EIS Quality Mark Case Study

Addressing socioeconomic issues at Weston Mead Farm

Description of the Project:
The site is identified as an allocation for residential development as part of the ‘Aylesbury north of A41’ strategic allocation within the emerging Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and is designated as a Major Development Area within the saved policies of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan.

In the locality, planning permission has been granted for residential development to the west (15/03806/AOP) and mixed-use development (16/01040/AOP) to the north and east, and therefore the site is located on the periphery of the settlement boundary and represents a sustainable site for development.

As such, an outline planning permission application was prepared for up to 177 dwellings, public open space, play areas, vehicular access of Aston Clinton Road and associated infrastructure. All matters were reserved except for principal means of vehicular access.

The proposal was revised during the preparation of the EIA, from an original scheme that sought 280 dwellings, since only part of the application site was included in the Emerging Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan land allocations.

Purpose of the Project:
Nexus Planning Ltd was commissioned to co-ordinate the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for a major residential development of Land at Weston Mead Farm.

As part of the EIA, Nexus Planning was also appointed to prepare the socioeconomic impact assessment chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES). This case study focuses on Nexus Planning’s preparation of the socioeconomic impact assessment, as opposed to the concurrent role as coordination of the broader EIA.

This process involved determining the socioeconomic impacts of the development and, where adverse impacts were identified, providing appropriate mitigation methods to integrate into the proposal. To identify socioeconomic impacts of the development, Nexus Planning ran the purpose-built socioeconomic model.

While the EIA process has historically focused on the protection of the environment, more account is now being taken of the degree to which development helps to build a strong, competitive economy and communities.

As such, it is essential that EIA’s consider the economic and social benefits of a proposal, including the project’s impact upon existing and future residents, as well as the environment and any interactions between the two.
EIA Learning Outcomes

Key Issues:

One key issue faced by Nexus Planning in preparing the socioeconomic assessment was ensuring a robust and timely assessment in light of continuing changes to the parameter plan for the proposal. Changes to dwelling numbers and housing types affect the socioeconomic model, so it was important that the finalised and most up-to-date parameter plan be used in the final model run.

Other issues faced by the team related to datasets. In particular, the availability of up-to-date data, and comparable data sets (in terms of time periods and geographies) as well as data sensitivity were all issues faced in the preparation of the socioeconomic impact assessment.

Lessons Learnt

One key lesson learnt through this process was the necessity of making the socioeconomic assessment flexible yet robust. Without the parameter plans locked in until late in the development process, parts of the socioeconomic assessment were required to be carried out ahead of time. Given time pressures associated with the work, stages of the assessment, such as the baseline, could be robustly carried out prior to the finalisation of the parameter plan. This process allowed time to be saved in completing Chapter 7 of the ES, so that once the parameter plan was finalised, the socioeconomic model could be run, and the assessment could be completed on time, incorporating any necessary mitigation measures without the need to re-write the entire chapter.

The second lesson learnt was to always check datasets to ensure data is only being compared with like data (specifically in terms of dataset year and geography). This process ensured that all comparisons were fair and robust, which was vital to the thoroughness of the assessment.

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