

# **University of Warwick**

## Coventry City Local Plan Examination

### Hearing Session 8 – Green Belt

September 2016

# Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Inspector's Questions	3

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**Client**  
University of Warwick

**Our reference**  
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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Warwick is a leading global HE institution and has a large modern campus on the edge of Coventry straddling the boundary between the city and Warwick District. It makes a significant contribution to the West Midlands economy of circa £515m a year, with a student population of around 25,000 supported by 6,000 staff. Its Science Park is home to 45 companies employing 2,100 people and its Arts Centre hosts 1,500 events a year attracting audiences of nearly one million visitors per year.
- 1.2 The University has participated in each stage of the Coventry Local Plan and has been the subject of supportive site specific policies in previous local plans.
- 1.3 The University has a good working relationship with Coventry City Council and is in regular dialogue at several different levels across both organisations.

## **Planning Status of Campus**

- 1.4 Central Campus East, north of Gibbet Hill Road, falls within the jurisdiction of Coventry City Council and was granted outline planning permission in 2009 for 89,000 sq m of additional floorspace. This permission runs until October 2019 and is still being implemented. Recent developments include the National Automotive Innovation Centre (a research collaboration with JLR and Tata Motors), a new Teaching and Learning Building, and various extensions to academic buildings
- 1.5 Central Campus West falls within Warwick District Council's administrative area and a similar outline planning permission was granted at the same time for a similar amount of development also running until October 2019.
- 1.6 Both permissions are accompanied by a single Campus Masterplan and Section 106 Agreement containing a Travel Plan which has been operating successfully and is monitored regularly with co-operation of the three local authorities – Coventry City, Warwick District, and Warwickshire County Highways. New infrastructure has been provided including two new roundabouts along Gibbet Hill Road, a 20mph zone through the campus, a new public transport interchange and Sustrans cycle route.
- 1.7 The University is commencing a refresh of its masterplan, which it hopes to progress to conclusion during 2017 in time for its approval before the current permission lapses. This is partly governed by the adoption timescale for the Warwick Local Plan, as Central Campus West is in the Green Belt but the Local Plan proposes its removal, recognising its 45 year history of development. This will create a more unified campus in planning terms, as most of the Coventry campus is excluded from the Green Belt.

## **The Land at Westwood**

- 1.8 A small portion of the University's land at Westwood campus is in the Green Belt, but the Council is proposing to remove the green wedge between the University and Westwood Business Park from the Green Belt (including land owned by others) and redesignate it as local urban greenspace through Policy GB1.

- 1.9 However, part of the land removed from the Green Belt is to be allocated as a housing site. This is south of residential properties on Charter Avenue and bounded to the west by Mitchell Avenue. Immediately to the east is recreational land owned by the University. It is proposed that this land is also allocated for development as part of the University's campus.
- 1.10 The Westwood Campus, contained in a triangle between Kirby Corner Road, Mitchell Avenue and Charter Avenue is likely to be substantially redeveloped for University purposes. Many of its buildings are already at the end of their useful life. Immediately south of the subject land is the Westwood Tennis Centre, built within the last 10 years and an important part of the University's current Sports Hub initiative to make the campus the most active of any UK University. The recreational land proposed to be allocated for development is not needed for recreational purposes, and any redistribution of recreational uses around campus would be agreed as part of any future application to be agreed with the Council and Sport England.

## 2. Inspector's Questions

- 2.1 In response to the Inspector's questions, the University has the following comments:

### **Q1: Green Belt**

- 2.2 The University supports the removal of land to either side of the main campus from the Green Belt. This is consistent with the findings of the Joint Green Belt Study which assessed all parcels of Green Belt along the inner boundary and identified that these legacy 'green wedges' did not serve the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 2.3 This is also consistent with the approach being taken by Warwick District Council to the south of Westwood Heath Road, where land is being safeguarded for future development and the new inner boundary of the Green Belt is therefore moving significantly from its current position.
- 2.4 The University's concern is that it is necessary to satisfy NPPF paragraph 83 which states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in 'exceptional circumstances'. Recent case law from Solihull shows that it is necessary for the LPA to set out the circumstances in the plan for any change it proposes to make to the Green Belt, whether removing or adding sites.
- 2.5 The Coventry Local Plan Publication Draft noted that 'exceptional circumstances' are different from 'special circumstances' which are required to justify inappropriate development within the Green Belt but in the supporting text to Policy GB1, reference is made to 'very special circumstances' rather than 'exceptional circumstances'. The University considers that Policy GB1 is not sound because it is inconsistent with paragraph 83 of the NPPF which requires exceptional circumstances to be identified. These should be specifically included in the supporting text.
- 2.6 We offer this observation to support the removal of Green Belt, not to oppose it.
- 2.7 In redesignating the land removed from the Green Belt as local urban green space, the University supports the Council's intentions to keep this land open. However, as the Council is proposing to allocate land south of Charter Avenue for housing development, it seems inconsistent to retain adjoining land to the east as urban greenspace. This would then be contained with development on three sides. The University's recreational needs can be met across the wider campus as part of its current Sports Hub initiative – where it is building a new sports centre on the Warwickshire side of campus and providing opportunities for physical activity in a number of other locations around campus. The allocation of this site for development can then be incorporated into the wider masterplanning exercise which will be looking at a substantive redevelopment of the Westwood Campus.

## **Q2: Reserved Land in the Green Belt**

- 2.8 In Policy GB2, land to the south of Westwood Heath Road has been allocated as Reserved Land in the Green Belt. This mirrors a similar proposal in the Warwick Local Plan which removes adjoining land south of Westwood Heath Road from the Green Belt and safeguards it for long-term development.
- 2.9 The policy states that such land will only be released from the Green Belt where it forms an integral part of a comprehensive development scheme that involves both the Reserved Land and the adjoining land within Warwick District.
- 2.10 The University is not opposed to this in principle, but has previously expressed concerns about infrastructure capacity in this area. The University is already engaged with the three highway authorities in looking at long term infrastructure improvements to serve both the continued growth of the University and any future housing or other development in the area. There is a proposed housing allocation on Westwood Heath Road in the Warwick Local Plan (Proposal H42) and similar concerns have been raised through that Local Plan Examination.
- 2.11 The University is simply seeking reassurance that in reserving land from the Green Belt for future development, an appropriate high level assessment of infrastructure capacity has been undertaken to ensure that there is a realistic prospect of delivery and that existing assets are not undermined.

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