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Sent: 13 November 2017 12:34
To: Planning Policy
Cc: Alsbury, Craig (GVA); [REDACTED]
Subject: Northampton Local Plan Part 2 - Sites Consultation Representations
Attachments: Northampton Local Plan Part 2 Written Representations - Network Rail.pdf

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Dear Sir / Madam

Please find attached written representations prepared by GVA on behalf of Network Rail in connection with the Sites Consultation on the Northampton Local Plan Part 2. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Ben Williams MRTPI
Planner

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Northampton Local Plan Part 2 Sites Consultation

Representations on Behalf of Network Rail Sites LAA0288 and LAA0333

Contact details

1. Please provide your contact details in the boxes below:

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2. Are you an agent responding on behalf of another?

Yes

3. If you are an agent responding on behalf of another, please enter your details below:

Name*	Network Rail
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Representations

4. Which sites that have been assessed as being suitable for further consideration (Appendix A) do you think are most appropriate for development?

Site: LAA0288 – Railway Station Car Park

Network Rail is looking at ways in which it can better utilise its operational land, and redevelop its surplus land, to help deliver sustainable growth and, particularly much needed housing. In doing so, it is committed to creating high quality places that make a genuinely positive contribution to the country's towns and cities – places in which people want to live, work, spend their leisure time and which deliver environmental and design excellence.

In April 2016, a consultant team was appointed to assess the development potential of its land adjacent to Northampton Station with a view to delivering a new multi-storey car park (to replace the current surface and (temporary) decked facilities) and, wrapping around that, a major scheme of mixed-use development. The entirety of Network Rail's land holding was assessed (bounded by Black Lion Hill, St Andrews Road, Spencer Bridge Road and the railway line), together with a small parcel of Borough Council land adjacent to Spencer Bridge Road (containing the Super Sausage Café). In other words, it assessed the development potential of Sites LAA0288 and LAA0333 (we return to LAA0333 under Question 7 below).

The team comprised:

- GVA – Planning, Property Market, Viability / Deliverability, Finance
- Hydrock Consultants Ltd – Highways, Ground Conditions, Flood Risk, Utilities, Structures
- Asset Heritage – Heritage Impacts
- ISH - Archaeology
- Countryside Consultants - Ecology
- Fira – Townscape and Landscape (Impact and Design)
- The Bush Consultancy – Masterplanning

The team conducted a full assessment of the site's constraints and potentialities (liaising as necessary / appropriate with District and County Council consultees), developed preliminary masterplans, and conducted soft market testing to gauge developer appetite for particular classes of development. The masterplan was then refined and preliminary conclusions reached on the type and scale of development that is likely to strike the best balance between being aspirational and deliverable, and satisfies the objectives of Network Rail and the Borough Council in environmental, social, economic, place-making and design terms.

In the sections that follow we summarise the findings of the consultant team and provide our considered view on whether the site is deliverable in NPPF terms.

Technical Matters

The consultant team has made findings as follows:

Highways - the site is in a highly sustainable location and is capable of accommodating a significant amount of new development without giving rise to widespread adverse impacts. The comprehensive development of Sites LAA0288 and LAA0333 would be likely to have a severe adverse impact on only one junction in the vicinity: the junction of St Andrews Road with Spencer Bridge Road. However, this impact could be mitigated by making improvements to that junction and, more specifically, by creating an additional left turn lane. Other junctions on the network are forecast to be operating at or over capacity at the future year assessment date but not as a consequence of the development of these sites.

Flood Risk – Site LAA0288 falls within Flood Zone 1 and is, therefore, at low risk of flooding.

Heritage Assets - The development plan makes specific reference to the requirement to have regard to the significance of and the need to preserve and enhance the setting of certain heritage assets in the vicinity of the site. These include the Scheduled Monument (Castle Mound) and the listed Postern Gate which stand adjacent to the south-eastern corner of the site, as well as certain assets that are further afield on Mare Fair. Asset Heritage Consulting has conducted a preliminary appraisal of the various heritage assets that exist in the vicinity of the site, including a number that are not referred to in the development plan, and have provided advice on how the presence of these assets is likely to impact on the form that any development takes. Specific regard has been had to the Postern Gate, the Scheduled Monument, listed buildings on Black Lion Hill and Mare Fair (3 Black Lion Hill, Black Lion Inn, St Peter's Church, Cromwell Hall/Hazelrigg House); Bailey Bank and views to St James's Church and the Express Lift Tower; Dorridge United Reform Church and views from the west. Asset Heritage has concluded that, subject to care being taken in respect of design, the development of the site has the potential to significantly enhance the settings of the Scheduled Monument and the Postern Gate, noting that both are heavily compromised currently. Insofar as other assets are concerned, Asset Heritage has concluded that the proposals are unlikely to have an effect. To minimise the impact of the development on views to the west (including of the Express Lift Tower), Asset Heritage has indicated that, if a multi-storey car park is to be constructed on site, orientated perpendicular to the railway lines is likely to be preferred.

Archaeology - Part of the site was once occupied by Northampton Castle, one of the principal strongholds of the realm in the late 12th and early 13th centuries and the seat of numerous parliaments. It was also the scene of some particular turning points in English history and was frequented by both King John and Henry III.

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ISH has completed a review and assessment of all published archaeological data for the site, including reports of recent excavations and the site. In the light of this assessment, ISH has reached conclusions on the likelihood of Site LAA0288 containing intact archaeological remains and remains that it might be possible to access. ISH's analysis and conclusions have been discussed and agreed with Northamptonshire County Council's Principal Archaeological Adviser. ISH has noted that received wisdom on archaeological survival within the Inner Bailey of the former Castle is of no survival at all. ISH goes on to note that the more recent evidence, including the results of the above mentioned geotechnical survey, confirm that there is no possibility of coherent survival of Inner Bailey structures or deposits whilst making it clear that only the filled-in river course, and the truncated but then deeply buried fills of the Inner Bailey ditch have any chance of coherent survival, albeit only at considerable depth and in an environment which is today fed by seepage from the Nene and the natural water table. In archaeological terms, these deposits are very difficult to access and, in terms of excavation, constitute a potentially hazardous working environment. With this in mind, ISH has concluded that further archaeological investigations should be confined to a row of consistently spaced archaeological boreholes across the ditch which should enable data to be retrieved that will allow the profile of the remaining ditch-cut to be reconstructed, along with allowing a series of samples to be taken as a guide to the environment of the Castle surroundings before its abandonment and ruin. ISH goes on to note that the raised surface level car park in the south eastern corner of the site might be an area in which archaeological remains survive. In respect of this part of the site, ISH recommends a more regular sequence of archaeological interventions comprising evaluation (probably by a single trench), a review on site of the results and set-piece fieldwork as appropriate. Finally, ISH confirms that, if archaeological remains are indeed found, the objective should, where possible, be to use sensitive design and engineering to enable these to be retained in situ.

Townscape - Fira has undertaken an assessment of the whole of the Network Rail Station site and the surrounding area, having regard to matters such as: strategic green infrastructure, strategic landscape and visual sensitivity, topography, urban grain, and townscape character. It has then analysed the likely visual impact of the development of the whole site (LAA0288 and LA0333) from 7 strategic viewpoints and 33 local viewpoints. Fira has concluded from its assessment that, as proposals for the site are brought forward and refined, it will be important to address the following key considerations:

- the role that the site plays in the provision and enhancement of the Town's green infrastructure;
- the setting of the Scheduled Monument and of the Postern Gate and how these could be enhanced through good design;
- the contribution that the development of the site could make to the wider context provided by the Brewery District and the historic core;

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- the contribution that the development could make to the regeneration of Spring Boroughs on the back of improved linkages and the provision, on site, of improved facilities / uses;
- the need for a high quality public realm and architectural design; and
- the role that the development will play in views from Victoria Park and the riverside to the west.

It is clear from Fira's analysis that the development of the site is highly unlikely to give rise to adverse townscape and visual effects. Indeed, the opposite is true and development here, planned properly, will deliver significant townscape, landscape and environmental benefits, including a significantly enhanced public realm establishing the Station as the iconic gateway required by the development plan.

Utilities - a mains sewer traverses the site and that the site is also home to a live electricity sub-station. Hydrock has surveyed the Anglian Water sewer and the consultant team has assessed the consequences, both practical and financial, of building over or around it. This has confirmed that it ought to be possible to develop around the sewer without compromising the quantum, scale and quality of scheme that is delivered, thereby minimising the costs associated with the development of the site.

Ground Conditions - Hydrock has undertaken a comprehensive ground investigation in the Site LAA0288, involving the digging of trial pits and the drilling of boreholes. Insofar as geo-environmental considerations are concerned, Hydrock has assessed risks to human health, plant life and controlled waters and has tested for ground gases. The investigation has detected very slightly elevated levels of asbestos (in 3 samples out of 20), small amounts of Benzo(a)pyrene, slightly elevated concentrations of Boron in the made ground, and elevated levels of Cobalt, Copper, Manganese and Lead in the groundwater in the made ground and natural soils. Hydrock notes that risks in all categories are low but goes on to recommend a series of mitigation measures, including the installation of a cover system (450mm of subsoil and topsoil) above the made ground in public open space areas and the use of barrier pipe for potable water supplies. Insofar as geo-technical matters are concerned, Hydrock has considered the approach that will need to be taken to site preparation and ground works, including the likelihood of the developer being able to re-use spoil from excavations and reaches preliminary conclusions on the approach that will need to be taken to foundation design and floor slab construction. It is likely, based on the investigations completed to date, that piled foundations will be required to the proposed multi storey car park

Ecology – the site has very little ecological value currently. The development of the site presents an opportunity to deliver material benefits in terms of habitat and bio-diversity.

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Conclusions of Technical Work

The site is capable of accommodating a significant quantum of development in a manner that enhances the settings of nearby heritage assets, enhances views and the townscape, delivers significant social, economic and environmental gains and does not give rise to any significant adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated.

Uses

The development plan makes specific provision for the development of this site with a mixture of uses, including transport interchange facilities, offices, housing, and ancillary retailing, cafés and restaurants, yet the Sites Consultation papers suggest that the site may be allocated only for residential development in Part 2 of the Local Plan.

Whilst the site could and should accommodate new housing, GVAs assessment of the Northampton property market and the masterplanning-undertaken, indicates that the site is capable of delivering a major mixed use development. Moreover, it is almost certainly the case that providing a mixture of uses (as opposed to just housing) will enable the creation of a vital and vibrant 'place' adjacent to the Town's primary transport hub. Accordingly, Part 2 of the Local Plan should allow for the development of other uses alongside housing (at the developers discretion), including: new car parking and transportation facilities, student accommodation and uses within Classes B1(a), B1(b), A1, A3, A4, C1, D1 and D2.

Residential Capacity

Depending on the mix of development that is ultimately preferred, it is estimated that Site LAA0288 could accommodate anything between 50 and 250 dwellings, delivered as apartments in a high density configuration.

Suitability / Availability / Achievability

This site is allocated for development in the development plan and the analysis work carried out demonstrates that it is suitable for development now. The Council's Sustainability Appraisal also indicates that the site is highly sustainable and is suitable for development (even though it attributes inappropriately low scores for certain metrics – see below). Indeed, it is one of the best (if not the best) ranking sites in sustainability terms.

The site is not available now (because the majority of it is being used as car park for the Station) but it will be available for development within 12-24 months and so well within the timeframe covered by the development plan.

The complete re-development of the site is achievable within 3-7 years. There are no insurmountable obstacles to delivery. Network Rail controls the land.

Accordingly, the site is deliverable in NPPF terms and so should be allocated for development in Part 2 of the Local Plan.

7. Are there any sites that have been assessed as not being suitable for further consideration (Appendix B) that should be?

Site LAA0333 – Castle Station

The Council's Land Availability Assessment (September 2017) indicates that this Site failed the Council's Stage 2 Assessment. It would appear that it failed because the Council concluded that, whilst the site is suitable for development, it is neither available nor achievable. This is not the case.

As indicated above, Network Rail is actively considering how it can better utilise its assets, and the surplus land that it controls, to deliver sustainable growth. An area of site LAA0333 has been deemed surplus to requirements and has been assessed for its ability to accommodate development. This assessment has focussed on potential constraints, such as flood risk, utilities and the capacity of the local highway network but has also included an analysis of the local property market and soft market testing to gauge likely developer appetite for different classes and scales of development.

Suitability

GVA's assessment of the property market has indicated that this site is unlikely to be attractive to developers of commercial floor space (Class B1, B2 or B8 uses). However, it would be attractive to housebuilders and because of where it is located and how it is configured, it could be developed together with, or independently of, Site LAA0288 (off a new access formed onto Andrews Road to the north of the existing Station car park entrance).

The Council's Sustainability Appraisal does not examine the sustainability credentials of this site but, were it to be assessed, it would be awarded an almost identical score to that given to Site LAA0288. The only differences between the two are likely to be in respect of metrics 11a (in respect of which Site LAA333 should score more highly as a consequence of it being further from the settings of Castle Mound and the Postern Gate) and 14a/14c (in respect of which Site LAA0333 should scoreless as a consequence of the EAs Mapping indicating that the land is at greater risk of flooding). We return to this below. Overall, when properly tested, the site will achieve a very high sustainability score, with 'significant positive effects' recorded in terms of metrics 1a, 2a, 2b, 3a, 4b, 8a, 8b, 10a, 15a (i.e. all those metrics in respect of which it is possible for a site to be classed as having 'significant positive effects') .

The highway analysis referred to above in connection with Site LAA0288 assumed, for traffic impact and accessibility testing, that this land would be developed with up to 270 dwellings. As indicated above, it concluded that this scale of development could be satisfactorily accommodated (alongside that assumed in respect of Site LAA0288), subject to improvements being made to the St Andrews Road / Spencer Bridge Road junction.

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Insofar as flood risk is concerned, the FRA confirms that the majority of the site falls within Flood Zone 2 where there is a medium risk of flooding, and that a small part of the site, close to the north western boundary, that falls within Flood Zone 3 where the risk of flooding is high. The assessment goes on to note that there have been no flood defence works carried out in the vicinity of the site but, as it passes the site, the channel that the River Nene runs in provides significant protection. This, Hydrock indicates, is confirmed by the Environment Agency's Hazard Mapping which shows that the vast majority of the site is actually at low risk of flooding. Finally, Hydrock has provided advice on the steps that would need to be taken in order to make a development in this location "safe" in flood risk terms, including details of the levels at which finished floors would need to be set.

The fact that the majority of the site falls within Flood Zone 2 means that proposals for it are likely to have to be the subject of sequential testing before planning permission can be granted. The precise scope of and approach to be taken to the sequential test will need to be agreed with the Borough Council, the County Council and the Environment Agency in due course. However, the NPPF and NPPG encourage Local Planning Authorities to take a pragmatic approach to defining the scope of such tests and, in this instance, the test should be defined narrowly on the basis that: (i) the need for regeneration in this case is locationally-specific; (ii) a development in this location would be highly sustainable; (iii) the development could be designed so as to be safe; and (iv) the Hydrock analysis indicates that the development of the site will not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. In the light of the analysis undertaken by Network Rail, we are satisfied that flood risk matters can be satisfactorily addressed in respect of this site.

Overall, it is clear that this site is suitable for housing development.

Availability

The site is not available for development now but it will be available within the next 3 years. Network Rail is already in the process of liaising with the present occupiers in order to enable it to take the site to the market with vacant possession.

Achievability

The site is capable of delivering housing development within 3 years and being fully built out within 6-7 years.

Residential Capacity

The analysis work undertaken indicates that Site LAA0333 could accommodate something in the order of 200 dwellings, assuming a mixed tenure development comprising town houses/terraced housing with some semi-detached dwellings and some limited low storey apartments.

8. Are there any sites which you think should be used for other purposes?

Part 2 of the Local Plan should make provision for the development of Site LAA0288 with a mixture of uses including uses within Classes: A1, A3, A4, B1(a), B1(b), C1, C3, D1 and D2. However, it should avoid being prescriptive on scale and mix enabling a developer to bring forward a primarily residential scheme if that is what the market wishes to deliver.

10. Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal of Site Options?

The Appraisal scores Site LAA0288 inappropriately in respect of metrics 4b (which should be significant positive), 10a (which should be significant positive), and 11a (which should be significant positive in the light of the ability of development to materially enhance the setting of designated heritage assets and further knowledge in respect of the Castle remains).

Thank you for completing this form