sustainable transport and do not conflict with other policies in the Plan. The proposed development is a sustainable location, being close to the Buntingford built up area and accessible by a range of transport modes. The proposed development includes measures to promote walking and cycling, as set out in the Transport Assessment and shown on the proposed access drawings.

4.2.14 In summary, the case for additional employment development at Buntingford is strong and the proposed development is a sustainable location to accommodate it.

4.3 Design Policies

4.3.1 Policy DES1 (Masterplanning) requires that all 'significant' development proposals have a collaboratively prepared masterplan, setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses; access; sustainable high quality design and layout principles; necessary infrastructure; the relationship between the site and other adjacent nearby land uses; landscape and heritage assets; and other relevant matters.

4.3.2 Policy DES4 (Design of Development) requires that all development proposals be of a high design standard and layout to reflect and promote local distinctiveness. This includes making the best possible use of the available land. Policy DES5 (Crime and Safety) also requires that developments be designed to reduce the opportunity for crime.

4.3.3 The application is submitted in outline, and approval for the layout, design and external appearance of the proposed development is not currently sought. However, the Design and Access Statement documents the design process to date. Future reserved matters submissions would accord with the principles reflected in the Land Use Components Plan, which has been informed by technical to date and which is submitted for approval as part of the outline application.

4.3.4 The Policy ED1 (Employment) requirements with regards to the flexible design of employment floorspace, energy efficiency and communications technology would also be addressed as part the detailed design stage and reserved matters submissions.

4.4 Landscape Policies

4.4.1 Policy DES2 (Landscape Character) requires development proposals demonstrate how they conserve, enhance and strengthen the character and District's landscape.

4.4.2 Accordingly, the application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which concludes that the site has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development without undue harm on the landscape character and visual amenity of the site and wider area. Further, the proposals will lead to tangible long term benefits on the landscape features and general character of the local area.

4.4.3 The LVIA concludes that whilst the proposed development will result in some important adverse landscape and visual effects, these mainly relate to effects at Year 1 of the operational phase and that significance will typically diminish as the landscape proposals become established. No landscape receptors will be subject to important adverse residual effects at Year 15 and two will experience important beneficial residual effects at that point. Only one visual receptor will be subject to important adverse residual effects at Year 15.

4.4.4 In combination with proposed residential-led development to the north, no landscape receptors are subject to important adverse residual cumulative effects at Year 15. Only three visual receptors will be subject to important adverse residual cumulative effects at Year 15. Of the remaining landscape and visual receptors, a third will be subject to cumulative effects that are on the threshold of important, and two thirds subject to cumulative effects that are not considered to be important.

4.4.5 In accordance with Policy DES3 (Landscaping), the proposals retain, protect and enhance landscape features of amenity and/or biodiversity value, including hedgerow and trees within the site. Planning conditions can be used to secure a detailed landscaping scheme and protect retained features during construction.

4.4.6 The Proposed Development will provide a greater level of pedestrian permeability through the landscape, create new areas for recreation, and substantially increase the level of vegetation on the Site. It will be softened and integrated within the landscape through the establishment of new tree planting and habitat, reinforcing sense of place and local identity.

4.5 Community Facilities, Leisure and Recreation Policies

4.5.1 Policy CFLR1 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation) states that commercial developments will be expected to provide adequate amenity space in addition to landscape and setting features. The proposed development meets this requirement through circa 6.31ha of informal open space within the development.

4.5.2 This is also consistent with Policy ES5 of the Neighbourhood Plan, which supports proposals that expand open space provision, where proposals are consistent with other Plan policies. The open space also maximises the potential contribution towards healthy communities pursuant to Policy CFLR9 (Health and Wellbeing) of the District Plan.

4.6 Transport Policies

4.6.1 Policy TRA1 (Sustainable Transport) sets out measures to achieve accessibility improvements and promote sustainable transport. This includes locating development in places which enable sustainable journeys to key services and facilities and ensuring a range of sustainable transport options are available.

4.6.2 In this regard, the proposed development is sustainably located adjacent to the built up area of Buntingford. The planned access arrangements and associated improvements works also positively address this requirement, as set out below.

4.6.3 In the first instance, the proposed vehicular access will meet the requirements of Policy TRA2 (Safe and Suitable Highway Access Arrangements and Mitigation), with the proposed development being served by a new ‘continental’ roundabout on the A507 Baldock Road.

4.6.4 The access proposals place a priority on pedestrians and cycling infrastructure and will, in compliance with Manual for Streets, encourage and promote more sustainable modes of transport to and from the site, reducing the need to use the private car. The junction works will comply with the DRMB standards and LTN1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance.

4.6.5 The TA already shows that a wide number of local services and facilities can been reached within the convenient 2km walking distance from the site, with further facilities falling within the 5km cycling distance. The proposed development also provides an opportunity to extend and improve the local pedestrian and cycle network in the western part of Buntingford.

4.6.6 Proposed improvements are set out in Table 5.1 of the TA, and the provision of footways and cycle paths on the southern side of the A507; pedestrian and cycle crossings on the access to the Buntingford Business Park, and to the west of the west of the Business Park access; the provision of bus stops on both sides of the A507 allowing connection to the bus services passing the frontage; an update to the existing shared cycle-footway to provide segregated footway and cycle paths; and an upgrade of the existing A10 crossing to TOUCAN crossing.

4.6.7 Further off-site works to B1038 Baldock Road east of the A10 are being considered and will be discussed with the Local Highway Authority. As per paragraph 5.5.6 of the TA, they could include extending the 30mph speed limit, relocating the existing bus shelter on the northern side of the road, relocating the existing parking spaces at the junction with Bowling Green and improved crossing facilities – all to assist pedestrian circulation and connections.

4.6.8 As required by Policy TRA3 (Vehicle Parking Provision), parking will be provided on site in accordance with the relevant standards, with due regard to the parking standards SPD and requirements of Neighbourhood Plan Policy T1. The specific provision will be discussed with the Local Highway Authority and set out in reserved matters submissions at the detailed design stage. Cycle parking provision will also accord with the relevant standards.

4.7 Natural Environment Policies

4.7.1 Policy NE1 (International, National and Locally Designated Nature Conservation Sites) states that material considerations must clearly outweigh any harm to any such designated sites. The submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) confirms the site is not subject to any designations. There are no international or local statutory designations within 10km or 3km respectively.

4.7.2 There is one national statutory designation within 3km (the Moor Hall Meadows SSSI), circa 2.8km to the south east of the site. The SSSI is connected to the site via public footpaths, and so the development will likely cause increased footfall at the SSSI. However, the public open space will draw recreation away from the SSSI, reducing the potential impact.

4.7.3 No direct harm would be caused to the 7no. Local Wildlife sites within 2km of the site, given their separation from it. As with the SSSI designation, the public open space provision will direct some recreational use away from these designated sites to reduce indirect impacts.

4.7.4 Additional investigation and survey work is required to demonstrate compliance with District Plan policies NE2 (Sites or Features of Nature Conservation Interest - Non-Designated) and NE3 (Species and Habitats), and policies ES7 and ES8 of the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to protecting biodiversity and biodiversity net gain. This will identify suitable ecological impact avoidance, mitigation and/or compensation measures and be submitted before the application is determined.

4.7.5 Policy NE2 also states that development resulting in the loss of significant damage to trees, hedgerows or ancient woodland sites will not be permitted and the Council will seek their reinforcement where appropriate. In this regard, only areas of woodland, hedgerows and mature trees have been identified as ecological development constraints, with no ancient woodland present or nearby.

4.7.6 Policy NE4 (Green Infrastructure) seeks to maximise opportunities to improve the District's green infrastructure network. The proposed development includes circa 6.31ha of public open space towards this policy objective.

4.8 Heritage Policies

4.8.1 Having regard to the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and in accordance with policies HA1 (Designated Heritage Assets) and HA2 (Non Designated Heritage Assets), the submitted Heritage Statement has assessed the potential impact of the proposed development on the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets, where there is potential for impact on their setting.

4.8.2 There are no heritage assets on the site and the Heritage Statement concludes that there would be no impact on most of the designated and non-designated heritage assets nearby. These include listed buildings close to the site and the Buntingford Conservation Area to the east.

4.8.3 The outline proposals, subject to siting, design and layout of the built form, are likely to result in a low level of less than substantial harm to the setting of the Aspenden Conservation Area, the Grade II listed Apsenden Hall and the Grade I St Mary's Church. The harm to the significance of these heritage assets needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

4.8.4 Policy HA3 (Archaeology) requires an appropriate desk based assessment and field evaluation results where necessary, where a site has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest. The submitted Archaeology Desk Based Assessment indicates that the site has moderate archaeological potential for finds from the Prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman periods, and a low potential for all other periods.

4.8.5 However, below ground heritage assets are unlikely to represent a design constraint and do not represent a constraint for proposed development. A geophysical survey is being undertaken to provide further baseline information and to refine the site's archaeological potential. The findings and will be submitted prior to the application being determined and inform the timing of an appropriate scope of works.

4.9 Climate Change Policies

4.9.1 Policy CC1 (Climate Change Adaption) states that all new development should demonstrate how the design, materials, construction and operation of the development would minimise summer overheating and reduce the need for heating in winter; and integrate green infrastructure to contribute to urban greening.

4.9.2 Policy CC2 (Climate Change Mitigation) states that all new developments should demonstrate how carbon dioxide emissions will be minimised and encourages development to achieve standards beyond Building Regulations. Carbon reduction should also be met on site where feasible and viable.

4.9.3 The submitted Sustainable Construction, Energy and Water Statement demonstrates the strong sustainability credentials of the proposed development. This includes a range of measures to reduce carbon emissions, mitigate the effects of climate change and to ensure the long term resilience of the development to the effects of climate change.

4.9.4 Measures include:

- All electric employment units, powered by air source heat pumps and solar photovoltaic panels;
- Reduced carbon emissions though the energy hierarchy and a fabric first approach with the aim of net zero regulated energy;
- A target of 'net zero ready' buildings in line with upcoming UK Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard.
- A sustainable transport strategy promoting active travel, public transport, and electric vehicles, helping to reduce carbon emissions associated with petrol and diesel vehicles;
- A surface water drainage strategy designed to accommodate a 1 in 100 (1%) annual probability event, plus a 40% allowance for climate change.

4.10 Water Policies

4.10.1 The proposed development is in accordance with Policy WAT1 (Flood Risk Management) as the whole of the site is in Flood Zone 1 and avoids areas at risk of fluvial flooding. The policy states that development should be steered to areas with the lowest probability of flooding as part of a sequential test to locating development.

4.10.2 The proposed development includes a drainage strategy to address surface water within the site. The Drainage Strategy considers climate change and will ensure no increase in the risk of any form of flooding, in line with the policy. The Drainage Strategy also sets out how water quality will be maintained, to meet the requirements of Policy WAT3 (Water Quality and the Water Environment).

4.10.3 The Drainage Strategy would use sustainable drainage systems in accordance with Policy WAT3 (Sustainable Drainage). Surface water run-off will be directed to a new onsite surface water drainage network, designed to appropriately control the offsite discharge and prevent flooding within the site and downstream areas.

4.10.4 The requirements of Policy WAT4 (Efficient Use of Water Resources) can be addressed as part of the detailed design and within the reserved matters submissions.

4.10.5 Policy WAT6 (Wastewater Infrastructure) and Neighbourhood Plan Policy INFRA4 require that development proposals ensure there is adequate wastewater infrastructure capacity to serve the site. Discussions with Thames Water are ongoing to identify a suitable strategy, which could involve upgrades to existing infrastructure.

4.10.6 The requirements of Neighbourhood Plan Policy INFRA5 with regards to maximum water usage of 110 litres per person per day area notes and will be addressed within the reserved matters submissions.

4.11 Environmental Quality Policies

4.11.1 The Phase 1 Desk Study Report, submitted in accordance with Policy EQ1 (Contaminated Land and Land Instability) considers, based on the historical and current operational use, that the overall risk of significant contamination at the site is low to moderate and that it is unlikely that the site would be classified as Contaminated Land. Intrusive investigation is proposed to confirm the ground conditions and actual risks to receptors. These works can be secured standard planning conditions.

4.11.2 Demonstrating compliance with Policy EQ2 (Noise Pollution), the submitted Noise Assessment concludes that the site is predicted to meet the requirements of the relevant British Standards and planning guidance, and that noise does not present a constraint to the development of the site. The development itself will be designed to ensure that it does not give rise to unacceptable impacts on existing residents. This could be secured by a noise limit condition.

4.11.3 The detailed scheme design will also have regard to the requirements of Policy EQ3 (Light Pollution) and to the amenity of residents, road users and ecology. The submitted Lighting Impact Assessment concludes that, by implementing standard mitigation measure such as light control, shielding and temperature selection, adverse effects can be minimised.

4.11.4 The proposals therefore comply with Policy EQ4 (Air Quality). The submitted Air Quality Assessment concludes the air quality effects of the proposed development are compliant with all regulatory standards and are judged ‘not significant’. Thus, the site is suitable for the proposed used in air quality terms. Some mitigation will be required during construction, which can be secured via planning conditions.

5. MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 It is necessary also to consider whether any material considerations indicate that planning permission should be granted or refused. The consistency of the proposal with national planning policies and supplementary planning documents is considered below, beginning with national planning policies.

5.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

5.2.1 The proposals comprise sustainable development in accordance with the Framework, in contributing towards its economic, social and environmental objectives, by reference to the relevant policies as set out below.

Achieving sustainable development

5.2.2 The Framework identifies three overarching objectives for the planning system to achieve sustainable development (economic, social and environmental objectives), which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways, to that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each objective.

Building a Strong and Competitive Economy

5.2.3 The proposed employment development will support economic growth and productivity, including within the local area. The proposed development will create temporary jobs during the construction period and permanent jobs during the operational phase. The development is predicted to directly create 467 FTE jobs including approximately 805 jobs across the wider economy, of which 397 are likely to be filled by residents of East Hertfordshire with contribution to the East Hertfordshire economy of circa £21m to the East Herts economy.

Promoting health and safe communities

5.2.4 The proposals provide for Green Infrastructure including areas of informal open space, walking and cycling routes to promote healthy lifestyles. The design will be further developed, and initiatives such as designing out crime will be considered.

Promoting sustainable transport

5.2.5 The proposals also provide for safe and suitable access into the site. Opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes are included in the proposals, with pedestrian/cycle links to existing infrastructure within the Buntingford built up area and potential improvements to these. The impact of the proposed development on the transport network has been assessed and key junctions will operate satisfactorily within their capacity. The Transport Assessment does not identify any transport issues that would prevent planning permission from being granted. The impact of the proposed development is not 'severe' in NPPF terms.

Making effective use of land

5.2.6 The density of development proposed will make efficient use of the land, whilst protecting features of interest within and adjacent to the site and creating a well-designed, attractive and healthy place. The Framework Plan shows how the quantum of development can be delivered to achieve an efficient use of the site.

Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

5.2.7 The Framework states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to planning. Whilst matters relating to scale, layout, appearance and proposed landscaping are reserved, the information submitted shows the development will function well, add to the overall quality of the area and be sympathetic to the local character including the landscape setting, in accordance with the Framework. The submitted Land Use Concept Plan shows extensive areas of high quality public open space as part of the Green Infrastructure network, which will provide recreational facilities for the local community.

Protecting Green Belt Land

5.2.8 The proposed development would contribute additional employment floorspace for East Herts on land outside of the Green Belt. There is an identified need for additional employment floorspace to meet a shortfall in provision and demand locally. Accommodating development here would support the policy objective of protecting Green Belt land, by reducing the requirement to develop there.

Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

5.2.9 The development includes measures to reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, the proposed development is in Flood Zone 1 (low flood risk). Satisfactory drainage measures can address localised issues and ensure no greater risk of flooding.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

5.2.10 The proposals incorporate recommended ecological enhancement measures, including new planting on site. A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment is included within the submission and reports a 12.84% net change in biodiversity. The risk of contamination is low and that the site is suitable for the proposed land uses. The submitted noise and air quality reports do not identify any adverse impacts. The impact of lighting to and from the proposed development will be considered as part of the detailed design and within the reserved matters submissions.

Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

5.2.11 There are no statutory or non-statutory designated heritage assets on the site whilst the proposed development would result in only low level of less than substantial harm to the setting of a Grade II* listed building, engaging paragraph 208 of the Framework. The submitted Archaeology Desk Based Assessment indicates that whilst the site has some archaeological potential, archaeology is unlikely to represent a design constraint. A geophysical survey report will be submitted prior to the application being determined.

Conclusion on the Framework

5.2.12 The proposed development is in entirely consistent with the policies of the Framework. This significant material consideration weighs in favour of planning permission being granted.

5.3 Supplementary Planning Documents

5.3.1 The scheme design and assessment in this Planning Statement has had regard where relevant to the various Supplementary Planning Documents adopted by the Council. These will inform reserved matters, but have been referenced where

appropriate, and include:

- Sustainability SPD
- Landscape Character Assessment SPD
- Open Space, Sport and Recreation SPD
- Vehicle Parking Standards SPD
- Planning Obligations SPD

5.3.2 The Applicant proposes to enter into a Section 106 Agreement to provide or contribute towards measures to mitigate the impact of the proposed development, as well as physical, social and green infrastructure, provided that the relevant tests are met, in accordance with the Planning Obligations SPD . A draft Heads of Terms is included in Section 6.

6. DRAFT HEADS OF TERMS FOR A SECTION 106 AGREEMENT

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The Applicant accept that they will enter into an agreement with the District Council and County Council to provide (unless the matter can be dealt with by condition):

a) any necessary highway works (under Section 278 of the Highways Act);

b) contributions towards the on-going maintenance of the open space within the development;

c) any other reasonable and directly related requirements as may be shown to be necessary based on detailed evidence of need.

6.1.2 This agreement is subject to any obligation being demonstrated to meet the tests as required within Paragraph 57 of the Framework and Policy DEL2 (Planning Obligations), taking into consideration the viability and costs associated with the development.

7. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The proposal is for outline planning permission for development of employment land (flexible use B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from A507, with all matters reserved save for access. This Statement has assessed the proposed development against the statutory development plan and material considerations.

7.1.2 The application site falls in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, where the proposed employment development is restricted by Policy GBR2. However, material considerations including the submitted Employment Needs Assessment indicate that planning permission should be granted, in view of a significant and immediate need for additional employment floorspace.

7.1.3 This arises from much higher forecasts of job growth than accounted for in the preparation of the District Local Plan, which translates into an additional 478,000 sqm of employment floorspace over the plan period. There is therefore a clear requirement for additional employment floorspace across East Herts to meet growing employment demand.

7.1.4 There is a compelling case for that development to be located at Buntingford, to address previous acknowledged shortfalls in employment land provision, and the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot within the Town. The proposed employment development would help to stem existing levels of out-commuting; and provide local residents with greater choice in where to work.

7.1.5 The Planning Statement has shown the application site is a sustainable development location, being close to the built up area of Buntingford and existing services and facilities.

7.1.6 In accordance with the Framework, the proposals would secure gains across the economic, environmental and social components of sustainable development.

7.1.7 The social benefits include:

- Meeting a significant and pressing need for additional employment floorspace
- Employment floorspace leading to job opportunities for local residents in East Herts and Buntingford, diversifying the options currently available.
- Extensive improvements to pedestrian and cycle networks on the western side of Buntingford, making walking and cycling more accessible, safer and more convenient for new and existing residents.
- The potential for further improvements to the B1038 Baldock Road, east of the A10, to improve the circulation of pedestrians.
- New public open space accessible to all.

7.1.8 The economic benefits include:

- The creation of 467 on-site jobs, and 805 jobs across the wider economy, during operation, of which 397 are likely to be filled by East Herts residents.
- The employment land will generate an estimated economic output of £43m of which, £21m will benefit the East Herts economy.
- The creation of circa 426 full time equivalent jobs over an 8-year construction period, of which 210 FTE jobs will be within East Herts.
- Total temporary economic output of £24m during construction, of which £12m will be within East Herts.
- Additional economic benefits through the construction and operation of the solar farm, including as a result of ongoing maintenance requirements.

7.1.9 The environmental benefits include:

- The retention of existing vegetation on the site, and additional planting to reinforce existing hedgerows and other landscape features.
- The creation of multi-functional green infrastructure, including sustainable urban

development features to promote biodiversity.

- An anticipated net gain in biodiversity of 12.84%.
- Measures to reduce carbon emissions and to mitigate against the adverse effects of climate change.

7.1.10 The planning application is accompanied by a suite of technical documents to demonstrate the proposal will not lead to adverse harm and that appropriate mitigation can be provided where necessary.

7.2 Conclusion

7.2.1 This Planning Statement has shown that the proposed development is sustainable development, and that there are no technical reasons why planning permission should not be granted. There are no other material considerations to indicate that planning permission should be refused. The Council is therefore respectfully invited to grant planning permission.