

4.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

4.1 SCOPE

4.1.1 This Chapter of the **Environmental Statement** outlines the main alternatives that have been studied on behalf of the applicant and indicates the main reasons for the selection of the application site and the form of the development proposed.

4.1.2 The appropriate scope of this is defined by adopted and emerging planning policy. In this respect, the principle and broad direction of growth for a Sustainable Urban Extension has been identified through the adopted **Regional Plan for the East Midlands** (March 2009). The adopted Regional Plan states at paragraph 4.2.28, *'in considering the areas for search for these urban extensions, regard has been had to an assessment of constraints and opportunities around Leicester. The best opportunities to meet the bulk of the additional provision for the PUA lie to the west of Leicester in Blaby...'*

4.1.3 The emerging **CSS** identifies that a Sustainable Urban Extension of 4,500 homes and associated development is located to the north of the M69 and west of the M1 (Policy 3), and a Strategic Employment Site is located to the south of the M69 (Policy 4). The evidence base both in support of the **Regional Plan** and the **CSS** evaluates alternative sites. A summary of the assessment of strategic alternatives is provided in the draft submission version of the **CSS** at Appendix 6 - Alternative Options Dismissed, and Appendix 6a - SUE / SES Options Considered. The plan on page 73 of the emerging **CSS** (Submission consultation draft) identifies the SUE and the SES, and the key plan on page 75 also identifies the location of the SES and SUE.

4.1.4 Consequently, this Chapter outlines the alternative scales and extents for the Project that has been studied. The broad nature of the development (as an SUE and SES) and its general location are not reconsidered having being established through policy.

4.2 SCALE

4.2.1 The Project proposes 4,250 new homes and related facilities. This is consistent with the requirements of the Regional Plan and the emerging **CSS**, which envisaged a development of 4,500 new homes. A further contiguous site not within the control of the applicant could accommodate around 250 new homes in our estimation, and would therefore meet the objectives and policy within the emerging plan. The assessment considers the impact of this additional development.

4.2.2 Development at this scale works to the environmental capacity thresholds identified for the site and considered through this **Environmental Statement**. The assessment of impacts shows that the development does not give rise to any significant negative environmental impacts and those impacts that do arise can be readily mitigated. In summary, environmental capacity exists to accommodate a development of this scale.

- 4.2.3 Importantly, at this scale the development is capable of accommodating and providing for a full range of local facilities including a range of new shops, health care, primary schools and a secondary school, and supports a good quality bus service. A smaller development threatens the viability for provision of a secondary school and affects the ability to deliver high quality facilities to serve the new population.
- 4.2.4 The scale of the development also allows for a greater range of commercial facilities on site including shops, financial/professional services, food and drink outlets and other leisure facilities than could be supported by a smaller population. In addition, the larger scale population supports health provision within the development and a full range of community facilities to serve the new residents. The need to travel to alternative facilities is reduced in accordance with sustainability objectives.
- 4.2.5 Provision of facilities and the school in particular, enables the development to meet local needs within and beyond the development, and makes a considerable contribution to developing a local sense of community within the development.
- 4.2.6 The provision of a Strategic Employment Site (SES) within the development, and of a significant scale ensures the development is attractive to large-scale employers and those with regional and national requirements. This is likely to attract businesses with a higher proportion of higher skilled employees and therefore contribute to meeting regional and sub-regional economic development objectives. The accompanying report from King Sturge demonstrates that the 21 hectare SES proposal meets the needs identified for this type of employment provision.
- 4.2.7 The scale of the SES offers an opportunity for a high proportion of trips to work to be 'internalised' within the development, reducing impacts on surrounding roads. It provides local employment opportunities and meets the strategic needs for a high quality, well-located and commercially attractive strategic employment site.
- 4.2.8 The applicant has also not considered inclusion of land held by others either to the north or west of the development as this is not considered as suitable as the proposed site. Alternative sites would give rise to increased impacts, particularly on the A47 and on Leicester Forest East, which affect the ability to deliver the proposed scale of development and have therefore not been considered.
- 4.2.9 A reduced provision of housing on the site also affects the council's own emerging spatial strategy and would necessitate greater housing provision within existing communities over and above that identified in the emerging **CSS** either within and adjacent to the PUA, or outside the PUA. This contradicts the council's own assessment of urban capacity and impacts on those settlements receiving greater numbers of new homes. As the project seeks to accommodate the defined requirements, the impacts of an alternative 'dispersed' strategy has not been evaluated or assessed.

4.3 EMPLOYMENT LAND

- 4.3.1 A Strategic Employment Site of some 21 hectares net is provided within the development, as well as opportunities for further employment development within the proposed district centre and local centres. The SES provides for a range of employment uses including B1, B2 and B8 type development. The balances of different types of employment development will be considered in response to demand to ensure opportunities for a full range of employment types are made available at the site and no single type dominates the development. The amount of B1 office space will also be controlled to ensure the development does not affect regeneration proposals for Leicester city centre. The proposals envisage a high quality of design and provision for clean industries. While alternative mixes of employment development are possible these do not reflect the objectives for the SES nor the regeneration plans for the city centre and have not therefore been assessed.
- 4.3.2 The scale of the site compares with a requirement for a site of some 20 hectares identified in the emerging CSS. This provision meets both the likely employment generating requirements of the development itself and also meets the strategic requirements to provide a good supply of employment land to meet wider needs of the sub-region. Higher density development may result from variations to the mix, and the **Transport Assessment** has considered development of up to 100,000 sq. m and the results are reported in **Chapter 15: Traffic and Transport** and the **Transport Assessment** itself (document 11).
- 4.3.3 The SES is seen as an integral element of the Project and is located at a principal gateway to the proposals in the south. The site can be developed early with an access from Leicester Lane. It is connected to development north of the M69 initially by the existing farm accommodation bridge which allows single file traffic, walking and cycling access, and then by the proposed M69 bridge. The employment development allows for more sustainable development of the SUE, reducing the need to travel for employment and within a reasonable walking and cycling range, with good quality public transport links. The provision of the M69 bridge also reduces through traffic from the north passing through Enderby providing benefits to the town.
- 4.3.4 Without the SES as part of the development then local residents would need to travel further to work and the opportunities for a more self-contained development reduced. The employment development provides an opportunity to create a high quality entrance to the proposals from the south and to optimise the benefits of new investment with new employment development stimulating new investment in the SUE and in other local facilities through a larger local working population.
- 4.3.5 While a smaller scale of employment development might be conceived this would fail to achieve the Council's own objectives for a Strategic Employment Site and therefore a smaller site has not been considered.

4.4 OTHER LAND USES

4.4.1 The nature and scale of the other uses proposed as part of the Project derives from those necessary to support the anticipated future population. Reduction in the facilities would affect the sustainability and viability of the community and increase pressure on facilities provided in neighboring communities, or lead to a reduction in the scale of the development accordingly. As the development is scaled to respond to the environmental capacity of the site and surroundings, and to meet the requirements generated by the population, the proposals are considered to represent an optimum mix to achieve the objectives of the **CSS** and deliver sustainable and viable development.

4.5 EXTENT

4.5.1 The Project works within the extent of the SUE defined by the emerging **CSS** and provides the scale of SES envisaged by the **CSS** within the location to the south of the M69. The Project is defined by clear boundaries with Leicester Forest East to the north, M1 to the east, Leicester Lane to the south and a combination of Beggars Lane, farmland, the Warrens Industrial Estate and Enderby Park to the west of the Project. These boundaries, along with the broader topographical context, provide containment to the development which ensures its impacts are manageable and that the development can be well-connected with the urban area, and also able to maintain the identity of surrounding communities while creating its own identity.

4.5.2 The proposed extent of the development contains all the necessary development and responds to the identified constraints particularly the wish to separate the development from Leicester Forest East, set development back from noise constraints from the M1 and M69, avoiding the estimated extent of flood risk and to responding to the visual envelope created by the setting. The location of facilities within the development makes them readily accessible to surrounding communities with linkages and retained footpaths allowing the development to be well-connected.

4.5.3 The Project also allows for extensive parkland areas to be created within the development and helping to define its boundaries to the north and west. In some cases the parkland coincides with the extent of potential flooding but in others it reflects requirements for a green setting for the development, protecting existing features such as major trees, woodlands and related habitats. The amounts of green infrastructure exceed the minimum requirements because of these constraints and the wish to create a high quality setting for the development. This makes a considerable contribution to strategic green infrastructure and also contributes to the character of the development. Given the constraints there is little or no opportunity to reduce the extent of the development and meet the requirements for a development of this scale.