Key issues:

The original route to permitting the whole of the International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP) was via a Development Consent Order to be determined by the Secretary of State under the Planning Act 2008. An EIA Scoping Report had been prepared and a Scoping Response received from the Planning Inspectorate. In response to the largest employer in the region, Nissan, subsequently accelerating their future production and model plans at their adjoining manufacturing plant, there was a need to alter this approach and to split the site into two parts, IAMP ONE and IAMP TWO, and to bring IAMP ONE forward in as short a timeframe as possible through a Town and Country Planning Act 1990 application to the Local Authority.

As such, Golder was required to undertake a robust EIA and to compile the Environmental Statement for IAMP ONE, within a highly demanding timeframe, suitable for consideration as part of the planning submission. The draft ES chapters were issued for client and legal review within 8-10 weeks following our formal appointment.

Purpose of the project:

The IAMP ONE project is set to create a world class location in Sunderland where the automotive supply chain and advanced manufacturing businesses will be able to innovate and thrive, benefiting from cluster co-location.

The principal uses at the IAMP will be for the production, supply chain and distribution activities directly related to the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors, as defined below:

- Nano-engineering;
- Additive/precision manufacturing;
- Design/management of supply chains;
- Green manufacturing;
- Next generation electronics; and
- Continuous manufacture of pharmaceuticals/bio manufacturing.

IAMP as a whole is anticipated to create approximately 7,850 jobs and to contribute to the long-term economic success of the North East of England region.
Key issues continued:

The IAMP ONE site consisted of previously allocated Green Belt land dominated by arable fields that supported a large farmland bird population, together with winter passage birds, barn owls and bats. Although most of the previous ecological surveys conducted across IAMP were in date and accepted as baseline data by the County Ecologist, updated winter passage surveys were required and a local ecology team was engaged.

Due to the nature of the proposed development footprint comprising large areas of hardstanding, an offsetting scheme was devised to encompass approximately 43 hectares of land immediately adjacent to IAMP ONE for biodiversity habitat creation and landscape enhancements, including screen planting for nearby residential properties. A detailed GIS based calculation of existing habitats to be lost and how these would be created and enhanced within the offset, with a targeted net gain, was included in the work undertaken as part of the EIA. An indicative landscape masterplan for IAMP ONE was also provided with the planning submission.

Additionally, a full suite of archaeological investigation was also needed within this short timeframe, including desk-study research, air photo and LiDAR mapping, geophysical survey and evaluation trenching, liaising with the LA’s archaeological advisor throughout. As such, the staged investigation process had to be programmed to commence immediately and to run seamlessly, all in accordance with various land access constraints that had to be agreed via land agents with multiple land owners and their respective tenants, some of whom were critical of the proposed development.

Throughout the EIA process weekly face-to-face meetings and conference calls were required to keep the client, planning and legal teams abreast of progress and to flag any potential risks to the programme. The client and legal review stage was a significant undertaking and in the closing days prior to submission involved the EIA and client team working alongside one another to finalise the deliverables.

Description of the project:

IAMP ONE is located on 61 hectares of land to the north of Nissan’s existing car manufacturing plant within the administrative boundary of Sunderland Council, and immediately adjacent to South Tyneside.

IAMP ONE is being delivered through a joint venture between Sunderland and South Tyneside Councils, known as IAMP LLP, in conjunction with its development partner, Henry Boot Developments Limited.

The IAMP ONE site, which constitutes the first phase of IAMP, lies wholly within the administrative area of Sunderland. The previous site usage comprises mostly agricultural farmland defined by rectilinear fields and separated by hedgerows and includes part of the former RAF Usworth that was active during the Second World War. Usworth Burn, a tributary of the River Don, forms part of the northern boundary of the IAMP ONE development.

IAMP ONE will comprise up to 156,840 m² of manufacturing floorspace with associated parking, service yards, access roads, landscaping and attenuation basins.

A 21 month build period for the main infrastructure works for IAMP ONE was anticipated, commencing in October 2018 and ending in February 2020.

The IAMP as a whole also includes the acquisition of 110 hectares of adjacent land which will be used to accommodate some of the environmental mitigation required to offset the biodiversity and landscape losses within the IAMP ONE and IAMP TWO developments. This zone, known as the Ecological and Landscape Mitigation Area (ELMA), will continue to remain in the Green Belt.

IAMP ONE was granted planning permission in May 2018.

Subsequently, Golder was also commissioned to prepare the Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) prior to the commencement of site works, containing various measures to minimise the potential effects of construction related activities, including traffic induced noise and dust. The CEMP also included plans to manage and mitigate the potential effects on ecological, cultural heritage, landscape, residential, and other sensitive receptors.
Lessons learnt:

The most challenging aspect of the IAMP ONE project was the short timeframe within which to complete all the baseline studies and impact assessments, in order to present a robust deliverable that met the requirements of stakeholders.

Although benefitting from a Scoping Response for the whole of IAMP, the acceleration of a component part demanded careful programming in order to meet the targeted planning committee date. Regular client calls and meetings with the project delivery team kept the EIA team focussed on their tasks, flagging early data gaps and allowing the schedule to be maintained.

Lessons learnt continued:

A dedicated point of contact between technical specialists and the IAMP ONE design team ensured ongoing changes to the design and application boundary were incorporated into the EIA process efficiently.

Permission to access land to complete site visits and undertake surveys (ecology, archaeology, noise, etc.) was complicated; not all land was available at the same time and land ownership boundaries were constantly shifting as the client was actively engaged in negotiations with owners throughout the EIA process. The assistance of a dedicated agent to co-ordinate and agree access with all relevant parties to meet the EIA timeframe proved invaluable.

The stringent legal review process required immediate consideration of draft ES chapter comments to maintain momentum and remain on schedule. Every single query or suggested alteration demanded a written response from the technical teams within 48 hours of receipt to confirm or otherwise changes made to texts and drawings. Effective internal and external communication and the establishment of consistent data management processes was key to tracking all document changes and keeping on top of the status of each deliverable.

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