EIA Quality Mark Case Study

Purfleet

Key Issues:
An EIA screening request was submitted to Thurrock Council (TC) in July 2014 for an opinion as to whether proposals for surface car storage at three sites in Purfleet (Purfleet Farm, the former ExxonMobil lubricants site and the former paper mill site), associated with their existing operations at Purfleet Thames Terminal constituted EIA development. TC subsequently issued four EIA screening opinions to the effect that EIA was not required for the Purfleet Farm or former ExxonMobil lubricants site proposals, but it was for the former paper mill site on the basis of its potential cumulative effect with the Purfleet Centre regeneration scheme (the approved masterplan for which overlapped with the former paper mill site) and also for Purfleet Farm, the former ExxonMobil lubricants site and the former paper mill site collectively, on the basis of potential cumulative effects with the adjacent Purfleet Centre scheme.

PRE subsequently submitted full planning applications for surface car storage areas at the Purfleet Farm and former ExxonMobil lubricants sites. PRE then applied for full planning permission for surface car storage at the former paper mill site and an ES was prepared which considered (1) the cumulative effect of the proposed development at the former paper mill site on the ecological and flood risk mitigation proposed as part of the Purfleet Centre scheme and (2) the cumulative effect of the proposed development at the former paper mill, Purfleet Farm and the former ExxonMobil lubricants sites, and any combined effect on the Purfleet Centre scheme.

However, the planning application was submitted in March 2015 without the ES.

Purpose of the project:
Purfleet Real Estate Ltd (PRE) proposed to construct hard standing for open-air vehicle storage (for up to 1840 car spaces and seven car transporter bays) and install a small pre-fabricated gatehouse, lifting barriers, security fencing, surface water drainage system and lighting columns with CCTV at the 2.4 ha former Paper Mills site at London Road, Purfleet. Landscape planting and habitat creation was also proposed along the western site boundary. The purpose of the application was to accommodate additional capacity for the storage of vehicles imported to the UK via PRE’s nearby Purfleet Thames Terminal port facility.

Description of the site:
The site is located south of the railway line connecting Purfleet and Grays, adjacent to the River Thames, within Purfleet, Thurrock. It lies within an industrial/commercial area with a number of port/industrial related uses on adjacent and nearby sites. The site is bordered by a railway line, unused open space, the sea wall to the River Thames and a site in port/industrial use containing oil storage tanks. A COMAH zone extends from the adjacent site to encompass much of the application site. The closest European designation to the site is the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA, approximately 12km to the east. There are three SSSIs in the vicinity of the site: the West Thurrock Lagoon and Marshes SSSI (900m away), the Inner Thames Marshes SSSI (1.4km away) and the Purfleet Chalk Pits SSSI (600m away). There is a small cluster of three listed buildings north of London Road, close to the junction with the Purfleet Bypass and a small number to the west of Purfleet Station. A section of London Road Purfleet (A1090) near to Jarrah Cottages is designated as an AQMA. Construction was forecast to last four months.
EIA Learning Outcomes

**Lessons learnt:**

TC acknowledged that whilst the former paper mill site was in principle suited to the proposed development use, the site’s role within the outline permission for the Purfleet Centre regeneration scheme was a significant material consideration and that the proposals conflicted with the use of the site for surface water attenuation and riverside park uses, including ecological mitigation.

TC’s screening opinion received confirmed its view that an EIA was required because of the cumulative impact on the adjacent Purfleet Centre scheme, with which the vehicle storage proposals partially overlap. The screening opinion was therefore made on the basis of the PRE proposal co-existing with the Purfleet Centre proposal and removing the land at the paper mills site from the Purfleet Centre project, or at least preventing the use of the land as mitigation for wider development of Purfleet Centre. It was notable that there were no other issues that were deemed to trigger an EIA and that the opinion that EIA was required was limited to this cumulative issue with the Purfleet Centre project. It was in fact acknowledged that the scale of PRE’s proposals and the potential ecological value of the site did not require EIA.

However, to implement the outline permission for Purfleet Centre, the paper mill land must first be acquired by the development partner or the Council. Hence it was not PRE’s proposed use of the land that would prevent the provision of the proposed ecological and drainage mitigation, rather it was the absence of control over the land. To implement the mitigation, the paper mill site would have to be acquired by the development partner or the council, with or without the PRE activities in place.

In reality, the PRE proposals did not need to prevent the implementation of the proposed mitigation for the Purfleet Centre project, indeed it was argued that they could provide a beneficial use for the land until it was needed by the Purfleet Centre project and the necessary site acquisition had taken place.

**Lessons learnt continued:**

Given that the position regarding the ability to bring the site into the Purfleet Centre project would not change with the PRE activities in place, there was no case for there to be any cumulative impact. Should the site be acquired, the development partner and/or Council could implement their scheme and replace the vehicle storage use with the planned ecological and drainage mitigation measures; or indeed with any other uses or variation of uses that were subsequently decided (subject to planning permission).

It should be noted that the PRE proposals did not involve significant changes to the site, such as erection of large buildings, merely reinstatement of a surface suitable for vehicle storage. It was understood that the creation of the mitigation proposed under the Purfleet Centre would involve raising the land levels and the creation of the new surface storage and ancillary development would not prevent this (i.e. it could all be removed easily).

The site conditions that PRE would create would not be significantly different from those that existed at that time and that were considered in the Purfleet Centre ES. Nor would they be a significant obstacle to the creation of the mitigation features required for the Purfleet Centre project. Given that the issue regarding the relationship of the site with the Purfleet Centre project was actually one of land acquisition and timing, it was concluded that there were no cumulative land use or environmental impacts arising from PRE’s proposals. Hence, no ES accompanied the planning application for the vehicle storage, and it was recommended that the proposals were screened again to conclude EIA was not required.

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