2013 was a positive year in the logistics market with a take up of around 20 million sq ft of floor space in the UK. The market consists largely of buildings of more than 100,000 sq ft that are located to close to major transport routes.

Logistics related land use raises a number of interesting planning and EIA considerations. Drawing on Savills’ experience, this article outlines the challenges often faced.

**Defining the Scheme**

For the EIA of outline applications, careful consideration needs to be given to the use of scheme parameters. These will often relate to the maximum building height and floor space which will need to provide an element of flexibility for future occupiers whilst allowing a robust testing of the proposals by the EIA. Other typical parameters may relate to access, movement through the site, strategic landscaping, drainage proposals and noise. However, for schemes with an identified occupier, a bespoke design can allow a fixed scheme to be assessed.

**Socio-economic Effects**

The number of jobs generated by a storage and distribution unit may vary significantly. If an occupier is known, then it will be possible to provide an accurate estimate of the number and type of jobs likely to be created.

However, it is common for outline proposals to seek a broad range of employment uses (B1, B2, B8); in effect, widening the potential for disparity between the ‘best case scenario’ (i.e. the highest number of jobs likely to be created, e.g. a greater proportion of B1 uses, which typically have the highest employment density) and a ‘worst case scenario’ (i.e. a greater proportion of less labour intensive B8 uses).

Unless an indicative schedule of use is available, it may be more appropriate to identify a range in the likely job numbers. Warehouse development will create a high proportion of new roles at elementary and operative level, with a small proportion of managerial roles.

Whilst job creation may be significantly lower than other traditional employment uses (i.e. office or industrial development), large warehouse development will often bring significant investment to an area. This can benefit the local economy in terms of the multiplier effects in supply chains and promoting an area’s wider appeal to business.

**Landscape and Visual Impact**

By virtue of their scale and mass, it is likely that the assessment of the development on landscape and visual receptors will be required. There are various design and landscaping measures that can be adopted to mitigate potential impacts. For example, the size and scale of warehouse elevations can be designed with changes in colour and texture that reduce the overall appearance of mass and scale of large buildings.

Any ancillary office facilities can be located as to act as focal points, addressing the main public vantage points as well as providing easy and efficient access. Service areas can be positioned away from view and landscaping buffers used to reinforce the boundaries and provide screening from sensitive receptors.

**Traffic and Transport Impacts**

The location of a warehouse close to nationally and regional transport links and hubs is likely to be a key requirement for potential occupiers. However, the impact of the 24 hour use of a site by a large proportion of HGV’s is often an important concern, especially for local residents. When there is a known occupier, the impact assessment may consider the type of distribution unit proposed and any specific trip generation and travel patterns it will have.
Noise Impacts

In new warehouses, most of the goods handling is done inside and so noise emissions have generally declined. However, noise often requires assessment, in terms of changes in traffic noise and operational activities such as vehicle manoeuvring, loading and unloading. Most occupiers will require a facility that allows them to operate 24 hours a day, and therefore both daytime and night time impacts need to be considered.

Where there is a named occupier, it is very useful for noise consultants to visit other warehouses / depots that they operate. Observations of their HGV movement around the site and the nature of external activities are then used to inform the assessment of potential impacts. These may then be reduced by inherent mitigation, such as the orientation of loading bays away from sensitive receptors. Additional mitigation may also be possible, such as undertaking that delivery vehicles are fitted with a broadband reversing warning in place of the traditional high pitched bleepers.

Sustainability

Storage and distribution warehouses are large, functional buildings, hence their common description as ‘sheds’. However, there is growing recognition of the importance of distinctive and high quality buildings to promote company image, attract investment and appeal to high calibre staff. Indeed, occupiers will often require BREEAM ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very Good’ accreditation and therefore most new warehouses are designed to achieve high levels of environmental performance.

Laura Price, Savills, January 2014.

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