

Planning Committee: 11 July 2006

Item Number:

Application No: W 06 / 0309

Registration Date: 22/02/06

Town/Parish Council: Wroxall

Expiry Date: 19/04/06

Case Officer: John Archer

01926 456500 john.archer@warwickdc.gov.uk

Oldwich Lane East (Former Honiley Airfield), Wroxall.

Advanced Engineering Research and Development Campus (Class B1 (Business) Uses) for the Automotive and Motorsport Industries, Catalyst Centre, new access road and roundabout, infrastructure, parking, landscaping, including details of Catalyst building. FOR The Fulcrum Partnership

The application is of major significance and has both local and regional implications.

"Plans of the proposal and the Planning Statement submitted by the applicants can be viewed on the Planning page of the Councils website at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/WDC/Environment/Planning/ "

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Beausale, Haseley, Honiley & Wroxall Joint Parish Council: Object for the following reasons:-

- "1. It is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore against Green Belt policy.
2. It does not conform to the Warwickshire Local Structure Plan.
3. The application site is not designated as a 'Major Development Site' (MDS).
4. Even if it were an MDS, national policy dictates that these areas be close to a 'major urban area' (MUA). The application site is not near an MUA.
5. The application site is within the Forest-of-Arden and the area has 'special landscape designation' in order to promote its rural features. This application would be a reversal of these intentions.
6. It is against Government Policy on the Environment in promoting 'green issues'.
 - a. Increased air pollution - from increased local traffic and long distance commuting.
 - b. Destruction of the wild-life and wild flower habitat to be replaced by a less effective environment plan covering a reduced area.
 - c. Felling of many hardwood trees to make room for buildings and roadways.
7. Increased traffic on many local rural roads.
8. Approval of this application would make it more difficult to resist further (incremental) development of the site.
9. Increased noise levels - traffic, test-track and, now that Formula One has been secured, increased helicopter activity."

Balsall Parish Council: "Balsall Parish Council object to the above application for the following reasons:

1. The site lies within the Green Belt and the proposed speculative development is inappropriate and in conflict with Green Belt policy where there is a general presumption against any development except in special circumstances or where considered essential for the agricultural industry. The site lies within the vulnerable gap of remaining open countryside between the conurbations of Birmingham and Coventry.
2. The proposed development would generate additional vehicular traffic in the surrounding roads. These rural roads carry fast moving traffic and are unsuitable for any extra traffic. They are narrow, in places winding and with poor sightlines and with no footways for pedestrians. They are well used by cyclists, horse riders, walkers and local residents. The extra traffic would create additional and dangerous conflict between the different users.
3. The site is not well served by public transport and would encourage the use of car borne travel contrary to policies towards encouraging sustainable development.
4. The proposal would cause more traffic problems in other areas, such as Balsall Common.
5. The proposal is not within a Major Urban Area, which the Regional Spatial Strategy has identified for such developments.

However, if this development is to be granted, the Parish Council would wish for the following to be taken into account:

1. An additional new roundabout to be constructed at the "T" junction between Honiley Road and the A4177.
2. Action to be taken to reduce the use, as rat runs, of Oldwich Lane, Fen End Road, Brees Lane and Holly Lane. These rural roads are unsuitable for the additional traffic generated by this proposed development, they serve local schools and are widely used for leisure activities.
3. Strict legal constraints be imposed to ensure that the site and buildings be only used for activities associated with the automobile industry."

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council: object for the following reasons:

"4.1 The proposals are a departure from the adopted local plan. Whilst the review of the local plan proposes an MDS at the former Honiley Airfield, it is not adopted. The proposals do not meet the criteria set out in national guidance on green belts that govern the extent of development of MDS. Very special circumstances are therefore needed to justify the use of green belt land for the development proposed. The case for the proposal in this green belt context is not sufficiently made out by the applicants to override the normal presumption against development in the green belt.

4.2 The proposals would encourage car borne travel and would conflict with current planning policies that seek to promote sustainable development principles and less reliance on the private car for access.

West Midlands Regional Assembly: "It is acknowledged that this application is a departure from the Development Plan and may not be wholly in conformity with the adopted Development Plan or PPG2 as the site is within the Green Belt. However, the long term future of the site appears to be heading towards further development with the designation of the site as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt in the emerging Local Plan.

In addition the Regional Conformity Advisor is of the opinion that the proposal should be supported because of the potential to contribute to the Region's Economic Strategy and the sub regional economy, through the implementation of Policies PA3 and PA4 of the RSS and the exceptional existing use of the site associated with the Proving Ground which will be almost impossible to locate in an Urban Area without causing amenity problems.

It is considered that these factors should outweigh any conflict with policy and provided the approval is limited to the automotive industry, we feel the application would be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy."

Advantage West Midlands: "I would like to add the voice of Advantage West Midlands to support for the above application.

The 'Catalyst' performance engineering business centre and 'Fulcrum' automotive technology park are set to become a very positive statement for the automotive, performance engineering and motorsports industries in the region which are of international significance. These industries are a proven and significant wealth generator for the local and regional economies and, if suitably encouraged, are well placed to succeed further through new highly-qualified and capable businesses.

The plans for the site will uniquely co-locate engineering, research and development facilities with a test and development track - a significant development opportunity in an industry that may otherwise follow the trends of overseas sourcing and loss of the UK competitive position. The proposals are well devised to provide significant technical research and development capability, probably the UK's best opportunity as a performance engineering force, via the proposed office and technical facilities to draw together the fragmented industry base to deliver business collaboration.

I am convinced that development of this site is a unique opportunity to create a very special business environment with partners of international repute and capability. I believe this development supports key aims of the Regional Economic Strategy and sits well with other region-wide developments.

The centre will be a most welcome beacon for all that is good about an industry that has seen great economic turmoil over recent years and will stand for all that is good and great about the industry that remains. It will also make a statement about the importance and development potential for this industry

in this area and promote increased activity in the region as the logical 'heart' of the UK automotive and linked industries.

'Catalyst' will bring together currently disparate sections of the automotive, performance engineering and motorsports industries to share new ideas and to learn from each other in a very new way. It will promote collaborative working and the generation of new innovative ideas that will be pivotal in businesses of the future. There is a recent strong trend of movement overseas for the automotive and performance engineering industries with attendant impact on the regional and national economies. It is my belief that Catalyst and Fulcrum will help to reverse this trend.

I am especially delighted with the plans to develop an 'automotive campus' as the theme for the 'Fulcrum' development. The site owners, 100 PerCent Properties, are steeped in the automotive and performance engineering business and already have a fully functioning and successful operation on the site. As such they have an exceptional and incisive viewpoint on their industry built upon a globally significant reputation in their field.

The locational and operational factors at work that today bring forward the Catalyst & Fulcrum opportunity are unique and cannot be easily replicated elsewhere, if at all. The proposals are themselves a product of the disparate character of the automotive design business sector which suffers from a lack of effective connectivity and partnership. To continue with this approach in such a key business cluster to this region will further undermine our competitive position in the global market place.

I strongly believe that it is important that all regional stakeholders seize the opportunity now presented to us and that the development of the site is committed at the earliest possible time to ensure the economic benefits for this region, and for the automotive sector nationally, are secured.

I commend the proposal to you."

CBI: Support proposal as it will provide the leading edge research and development necessary to support the automotive and motorsport industries so vital for the West Midlands, will be located at the heart of the British automotive industry making it ideally placed for an international technology park.

Motorsport Industry Association: Support the proposal and wish to reinforce the importance of the fulcrum proposal and, in particular, the Catalyst "hub" to the future well being of these important industries. They state:

"The MIA, after securing full support from our industry, responded by proposing the creation of a national industry 'hub' (the Catalyst Centre) to act as a focus, a Network Development Centre, and a Centre of Excellence with a truly international profile. The MIA planned to move its international headquarters to its chosen site to act as a vital inspiration to others, and to show commitment from the industry.

The MIA's proposed Catalyst Centre will create a sustainable centrepiece for cross- sectoral industry networks to grow, and generate research and development activity alongside, which encourages technology transfer by, wherever possible, sharing costs and knowledge. All these are key priorities in maintaining our competitive edge as identified by the DTI Panel.

After an extensive national site search, Fen End was selected by the MIA and others from industry, as our preferred site. It offers a unique set of potential advantages, centred on the existing test track, to deliver what we required, including;

- High performance and Motorsport industry co-location with critical mass and interaction of peer group companies
- a secure, confidential campus with as a central focus, The MIA's Catalyst, sited within a high quality environment
- an accessible site in the "High Technology Corridor" – promoted by Warwickshire Investment Partnership – as the "Gateway to Motorsport Valley" closely linked to associated institutions and academic establishments.
- Located within a nationally and internationally renowned Centre of Excellence with a clear identity and prestigious profile – Fulcrum.
- Opportunity for the MIA to create a genuine catalyst for information, industry knowledge, training, skills and research acting as a conduit for government initiatives and a range of partnership projects.
- the ability to accommodate alongside an industry-specific "community", seed-bed research and innovation utilizing "grow-on" space, economies of scale and shared facilities.
- the facilities offer crucial minimization of research and development time and costs offered by immediate access to the test track.

These combined advantages were not offered elsewhere and are specific to this unique Warwickshire location. The choice of Fen End met with the full approval of our industry."

WCC (Ecology): Consider, following a site visit, that the ecological impacts can be mitigated and, therefore, have no objection subject to various conditions/Section 106 Agreement for mitigation works in the 'blue' area of the site if permission is to be granted.

WCC (Archaeology): have no comments.

English Nature: See no nature conservation reasons why development should not go ahead, but identify a number of information gaps, namely (a)

The absence of baseline "Phase 1" habitat survey, (b) The omission of an assessment of the operational impacts, (c) The lack of any consideration of a revised footprint to reduce the impacts, (d) The reliance on unspecified mitigation for trans-locating the grassland, and (e) The omission of any assessment of the impact on the bird community. They recommend taking account of WCC (Ecology) comments.

Forestry Commission: Have no comment concerning Nunley Wood and do not consider impact on Longlands Spinney to be significant. They would support replacement tree planting.

Leisure and Amenities: Have no objection in principle, but recommend conditions to protect the retained trees, replacement woodland planting, and tree preservation orders on retained woodland and trees.

Motorsport Industry Association: support the application as it "will deliver high-tech value added employment in Warwickshire and act as a global magnet for universal investment in high performance engineering".

Xtrac Ltd.: support the application as the motorsport industry is a substantial employer, generates significant levels of exports, and is a flagship for the engineering industry in general.

Environment Agency: consider previous uses of the site may have caused, or have the potential to cause, contamination of soils and groundwaters but that insufficient information has been supplied to comment from a contaminated land perspective. However, if the Council considers there is sufficient information to judge the environmental impacts, then any consent should be subject to conditions requiring (a) a full assessment and the identification of remediation requirements and (b) the provision of a scheme for the provision of surface water drainage including the use of sustainable urban drainage.

Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Ltd.: support the proposal and the concept for an international research and development centre.

Prof. Howard Thomas of the Warwick Business School: supports the international research centre proposed and believes that it is very important for regional activity and regional employment prospects in the Warwickshire Region.

Fulcrum Prodrive Action Group: object to the proposal on three primary areas:

Planning Issues

The primary concern is that whether the proposal is appropriate and in keeping with the environment. The site is Green Belt and no weight can be put on the emerging Local Plan Policy to designate a Major Developed site.

The building footprint will increase from 5% to 22% and will have a significant effect on the openness of Green Belt. The site also falls within a Special Landscape Area and the fact that the site is screened does not affect the principle of openness. The Very Special Circumstances do not outweigh the significant harm that would be created by the development. The seclusion of the site cannot be a driving force behind the significant reduction on openness of the Green Belt.

The High Tech Corridor is a "red herring" in relation to this site. The benefits in employment terms are highly debatable. They would not be drawn from the local area due to their specialist nature.

Traffic Concerns

One of the greatest impacts would be from significant increases in traffic. The planned increase in staff would lead to a huge increase in traffic movements. The Transport Assessment shows a lack of understanding of the local area and a misunderstanding of where the traffic flows would route. The potential for a travel plan reducing car traffic is remote.

Environmental concerns

A number of concerns are raised in relation to tree loss and wildlife impacts. Noise is also considered to be a major factor, with the use of the test track and the likelihood of additional helicopter flights.

The full text of the FPAG submission is attached as an appendix to the report.

Government Office for the West Midlands: have acknowledged receipt of the Environmental Impact Statement.

WCC (Planning) : have provided conformity advice to the Regional Planning Body which has responded as set out above

WCC (Highways): comment on the submitted Green Travel Plan and advise that it would need to be secured through a S106 Agreement.

Fire and Rescue: have no objection subject to a fire fighting condition.

Severn Trent Water: has no objection subject to a drainage condition.

EHO: recommend contamination and noise conditions.

CPRE (Warwickshire): "The Warwickshire Branch of the CPRE objects to this planning application. Please note the following points:-

1. This site is in the Green Belt and Special Landscape Area. Development should only be permitted in "very special" circumstances.
2. Policy EMP4 of the existing Local Plan prohibits the building of NEW employment buildings in the Green Belt.

3. Policy statement on page 37 of the existing Local Plan states that location of employment should minimize travel distances and ameliorate traffic congestion. With up to 1000 people travelling to and from this site in the countryside each day the narrow country lanes will be inadequate to cope. The applicant acknowledges this by including funding of a roundabout on the main access road.

4. In addition the increase of traffic at least five-fold will be an unacceptable intrusion for people living near the site.

5. We are not aware of any targets in the Regional Spatial Strategy which require the release of further land for employment purposes up to 2011.

6. We note that the second draft of the revised Local Plan proposes to designate this site as a major development site. We dispute whether this is an appropriate designation given the problems outlined above and the consequences which follow from such designation. We have objected to this designation -see reference 148/BQ in the Local Plan Inquiry papers."

Neighbours: A total of 36 letters of objection have been received (one with an 8 address petition and another with a 3 address petition) on grounds of its scale, in the Green Belt, increased traffic on country lanes, noise from increased testing, impact on wildlife, lack of justification, shuttle bus would not be used, traffic danger to walkers, horse riders and school children, loss of trees and increased light pollution.

One resident supports the application in principle, but raises some traffic concerns. A former resident supports the proposal. A parish councillor has written separately to support the proposal. A resident from Warwick also supports the proposal.

Balsall Common Village Residents Association: Support Solihull objection and comment particularly on traffic concerns, need for traffic island on Meer End road, need for traffic management, protection of trees, engine testing should be in soundproof building. Should be no further expansion, no hotel.

RELEVANT POLICIES

- (DW) EMP4 - Employment Development in the Rural Areas of the District (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)
- (DW) ENV3 - Development Principles (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)
- (DW) C8 - Special Landscape Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)
- (DW) ENV1 - Definition of the Green Belt (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)
- RAP1 - Development within Rural Areas (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 Revised Deposit Version)
- RAP7 - Directing New Employment (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 Revised Deposit Version)
- RR1 - Rural Renaissance (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)
- PA1 - Prosperity for All (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)
- PA3 - High-Technology Corridors (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)

- PA4 - Development related to Higher/Further Education and Research Establishments and Incubator Units (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)
- SSP2 - Major Developed Sites (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 Revised Deposit Version)
- QE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Environment (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)
- QE3 - Creating a High Quality Built Environment for All (Regional Planning Guidance 11 - June 2004)
- (DW) C1 - Conservation of the Landscape (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)
- GD.3 - Overall Development Strategy (Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011).
- GD.4 - Strategic Constraints (Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011).
- GD.7 - Previously-Developed Sites (Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011).
- RA.1 - Development in Rural Areas (Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011).
- RA.3 - Housing and Industrial Development and Hierarchy of Settlements in Rural Areas (Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011).

PLANNING HISTORY

The site was originally developed as a wartime airfield and continued in use, to a very limited degree, until the 1950's. Research of testing of jet engines commenced at that time with vehicle testing (tyres, wheel and brakes) commencing in 1961, with planning applications for various buildings and facilities over the next decades. In 2000 Lucas sold the site, but it has continued in use for vehicle testing, with a further planning permission to permit vehicle demonstrations, driver training, etc. in 2002.

KEY ISSUES

The Site and its Location

The application site forms part of the former Honiley Airfield and lies in the Green Belt adjoining the boundary with Solihull. The parts shown to be developed include a small area in Nunley Wood, which already has buildings on it, and a large area by the present entrance, which is partly open and partly has a conifer plantation on it. The site is generally well screened by tree belts and woodland, and by an earth mound behind the hedge by the Honiley Road.

Details of the Development

The proposal is for the development of a "Centre of Excellence" in relation to the development of the automotive/autosport industries. It has been submitted in outline, but with details of the 'Catalyst' building and a new vehicle access, which includes a traffic island on the Honiley Road. The red line has been amended so as to coincide with the Local Authority boundary since the only works outside are within the highway. The application has been accompanied

by a detailed Environmental Statement. The accompanying illustrative material indicates the potential location of buildings for research and development, at two main locations, one on the site of the former main airfield buildings and the other on a detached site where buildings were formerly utilised for aircraft engine testing. Immediately adjacent to the proposed buildings is the existing test track, which is proposed to be used in association with the building. The development at the main part of the site would cover approximately 9 Ha and is anticipated would create 9 units, with a total overall floorspace of about 23,300 sq.m. for offices/R&D associated with the automotive industry. Car parking would increase from 280 spaces as existing to 1,200.

The details of the 'Catalyst' building show an oval shaped building containing offices, exhibition hall, conference facilities, retail facilities for the site and dining areas, of modern design finished in zinc cladding with curtain wall glazing in metallic silver powder coated aluminium frames, linked to a two-storey office block finished in the same materials. The associated car park area has 259 spaces.

The application has been accompanied by an Environmental Statement as it constitutes EA development. The assessments undertaken as part of the ES have been fully taken into account in the review of the proposals

Access to the site would be taken from a new roundabout on Honiley Road and the existing access into the site on Oldwich Lane East would be closed.

The applicants have submitted a summary of the scope and purpose of the proposal as follows:

"Why is The Fulcrum being proposed?"

The Fulcrum and Catalyst proposals, if approved, would deliver a high quality automotive and motorsport related Centre of Excellence with an international profile. The proposals would create a sustainable 'cluster' of research and development activity to help secure the future well-being of the automotive and motorsport industries. The unique advantages offered by this proposal is a response to threats identified at both regional and national level to the industry as a whole.

In particular the Fulcrum proposal is a response to the July 2003 Motorsport Competitiveness Panel which reported to government on the importance of the industry to the UK economy. This report also emphasised the very real, immediate and pressing threat to the industry from global competition and identified a series of priorities to meet this global challenge and retain the industries competitive edge.

The Fulcrum is able to deliver on all these priorities and would;

- *enable cross-sector technology transfer and business development.*

- *continue to attract talented, well-trained and highly skilled people who drive technological innovation and application.*
- *ensure a co-ordinated approach between the industry and educational institutions in order to avoid fragmented initiatives and confusion.*
- *produce a cluster infrastructure which will produce the support structures, processes, measurement and information needed to maintain a world-class industry.*
- *create an industry led 'Motorsport Academy' in order to drive and co-ordinate human resource development initiatives.*

The motorsport industry itself has responded to the challenge outlined in the Motorsport Competiveness Panel by promoting the concept of a national 'hub' or 'Motorsport Academy' (the Catalyst). After an extensive site search Fen End was selected by the Motor Industry Association as a site with a unique set of prospective advantages, centred on the existing test track, which could deliver a realistic and deliverable Centre of Excellence providing;

- *industry specific co-location with critical mass and interaction of peer group companies*
- *a secure, confidential campus with a central focus, The Catalyst, within a high quality environment*
- *an accessible site in a "High Technology Corridor" close to associated institutions and academic establishments*
- *a nationally and internationally renowned Centre of Excellence with a clear identity and prestigious profile.*
- *a genuine catalyst for information, industry knowledge, training, skills and research acting as a conduit for government initiatives and a range of partnership projects*
- *the ability to accommodate, in an industry-specific "community", seed-bed research and invention utilising innovation and "grow-on" space, given economies of scale and shared facilities.*
- *the crucial minimisation of research and development time and costs offered by immediate access to the test track.*

In this context the Fulcrum proposals have been progressed to deliver these aspirations and fulfil a vital role in safeguarding the international competitiveness of the UK motorsport and automotive industries.

What is The Fulcrum?

The Fulcrum will provide a self contained, confidential and secure site which would be developed solely and exclusively for automotive technology uses. The combination of the established test track and the proposed Research and Development facilities will create a vibrant, synergistic campus style community promoting automotive technology transfer, innovation and cooperation in a high quality, secure location.

The development will cater for a wide range of needs from small to medium enterprises to large international automotive companies. Links to educational establishments will be promoted and expanded to create an environment which encourages innovation and technical development. The clustering

approach promoted at The Fulcrum will assist in providing a significant accelerator for new development and innovation and will encourage the building of cross sector skills.

The site will provide a critical mass of automotive excellence where specialist skills and common business partners can thrive with the unique ability to develop and test components, systems and complete vehicles from concept through to road going prototypes on the existing test track. The track itself is central to The Fulcrum ethos and will make the development unique in its ability to test vehicles on a secure, private test track within easy reach of the development team.

A central component of The Fulcrum will be the Catalyst building housing a range of office functions for the various automotive bodies along with exhibition and lecture space. The Catalyst will bring together a number of, currently disparate, organisations into a single building which will significantly improve efficiency and cross sector communications within the industry as a whole. The Catalyst building is being promoted by the Motor Industry Association and Advantage West Midlands.

In addition to the Catalyst an Innovation Centre will form part of the proposals. Linked to educational establishments the Innovation Centre will provide incubator and grow on space for fledgling companies which will benefit from the synergistic concept of co-location and collaboration where companies can maximise business development and technology transfers.

What activities will take place within the Fulcrum?

The existing Fulcrum development already benefits from a number of automotive related occupiers engaged in the development of premium products in the automotive and motorsport sectors. A number of these companies work closely with academia in joint ventures developing cutting edge prototypes. Key areas of activity within the Fulcrum will include composites, mechanical and electrical engineering.

The provision of the test track will allow the development and testing of a wide range of components through to full vehicle prototype testing and vehicle launches. An area of development which is becoming increasingly important is the advancement of new programmes that are technology led and innovative in their approach in support to eco-friendly vehicles aimed at easing congestion and reducing emissions. Typical of these activities are:

- Hybrid vehicle integration*
- High performance electric vehicle development*
- Innovative Variable compression ratio engine (VCR engine) increasing efficiency and power output*
- Hydrogen fuel cell controller ECU*
- Hydrogen fuel cell powered bike*
- Small footprint vehicle (NARO) with Innovative leaning technology*

- Performance lifestyle vehicle with small footprint for reduced congestion
- DC-DC converter for fuel cell & hybrid vehicle applications

All of these projects will have a significant impact on improving the efficiency of road vehicles and thus help in reducing emissions.

What would be the impact if The Fulcrum did not proceed?

These combined advantages cannot be repeated or offered elsewhere - they are specific to this unique location. In addition, there will not be another opportunity for those advantages to be applied. If the Fulcrum and Catalyst proposals do not proceed then many parts of the industry will be forced to continue in disparate, often ill-connected locations where the clear advantages set out above cannot be brought forward. The upshot of that is the prospect of a gradual decline in UK competitiveness across both the industry at large as well as its constituent specialisms.

The consequence will be a continuing erosion of the industry as jobs and investment are diluted or go abroad.

Time is now of critical importance if the wide range of innovative, high technology, performance engineering, advanced materials, electronics, design, research and service companies within our industry are going to continue to make a vital contribution to the UK economy."

Assessment

The principal policy issues in this case are whether the proposal is in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan, including the Regional Spatial Strategy, the County Structure Plan, the Local Plan and other related policy documents having relevance to planning policy. Issues of local significance include those relating to highway matters, alternative transport proposals, local amenity and ecology and conservation matters.

The justification for the proposal as set out above can be summarised as follows:

- The site provides a unique opportunity to create a motor industry research and development campus of national and international importance
- The presence of the test track would enable R&D to be carried on at this location with on site testing. No other potential employment site provides this opportunity
- The site is in an enclosed location that provides the security and seclusion necessary for Automotive R&D

- The development of such a site will contribute significantly to the economic diversification of the West Midlands and meet needs identified by Government and the Region for economic development
- If the development does not take place here, there is no alternative location that would be chosen. The concept would not proceed.

This justification needs to be weighed against relevant policy as follows:

Regional Policy

The Regional Spatial Strategy has a number of relevant policies but there is only one which is directly applicable. This is Policy PA3: High Technology Corridors. This states:

"A. In order to encourage the diversification of the Regional economy, three High-Technology Corridors (HTC) are identified within which cluster developments, closely linked to the Region's critical research and development capabilities and advanced technologies, will be promoted:

- (i) Birmingham to Worcestershire (Central Technology Belt);*
- (ii) Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire; and*
- (iii) Wolverhampton to Telford.*

B. In land-use terms, new developments within the HTCs should be focused on the MUAs and at specific nodes shown on the Prosperity for All Diagram.

C. In order to reduce pressure for the development of greenfield sites, it is particularly important that scarce land resources within the HTCs should be used for developments which will reinforce the potential of the particular corridor. Development plans should consider the use of appropriate conditions, legal agreements, or other implementation mechanisms, such as landlord control, to help achieve this."

[N.B. 'MUA' stands for Major Urban Area and is defined as Birmingham, Black Country, Coventry, North Staffordshire and Solihull while the 'nodes' are shown as Coventry and Warwick/Leamington.]

The present site could be considered to fall within the High Technology corridor of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire, though it is not "focussed" on one of the MUAs nor is it at one of the nodes identified in the Key diagram. Whilst it meets other criteria in respect of R&D and diversification, it does not fully meet the requirements of policy in terms of location. However, against this must be balanced the nature of the proposal and its contribution to the Region's Economic Strategy and the impracticality of locating it at such locations because of its specific requirements in relation to synergy with the test track. This issue has been addressed by the Regional Assembly, whose role is to determine the relationship of proposals of regional significance to

RSS policy. The Assembly has concluded that the application would be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Structure Plan/Green Belt Policy

The Warwickshire Structure Plan includes a number of relevant policies, including the identification of the Green Belt as a 'strategic constraint' and encourages most development to go to the urban areas of over 8,000 population. Policy GD7, which gives guidance on the potential for development of 'previously developed sites', states:

"The redevelopment of very large unallocated areas of previously-developed land and buildings for a strategically significant purpose, will only be acceptable where:

(a) the development does not provide for needs accommodated elsewhere in the Plan or prejudice the redevelopment or regeneration of urban areas, subject to provisions laid out in Policy I.8 or the RA Policies; and

(b) there is no adverse impact on the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or any other feature with national or international statutory protection; and

(c) the travel demands for the development are, or can be made to be, satisfactorily accommodated by existing transport infrastructure taking into account the mix of development; and

(d) it can be demonstrated that the benefits of the development have been thoroughly assessed and clearly outweigh the benefits of developing other sites; and

(e) a development brief is agreed by the County Council and the district councils."

The County Council is no longer the Strategic Planning Authority and the RPB, through its interpretation of RSS, provides the substantive strategic response where appropriate. However, the Structure Plan constitutes a "saved" plan under the new regulations and needs to be given weight in assessing proposals. It cannot, however, supersede the policies of the RSS. It does however, address issues of relevance.

The key elements of policy GD 7 relate to the application as follows:

- (a) - the acceptance by the Regional Assembly that the development of this site is appropriate in the wider regional context means that there are no concerns regarding any adverse impacts on the regeneration of urban areas
- (b) - the site is not affected by any such designation
- (c) - Travel and traffic issues have been satisfactorily dealt with (see later in report)
- (d) - The benefits of the development have been assessed and their contribution to the wider economic benefit of the Region established and

agreed by the relevant bodies. There are no opportunities for developing alternative sites for such a concept. It is only viable at this location because of its very specific site characteristics that cannot be replicated elsewhere (e) - No development brief has been formally agreed, though the proposal is accompanied by detailed illustrative development proposals that indicate the manner in which the site would be developed and the manner in which matters of importance would be dealt with

The supporting text to Policy GD7 in relation to previously developed sites states:

"Policy GD7 is activated by potential windfall proposals relating to large scale areas of previously developed land whose approval and development could have strategic implications. The policy would allow for mixed use proposals where it can be demonstrated that the development is not intended to provide for development needs accommodated elsewhere in the Plan, rather it represents a major investment opportunity which, because of its particular location, size, character, mix of use and constraints on other land within the district/borough, cannot realistically and demonstrably be achieved elsewhere"

The current proposal would fall within the category of a major investment opportunity that cannot realistically be met elsewhere because of the particular nature of the proposal. Whilst it does not constitute a large area of land that has become redundant in recent years, it is a site that has seen earlier development as an airfield, and although significantly changed and matured since then, does retain some characteristics of its former built form.

Green Belt policy is set out in Structure Plan Policy GD6 that adds a further layer of policy over that set out in GD7 above. The approach to Green Belt designation and development within the Green Belt reflects that set out in PPG2: Green Belts. In relation to development at major developed sites, Annex C to PPG2 states that, if such sites are specifically identified in an adopted Local Plan, then infilling or redevelopment to meet specified criteria would not be inappropriate development. Infilling is defined as "the filling of small gaps between built development "which should have no greater impact on the Green Belt than the existing development and should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site. In the case of redevelopment, it should not occupy a larger area of the site than the existing buildings."

The revised deposit version of the Local Plan contains a proposed designation of the two sites at the former Honiley Airfield as major developed sites. The development proposed by the application falls within these areas. However, although this forms the current policy of the Council, because it has not been confirmed through the local plan inquiry process, it is not possible to place substantive weight on it as a relevant material consideration.

As set out above, there are two development sites. The smaller site, in the middle of Nunley Wood, would involve development largely within the footprint of the existing built development. On the larger site, there is an existing single

building of some 6,500sq m. The proposal would extend the built up area quite significantly with the erection of a further 9 buildings as indicated on the illustrative plans submitted. These would largely not be on the site of existing buildings, but would fall predominantly within the area of former buildings at the airfield whose bases and outline are still, in part, apparent on the ground. Notwithstanding the compliance of the proposal with RSS as indicated by the Regional Planning Board, the proposal does still conflict with Green belt policy provisions.

The applicants have accepted that their proposals are contrary to Green Belt policy and have submitted the justification set out above at the start of this section as the "very special circumstances" necessary to set aside the normal presumption against inappropriate development. An assessment of this justification is required:

(a) uniqueness of opportunity - economically

It has been acknowledged by the Regional Assembly and Advantage West Midlands that the development of such a proposal would be a significant and beneficial one for the West Midlands and would support the key aims of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The proposal takes forward Government support to maintaining the competitiveness of the motor industry set out in the Government's manufacturing strategy. AWM are of the view that development supports key aims of the Regional Economic Strategy and is "convinced that development of this site is a unique opportunity to create a very special business environment with partners of international repute and capability."

(b) uniqueness of opportunity - test track

It is submitted that the development of the concept is wholly dependant on the co-location of R&D with a test track This already exists at this site and does not at any alternative location within the region with potential for development. Whilst there are other test tracks in existence, none provides the opportunity for development to be located immediately adjacent to allow for developmental work to be put to immediate test. Without this co-location, the development concept cannot proceed.

(c) uniqueness of opportunity - seclusion

The seclusion necessary for automotive development is also of significance in this proposal. It is submitted that in order to attract the form of R&D anticipated, there must be the opportunity to develop and test away from public view. This is achieved at this site but could not be replicated in other employment locations. If this development were not to go ahead here, it would not go ahead at any alternative location and the Region would lose the opportunity to develop an area of engineering expertise it is recognised is necessary for its future prosperity.

It is my view that in weighing the benefits of the proposal for the region, its very particular site requirement characteristics and the lack of alternative

sites, there are sufficient very special circumstances to set aside Green belt policy in this instance.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding any justification in respect of Green Belt policy in the context of Regional Planning and Economic policy, it is necessary for the proposal to be considered against other policy requirements and standards that relate to the detailed impact of the proposal on the site and its vicinity

In general terms, central government guidance and development plan policies are intended to protect and enhance the character of the countryside. In this context, a set of Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines published by the County Council and the then Countryside Commission, were adopted as supplementary planning guidance. The guidance for the Arden area, in which this site lies, includes (inter alia) the following guidelines:-

- Conserve the historic, well-wooded character of the region.
- Conserve the built character of Arden by ensuring that new development reflects the vernacular type.

In this context, while the application proposes the felling of a fairly substantial part of a post-war conifer plantation on the main part of the site, it also proposes substantial tree and woodland planting to compensate and enhance the area. The proposed buildings will not reflect the local vernacular, however, as the location of the site, its current characteristics and the nature of the proposal will allow for some more varied expression of design

Site specific issues

Vegetation and ecology

The site will have significant impact on the existing vegetation. However, no objection has been raised from the appropriate consultees on tree or ecology grounds subject to the imposition of conditions to secure the necessary compensatory planting and management of the site. The County ecologist is satisfied that subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition and the submission and implementation of appropriate detailed proposals (which have already been submitted in draft), it should be possible to translocate species and to achieve a balance of development and ecological enhancement which will result in no net biodiversity loss to the site.

Whilst there is some loss to the trees already on site, the Forestry Commission do not object to this, but would support proposals for additional planting elsewhere within the site. The proposal will involve additional planting of native species within the site

Detailed design

Whilst the majority of the site is covered by the outline application, there is a detailed application for the "Catalyst" unit, the central focal point of the site. This building is in a modern style and is proposed to be zinc cladded. Whilst

this approach does not comply with the guidelines that apply more generally throughout the rural area, it is a particular site and very specific development that can justify and support a more contemporary approach to development principles. The unit will only have very limited visibility, and is central to the principal purposes of the development. Whilst the applicants have submitted support for the cladding approach proposed, and it may be that it could be acceptable, I am of the view, that if the development overall were to be considered acceptable, it would be appropriate to condition the use of materials on this unit for subsequent assessment.

Traffic Issues

Access to the site will be achieved through the creation of a new roundabout access on Honiley Road. This will provide more direct access to the main highway network and in association with this, the existing main access at the north of the site off Oldwich Lane East will be closed and used as an emergency access and pedestrian cycle link only.

The present proposal has given rise to concern from Solihull in respect of local traffic generation. This is also the issue of most concern expressed by individual and group objections to the site. There is significant concern that the development will create high traffic volumes on the smaller roads serving the site.

Solihull is the Highway Authority for most of the roads serving the site and as part of its objection, has stated that the impact of traffic on local roads would be very noticeable. In this context, the application site currently employs some 300 people while the proposed development would employ some 1,200. The applicants have acknowledged that there is a poor bus service at present and have proposed that the existing shuttle bus from Warwick Parkway and Leamington Station be extended to serve this site. The green travel plan submitted by the applicants has been considered by the County Council who raise a number of points to improve its requirements, but who are otherwise satisfied with its approach. The County have no objections as far as roads under the control of WCC are concerned.

However, due to its isolated location, it is undoubtedly the case that there would be more traffic on roads within the vicinity of the site. This is of concern to Solihull, and forms part of their general objection. However, there is no formal highway authority objection from Solihull or Warwickshire County Council on highway grounds. The Transport Assessment for the proposal indicates that on the 7 roads adjacent to and in the vicinity of the site, 5 have increases in peak hour flows of less than 10% over existing flows, one has approx 14% and another, Netherwood Lane, has an increase of approx 55%. However, in these latter two cases, the increase is from a very low base and in terms of actual numbers of vehicles, represents less than 15 additional vehicles per hour at peak time.

The concern of Solihull in respect of transport is therefore a general one related to wider policies that look to locate significant trip generating

development in more sustainable locations. In this respect, the specific requirements for the site, as set out above, indicate that the site has special characteristics for the proposed development that could not be fully replicated elsewhere, and for this reason it would be appropriate for the normal sustainable locational criteria to be set aside, provided, as is the case, that a satisfactory Green Transport Plan can be put in place and agreed by the County Council. It would be anticipated that such a Plan would need to be coordinated with Solihull in order to ensure the measures in place address the concerns of the immediately adjacent authority through which employees will travel to the site.

Test Track Use

The operation of the test track is an integral part of the proposal. Its use is presently controlled by a permission granted in 2002 which established a number of constraints on its use. However, the use of the track has been the subject of concern from the local area.

At the moment the track caters for product /component development but also non-development uses, sometimes of an intensive nature. The non-development uses fall into three categories; vehicle launches, driver training and one make car clubs events. The concern of the local community over noise has generally coincided with the one make car club events. The applicants have proposed that in the event of granting permission, they would undertake to terminate the one make car club events, subject to the expiry of existing contractual obligations.

In addition, the applicants indicate that implementation of the development would see the research and development needs, including product and vehicle promotion launches arising from R & D, increase and, within the capacity constraints of the track and the established planning controls, these will assume first priority. This will mean that lower key more regular and routine testing will replace the more organised and sometimes more intensive current non-developmental events.

The reduction in track operations that have the greatest potential to impact on the local community would be a positive benefit and, subject to the principle of the proposal being acceptable overall, it would be appropriate to enter into a Section 106 agreement to secure this additional restriction.

Conclusion

The proposal would create a unique form of development undertaking R&D for motor sport/the motor industry. The development of such a centre is seen by the strategic authority, the Regional Planning Board and the Regional Economic Body, AWM as a major contributor to the future of the West Midlands economy. It incorporates a relationship between R&D and testing that can only take place at this location, providing the facility for testing on site. It also accords with Governmental Strategies for the development of industry. However, it is located within a Green Belt location which would not

be considered appropriate for "normal" employment development. However, I am of the view that the case for very special circumstances justifying the location of the proposal at this site has been made and it would be appropriate in policy terms for such an exception to policy to be allowed.

In relation to local impact issues, the ecological and landscaping matters can be dealt with to the satisfaction of the relevant bodies, and design issues can be resolved through condition on both the outline and detailed elements of the scheme

The traffic issues have given rise to concern, and it will undoubtedly be the case that there will be more traffic on local roads. However, the Transport Assessment indicates that this impact will be limited, and neither highway authority has raised a highway objection

As the proposal is a departure from the Development Plan, if members consider it appropriate to support the proposal, it will need to be referred to the Secretary of State for her to consider if she wishes to determine it herself, in which case a public inquiry would be held, or not to intervene, in which case, when advised, permission can be issued by the Local Planning Authority

It would be necessary for the use of the site to be limited to employment associated with automotive research and development only in order to prevent the site constituting general employment provision. As an integral part of the R&D activity at the site will be associated office, conference and support facilities together with an element of low volume production necessary for undertaking R&D processes. Such uses fall within Use Class B1 (b) which allows for "research and development of products or processes". The imposition of a condition restricting use to B1 (a) will therefore allow the development to function in the manner intended as set out in the concept without it becoming open employment.

It would be appropriate, given the offer of a commitment to reduction in intensity of track operation, to enter into a Section 106 Agreement to secure the cessation of the one make car events on the track after the conclusion of existing contracts. It will also be necessary for such agreement to incorporate a satisfactory Green Travel Plan to be negotiated and agreed with the County Council

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT after reference to the Secretary of State as a departure from the Development Plan, subject to a Section 106 Agreement on restriction of test track use and a Green Travel Plan.

CONDITIONS

- 1 This permission is granted under the provisions of Article 3(1) of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, on an outline application and the further approval of the District Planning Authority shall be required to the undermentioned matters hereby reserved before any development is commenced:-

 - (a) the siting, design and external appearance of the proposed buildings (except for the 'Catalyst' building),
 - (b) details of landscaping.

REASON : To comply with Section 92 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 2 In the case of the reserved matters specified above, application for approval, accompanied by all detailed drawings and particulars, must be made to the District Planning Authority not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission. **REASON**: To comply with Section 92 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 3 The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of two years from the final approval of the reserved matters or, in the case of approval on different dates, the final approval of the last such matter to be approved. **REASON** : To comply with Section 92 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 4 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details shown on the approved drawing(s) 250866/A01, /A04, /A05, /A06revA, /A08, /A09, /A10revA, /A11, /A12revB, /A13revA, + /A14revA, and specification contained therein, submitted on 22 February 2006 except as required by condition 12 below and unless first agreed otherwise in writing by the District Planning Authority. **REASON** : For the avoidance of doubt and to secure a satisfactory form of development in accordance with Local Plan Policy ENV3.
- 5 Before the development hereby permitted is begun, the further written approval of the District Planning Authority shall be obtained for details of the design and construction of the estate roads and footways serving the development. These details shall include large scale plans and cross and longitudinal sections, showing design, layout, construction of the estate together with surface water drainage to outfall. **REASON** : To ensure compliance with the Council's standards.
- 6 The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the proposed means of access has been constructed in strict compliance with details approved in writing by the District Planning Authority. **REASON** : In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
- 7 The car parking areas shown on the approved plans shall be constructed prior to occupation of the development and thereafter be permanently

retained for parking purposes for the development hereby permitted.

REASON : To ensure that adequate parking facilities are retained for use in connection with the development, in accordance with the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.

- 8 Development shall not be commenced until there has been submitted to the District Planning Authority a survey report on the extent to which any part or the whole of the application site is contaminated by toxic or other noxious materials and on the remedial measures required to deal with the hazards. No development shall be commenced until all toxic or obnoxious materials have been removed or otherwise treated in accordance with details which have been approved in writing by the District Planning Authority. **REASON** : To protect the health and safety of future occupiers.
- 9 Details of the means of disposal of storm water and foul sewage from the development shall be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority before the development hereby permitted is commenced and the development shall not be carried out other than in strict accordance with such approved details. **REASON** : To ensure satisfactory provision is made for the disposal of storm water and foul sewage.
- 10 All surface water drainage shall be passed through an oil interceptor(s) designed and constructed in accordance with BS 8301:1985 and of a capacity compatible with the site being drained, prior to being discharged into any watercourse, surface water sewer or soakaway system. Roof water should not be passed through the interceptor. **REASON** : To prevent pollution of the Water Environment.
- 11 No work of any kind shall be begun on the site until the protective fence(s) around the trees identified as being retained on the approved plans, have been erected and the fencing has been confirmed in writing to be acceptable by the District Planning Authority. Within the approved fenced area(s) there shall be no scaffolding, no stockpiling of any materials or soil, no machinery or other equipment parked or operated, no traffic over the root system, no changes to the soil level, no site huts, no fires lit and no excavation of trenches for drains, service runs or for any other reason. **REASON** : To protect and enhance the amenities of the area, and to satisfy the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
- 12 Notwithstanding the materials specified for use on the 'Catalyst' building, no development shall take place until details of all external facing materials have been submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. **REASON** : To ensure that the visual amenities of the area are protected, and to satisfy the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
- 13 No development shall be carried out on each phase of the site which is the subject of this permission, until details of a scheme for the protection of the ecology of the site and, where necessary, the mitigation measures for the

ecological impacts of each phase of the development have been submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in full accordance with such approved details. **REASON** :To protect the ecological importance of the site.

- 14 The buildings shall be used for automotive and motorsport research and development together with ancillary office provision and ancillary low volume developmental production and for no other purpose including any other purpose in Class B1(b) of Part B of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, (or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification. **REASON** : Permission is only granted for this development for the very special reasons given by the applicants and, therefore, it would be inappropriate to grant consent for other purposes in this Green Belt location.

- 15 The proposed car parking area for the development hereby permitted shall be constructed, surfaced, laid out and available for use prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, in accordance with details which have previously been approved by the District Planning Authority. **REASON** : To ensure that adequate parking facilities are available, in accordance with the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.

INFORMATIVES

For the purposes of Article 22 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (England) (Amendment) Order 2003, the following reason(s) for the Council's decision are summarised below:

The development will provide a major contribution to the regional economy, supporting the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy and implementing Regional Spatial Strategy Policy to facilitate development of research facilities and secure high technology development.

Its necessary co-location with a testing facility, already in existence at this site provides an exceptional circumstance to support a proposal of this nature at this location and the very special reasons necessary to set aside Green belt Policy.

Site specific ecology impacts and local highway impacts have been addressed satisfactorily by the proposal.
