Land South of A507, West of A10 Buntingford

784-B077665

Proof of Evidence of Peter Blair on Sustainability and Accessibility from a Highways and Transportation Perspective

In Respect of '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 except for access.'

Land South of A507, West of A10 Buntingford

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Final

On behalf of Hallam Land Management Ltd

Volume 3: Summary Proof of Evidence

TETRA TECH

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

1.1.1 This Highways and Transport Proof of Evidence has been prepared by Peter Blair, Head of Transport North at the international consultancy Tetra Tech. It describes my Highways and Transport evidence, considerations and findings, focusing on the areas of Sustainability and Accessibility.

1.2 Experience of Witness

1.2.1 My name is Peter Blair. I have a degree in Civil Engineering and a diploma in Industrial Studies, both from the University of Ulster. I am a Chartered Engineer, a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers and a Fellow of the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.

1.2.2 I am Head of Transport North at the international consultancy Tetra Tech (TT). I have over 35 years' experience of working in the field of traffic engineering, acting both for Public Authorities and Private Clients.

1.2.3 I am familiar with the development site and the highways, transport and active travel conditions in the local area. I was the expert witness on transport related accessibility and sustainability matters on behalf of the Appellant at the recent Inquiry (PINS Ref: 6008238, LPA Ref: 3/24/0966/OUT).

1.2.4 My evidence is given in accordance with the requirements of my professional bodies. I can confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions, irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

1.3 Appointment

1.3.1 I am instructed on behalf of Hallam Land Management Ltd, thereafter referred to as the appellant, to present evidence relating to the sustainability and accessibility aspects of Highways and Transportation matters in respect of the Appeal, submitted pursuant to Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, concerning development of Land South of the A507 and West of the A10 in Buntingford ("the Appeal site").

1.3.2 My evidence should be read in conjunction with the Highways and Transportation evidence of Mr Duffy and other evidence prepared by the Appellant.

2.0 Summary Proof of Evidence

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 This Summary Proof of Evidence relates to the transport related aspects of accessibility and sustainability of the proposals. The Inspector included the site location as one of the Main Issues in the Case Management Conference, and so my evidence also describes the key site locational characteristics from a transport perspective.

2.1.2 As of Mid-October 2026, the LHA and the LPA have dropped their case and consider that the proposals should be approved At the time of finalising this Proof, a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) which includes the Authorities position on Highways is in final draft stage, but has not yet been signed. It is hoped that the SoCG will be a Core Document before this Inquiry. The Authorities have not entered into a Highways Statement of Common Ground, but did so on the recent residential Appeal Ref: 6008238 on an adjacent site to the north of the A507. I refer to points agreed for that Appeal where I consider they are also directly relevant to the employment Appeal.

2.1.3 In deciding that residential Appeal, the Inspector determined the following points which are of particular relevance to this employment Appeal:

- The residential site benefits from a good baseline level of connectivity, with the existing services and facilities within Buntingford located within an acceptable walk and cycle distance. The inspector confirmed that a 2km walk distance is suitable to encourage journeys on foot.
- The proposed active travel and public transport improvements would enhance that baseline level of connectivity, providing safe and convenient active travel links which include the route along the A507 / Baldock Road (and the toucan crossing).
- Good on-site connections could be secured through the detailed design process.
- Individual routes did not need to provide a perfect solution, and that LTN 1/20 allows a degree of flexibility in design and provision.
- The proposed pedestrian / cycle route along the A507 and Baldock Road, including the proposed Toucan Crossing, is safe and suitable.
- The existing and proposed bus infrastructure and services would provide residents with a realistic and convenient choice of travel mode to Buntingford and wider towns.
- The site is suitably and sustainably located, physically well related to the Settlement, and offers a genuine choice of travel modes which provide opportunities to reduce car journeys.

2.1.4 Even with the current Authority position, the Inquiry will still be heard by the Inspector, so I have presented my evidence relating to the topics of accessibility and sustainability from a highways and transportation perspective. Those areas assist in informing the Inspectors main

points of location in relation to policies and the Authorities previous points on sustainable travel, active travel and isolation.

2.1.5 Whilst my evidence addresses those points on their own merits, I also cross reference relevant points to which the LHA were in agreement for the residential Appeal and also relevant points which were established by the Inspector at that Appeal Inquiry.

2.1.6 It is notable that in the last two LHA consultation responses, the only points of objection which were raised related to highway safety. None of points within the LHAs latest consultation responses refer to the locational and sustainable travel aspects or wider active travel aspects as appear in the RfR1 and RfR 3.

2.1.7 Matters of Highway safety are being dealt with for the appellant by Mr James Duffy, but for ease of cross reference those same points were determined in favour of the Appellant at the residential Inquiry by the Inspector CD 7.1 paragraphs 46, 50, 53, 56 and 58.

2.2 Locational Matters, Connectivity

2.2.1 In analysing this employment case, I have reviewed the connectivity of the site using the DfT's Connectivity Tool, which by definition "*generates a national measure of connectivity for any location in England and Wales. The connectivity score measures people's ability to get where they want to go.*"

2.2.2 My review found that the Appeal site at present, has a connectivity score of 48 for all modes except driving. Applying guidance from the DfT, this means that the site is 48% as connected as the most connected area of England and Wales (Tower Hamlets in Central London). A more localised comparison of the Appeal site against other areas within East Hertfordshire shows that the site is categorised as Band B in a 10-tier banding scale from A to J (with A being the most connected), i.e. the Appeal site is located within the second highest banding of connectivity in the district. The north-east corner of the site is in fact partially within Band A.

2.2.3 The site also has a connectivity score of 76 by driving which demonstrates the excellent connectivity by road which the site benefits from. That assists sustainable car journeys, taxis, public transport, deliveries and emergency services.

2.2.4 Those scores will be further enhanced under the proposals. The Connectivity Score of this Appeal site (48) is greater than the Connectivity Score of the residential Appeal site (45).

2.3 Locational Matters, Physically Well Related to the Settlement

2.3.1 My evidence describes how the Appeal Site is physically well related to the Settlement, consistent with the requirements of the NPPF Policy S5 for developments outside of the Settlement. The glossary of the NPPF defines a Settlement to include allocations and consented developments that will form part of the Settlement once developed – and that therefore encompasses the recently approved residential development, the BUNT3 allocation and Buntingford Business Park. Which are adjacent to the employment proposals.

2.3.2 The Inspector of the residential development Appeal determined that it was physically well related to the Settlement, and that the location of the development would limit the need to

travel by private car, and that it would offer a genuine choice of sustainable, quality and safe transport modes for residents and users. Those conclusions can also be drawn for the Appeal site, which is in fact closer to the existing Settlement than the residential site.

2.4 Safe and Suitable Access

2.4.1 Matters of highway safety are dealt with in the evidence of Mr Duffy. The same highways safety points raised by the Authorities were determined by the Inspector of the residential Appeal to be acceptable and are no longer contested by the Authorities.

2.4.2 With regards to physical access for the proposals, it can be ensured at detailed planning stage that the on-site layout will be designed and laid out to modern standards, putting pedestrians and cyclists to the fore.

2.4.3 The Appeal site will be served by an all-modes roundabout access of the A507, with an additional active travel access further east off the A507, tying into proposed footway/cycle infrastructure. These accesses ensure convenient, safe and suitable access into the site for all users and that the site is suitably connected with the off-site network.

2.4.4 Off-site, the proposals include a new 4m wide shared foot/cycleway on the A507. A parallel crossing will connect the proposed active travel routes on the northern and southern side of the carriageway.

2.4.5 A proposed Toucan crossing facilitates safe crossing of the A10 and connects to a 3m shared footway /cycleway on Baldock Road east of the A10. The proposals promote a traffic speed reduced and street lit environment along that route. The proposals offer the same route improvements which were approved as part of the residential development, (other than additionally serving the southern of the side of the A507, rather than the north). The Inspector from that Appeal found the route to be safe, suitable and accessible for all users, including the proposed toucan crossing facility across the A10.

2.4.6 Almost all residential areas of Buntingford and the Town centre are accessible within an acceptable walk distance.

2.4.7 Although the proposals do not rely upon the residential development coming forwards, the employment development will be bolstered by three additional access routes through the residential site and over the A10 via improved and new bridge crossings and PRoW upgrades when that development does come forward. Those routes were also found to be safe and suitable by the Inspector at the residential Appeal.

2.4.8 I consider that the proposals offer safe and suitable access for all users, on site, at the interface between the site and external network and on onward routes to residential and town centre areas.

2.5 Sustainable Travel and Accessibility

2.5.1 The topic of sustainability of the site is broader than just travel alone, with transport forming only one part of the social, economic and environmental considerations of sustainable development. My evidence seeks to address the transport aspects.

2.5.2 The proposals will benefit from digital connectivity, which will support home and flexible working, whilst also reducing the need to access services in person, thereby helping to reduce travel demand and peak-period traffic.

2.5.3 Off site, the employment proposals provide sustainable travel choices for active modes through the footway/cycleway infrastructure proposals along the A507 and Baldock Road (Route 1) which are also committed under the recent residential approval.

2.5.4 The employment proposals also promote sustainable travel choice by public transport by providing new stops along the site frontage. Those (and the Toucan crossing) will also encourage public transport use by existing and future users of Buntingford Business Park and the BUNT3 allocation. Bus services 18, 36, 37, 37x and 331 all use the existing bus stops on Baldock Road, opposite Greenways to the east of the A10 and are within a reasonable walking distance.

2.5.5 In addition to those physical works, the Appellant has agreed to provide a financial contribution of £247k, as requested by the LHA and calculated using HCCs Toolkit, as part of HCCs Strand 2 Sustainable Travel contribution

2.5.6 Sustainable travel is also promoted as the development reduces travel distance and the need to travel by car, by providing employment opportunities within an acceptable walking and cycling distance of the significant majority of residential properties in the town. Some existing residents of Buntingford may wish to seek employment at the site, rather than travelling further afield (via car) to work.

2.5.7 There are shopping facilities located at MFG Howegreen, within a reasonable walking distance from the site where future employees can undertake daily shopping needs before work, during breaks or after work. In addition, the consented residential development, when built, will provide a local centre, which will further bolster local retail opportunities accessible on foot from the site.

2.5.8 The FTP seeks to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips by 15%. In reality, that target will seek to reduce 15% of unsustainable single occupancy vehicle trips, noting that zero-emission vehicles are a sustainable mode of transport. A comprehensive list of measures are provided within the proposals, which will seek to promote and encourage active modes and sustainable modes of travel. That is further bolstered by the active mitigations and bus strategy provision which will be delivered by the residential site when that is developed.

2.5.9 I consider that the proposals are acceptable in terms of sustainable travel.

2.5.10 The definition of accessibility in the HCC Local Transport Plan 4 recognises the role of the private car. It is clear that whilst prioritisation of active and public transport is prioritised by the proposals (as advised by planning policies), a level of reliance upon the private car for some users, is to be accepted and the site is well connected in that regard.

2.5.11 Not all vehicle use should be regarded as unsustainable. The development will support sustainable travel by accommodating charging facilities for zero-emission vehicles and promoting car sharing, both of which are recognised as sustainable forms of transport. Over time, the use of unsustainable vehicles (internal combustion engine vehicles) will be phased

out, and after 2030 the purchase of new ICE vehicles will be restricted. Over the lifespan of the development, the ICE car will be a quickly diminishing mode of travel.

2.5.12 It is was agreed by all parties at the residential Appeal that services and facilities within Buntingford are accessible within a 2km walking distance of that site. The employment site is closer to the centre of Buntingford and my review has identified that the majority of residential areas within Buntingford are within that catchment, via the primary walking and cycling route along the A507 and Baldock Road. The whole of Buntingford will be accessible within a 5km cycle catchment.

2.5.13 When the recently approved residential development is delivered, it will additionally provide three active travel routes into Buntingford, local facilities and enhanced public transport services, all of which would benefit the sustainable accessibility of the Appeal site.

2.5.14 I consider that the employment proposals are suitably accessible on foot and by cycle via the proposals along Route 1, and that further committed routes will be available once the residential site has been developed.

2.5.15 I also consider that the existing level of bus provision is acceptable to serve the site, and that will be enhanced by the provision of the proposed bus stops on the A507, and further enhanced by the agreed bus strategies of the consented residential sites. Residents of Buntingford, Hertford, Stevenage, Letchworth, Royston amongst other centres of population will have public transport access to the site. Accessibility of the site via public transport has not been raised as a concern in the LHAs latest two consultation responses and the LHA did not raise concerns on that level of existing public transport provision in relation to the recently approved employment application ref: 3/25/1986/FUL which is opposite the current employment site.

2.5.16 I consider that the proposals are acceptable in terms of access and sustainable accessibility

2.6 Wider Benefits to Travel in Buntingford

2.6.1 I consider that the proposals deliver additional benefits to the transport and travel environment in and around Buntingford. Those benefits go beyond just mitigating development impact and providing for the travel of development users.

2.6.2 The active travel route along the A507, the A10 Toucan crossing and the active travel route along Baldock road all serve aspirations of the East Herts LCWIP and can better serve existing active travel and public transport trip making to the Buntingford Business Park area.

2.6.3 Individually and in combination the proposed speed limit reductions, Toucan crossing, active travel infrastructure and public transport infrastructure and sustainable travel funding, will all improve the existing travel environment in the area. That will improve road safety, provide access suitable for those with mobility needs and encourage a mode shift to sustainable travel for existing trip making in and around Buntingford.

2.6.4 As such, the wider sustainable travel and safety benefits of the proposed scheme, for existing and future residents, employees and visitors of Buntingford should be considered as a positive aspect of the proposals.

2.6.5 To reinforce my findings on matters of location, access and sustainable accessibility the Inspector on the adjacent residential Appeal site found that site to be suitably and sustainably located, physically well related to the Settlement, and offered a genuine choice of travel modes which provide opportunities to reduce car journeys. The Inspector also concluded that some of the proposals, including infrastructure and services, would benefit existing residents of Buntingford and bring forward some aspirations of the Authorities Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan and Rights of Way improvement plan (LCWIP and RoWIP).

2.6.6 In transport terms, the proposals are situated in an accessible and sustainable location, and the site is physically well related to the Settlement. The increasing prevalence of sustainable vehicles, modern active travel infrastructure, bus accessibility, and promotion of sustainable travel within the Travel Plan, all align with vision-led aspirations for a sustainable and accessible development.

2.7 Policy Compliance

2.7.1 I have reviewed the proposals against all the transport related policies referred to in the Reasons for Refusal and in the New NPPF. Policies and compliances are tabulated in Appendix H and set out, point by point in Section 9. Not all the policies cited in the RFR are applicable to highways and transport sustainability and accessibility matters.

2.7.2 Further to my review I consider that the proposals comply with NPPF policies S5 1j, TR1, TR3, TR4, TR6, TR8, DP3 and CC2. The proposals comply with EHDP policies TRA1, TRA2 and ED1 , with LTP policies 1 and 5 and with the BCNP policy BE2.

2.7.3 As of mid October, the LPA and the LHA consider that the proposals should be approved, which is a clear indication that the proposals are not in conflict with local or national policy.

3.0 Conclusions

3.1.1 In consideration of my evidence, I conclude that;

- The site is physically well related to the Settlement, is sustainable (from a transport perspective), is well connected and is accessible;
- The site is adjacent to other sites which are agreed to be in sustainable locations;
- The jobs created close to Buntingford and close to the recently approved Residential site will reduce the need for out commuting to employment further afield, for some residents;
- The site benefits from a good baseline of connectivity, which will be enhanced further through the proposals;
- The proposals provide safe and suitable access for all modes of travel;
- The proposals prioritise, encourage and provide for sustainable journeys on foot, by cycle, by bus travel and by sustainable vehicles;
- Bus, highway, cycle and pedestrian improvements and contributions have been developed in conjunction with the authorities and are appropriate;
- The improvements deliver aspirations of the LCWIP;
- Site users will have a choice of travel modes and will not be reliant upon the private car;
- The proposals comply with national and local policy;
- The proposals offer a safe active travel connection between the site and Buntingford which will also benefit existing trip making and encourage active travel; and
- The Inspectors decision for the recently allowed residential approval, to the north of the A507, addresses substantially the same points and supports the above findings.

3.1.2 I conclude that the development proposals should be considered to be acceptable in terms of travel and transport related accessibility and sustainability and that the proposals are physically well related to the Settlement.