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29 November 2017

Mrs Burden and Mrs Wright  
c/o Mr Robert Young  
Programme Officer  
Joint Local Plan Team  
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure  
Plymouth City Council  
Ballard House  
West Hoe Road  
Plymouth  
PL1 3BJ

**By email & letter**

Dear Mrs Burden and Mrs Wright

**PLYMOUTH AND SOUTH WEST DEVON JOINT LOCAL PLAN 2014-2034  
ID NO: 1095702**

We write in response to the publication of Documents EXC6, 7 & 8, all received on Friday, 10th November, 2017.

We have now had the opportunity to see how you propose to structure the Examination sessions and the questions identified for consideration at this stage.

As you will be very well aware, at the heart of the Examination Process lies the requirement to assess the soundness of the Joint Local Plan (JLP). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains<sup>1</sup> that soundness has four elements, the second of which is that the plan must be “Justified – the plan should be the *most* appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based upon proportionate evidence”.

You will know from our previous representations that our clients believe the Former Airport Site represents an outstanding opportunity to deliver sustainable growth for Plymouth on a redundant brownfield site embedded within the urban area of the City. Given the scale of the opportunity, previous Inspectors have identified the development plan process as the most appropriate vehicle for examining its role. Indeed, with this in mind, Plymouth City Council commissioned a number of studies from ARUP, the most recent entitled “Plymouth Airport Safeguarding Consideration of Alternatives” (November 2016), which explored alternative land use options for the Former Airport Site. Whilst we disagree with ARUP’s final conclusions, it is noted that they fairly acknowledge that “*both residential and employment development at the Site would contribute positively to the overall plan vision and many of the plan’s objectives*”.

It is clear, therefore, that development at the former Airport Site has long been recognised as a “strategic scale” growth option to be considered through the development plan process. Its development is plainly a “reasonable alternative” to the full extent of greenfield release now proposed by the JLP, and could, for example, obviate the need to release environmentally sensitive land at Woolwell and elsewhere. This alternative can be assessed by

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 182

reference to “proportionate evidence” that has been commissioned by the Council from Arup, as there is no dispute in principle about the potential of the site to support a variety of other uses.

The NPPF is clear that the plan must be the *most* appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based upon proportionate evidence. As explained above, there can be no doubt that development of the Former Airport Site represents a reasonable, strategic scale alternative to extensive release of greenfield land, including land which forms part of the setting of the Dartmoor National Park.

Whilst the Hearing Programme allows for consideration of the proposed safeguarding policy (SPT8 and PLY42) in respect of the Former Airport Site, it is not entirely clear at present as whether this session is intended to encompass consideration of the potential role which the site could play if safeguarding were not considered to be justified. Plainly, as a brownfield site within the urban area with acknowledged potential to support the JLP’s vision, this is an important matter to consider now, alongside the inappropriateness of sterilising the site for a further 5 years. We note, for example, that Professor Warner Vice-Chancellor of MARJONs has been invited to the session on safeguarding, so we are making the working assumption that the session *will* look at the potential land use opportunities for this site if it were not safeguarded for general aviation use. However, it would be helpful if this could be clarified.

We are also unclear as to when the objections in principle to sites such as Woolwell and West Park will be considered.

We fully understand that you wish to avoid considering at the Examination representations from “every farmer with a field” but are anxious that, in the desire, to streamline and expedite the Examination, the process of determining whether the plan represents “the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives” is not omitted altogether. Unnumbered paragraph 3 of EXC5 includes the following passage:

“However the NPPF states that “the plan should be the most appropriate strategy,.....,based on proportionate evidence”. At this stage of the examination and for the hearings we are examining the evidence to consider *whether the Council’s proposals for the strategy of the JLP meets the test of soundness and whether proposals for the housing and employment sites which it considers would fulfil that strategy are sound*. We are not, therefore, considering the relative merits of alternative or omission sites.”

This seems to us to be somewhat circular. If the Examination is to test the soundness of the Council’s proposals now, then, by definition, part of that exercise involves consideration of whether the plan’s strategy is “the most appropriate considered against reasonable alternatives”. Moreover, we cannot see that the reference to “proportionate evidence” could sensibly or lawfully permit the Examination process to dispense altogether with the exercise of establishing whether the plan is “Justified” in the terms set out in the NPPF. It is for the Examination to apply the NPPF’s tests and to ensure that it confines itself to consideration of proportionate evidence.

We, therefore, seek your clarification as to how the Examination will address the potential role of the Former Airport Site, as a major brownfield site embedded within the urban area and as an alternative to major greenfield release on environmentally sensitive sites at peripheral locations. We have no desire to open up this question more broadly and it may be possible to address our concerns by extending or clarifying the scope of the session programmed to consider the safeguarding policy.

Finally, our clients have been told by an elected Member of Plymouth City Council that you have already expressed your preliminary views on the JLP to the Councils. In the interests of openness and fairness, we would be pleased to receive copies of any communications which have passed between yourselves and the Councils.

Yours sincerely



**WILL EDMONDS  
PARTNER  
MONTAGU EVANS LLP**

cc. J.Schofield - Sutton Harbour Holdings plc