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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document summarises the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of a proposed large scale, mixed use development to the north west of Huntingdon, in Cambridgeshire.

1.2 The Proposed Development is known as Alconbury Weald. The following two plans show its strategic location and its detailed boundary respectively:

Figure 1: Strategic Location
Figure 2: Detailed Boundary
1.3 The purpose of an EIA is to assess the likely significant environmental effects of a development proposal. The scope of the Alconbury Weald EIA has been informed by a Scoping Opinion issued by Huntingdonshire District Council in February 2012.

1.4 The full findings of the Alconbury Weald EIA are reported in an Environmental Statement (ES). The Alconbury Weald ES can be obtained free of charge on disc from:

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2. THE SITE

2.1 The Site is large, comprising some 580 hectares (around 1420 acres). It consists of two main elements: the former Airfield (including the Runway Approach Land) at Alconbury, which is currently in a range of employment and storage uses; and neighbouring farmland to the south east of the former Airfield. The following plan shows the key features within the Site and its immediate environs:
3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The Proposed Development comprises, in summary: up to 290,000sqm of employment floorspace, including data storage and a materials recovery demonstration centre and up to 5,000 dwellings, including sheltered/extra care accommodation; a mixed use hub and mixed use neighbourhood facilities, featuring retail, commercial, leisure, health, place of worship and community uses; non-residential institutions including primary schools, nurseries, a secondary school and land reserved for post 16 education provision; open spaces, woodlands and sports provision; a heritage area and retained listed buildings; new vehicular access points from Ermine Street and the A141, with other new non-vehicular access points; associated facilities and infrastructure, comprising utilities including gas, electricity, water, sewerage and telecommunications, energy centres, a water tower, highway improvements and diversion to existing utilities where necessary; a reserve site for a railway station and ancillary uses; and associated demolition and groundworks.

3.2 Outline Planning Permission is sought. All detailed Matters (Access, Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale) are reserved for future determination.

3.3 The Parameter Plan overleaf has provided the basis for the EIA of the Proposed Development. As its name suggests, this plan sets the broad parameters for the Proposed Development, showing the broad location of proposed land uses, accesses and facilities.

3.4 An inset plan on the Parameter Plan defines maximum building heights across the Proposed Development. Maximum and minimum building heights, frontage lengths and building widths/depths are specified in a Building Envelope Schedule. A Development Areas Schedule defines a series of zones across the Site and the proposed range and scale of development or other land uses within each zone. A set of Spatial Principles contains further parameters for the layout and disposition of land uses and the inter-relationships between them. The EIA takes account of all this information in assessing the effects of the Proposed Development.
Figure 4: Parameter Plan
3.5 A wide range of measures to avoid, reduce or remedy potential significant adverse environmental effects has been incorporated into the Proposed Development. The EIA takes account of those mitigation measures in assessing the effects of the Proposed Development.

3.6 A set of principles within the Design & Access Statement (DAS) for the Proposed Development provides a further level of design control that forms a reference point for subsequent detailed designs. The DAS Principles are consistent with the Development Specification and the EIA mitigation measures.

3.7 The EIA assumes construction of the Proposed Development would take place over a 20-year period from 2013-14 until 2034. An accelerated, 12-year construction scenario involving completion of the Proposed Development in 2026 is also assessed. There is no specified order of phasing of development.

3.8 Construction activities are assumed to include the creation of lit compounds, the demolition of unlisted buildings outside the proposed Heritage Area, the breaking up of runways and taxiways, the crushing and re-use of concrete, the erection of hoardings, the control of dust and the avoidance of other unnecessary environmental impacts.

3.9 Construction would be regulated by a Code of Construction Practice (CoCP), the approval of which by Huntingdonshire District Council would be a condition on any Outline planning permission for the Proposed Development.

4. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 The planning policy context for the Proposed Development is set by the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (2012), the statutory Development Plan and a range of other material planning considerations.

4.3 Other material considerations include the District Council’s abandoned draft Development Management Policies (2010), its emerging Local Plan to 2036, its Supplementary Planning Documents and Supplementary Planning Guidance notes, and the Government’s 2011 designation of an Enterprise Zone over large parts of the Site (Development Areas 1, 2 and 3 on the Parameter Plan).

5. **EIA APPROACH**

5.1 The EIA has been rigorous, systematic, objective and iterative. The direct and indirect effects of the Proposed Development have been assessed, as have interactive effects between assessment topics and between the construction and parallel occupation of the Proposed Development.

5.2 The cumulative effects of the Proposed Development and other nearby development proposals (Northbridge, Hinchingbrooke Community Campus, Lancaster Way, North of Ermine Street, North of Spittals Way, Bearcroft Farm (Godmanchester), Huntingdon Town Centre West and RAF Brampton) have also been assessed. Where significant cumulative effects have been identified, these are summarised below.

5.3 Effects have been assessed as adverse or beneficial and of major, moderate, minor or negligible significance, in accordance with recognised EIA methodology and applying professional judgement, taking into account the magnitude of predicted changes to baseline conditions and the sensitivity of particular receptors to those changes. For example, a change of High magnitude affecting a receptor of High sensitivity would generally result in an effect of Major significance. Conversely, a change of Low magnitude affecting a receptor of Low sensitivity would generally result in an effect of Minor significance.

5.4 Four alternative sites have been considered (RAF Upwood; RAF Wyton; the proposed large scale southerly extension to Godmanchester; and the completion of the eastern expansion of St Neots).
5.5 Five alternative forms of development within the Site have also been considered (ongoing occupation of the former Airfield by its permitted employment and storage uses; implementation of the 2003 permissions for warehousing-led development; confinement of development to the Enterprise Zone; limitation of development to the former Airfield; and restriction of development to employment uses).

5.6 These alternative sites and forms of development were each rejected, principally because they do not respond as fully as the Proposed Development to the Enterprise Zone designation or do not secure its successful and rapid delivery.

6. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS**

6.1 The socio-economic effects of the Proposed Development would be wholly beneficial. In particular, some 8,000 jobs offering a wide range of employment opportunities are predicted to be generated, as well as around 800 jobs during construction. The provision of up to 5,000 new homes of all types and tenures would be a further beneficial effect of major significance.

6.2 The provision of a wide range of education, health, recreation, community and retail facilities would also be beneficial, including for local residents around the Site. The timely provision of these facilities would be secured by conditions and legal obligations attached to any Outline planning permission. These measures would prevent any potential significant adverse effects that might arise from the provision of facilities lagging behind the occupation of homes.

7. **LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL**

7.1 Construction would have a minor adverse effect on landscape character and a moderate adverse effect on visual amenity, arising from the presence of vehicles, cranes, compounds, partially constructed buildings and disturbed areas of ground.

7.2 Following the completion of the Proposed Development, a moderate beneficial effect on landscape character would result, owing to the replacement of a haphazardly occupied former Airfield by a comprehensively masterplanned new development exhibiting high design quality and featuring extensive areas of green space (up to 270ha).
7.3 Also following completion, the moderate adverse effect on visual amenity during construction would reduce to minor adverse significance, as new woodland and tree planting forming part of the Proposed Development reaches maturity over a 15-year period.

7.4 When considered cumulatively, the Proposed Development and the Northbridge, north of Ermine Street and north of Spittals Way development proposals may give rise to a perception of coalescence between Huntingdon and Great Stukeley.

8. ECOLOGY

8.1 The Proposed Development would have negligible effects on the conservation status of the two nearby Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs): Great Stukeley Railway Cutting, adjacent to the south-eastern boundary of the Site; and Monks Wood & The Odd Quarter, a little over 1km north of the former Airfield.

8.2 Great Stukeley Railway Cutting SSSI would be buffered by a 10m corridor of managed grassland along its length, preventing potential significant adverse effects on its conservation status. The possible loss of 1ha of SSSI to one of two alternative road accesses from the A141 Spittals Way would be compensated by the provision and management of 3ha of replacement scrub/grassland, again mitigating potential significant adverse effects on its conservation status. Monks Wood & The Odd Quarter SSSI is sufficiently removed from the Site to not require any specific mitigation measures for its conservation status to be safeguarded.

8.3 Two adverse effects would arise on particular species: Skylark would be displaced from its existing habitats on the grasslands between the runways on the former Airfield, resulting in a reduction of breeding densities; and Brown Hare would also be displaced from its existing habitats in this part of the Site. New grassland to be established within other parts of the Site, which would benefit both species, would limit these adverse effects to minor significance.
8.4 These minor adverse effects would be outweighed by beneficial effects on several ecological sites, habitats and species, including Hill Wood and Long Coppice County Wildlife Site (CWS) on the northern boundary of the Site, grassland and ancient semi-natural woodland habitats, bats, newts, reptiles and invertebrates. Each of these sites, habitats and species would benefit from measures integral to the Proposed Development, including measures forming part of the CoCP, extensive tree and woodland planting, and habitat creation and management. These measures would prevent potential significant adverse effects on each of these sites, habitats and species.

9. AGRICULTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES

9.1 There would be a negligible effect on soil resources within the Site, as soil would be re-used within the Proposed Development and its quality safeguarded, in accordance with good practice on soil handling. These measures would prevent potential significant adverse effects on the quantity and quality of soil resources within the Site.

9.2 The loss of some 147ha of agricultural land classified as Grade 2 or 3a (the “best and most versatile land”) to open space uses and the loss of some 19ha of such land to built development would be moderate adverse effects. These effects should, however, be considered in the context of the relative abundance of the best and most versatile agricultural land in Huntingdonshire.

9.3 When considered cumulatively, the Proposed Development and the Northbridge, North of Ermine Street, North of Spittals Way and Beascroft Farm development proposals would result in the loss of significant areas of best and most versatile agricultural land around Huntingdon. However, this effect should be considered in the context of the Proposed Development taking place on a Site that is, in large part (a little over 70%), non-agricultural and previously-developed.
10. TREES AND WOODLAND

10.1 The planting and management of around 90ha of new woodland and of more than 500,000 new trees within the Site would be a moderate beneficial effect. The latter would greatly outnumber the 25 or so individual trees and 100 or so tree groups potentially affected by the Proposed Development, while the removal of poorer quality trees would itself be beneficial from the perspective of sound management of the tree resource within the Site.

10.2 The CoCP that would be part of the Proposed Development would ensure any effects on trees arising from changes in ground level and soil compaction, physical damage, pollution, chemical application or spillage, drainage changes, pests and diseases or health and safety in site management would be negligible, preventing potential significant adverse effects in each of these respects that could arise in the absence of the CoCP. Nuisance caused by trees to occupiers within the Proposed Development would be an adverse effect, but one of only minor significance.

11. ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

11.1 The Proposed Development would have adverse effects on the settings of three listed buildings in Little Stukeley (Pringle Farmhouse, Pinks Cottage and the Church of St Martin). The proposed woodland planting on the perimeter of the Site nearest these buildings would reduce these adverse effects from moderate to minor significance.

11.2 These effects would be outweighed by two beneficial effects on designated heritage assets within the Site. The refurbishment and restoration of the Grade II listed World War 2 Watch Office and the provision of a cricket pitch to enhance its setting would result in a major beneficial effect on its significance as a heritage asset. The management and interpretation of the Scheduled Monument of Prestley Wood, a medieval moated site surrounded by a copse to the south east of the former Airfield, would be a moderate beneficial effect.
11.3 Effects on all other heritage assets within and around the Site would be negligible. In particular, the settings of the three Grade II* listed buildings within the Site (the Avionics Building and two Hardened Aircraft Shelters) would be protected by their inclusion within the proposed Heritage Area, within which no demolition of buildings would take place. Archaeological features lost to the Proposed Development would be investigated, excavated and recorded, while buildings to be demolished would also be recorded and historic artefacts exhibited, thereby preventing potential significant adverse effects on the status of these heritage assets that would arise from an absence of any such recording.

12. TRANSPORT

12.1 In accordance with recognised methodology (including the use of the Cambridge Sub Regional Model (CSRM) to predict traffic flows), the EIA has assessed the particular effects of the Proposed Development on the degree of severance presented by roads; delays experienced by vehicle drivers and pedestrians; amenity, fear and intimidation experienced by pedestrians; personal injury collisions and safety; and hazardous loads. A separate Transport Assessment has been undertaken, which assesses the effects of the Proposed Development on the operation of the local and strategic transport networks. A factor in the consideration of transport effects has been the uncertainty over the A14 enhancements and this has informed the approach to mitigation in order to respond to changing circumstances.

12.2 Construction would give rise to negligible effects on all of the matters assessed. An indicative first phase of just under 900 homes and 80,000sqm of employment floorspace in the south-western part of the former Airfield assumed to be delivered by 2016 would have a minor adverse effect on severance at the Rusts Lane Interchange Overpass, but the effects of that indicative first phase on all of the other matters assessed would be negligible.

12.3 The approach to mitigation beyond the indicative first phase includes the ongoing monitoring of changes in transport circumstances (including proposals for the A14) and the bringing forward of specific mitigation measures for future phases in response to those changes.
12.4 On completion and subject to the operation of this adaptive approach, the Proposed Development would give rise to minor adverse effects on: severance and pedestrian delay at Rusts Lane west of the A14, at the Rusts Lane Interchange Overpass and on St Peter’s Road north of the B1044; fear and intimidation at the first two of these locations; pedestrian amenity at these two locations and on the A141; and driver delay more generally across the network. The completed Development would, however, give rise to minor beneficial effects on levels of fear and intimidation on the A141 east of Ermine Street.

12.5 These assessments of effects take account of relevant measures forming part of the Proposed Development, including those measures within a Framework Travel Plan directed at reducing reliance on private car travel, as well as measures within the CoCP and measures directed at improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, enhancing capacity on the highway network and managing the demand for travel across that network. In combination, these measures would limit any adverse effects to those of minor significance identified, preventing any more significant adverse effects from arising.

13. AIR QUALITY

13.1 The CoCP would limit adverse effects on air quality during construction - dust generation, elevated particulate matter concentrations and contaminant releases - to minor levels.

13.2 Once the Proposed Development begins to be occupied, the effects of emissions from road traffic upon sensitive residential and ecological receptors are assessed as being negligible, as are the effects of emissions from the proposed energy centres and of odour from the proposed waste water treatment works.

13.3 In this respect, emissions from energy centres would be limited to specified quantities below which significant environmental effects would be unlikely to arise, while the proposed waste water treatment works is likely to be odourless beyond its boundary.
14. **NOISE AND VIBRATION**

14.1 The CoCP would limit noise and vibration during construction to negligible levels.

14.2 Once the Proposed Development begins to be occupied, the incorporation of appropriate noise mitigation measures including physical barriers, set backs from noise sources, careful orientation and suitable glazing would limit effects on noise-sensitive receptors (including homes, schools and the place of worship and library forming part of the Proposed Development) to negligible levels. The incorporation of these mitigation measures would prevent any significant adverse effects on these noise-sensitive receptors.

14.3 Night-time noise from the proposed energy centres would be limited to specified levels, below which significant adverse effects would be unlikely. As for air quality, these levels would be the subject of a condition on any Outline planning permission for the Proposed Development.

14.4 Vibration, including from the proposed employment uses, is assessed as being negligible.

15. **HYDROLOGY**

15.1 Again, measures within the CoCP would limit any adverse effects on flood risk, water quality and water demand during construction to negligible levels. Those measures would prevent any significant adverse effects in these respects that might arise in the absence of the CoCP.

15.2 The proposed surface water management strategy would reduce the peak rate of discharge from the Site by around 65% relative to the current situation, which would be a minor beneficial effect in reducing flood risk downstream of the Site.

15.3 The preferred treatment of foul water discharges at an on-site waste water treatment works would ensure a negligible effect. The alternative solution of pumping flows to be treated at the existing Huntingdon Treatment Works would constitute a minor adverse effect, due to the works and associated carbon emissions associated with that solution.
15.4 Effects on water quality would be negligible owing to the incorporation of SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems), which would filter, store and treat surface water, safeguarding water quality and preventing any potential contamination of water arising from increased foul water discharges from the Site.

15.5 Minor adverse effects in respect of water demand would arise, although the water tower forming part of the Proposed Development would minimise that demand and thereby reduce the degree of off-site reinforcement that would be required to water supply infrastructure. More generally, measures within the integrated Energy, Water and Waste Strategy for the Proposed Development, including greywater and rainfall recycling, as well as the incorporation of other water efficiency measures, would reduce water demand and thereby mitigate potential major adverse effects on water resources in this water-stressed area.

15.6 Increased water demand would constitute a minor adverse cumulative effect of the Proposed Development and the other nearby development proposals, given the pressure on water resources in the wider area.

16. LIGHTING

16.1 The CoCP and appropriate lighting design at the detailed planning stage would ensure any effects during construction arising from light intrusion, glare or sky glow would be negligible. These measures would prevent potential significant adverse effects on sensitive receptors, including homes, wildlife, astronomers, road users, and train drivers and passengers.

16.2 Appropriate lighting design at the detailed planning stage would ensure any longer term effects arising from light intrusion would be negligible, preventing potential significant adverse effects on existing residential receptors on Pringle Way in Little Stukeley and on new receptors within the Proposed Development. Minor adverse effects arising from glare would be limited to road users, whereas potential moderate adverse effects on road users and train drivers would arise in the absence of appropriate lighting design. Minor adverse effects arising from sky glow would be limited to observers in the direction of Abbots Ripton, to the north east of the Site, whereas potential major adverse effects would arise more widely around the Site in terms of sky glow in the absence of appropriate lighting design.
17. GROUND CONDITIONS

17.1 A minor beneficial effect of the Proposed Development would arise from the scope it presents to investigate and fully remediate any remnant contamination, in particular within the former Airfield. This measure would prevent potential significant adverse effects that would arise from the continued presence of any such contamination within the Site.

17.2 The construction of each element of the Proposed Development in accordance with relevant British Standards, best practice guidelines and Building Regulations requirements would ensure negligible effects on ground stability, preventing any potential significant adverse effects if such standards, guidelines and requirements were not observed. The presence within the Site of clay soils susceptible to swelling and shrinkage gives rise to a residual risk of ground movements and resultant effects on building foundations, albeit of negligible overall significance.

18. WASTE

18.1 Demolition within the Site would generate some 2 million tonnes of material suitable for re-use or recycling. A high proportion of this would be re-used as part of the construction of the Proposed Development, which would generate some 179,000 tonnes of waste, of which at least 75% would be re-used or recycled.

18.2 At operational stage, around 5,000 tonnes per annum of domestic municipal waste and some 1,900 tonnes per annum of commercial municipal waste would be generated, of which the recycling of 75% is targeted by 2020.

18.3 The effect of these volumes of waste generation on landfill treatment capacity in the area, taking into account likely levels of recycling and re-use, is assessed as minor adverse during construction and negligible at operational stage.
19. ENERGY

19.1 The total energy demand for the Proposed Development is assessed as a little under 50 GWh of electricity and around 55 GWh of gas. In accordance with relevant planning policy, at least 10% of the energy demand should be derived from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources. The effects of the Proposed Development in respect of energy have been assessed against both this 10% contribution scenario and a 100% scenario which the Applicant aspires to achieve during the lifetime of the Proposed Development.

19.2 In the 100% scenario, in which up to three energy centres could be provided within the Proposed Development, minor adverse effects would arise in respect of visual amenity from flues/stacks at the energy centres. The supply of a significant proportion of energy requirements from low or zero carbon sources would be a moderate beneficial effect, especially in the 100% scenario, contributing to the decarbonisation of energy supply, increasing the security of that supply and reducing fuel poverty. Even in the 10% scenario, the Proposed Development would significantly reduce per capita CO₂ emissions in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, which would also be a moderate beneficial effect.

20. CONCLUSION

20.1 Four effects of the Proposed Development (job generation, housing provision, population increase and enhancement of the heritage status of the World War 2 Watch Office) would be of major beneficial significance. A further fourteen effects (education provision, health provision, open space provision, community facility provision, landscape character change, ancient woodland effects, newt impacts, reptile effects, invertebrate impacts, woodland planting, tree removal, Prestley Wood management, reduced per capita CO₂ emissions and energy generation) would be of moderate beneficial significance. No residual effects would be of major adverse significance. Only three effects of the Proposed Development (visual amenity during construction and losses of agricultural land) would be of moderate adverse significance. All of its other effects would be of either minor (whether adverse or beneficial) or negligible significance.
20.2 The beneficial effects of the Proposed Development therefore considerably outweigh its adverse effects. The Proposed Development has also been evaluated against each of the 21 sustainability objectives being used by Huntingdonshire District Council in its Sustainability Appraisal of its emerging Local Plan. This evaluation found the Proposed Development would contribute positively to all 21 objectives, with especially significant contributions to more than half (13) of these.