WEST LANCASHIRE REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN

Revised Development Brief

WHITEMOSS BUSINESS PARK, SKELMERSDALE

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Executive Manager Planning/Development Services
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Brief

1.1.1 This document updates a previous development brief produced by West Lancashire District Council as a guide to the development of a largely office based (Class B1) Business Park on 13.2 hectares of land adjacent to Junction 4 of the M58 motorway at Skelmersdale, Lancashire. The development is being promoted through the West Lancashire Local Plan on the clear basis that only development of the highest quality will be permitted.

1.1.2 There are a number of industrial estate type developments in the district but limited availability of high quality business park developments. This brief will be used to ensure that the necessary standard of development is obtained on this site and that the District Council’s main requirements for the site are met, so that:

- There is provision for a high standard of development which respects the surrounding rural environment, the amenity of nearby residents and provides the quality parkland environment that is not otherwise available in the District for business investment;

- A comprehensive plan is produced for the whole of the site and any partial development which may take place will only be allowed in the context of this plan;

- The comprehensive plan must include a landscape strategy for the whole site and proposals for its future management;

- Considerable attention to detail is required in order to ensure a high standard of development and therefore planning applications will need to include appropriate levels of information on the nature of the development proposed;

- Particular scrutiny will be given to speculative proposals to ensure that the District Council’s objectives are being met;

- Details will be required of the means of implementing development in relation to partnership between owners, third party involvement, method of disposal etc. where this is likely to have a bearing on the achievement of the District Council’s planning objectives.
1.2 Location

1.2.1 The site occupies a unique position located on the outskirts of Skelmersdale, but within a rural setting and surrounded on three sides by Green Belt. Situated immediately south of junction 4 off the M58, the site will be served by fast links to the M6, the rest of the national transport network and Liverpool.

1.3 Structure Plan

1.3.1 Within the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan, Skelmersdale is classed under policy 2 as a main town where development will be permitted at levels sufficient to support the ongoing aims of the Regeneration Priority Area.

1.4 Replacement Local Plan

1.4.1 The West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan was adopted in July 2006 and allocates this particular site for employment use under Policy DE5 (Employment Development) and states that "Industrial, business, storage and distribution uses will be permitted" on the site.

1.5 Site Ownership

1.5.1 The majority of the undeveloped part of the site is owned by West Lancashire District Council.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The site extends to approximately 13.2 hectares and falls into two distinct parts: 6.20 hectares to the west of Moss Lane, and a further 7 hectares to the East. Portions of the business park have now been developed, 3ha has been developed for the purposes of a distribution centre / offices to the West. West Lancashire District Council has developed a further 1.5ha for offices in the South and 1ha to the North has been developed for offices.

2.1 Elevation

2.1.1 The site is relatively level throughout, beyond the site to the East the ground rises steadily but in all other directions there is little or no change. To the North of the site there is the M58 cutting which means that land drops steeply down to the motorway.

2.2 Drainage

2.2.1 There is little surface drainage within the site, although there is a 525 – 725mm highway drain running parallel to the motorway and discharging into the River Tawd culvert. There are also minor ditches running along
the eastern and western boundaries of the site and around the Quantum warehouse development.

2.2.2 It is thought that there are a number of important field drains running underground across the site and these will need to be subject of further investigation through the development process.

2.2.3 Foul drainage is available along the northern edge of the site up to the NFU building in the form of a 150mm foul sewer which discharges into the main foul trunk sewer in Whiteledge Road / Pimbo Road.

2.2.4 A balancing pond has been created on the eastern side of the Business Park to provide a sustainable method of receiving surface water run-off from the development area; this can be used for surface water collection from future developments.

2.3 Trees / Hedgerows

2.3.1 Large poplar trees and hedgerows surround the nursery site, although along part of the western boundary the hedges are quite thin allowing an open aspect to the business park onto the moss land to the west.

2.3.2 A substantial hawthorn hedge from the motorway down to Moss Lane Middle borders the eastern half of the site. However, the rest of the border is less dense and incorporates a number of Oak and Ash trees as well as Willow and Elder. Between Inglenook and the Livestock Unit there is neither a hedge nor fence to form a boundary. Within this half of the site, behind Whitemoss Farm, there are more hedges and natural boundaries.

2.4 Access

2.4.1 Vehicular access down Moss Lane is currently used by residents and necessary service and supply vehicles only, this being no through road. A roundabout has been constructed on Moss Lane to gain access to the East and West portions of the Business Park. Moss Lane has direct access to the M58 at junction 4; the only other access south of this junction is along White Moss Road South, a minor road unsuitable for heavy levels of traffic. The Department of Transport also have a storage depot at the junction with Moss Lane and White Moss Road South.

2.4.2 Moss Lane is adopted for nearly all its length although there is a small length between Pleasant View and Midge Nook that has not been adopted. White Moss Road South is an adopted road.

2.5 Surrounding Uses

2.5.1 To the North the site is bounded by the motorway and beyond that the industrial areas of Skelmersdale. To the East and West there are
considerable open views extending over high quality agricultural land allocated as Green Belt. To the South are a number of residential properties and again extensive agricultural land to the rear, all in the Green Belt.

2.5.2 The moss land to the west is a site of regional scientific and conservation interest identified by the LWT and allocated as such in the Replacement Local Plan. The nature of the ground allows for historic remains being preserved within peat, suggesting there may be some archaeological interest on the site.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

3.1 The clear aim is to secure a very high quality development that respects the surrounding quiet and attractive rural environment. A high quality of building design and landscaping will be expected within a comprehensive framework.

3.1.1 Development on this site is to be confined to class B1 (a) office use and Class B1 (b) research and development use only (Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987). The only exception will be for ancillary uses, for example employee recreation facilities etc., industrial uses will be considered unsuitable in this sensitive location.

3.2 Features to be retained on the Site

3.2.1 Boundary features should be retained except when it is found necessary to improve / widen access etc. The rows of poplar trees around the nursery being more mature can be particularly valuable when producing a landscape scheme – a variety of ages, as well as species will produce a richer landscape. The trees along the motorway are also important in landscape terms, screening both the motorway and the industrial units north of the motorway, these should not be affected by the development.

3.2.2 The thick hedges running along the first stretch of Moss Lane are particularly attractive and as mentioned above will be retained wherever possible. A full survey of trees and hedges should be carried out prior to development to identify which trees are in a healthy condition worthy of retention.

3.2.3 Trees which have been grown as part of the nursery may form a valuable landscape resource, however, much of the stock is likely to be in a poor condition. Any planning application will need to be supported by a detailed assessment of these trees and if any are found suitable for further use then they should be utilised within the development site. This assessment should also include a management plan to indicate the future management or replacement of these trees.
3.3 Access

3.3.1 Access to and from the M58 is the concern of the Highways Agency and as such the traffic generated effects of the proposed development need to be fully discussed with the Agency and a technical submission in the form of a Traffic Assessment may be required. The developer may be asked to contribute to fund any improvements necessary at the junction. Access to the expansion sites to the South, East and the West must not be prejudiced as part of any development on the existing Whitemoss site.

3.4 Building Location

3.4.1 Landscaping will be necessary to retain the rural scale of development. Of equal importance are overall height and massing, the relationship between buildings and their impact on the external landscape and views from residential properties. The location of buildings will also have an important bearing on the impact of the development on its surroundings. An estate type of development will be resisted in favour of imaginative schemes that involve ideas such as the groupings of buildings with shared servicing in the form of courtyards and pockets of ‘built development’ that maximise the amount of open landscaped areas. This would also enable areas to be used for nature conservation etc., to stress the rural ‘green’ setting in which the centre is placed.

3.4.2 The form of the built development should be designed to create opportunities for reducing the visual impact of access roads and car parking.

3.5 Building Design

3.5.1 Design is of paramount importance if this development is to be successfully incorporated into the surroundings. Due to its rural setting and close proximity of residential properties, buildings should reflect the character and setting of this location and surrounding properties and buildings. A mixture of two storeys and single storey development would be most suitable. Buildings and particularly groups of buildings that have associations in style, form and materials to agricultural buildings will be particularly appropriate. Buildings should use traditional materials that reflect the character and setting of the surrounding buildings and area, other materials will not generally be acceptable although they will be considered on merit.

3.5.2 Signs can have a considerable impact on the aesthetics of any development and it is important that any signs on buildings and along roads are of such a size and colour as to be in keeping with the overall theme of a high quality rural development. Signs will be subject to the statutory requirements concerning the design and location of road signs.
3.5.3 Any fencing erected on site should be sympathetic to its Green Belt surroundings and reflect the standards of a high quality business park. As a result the use of paladin / wire mesh fencing or post/rail and hedging should be encouraged and the use of palisade or industrial type fencing should not be permitted. Any fencing should be erected in a colour to match its rural surroundings.

3.6 The Provision of Services

3.6.1 Water: A new main has been installed as part of phase 1 of the Business Park Development that should adequately provide for the remainder of the site.

3.6.2 Drainage: Any development of this site must be drained on a separate foul and surface water system.

6.3.2 Surface Water: Only clean, uncontaminated surface water should be connected to the surface water system. Developers would not have an automatic right of connection into a 525mm – 725mm highway drain running parallel to the motorway as it is in the ownership of the Highways Agency. The Highways Agency may allow discharge of an attenuated surface water flow with a limited discharge into the drain but this would have to be negotiated directly with the Highways Agency and would require some means of on site storage. It may be necessary in the Western part of the site for the developer to requisition sewers from United Utilities. There are also watercourses on the Western and Eastern boundaries of the site, but discharge to these requires further consent from the E.A. Granting of such consent may involve improvements to the watercourse to cater for the increased flow. Any extension to the surface water system must preserve the existing sub – surface drainage network.

3.6.4 Foul Drainage: All foul drainage must be connected to the foul sewers. There is a 150mm diameter foul sewer in the vicinity of the NFU building which discharges into the main foul trunk sewer. It is approximately 4m deep at its head and could therefore serve the remainder of the eastern site. It may be necessary for the developer to requisition foul sewers from United Utilities Ltd. Dependant on the nature of work which will be undertaken at the Business Park and the intensity of development, some increase in capacity of the sewer may be required.

3.6.5 Any extension to the foul drainage system must preserve any existing subsoil drainage systems. The E.A will require direct consultation for any option not involving discharge to the foul sewer.

3.6.6 Electricity: There are overhead cables crossing the eastern side of the site and these should be put underground or diverted at the developers cost. Provision may be made by United Utilities to remove these as part of any masterplan put forward for future development.
3.6.7 **Gas**: A new main has been installed as part of phase 1 of the Business Park Development that should adequately provide for the remainder of the site.

3.6.8 **B.T**: British Telecom has lines to the adjacent properties and it should be possible to service the Business Park.

3.6.9 The responsibility will rest with the developer to carry out detailed investigations with various statutory undertakers. Certain legal agreements will be required to ensure that the work carried out is to the required standard.

3.7 **Constraints to Development**

3.7.1 The Whitemoss site is situated in an area of past underground and open cast mining activity and where it is known that disused mineshafts and coal seam outcrops exist. In view of this British Coal have recommended that a suitably qualified mining consultant be engaged to investigate the situation and make recommendations to ensure the stability of the scheme.

3.7.2 The possibility of finding items of archaeological interest on this site is thought to be limited but due to the extent of the peat adjacent to the site, the Lancashire Archaeological Unit may wish to hold a watching brief during any ground disturbance episodes, e.g. excavation of cable and pipe trenches etc.

4.0 **LANDSCAPING**

4.1 Landscaping will be one of the most important features of this site and proposals should be given in a full landscaping strategy.

4.2 **General Landscaping**

4.2.1 The Whitemoss site, although screened along the edge of the M58, has an open aspect with views in from the houses to the south and from the land and motorway to the east and west. Views to the west are of open moss land and should be kept relatively open; benefiting the Business Park environment with only limited planting along that edge to soften visual effects of development. It is important, however, that the development is contained and does not impinge on the agricultural uses surrounding the site by a boundary treatment including soft and hard landscaping.

4.2.2 The eastern side of the site is somewhat more exposed to existing properties and wide structural planting of at least 15 metres in breadth, but preferably 20 metres in breadth along Moss Lane Middle with tree and shrub species native to the local environment. This planting
scheme should be implemented early to reduce visual impact of the development on the residents.

4.3 **Nature Conservation Value**

4.3.1 If the buildings are grouped together, larger areas of open space could be provided and this would offer more scope for landscaping schemes. Design of any open space areas within the site should include an assessment of what measures can be taken to develop nature conservation interest in relation to flora and fauna habitats.

4.3.2 The rural setting of this site would lend itself to a mixture of landscaping both formal and wild. The use of the native species of trees and shrubs and areas of wildflowers as proposed to amenity grassland will aid the development of areas with conservational interest. In addition this will often result in reduced maintenance costs, for example the meadowland type habitat would require significantly less resources than mown grass, and that could result in an area rich in flora and fauna. More formal landscaping should be situated closer to the buildings with a mixture of ground cover planting and shrub beds as well as mown areas.

4.3.3 Sites such as this are often enhanced through the development of water features. However, in this case the land available is limited and therefore the opportunity for creating water features are limited. There are both natural ponds and a balancing pond for the sustainable drainage system on-site and all efforts should be made to incorporate this into the proposed development.

4.4 **Car Parking Areas**

4.4.1 It is hoped that much of the car parking can be kept to more secluded sides of buildings but there will still be considerable landscaping requirements. The District Council car parking standards state that ‘large, unbroken expanses are unattractive’ and therefore areas need to be broken up by landscaping. Different treatment applied to different areas of car park could help break up the usual monotony of otherwise large areas of macadam. Any new car parking that is proposed should be in line with guidance and criteria given in guidance on car parking standards.

4.4.2 A variety of landscaping should be encouraged including mounding or change of levels to sub-divide areas of car parking into groups, preferably 10 –15 cars. Planting should be at different levels with evergreen ground cover and a variety of shrub and tree layers. From a personal safety point of view there should not be a complete wall of cover in these areas. Visibility lines should be maintained as far as possible. Either ground cover and a low-level shrub planting or ground cover and trees would enable people walking from their cars to have a
clearer view around them. Small groups of trees in corner sections would be acceptable and would add variety to the scene.

4.4.3 The District Council does not wish to see high security internal fencing such as palisade fencing scattered around the site, security should be dealt with on an overall basis for the whole Business Park. Any internal boundary markers that are required should be low-level attractive features (not restricted to fencing) that can enhance the landscape value.

4.4.4 Any detailed landscaping proposal would, of course, have to be agreed with the Council once details were put forward for the design of the proposed development.

5. TRANSPORT

5.1 Public Transport

5.1.1 Developers will be required to contribute to providing an appropriate level of bus services and facilities to serve prospective employees and visitors to the site. Currently a community bus service serves the employment areas of Skelmersdale including Whitemoss Business Park. At present this level of public transport to the site is acceptable, however, with further development the quality and regularity of bus services and public transport links to Whitemoss must be improved. Developers will be expected to put forward proposals showing how they intend to cater for the public transport needs of the employees and should discuss the matter with the District Council and County Council. A commuted sum may be an appropriate mechanism for meeting any identified need.

5.1.2 The development will need to incorporate a high quality of bus stop facilities including bus shelters. There should be a maximum distance of approximately 400 metres between bus stops and any development.

5.1.3 Large employers moving to the Whitemoss site which as a result would generate a large numbers of vehicle movements will be expected to submit a Green Transport Plan with any detailed planning application, which should show how any potential vehicle movements can be minimised.

5.2 Cycle / Pedestrian Access

5.2.1 Plans for the development of the site should make full and adequate provision for safe, convenient and direct pedestrian and cycle access into and through the site wherever possible. Provision should be made for cycle parking.
6.0 IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Phasing

6.1.1 It has already been stated that this site is to be developed comprehensively, however, this does not mean that the building commences right across the site immediately. The site is in sensitive location in close proximity to residential properties and therefore development should be gradual.

6.1.2 When the area of land to the east of Moss Lane is to be developed. The developer will be expected to carry out extensive planting along the southern boundary of this part of the site during the early stages of development to ensure the minimal level of visual intrusion to nearby residents.

6.1.3 Any developer will be expected to put forward a programme of phasing along with the planning application although the actual timing of the phase will be largely dependant on market forces.

6.2 Management of the Site

6.2.1 The theme of this development is ‘quality’ and to ensure that this is retained throughout, a high quality of maintenance and management of the site is required. The developer will have to submit details of the proposed management strategy with the planning application, so that it can be agreed by the District Council.

6.2.2 Obviously if one developer or consortium intends to secure development of the whole area it will be more straightforward to produce a management strategy. If, however, there are a number of developers, it may be appropriate to set up joint management arrangements.

6.2.3 The advantages of a good management strategy include: -

- Site Security
- Common Signage
- Road and Path Cleaning – where they are unadopted
- Refuse and Litter Collection
- Site Lighting
- Repairs to common areas and facilities and external repairs to buildings
- Recreation Facilities
- Landscape Maintenance

6.2.4 Agreements will need to be made between developers regarding service charges to cover such maintenance works.
6.3 Planning Permission and Requirements for Section 106 Agreements

6.3.1 As development on this site is already embodied within the Local Plan the District Council requires applications to include all details on: siting, design, external appearance, access and landscaping. Other details may be covered by conditions of permission.

6.3.2 The District Council will consider requesting developers to enter into a Section 106 Agreement dealing with matters that cannot properly be covered by planning condition if this is necessary in order to secure the Council's planning objectives for this area.