

Hearing Statement on Inspector Questions

Mid Sussex Local Plan 2014-2031

Site Allocations DPD

Examination: Matter 5

Science & Technology Park, Burgess Hill

On behalf of Dacorar (Southern) Limited
& Wortleford Trading Company Limited

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Matter 5.1(x)

Prepared by:

Suzanne Holloway BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI

Partner

M: 07769 938554

E: sholloway@vailwilliams.com

Matter 5 - Are the policies to manage and promote the Local Economy and Employment Areas and Allocations sound?

5.1 **Policy SA9** allocates land for a **new science and technology park**; it is located to the north of the A2300, whereas the District Plan policy DP9 is for a high-quality business park to the south of the A2300.

(x) Is the **impact of Covid-19 on the local economy** significant, and if so, is there a case for changing any or all of policies SA2-SA9?

The wider region has experienced a significant impact based on Covid-19 pandemic and in particular the change in the economic dynamic around a significantly reduced operation at Gatwick Airport and increased demand for last mile distribution.

The R&D, manufacturing and assembly sectors are largely unaffected and the B8 distributors have benefited because of Covid, with less reliance on high street retail and more internet purchases. The office sector has been affected as businesses work out how they will occupy space and how much is needed. Office take-up last year was low. It is difficult to predict how office demand might change, although recently Vail Williams has seen an increase in office searches as a result of the successful vaccine roll-out. The early lockdown impression that the workplace was outdated seems to be receding, with a realisation by many businesses that home working is not ideal, due to a loss of personal/colleague interaction and collaboration, and "zoom fatigue".

It seems likely that a more balanced hybrid/agile working practice is developing across many industries. However, collaboration, face to face contact and high-tech facilities ensure that demand for bespoke buildings are still required for businesses in the science and technology and innovation sectors.

Whilst Covid 19 has impacted regionally on demand and supply, the January 2020 EGA update (E2) considers short and long term peaks and troughs in the market and reflects different growth scenarios, specifically in para 7.3 states that "*given the focus of the EGA Update upon longer term needs as well as short term needs, it is important that any analysis of commercial property market signals takes a longer-term view*".

Para 7.4 states that "*The NWS sub-region continues to have a relatively buoyant commercial property market, boosted by its central location within the wider South East and excellent transport links and connectivity, making it an attractive and competitive business location for a wide range of industries and occupiers. Strong quality of life factors and access to a highly skilled workforce combine to both retain indigenous firms within the sub region and attract investment from elsewhere*".

The EGA also shows (para 7.8) the strength in local markets complementing each other: *"It is therefore sensible to continue to consider the sub-region as a broad property market area. In future, key developments such as The Hub at Burgess Hill (from an industrial perspective), Gatwick Park at Crawley and North Horsham (from an office perspective) have the potential to start to change this traditional dynamic, by offering the scale of business space and critical mass to attract larger occupiers from further afield into NWS."*

Para 7.17 of the EGA also illustrates high take up and developer and investor demand and confidence in the region and that *"recent and ongoing developments demonstrate a strong level of investor and developer confidence in the NWS market,it also confirms market confidence "that Local agents expressed concern about the limited portfolio of sites and supply that currently exists across NWS for the sub-region's next phase of growth and development (i.e. over the next 5 to 10 years), and where the next strategic development opportunity will come from"*.

7.29 of the EGA also reconfirms that *"Analysis presented within the emerging Coast to Capital LIS evidence base shows that recent office take up across the whole LEP area has been for mid-to-lower quality stock, driven by a lack of higher quality stock across the region (Figure 7.2).*

This shows that despite recent downturns and inactivity due to COVID, strong investor demand and confidence in the area is present.

Para 10.43 commits MSDC to support the economic function of the sub region both now and in the future. *"The NWS sub-region is an economically successful location and continues to offer significant future growth potential over the period to 2036. In the context of the NPPF and the requirement to plan positively for growth, it is incumbent on the three local authorities to consider ways in which this growth can be accommodated, both to meet indigenous business needs and to cater for footloose investment that operates across and within the sub-region"*. The STP under SA9 is the only opportunity within adopted and emerging Local Plan frameworks to deliver such a STP.

The EGA update also recognises the role of the STP and states in paras 10.57-10.59 *"employment development of a strategic scale is also proposed at Burgess Hill in Mid Sussex, through the form of a Science and Technology Park west of Burgess Hill on the A2300. This was allocated as a broad location in the Mid Sussex District Plan (policy DP1)".* It goes on in para 10.58 to recognise that such a development could impact positively on the wider region and beyond, supporting high end economic and business growth across the Coast to Capital and South East LEP areas, and in para 10.59 that *"The scale and nature of proposed (B class) uses on the Science and Technology Park site suggests that any future development could feasibly accommodate occupiers seeking a location within the wider NWS commercial property market area, albeit the focus on science and technology activity means that the site is likely to serve the needs of specific sector based occupiers rather than 'general market' needs."*

The unique offer of the STP allows the current Science Park gap in the region to be realised in the Plan period and beyond, despite any current downturn as a result of COVID.

We therefore do not consider the short term impact of Covid-19 on the local economy will be significant, especially over the short to medium term and the pandemic does not justify any change to policy SA9. The STP regional aspiration is not met anywhere else and should be allocated in the DPD under SA9 to allow a much needed opportunity to deliver a sustainable and accessible STP.

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Our offices:

Birmingham

Edmund House
12-22 Newhall Street
Birmingham B3 3EF
T: +44 (0)121 654 1065

Crawley

Unit 4 Peveril Court
6-8 London Road
Crawley
West Sussex RH10 8JE
T: +44 (0)1293 612600

Woking

One Crown Square
Woking
Surrey GU21 6HR
T: +44 (0)1483 446800

Heathrow

450 Bath Road
West Drayton
Heathrow UB7 0EB
T: +44 (0)20 8564 8300

London

2nd Floor, 33 Cavendish Square
Marylebone
London W1G 0PW
T: +44 (0)20 3589 0050

Portsmouth

Lakeside North Harbour
Western Road
Portsmouth PO6 3EN
T: +44 (0)23 9220 3200

Reading

550 Thames Valley Park Drive
Reading RG6 1PT
T: +44 (0)118 909 7400

Southampton

Savannah House
3 Ocean Way
Southampton
SO14 3TJ
T: +44 (0)23 8082 0900

Bournemouth

170 Magna Road
Bournemouth
Wimborne BH21 3AP
T: +44 (0)1202 558262

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