DONCASTER LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Matter 4 – Green Belt

In respect of

Inland Port (iPort), Rossington

on behalf of

Troy Verdion
Representor ID: 05177

JCG9419
Hearing Statement
Final
2 September 2020
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INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement seeks to address the Inspector’s questions that relate to the representations made previously by RPS on behalf of Troy Verdion to the Regulation 19 Pre-submission Local Plan, in relation to the Inland Port site in Rossington, known as iPort.

1.2 The Inland Port benefits from outline planning permission (LPA ref: 09/00190/OUTA) for a rail freight terminal served by rail and road, 562,000m² of warehouses and over 100 hectares of ecological enhancements. Verdion commenced construction in 2015 and to date eight major buildings have been built together with the rail terminal that has been operational since September 2018. The site access roads, drainage infrastructure and building plateaux for the remaining proposed buildings have all been constructed.

1.3 iPort is a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) which is a large multi-purpose rail freight interchange and distribution centre linked into both a rail and trunk road system. It is connected to the rail network via the line of the former South Yorkshire Joint Railway.

1.4 The implementation of the SRFI at iPort enables the diversion of freight from road to rail and plays a vital role in achieving the Government's commitment to sustainable development. The transfer of freight from road to rail has a vital role to play in a low carbon economy and helps to address climate change thus contributing to the Government’s economic, strategic and environmental objective’s.

1.5 The site where outline planning permission was granted, is divided into 3 main zones, the development site (or iPort zone), the access corridor, and the countryside area, as illustrated on the plan within Appendix 1.

1.6 The Strategic Rail Freight Interchange forms the main core of the development site. The SRFI site is bordered by the South Yorkshire Joint Line (The Minerals Line) to the west, Carr Bank to the south, River Torne and Rossington Colliery to the east and the Access Corridor to the north.

1.7 The Access Corridor comprises the land that was required for the first length of the Finningley and Rossington Regeneration Route Scheme (FARRRS), and a link road into Rossington and other general road arrangements.

1.8 The remaining areas of land, mostly located to the west and south, form the Countryside Area, where agricultural use continues, both landscaping, habitat enhancement, and flood mitigation works have been carried out, including the provision of a major extension to Potteric Carr nature reserve to the north. A bridleway has been developed through the western part of the Countryside Area connecting to existing footpaths and bridleways in the wider countryside.

1.9 This statement specifically responds to the following matters and issues raised by the Inspector set out in the Schedule of Matters, Issues and Question for the Examination (Inspector’s Note 4, 11th June 2020). These are:

Q1 (C). Were all reasonable options for meeting identified development needs in non Green Belt locations fully examined during the preparation of the plan? In particular what would be for sustainable development of accommodating all development needed during the Plan period in non-Green Belt locations?

Q4.10 Assuming that I conclude that the Plan identifies sufficient land to ensure that justified development needs can be met in suitable locations throughout the Plan period, would there be exceptional circumstances to justify taking additional land out of the Green Belt at the present time, for example to try and ensure that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered again at the end of the Plan period?

1.10 Our response to the above issue and questions will be set out in the following section.
2 MATTER 4: GREEN BELT

Q1 (C). Were all reasonable options for meeting identified development needs in non Green Belt locations fully examined during the preparation of the plan? In particular what would the consequences be for sustainable development of accommodating all development needed during the Plan period in non-Green Belt locations?

2.1 Yes, we consider that all reasonable options for meeting development needs in non-Green Belt (GB) locations have been fully examined during the preparation of the plan.

2.2 In relation to iPort, an Assessment of Development Need and Alternatives Sites for a new SRFI to serve the Yorkshire and Humberside region was submitted with the outline planning application and the Council concluded that very special circumstances exist to permit its development in the GB.

2.3 A total of 109 sites throughout the region were identified as worthy of assessment following a search criterion of sites above 50ha, less than 2 km from a railway line, road linked to a motorway junction less than 5km away and of a suitable topography and available. Of these sites, 6 sites were selected for more detailed analysis considering a greater range of factors. Of these 6 sites, the application site was found to perform best overall.

2.4 The Council concluded that the alternative site assessment was sufficiently robust to establish that there were no alternative sites within the region on non-GB land capable of delivering this type of development.

Q4.10 Assuming that I conclude that the Plan identifies sufficient land to ensure that justified development needs can be met in suitable locations throughout the Plan period, would there be exceptional circumstances to justify taking additional land out of the Green Belt at the present time, for example to try and ensure that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered again at the end of the Plan period?

2.5 Inspector’s question Q4.10 relates to longer-term GB issues and refers to paragraph 139 of the NPPF, which requires local authorities to “satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period”. We consider that the Doncaster Local Plan 2015-2035 – Policies Map and related Local Plan policies are in part, unsound, as result of the inclusion of the iPort development site within the GB.

2.6 RPS agree that the openness and permanence of Doncaster's GB should be protected, however the existing Policies Map and subsequent Policy 2, fails to do this, for the reasons set out below.

2.7 Policy 2, “settlements hierarchy” within section 5 of the Local Plan (publication version) states, “The openness and permanence of Doncaster’s Green Belt (as indicated on the key Diagram) and defined on the Proposals Map will be protected. The general extent of the Green Belt will be retained. Within the Green Belt, national planning policy will be applied including the presumption against inappropriate development except in very special circumstances. Safeguarded Land (shown on the Proposals Map) has been removed from the Green Belt but not allocated for development to meet longer development needs equivalent to 5 years beyond the Plan Period. The principles of protection given in national planning policy will apply to safeguarded land during the current Plan period”.

2.8 We consider exceptional circumstances exist to justify taking additional land out the GB at the present time, specifically the iPort Site, to ensure that the GB boundaries do not need to be altered again at the end of the plan period. The continued retention of the iPort development site in the GB is not consistent with the character of the site. The continuation of its status as Green Belt land undermines the overall legitimacy of GB policy.

2.9 The Council’s GB Topic Paper outlines the approach taken by the Council in, firstly, identifying that GB land is needed for development during the plan period, and secondly, deciding which sites should be selected and consequently amending the GB boundaries. However, we have concerns that the Council’s approach relating to existing sites with planning permission do not relate or contribute to the GB purposes as set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF.
2.10 As stated above, there have been a number of planning approvals on GB land, including the iPort SRFI, since the UDP formally designated the extent of the GB within the Borough. It is important to point out that development on GB land can effectively change the status of the GB and this is acknowledged by the Council at paragraph 5.2.3 of the GB topic paper. This is a result of development contradicting the aim for the GB set out in Paragraph 133 of the NPPF with regards to openness.

2.11 In reviewing the GB boundary, the Council state, “development on sites which has led to the purposes of the GB being conflicted and meaning that the boundary is now clearly indefensible will be considered for removal of the GB, with a new boundary being drawn to excluded these sites”. In order to assess this the Council used a number of approaches and our site falls under the following approach “planning permissions for employment which are connected to defined settlements, but which are outline, have not started or not fully developed”.

2.12 Paragraph 5.3.11. of the GB Topic Paper States “In future, when the Green Belt comes to be reviewed again, this matter can be revisited when an up to date position can be established. If a site is fully developed then there may be a more compelling case to remove the site from the Green Belt, as per point ii, however until that point the land will remain as it currently is – a green belt site with a planning permission which has demonstrated very special circumstances”.

2.13 In relation to iPort the Council state on page 134 of the GB topic paper that the development has commenced and is currently approximately half complete and thus will remain in the GB until fully complete.

2.14 This is not an up to date position for our site and we consider that the Council have incorrectly assessed our site based for the following reasons:

1. The entire site has been remodelled to provide building plateau and the main road network throughout the site has been constructed; and

2. The buildings that have been constructed extend along most of the western boundary of the approved development site, adjoining open countryside.

2.15 It is clear from the photographs included within Appendix 2 that the our site is more than half completed and that the main parcel of land where construction has not yet gone beyond creating the building plateau is located in the south eastern corner of the site which adjoins the existing settlement of Rossington. Other built-plateau awaiting further construction, are dispersed between the units that have already been built.

2.16 The Council’s approach is not consistent with National Policy with regards to Green Belt boundaries, Paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that when defining boundaries, plans should define these clearly, using physical features which are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. Furthermore, it states, local plans should be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period.

2.17 In response to our previous representation on the removal of iPort from the Green Belt the Council have, “It is considered that amending the Green Belt will make no difference to the permitted scheme or its delivery in any eventuality, which can be developed as per the permission regardless of the site being Green Belt”.

2.18 As stated above this approach is not in line with National Policy, as regardless of how the Green Belt designation effects deliverability of the site, the land is, by virtue of its development, no longer permanently open.

2.19 Paragraph 134 sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt. With a number of large warehouse buildings and other built form spread throughout the iPort development site, the latter no longer serves any of the purposes of the Green Belt.
Proposed Boundary

2.20 As set out above, the iPort development site is, by virtue of its development, no longer permanently open and does not contribute to five purposes the GB.

2.21 Paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that when defining boundaries, plans should define these clearly, using physical features which are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. As demonstrated by the photographs within appendix 1, it is clear that the western boundary is clearly defined and that the iPort development site is no longer open, as a result of the buildings spread along the western boundary from north to south.

2.22 We recommend that the Council reconsiders the current GB boundary proposed and in particular, excludes the development site at iPort from the GB.

2.23 In addition, there is a parcel of land within the access corridor, north east of the iPort development site, known as Bankwood Triangle, and we consider that there is also in merit in excluding it from the GB to provide capacity for the expansion of iPort and Rossington. The subject site falls within the ‘Access Corridor’, of the Inland Port Scheme, and thus in the zone where permission was granted under (09/00190/OUTA) for road, rail and drainage infrastructure, but is no longer required for those purposes. The iPort planning permission does not include any retail/catering facilities to serve either its very substantial workforce or commercial visitors to the scheme, and this parcel of land is capable of providing for that role.

2.24 We consider that the GB boundary should be re-drawn and would ask the Inspector to consider the changes set out on figure 1 and 2 within Appendix 3.
3 CONCLUSION

3.1 We consider that the Local Plan Polices and Polices map are, in part, unsound as a result of the of the iPort development site being retained in the GB land. We have demonstrated that there are exceptional circumstances to justify taking land at iPort out of the Green Belt at the present time, as it no longer serves the purposes of the GB.
Appendix 1

Approved development zones
Appendix 2

Site photographs

[Photograph 1: aerial photo taken looking south showing the built development across the iPort development site]
Photograph 2: aerial photo taken looking south showing the built development across the iPort development site. This photo was taken during unit IP9’s enabling works which has since been completed – Refer to photograph 1 and 4]
[Photograph 3: aerial photo taken looking north showing the built development across the development site]
[Photograph 4: aerial photo taken looking south showing the most recent unit (IP9) that has been constructed on site, and which is located in the southern part of the site along the western boundary]
[Photograph 5: aerial photo taken looking east showing the built development across the northern part of the iPort development site. This photo shows that the western boundary is clearly defined]
Appendix 3

Proposed amendments to the Green belt boundary

[Figure 1: extract from the Doncaster Local Plan 2015-2035 Policies Map showing the extent of the Green Belt and our site, the iPort Development Zone and Bankwood Triangle, outlined in red, which we consider should be removed from the Green Belt]
[Figure 2: The approved site build out plan, with the area outline in red, which we consider should be removed from the GB]