

Birmingham Development Plan – Matter G

Further Statement by Birmingham City Council on Birmingham Wheels Park and the Further Statement of the Wheels Operators (Exam 144)

Background

Both the City Council and representatives of the Wheels operators appeared at the Public Examination with regard to Matter G and the following question from the Planning Inspector:

“Issue 13 – Does GA7 take sufficient account of the existing wheeled sports users at the Birmingham Wheels site?”

The City Council propose that the site is brought forward for employment development given the evidenced need for employment land within the city and the significant levels of unemployment and worklessness in the local area. The site has the potential for up to 1.1 million square feet of employment space and 3000 jobs.

At the Public Examination the Inspector asked the two parties to meet to explore if areas of common ground could be agreed. The City Council has put forward a proposed statement of common ground to the occupiers of the Wheels site (Appendix 1). The Wheels occupiers were not willing to agree this statement and put forward an amended proposal to the City Council which was not accepted.

As a result it was recognised by both parties that they were not likely to reach a common position as exchanging further amendments back and forth was not likely to resolve the situation. As a result it was suggested that both parties put forward their final proposed modifications to the Inspector (which the Wheels operators have now done).

Response to Exam 144 from the Wheels Operators

For clarity, and as stated at the Public Examination, it should be recognised that the long lease on the site is not with the current occupiers. The long lease is with Birmingham Wheels, a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee. Wheels was originally set up in the 1970's as a partnership between the Council and the Probation Service to manage a project aimed at rehabilitating young offenders. The Probation Service transferred its interest in Wheels to BXL Connexions which passed into Administration in January 2012 and thus is no longer involved with the project. As a result the City Council is the sole remaining member. It is understood that the current occupiers operate from the site under licence from Birmingham Wheels.

At the Public Examination the City Council set out a clear and evidenced need for employment land within Birmingham. The City Council considers that the site is both under-utilised and represents a major opportunity for new employment uses and jobs in an area of high unemployment (in February 2015 the unadjusted unemployment claimant rate was 12.9% in the Nechells Ward compared to 6.4% in Birmingham and 2.7% in the UK).

In accordance with the NPPF the City Council does draw a distinction between sporting activities such as speed skating and spectator activities such as stock car racing because of the participatory nature and associated health benefits of the former. This is consistent with the City Council's case as set out at the Public Examination – It is not a “fabricated” argument that participatory sports facilities should be treated differently as suggested by the Wheels occupiers in Exam 144.

In terms of work on the Relocation Strategy Jones Land LaSalle have now been appointed by the HCA to work on this and after a little delay the scope for the commission has been agreed and is

attached at Appendix 2. This scope will now be shared with the Wheels occupiers as agreed and the consultants will now contact the occupants.

In terms of Washwood Heath, HS2 Ltd have not to date agreed a smaller footprint for the proposed Rolling Stock Maintenance Depot. What has happened is that the HS2 Select Committee has stated that it did not believe that there is enough evidence to support a move of the depot from Washwood Heath but that “We impress on HS2 the need to adjust the scheme so that there is minimum land take and for the shortest time with sensible placing of balancing ponds and a hand-back configuration that after construction will attract maximum business use of the residual site.” This design review is now underway and anticipated to be completed in the summer.

The City Council’s suggested modifications to policy GA7 remain as presented to the Wheels occupiers and are set out below.

Modifications to policy GA7 proposed by the City Council

Whilst the City Council, in accordance with its usual practice, will work with all current occupiers on potential relocation options; in accordance with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework it is proposed that the importance of the participatory sporting activities at the Wheels site is recognised within the Birmingham Development Plan. This is particularly the case where there is an identified need for the participatory sporting activity in question (including whether it is an established and continuing activity which is both viable and with an on-going demand). **The following modification to para 5.72 in the Birmingham Development Plan is therefore proposed.**

“..as would the future of existing sports facilities and other occupiers of the site. For participatory sports facilities where there is an identified need this will require an equivalent or better quantity and quality replacement provision. This will include consideration of the catchment area of the participants involved.”

Appendix 1

Birmingham Development Plan Public Examination Matter G

Wheels Statement of Common Ground

Background

Both the City Council and representatives of the Wheels operators appeared at the Public Examination with regard to Matter G and the following question from the Planning Inspector:

“Issue 13 – Does GA7 take sufficient account of the existing wheeled sports users at the Birmingham Wheels site?”

The City Council propose that the site is brought forward for employment development given the evidenced need for employment land within the city and the significant levels of unemployment and worklessness in the local area. The site has the potential for up to 1.1 million square feet of employment space and 3000 jobs.

The current occupiers on the site wish to remain in situ and have indicated their willingness to rationalise their operations on site. If they have to relocate then they wish to relocate together.

Areas of Common Ground

The City Council and representatives of the Wheels operators have agreed and produced a plan which identifies the activities which currently take place on the site (attached).

The City Council will work with current operators to help identify alternative sites based on locational and operational requirements. In order to progress this consultants are in the process of being appointed to work with the occupants and the City Council to explore and identify potential relocation options (the consultants work is being funded through the Homes & Communities Agency’s Asset Accelerator initiative with the City Council).

Further Additional Modification to para 5.72 proposed by the City Council

Whilst the City Council, in accordance with its usual practice, will work with all current occupiers on potential relocation options; in accordance with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework it is proposed that the importance of the participatory sporting activities at the Wheels site is recognised within the Birmingham Development Plan. This is particularly the case where there is an identified need for the participatory sporting activity in question (including whether it is an established and continuing activity which is both viable and with an on-going demand). The following modification to para 5.72 in the Birmingham Development Plan is therefore proposed.

“..as would the future of existing sports facilities and other occupiers of the site. For participatory sports facilities where there is an identified need this will require an equivalent or better quantity and quality replacement provision. This will include consideration of the catchment area of the participants involved.”

Appendix 2

Bordesley Park Area Action Plan

**Wheels Relocations Strategy
Project Brief**

**Birmingham City Council
Homes and Communities Agency
Jones Lang LaSalle**

March 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This brief sets out the background, scope and delivery requirements for the Wheels Relocations Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Birmingham Wheels site is owned by the City Council and is on a long lease to Birmingham Wheels (a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee). Birmingham Wheels was originally set up as a partnership between the Council and the Probation Service to manage a project aimed at rehabilitating young offenders. The Probation Service transferred its interest in Wheels to BXL Connections which then passed into administration in January 2012 and thus are no longer involved. As a result the City Council is the sole remaining member of Birmingham Wheels. The occupiers of the site operate under licence arrangements from Birmingham Wheels.
- 2.2 The site is used for a range of wheeled activities including stock car track, off road and track based karting and roller speed skating. There are also a number of non-leisure occupiers on the site.
- 2.3 The site is located within the boundary of the emerging Bordesley Park Area Action Plan (AAP). It is surrounded by a mix of other uses including residential, industrial, education and community uses. It is also adjoined by rail and canal corridors.
- 2.4 The development potential of the area and the site is being considered through the preparation of the Bordesley Park Area Action Plan. Consultation has already been undertaken on an initial Options Report for the area, and this was followed by consultation on a Preferred Options Report during late 2013. For the Wheels site, the Preferred Options Report set out the potential development of the site for major employment and industrial uses, and it is intended to take this option forward into the Pre Submission Version of the Plan. The potential development area includes areas occupied by the wheeled activities, various business uses as well as terraced housing fronting Bordesley Green Road.
- 2.5 The Wheels site is a challenging project due to its history - first as brickworks and then as a landfill site. It does represent a significant redevelopment opportunity close to the City Centre - 20 hectares in the City Council's freehold with the potential for a larger site when third party interests are included. There are, however, issues with regard to access, ground conditions and the need for remediation and site topography that also need to be resolved and a separate consultants' commission is addressing these aspects of development.
- 2.6 This project is concerned with the relocation of a number of uses across the site. This includes the sporting/leisure activities, the acquisition and relocation of various business uses and housing. The initial phase of the commission will focus on the relocation strategy for the current occupiers of the Wheels site with the second phase focusing on the potential larger site.

The key activities subject to the commission comprise:

Phase 1: The Wheels site

Sporting and Leisure uses on the Wheels site (and principal contacts)

- Stock car track (Philip Bond)
- Go-kart tracks (John Keattch)

- Off road vehicle track (Steve Adams)
- Roller speed skating track and associated buildings (John Fry)
- Motor cycle training centre (Vicki O'Brien)
- Drifting (tbc)
- Office / administrative buildings – (Mick Roberts - Wheels Site Manager)

Business Uses

- Gristwood & Toms Tree Surgeons (offices, storage and yards)
- National Road Planings (open storage)
- Security Firm (General Guard) offices and storage
- GMJ Woodcarving
- AT Labs

Phase 2: The potential Wider Site

A number of primarily industrial uses form part of the potential wider Wheels site.

3. Project Requirements

3.1 The project comprises the following key elements

For the sporting and leisure uses:

- Assessment and valuation of existing facilities and confirmation of potential relocation requirements.
- Identification of relocation opportunities.
- Viability assessment of alternative options identified.
- Advice on property management and costs associated with relocation.

For the business uses:

- Assessment and valuation of existing premises and assessment of potential relocation requirements
- Identification of relocation opportunities. This may include opportunities that may be presented by the Wheels redevelopment itself.

4. Phase 1 Relocation Strategy for the Wheels Occupiers

4.1 Assessment / Audit of Occupiers' Individual Facilities

Assessment of Existing Facilities

- Preparation of a schedule of accommodation and current conditions.

Confirmation of Occupiers' Relocation Requirements

Preferred locations/extent of potential site search based upon:

- Catchment areas for users and spectators,
- Accessibility requirements – private and public transport,
- Site requirements in accommodating key layout, design, amenity, operational and management issues.
- Opportunities for shared facilities or co-location with other existing Wheels operators or with other existing facilities or activities elsewhere.

For some of the uses and activities on site the search for potential relocation options will include sites in the wider region outside of Birmingham's administrative boundary.

Costed specification of replacement facilities

This should include advice on the replacement of facilities on an as new basis, as well as the opportunities for existing elements to be relocated on a 'lift and shift' basis (for example buildings, structures, other facilities, etc.).

4.2 Identification of Relocation Opportunities

Site Search of Potential Relocation Opportunities.

Each activity will have its own detailed requirements identified and confirmed above. The speed skating facility is likely to have a relocation requirement that would be more local to the current facility than some of the other track based activities. Potential options in Birmingham for this facility include Ackers Adventure Park on Golden Hillock Road and two initial options at Ackers have been identified that should be explored further. The contact at Wheels Adventure Park is Kelvin Staples, Site Manager.

Consideration of Site Availability

Including:

- Sites currently on the market – leasehold or freehold.
- Site search of other sites with potential for development.
- Initial liaison with landowners and/or agents regarding availability.
- Timescales regarding potential site availability – whether short, medium or longer term opportunities.
- An initial long list of options to be refined down to a short list of sites with most potential.
- Opportunities for co-location of existing facilities or location with other similar facilities.

4.3 Viability Assessment of Options Identified

- Assessment of each site option's suitability judged against Occupiers' requirements and specifications.
- Provision of advice/analysis on the costs associated with and viability of each option.
- Consideration of initial planning, transportation and accessibility issues as well as any policy or site specific considerations arising.
- Current ownership and valuation information.
- Financial issues – costs of acquisition, lease, development, management and transfer of facilities.
- Opportunities for complementary development.

4.4 Advice on Property Management and Relocation Issues

- The identification of any potential acquisition and relocation issues.
- Potential development timescales.

5. Phase 2 Wider Site

The detailed requirements for Phase 2 of the brief will be confirmed following the completion of Phase 1.

At this initial stage a schedule of the current occupiers with estimated acquisition costs is required.

6. Project Management.

The project will be managed through regular project meetings involving lead officers from Birmingham City Council (Planning and Regeneration and Birmingham Property Services) and the Homes and Communities Agency.

This will comprise:

BCC: Doug Lee	doug.lee@birmingham.gov.uk 0121 464 9858
Richard Thomas	richard.l.thomas@birmingham.gov.uk 0121 675 8453
Ashley Skinner	ashley.skinner@birmingham.gov.uk 0121 464 2117
HCA: Assad Hamed	assad.hamed@hca.gsi.gov.uk 0121 234 9907

7. Background Documents.

Plan of the Wheels site and environs.
Map/list of tenants/principal contacts.
Bordesley Park Area Action Plan Preferred Options Report.