

Employment Development

Issue 1 – Allocations and the delivery of employment land

My statement relates to the question raised by the Planning Inspector, namely:

'Is there a reasonable prospect that the employment land allocated will be delivered'

Statement

Ashbourne Town Council has agreed a draft Ashbourne Neighbourhood Plan which has been submitted to Derbyshire Dales District Council for 'screening' opinion prior to Rule 14 consultation.

The Ashbourne Neighbourhood Plan has economic regeneration as one of the key planks of its sustainable development strategy. It is also a key driver for the significant housing development that has already been permitted in and around the town over the last 3 years as well as that planned in the Local Plan. Consultation with the Ashbourne Industrial Estate occupiers early in the Neighbourhood Plan process identified the need for significant new employment space to meet the expansion plans of many of the estate's companies. I believe that this information on the needs of existing Ashbourne companies was passed to DDDC which then used it as supporting evidence for D2N2's allocation of Local Growth Fund monies for the proposed access link road to the A52 on Phase 1 of the proposed development of the Ashbourne Airfield site. Indeed in the planning officer's report on the outline application for Phase 1 of the Ashbourne Airfield site development in October 2014 the Council's Head of Regeneration and Policy states:

"Timing is of importance. Officers are aware of businesses on the Airfield currently choosing to relocate jobs out of the District due to a lack of available expansion space in Ashbourne. The identified need for additional employment space in Ashbourne presents not only an opportunity cost (potential new jobs going somewhere else rather than being created in the Derbyshire Dales), but also an immediate risk of loss of existing jobs"

That was nearly three years ago. Without any further expansion of employment land in the meantime it can only be assumed that existing companies are facing difficulties expanding and that there is continued threat of loss of jobs to both Ashbourne and Derbyshire Dales.

There is therefore an urgent need for this additional employment space to be constructed to meet both the existing needs of Ashbourne companies as well as the predicted employment needs of the whole of Derbyshire Dales as evidenced in the Local Plan.

The Ashbourne Airfield site, part of which is within the Ashbourne Neighbourhood Plan boundary, accounts for over 70% of allocated employment land in the Local Plan. Phase 1 of the development comprises 8 hectares of employment land (53% of the Policy S7 requirement). It is therefore essential, I contend, that the employment land allocation on the Ashbourne Airfield site is delivered as soon as practicable, to ensure sustainable development for Ashbourne.

Since the first planning application was approved for the Ashbourne Airfield site (Phase 1) in October 2014 representations have been made to DDDC for an employment masterplan for the Ashbourne Airfield. This masterplan must show clearly how this site will be developed and how it will ensure quality employment opportunities for both Ashbourne and other local residents. Particularly important is the building of a new Enterprise and Vocational Skills Centre which will provide employment space for new small business as well as a training facility to improve skills for local people to access new employment opportunities.

This clear and practical demand for a masterplan and timescale for the development of the employment land is part of Ashbourne Town Council's formal written representation on the Local Plan. Unfortunately no masterplan has been provided to demonstrate clear deliverability of the employment land on the Ashbourne Airfield site.

Indeed detailed applications for Phase 1, with the exception of the link road application, have not been progressed.

On 30 March 2017 a further outline planning application for the Ashbourne Airfield site (Phase 1) was approved by DDDC. This reduced the amount of land available for development by some 14%. Again there was no detailed masterplan for the development of the employment land.

At this point in time therefore, we are left, with:

- Outline planning consents for the main development with the exception of the link road to the A52.
- a D2N2 Growth fund financial allocation for the proposed link road to the scheme
- an aspiration from DDDC that the employment land will be delivered
- Continued lack of quality employment space in order that Ashbourne's businesses on the Airfield Industrial Estate can expand
- Threat of loss of existing jobs
- No idea when the proposed Enterprise Centre might be constructed.

Therefore a reasonable and practical answer to the Planning Inspector's question '*Is there a reasonable prospect that the employment land allocated will be delivered*' perhaps should be - Hopefully.

This only refers to Phase 1 of 8 hectares. The remaining 7 hectares of employment land allocated in the Local Plan for Phase 2 of Ashbourne Airfield is less certain.

What is required to give a positive answer to the Planning Inspector's question on this critical Local Plan issue for both Ashbourne and the whole of Derbyshire Dales is:

- A detailed masterplan as part of a detailed planning application for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Ashbourne Airfield site as speedily as possible
- A robust business plan and marketing strategy for the development and future occupation of the employment land at Ashbourne Airfield
- A practical programme and business plan for the provision of the proposed Enterprise and Training centre which is included in Phase 1 of the development.

Ashbourne Town Council wants to see this key employment site delivered as soon as possible to ensure that sustainable development is a reality rather than a Local Plan aspiration. We urge the developer, D2N2 and DDDC to work with Ashbourne Town Council to ensure that the new employment and jobs offered by the Ashbourne Airfield development are delivered speedily and practically on a sound economic business case.

Councillor Albert Golding

Ashbourne Town Council

21 April 2017