

CHAPTER 4: EMPLOYMENT AND PROSPERITY

INTRODUCTION

Objections to First Deposit 1275/123 – CPRE.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does the Plan acknowledge the damage to the environment and impact on transport infrastructure that economic growth has caused;*
- *Does the Plan over-emphasise the Borough's role in providing jobs, pointing to an unsustainable future which could damage the environment;*
- *Should the introductory text recognise that economic growth has led to the over-heating of the local economy, and include a commitment to restrain growth in the future.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.1 The introductory text to this chapter summarises the past growth in Solihull's economy and the background to the policies in the adopted UDP. It also identifies two areas of caution: the long-standing high unemployment rate in the north of the Borough and concern about the environmental and highway impacts of rapid growth. Rev 4/1 confirms that developers should demonstrate that proposals help to achieve an integrated and sustainable transport strategy and protect the environmental quality and character of the Borough. CPRE considers the text does not sufficiently acknowledge the environmental and transport impact of past economic growth and overstates the Borough's role in providing additional jobs, encouraging commuting from areas outside Solihull, and urges restraint on economic growth in the future.
- 4.2 As SMBC rightly says, Solihull continues to be attractive to business and other economic development. Past and current regional guidance requires the Borough to contribute to the portfolio of business sites, recognising its important role in attracting regionally significant economic development that may otherwise be lost to the region, in the context of RPG11 Policies UR1, PA1-PA9 & PA14. Although the latest regional strategy focuses economic development on the MUAs, Chapter 2 of RPG11 recognises the importance of maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, helping to support and diversify the region's economy, and providing the right amounts of employment land of the right type in the right places (¶ 7.30).
- 4.3 Recent developments, including BBP, BVP, BIA & NEC, have provided a substantial number of jobs, and 30,000 more jobs could be created by planned developments by 2010. This might begin to upset the balance between the existing workforce and commuting, but would be unlikely to affect the character of the Borough, due to the policies protecting the environment. Some commuting is inevitable in a tightly-knit metropolitan area like the West Midlands, particularly given the proximity of Birmingham and Coventry city centres to Solihull and the good transport links. It is neither practicable nor equitable to expect all new jobs to be provided in Birmingham or other parts of the conurbation. Solihull clearly has a role to play, in not only providing jobs for its own workforce and diversifying its own economic base, but also making an important contribution to the West Midlands economy, subject to the qualifications of environmental impact and transport considerations.
- 4.4 The text already recognises most of CPRE's concerns, particularly the impact on the environmental character and quality of the Borough and on the transport infrastructure. The SUDPR attempts to balance economic, social and environmental considerations and to address specific problems such as high unemployment levels in the north of the Borough. Apart from BVP2, it does not propose any further major releases of new employment land, and future

economic growth would be subject to environmental protection and sustainable transport considerations. The overall strategy reflects the objectives and policies in the latest regional strategy [CD51G], aiming to maintain high and stable levels of economic growth, whilst protecting the environment. Moreover, there is little firm evidence or analysis about any adverse effects arising from the possible over-heating of the local economy.

- 4.5 CPRE's suggested amendments to the introductory text would not, in my view, reflect the legitimate role of Solihull in providing employment for the wider area, as confirmed in the latest regional strategy, and would introduce an unnecessary and unjustified level of restraint on the future growth of the local economy. I deal with the criticisms about particular sites and proposals later in this section of my report. Consequently, I am satisfied that the introductory text, as amended in the Revised Deposit draft, strikes an appropriate balance between economic development, environmental protection and impact on transport infrastructure, and provides an appropriate context for the policies and proposals which follow.

Recommendation

4.6 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

POLICY E1 - PROVISION OF PREMIUM EMPLOYMENT SITES

General background to the provision of Regional Investment Sites

- 4.7 The background to the provision of *Regional Investment Sites* (RIS; formerly known as *Premium Employment Sites (PES)*) is fully set out in SMBC's Background Papers [CD147-148]. Most of the information in these papers is factual and largely uncontentious. Suffice it to say that there has been a long and consistent history of strategic planning policy in the West Midlands requiring the release of land for high quality business development, stemming from the 1982 WM County Structure Plan and 1988 regional guidance [PPG10; CD24]. *Birmingham Business Park* (BBP) was the first site to be released in Solihull, following approval by the Secretary of State in 1986. *Blythe Valley Park* (BVP) followed after its approval by the Secretary of State in 1995, following public inquiries which considered several competing schemes.
- 4.8 The latest regional strategy [CD51G] continues to require the release of land for RIS and recognises that this may involve development on greenfield land. Policy PA1 sets the context for economic growth, focusing such development within the MUAs and emphasising the importance of Regeneration Zones, but including criteria for growth opportunities outside and on the edge of the MUAs and on other greenfield sites. Policy PA2 identifies Urban Regeneration Zones, within which economic investment should be focused, including that at East Birmingham & North Solihull (EB/NSRZ). Policy PA3 identifies High-Technology Corridors, focused on MUAs at specific nodes, including one on the south-eastern side of Solihull serving Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire (CSW-HTC). Policy PA6 requires LPAs to provide and maintain a range and choice of readily available employment sites to meet the needs of the regional economy, as part of a portfolio of employment land, including RIS, Major Investment Sites (MIS) and Regional Logistics Sites (RLS), along with second tier Sub-Regional and good quality local employment sites.
- 4.9 Policy PA7 is the key regional policy relating to RIS, requiring the provision of a series of RIS and setting out specific criteria. Sites should be between 25-50ha in size, high quality and attractive to national/international investors, served by multi-modal transport facilities and broadband IT, well related to the motorway/trunk road network, within or close to the areas of greatest need,

and accessible to education/training opportunities to bring employment benefits to the local workforce. At least one RIS should be provided within or linked by public transport to each of the Urban Regeneration Zones and High-Technology Corridors, with possible additional provision in CSW-HTC. Priority is given to proposals within the Regeneration Zones, and those on the edge of the MUA or on other greenfield sites should only be permitted if there are no suitable alternatives available on previously developed land and buildings within built-up area, and the development is capable of being served by rail or high quality public transport within easy access of centres and facilities, and respects the natural and built environment and heritage.

- 4.10 The accompanying text indicates that EB/NSRZ is currently adequately served by RIS. It identifies existing PES at BBP serving CSW-HTC & EB/NSRZ, with BVP serving CSW-HTC. It also recognises that an extension to BVP serving CSW-HTC and the principle of a new RIS at Bassetts Pole are contained in emerging and adopted development plans. BBP & BVP are thus seen to play a key role in delivering the provision of RIS employment land in this part of the West Midlands. In terms of the regional spatial strategy, both BBP & BVP lie close to the edge of the MUA. The employment strategy for the region also has to be seen in the context of the *Regional Economic Strategy [CD65/67]*. This acknowledges the need for further RIS, but applies a spatial, rather than a quantitative approach to provision. It also identifies four “pillars” of the strategy: creating a diverse and dynamic business base, a learning and skilful region, conditions for growth, and regenerated communities, all underpinning AWM’s EB/NSRZ Implementation Plan [CD68].
- 4.11 The adopted UDP [CD111] was prepared in the context of previous regional guidance [PPG10; CD24], but later revisions following the UDP inquiries took on board the subsequent 1995 RPG11 [CD53] and the approval of BVP. The SUDPR was originally prepared in the context of the 1998 RPG11 [CD52], but as it progressed has taken the emerging new regional strategy into account. It also takes on board the objectives of SMBC’s *Economic Development Strategy [CD124]*. At the inquiry, SMBC provided further amendments to this section of the SUDPR [CD170], updating the position and reflecting the latest regional strategy, which have been incorporated into the latest amendments [CD175].
- 4.12 The provision of RIS is one of the most contentious aspects of the SUDPR. It is not so much the general approach of providing such sites, but the specific sites proposed to be designated as RIS. The Borough contains two existing RIS, at *Birmingham Business Park* (BBP) and *Blythe Valley Park* (BVP). The First Deposit draft included proposals to extend both business parks, but at Revised Deposit stage only BVP2 is retained. There are several other competing proposals, including those at *Brickfield Farm & Blackfirs Lane*, along with another proposal to extend BBP, which were discussed at the inquiry. Other sites have also been suggested by objectors.
- 4.13 This issue was the subject of several days debate at the inquiry, including a RTS, at which a large number of documents and material was referred to. I have taken all this material into account, but I do not intend to refer to every document or piece of evidence that was submitted or referred to at the inquiry or in writing. SMBC and the developers of the competing RIS generally agree that there is a need to make further provision of RIS in Solihull at this time, but some argue that their sites are more suitable than the extension proposed at BVP. However, other objectors, like CPRE, HIAS & HHPC, question the philosophy of making further RIS provision on greenfield Green Belt sites, and argue that such provision could be made within the urban area or outside Solihull. In order to provide a consistent approach and avoid duplication, I deal firstly with the general issue of RIS provision in Solihull, before considering the proposals for BVP and the other sites promoted by objectors.

POLICY E1: PREMIUM EMPLOYMENT SITES**Objections to First Deposit**

1069/1041 – GO-WM; 1080/198 – WMFOE; 1126/331 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1144/1076-1077 – Development Securities; 1275/126 – CPRE; 1359/724 – Taylor Woodrow Devts Ltd; 1371/346 – Gallagher Estates; 1402/971 – Redland Properties; 1411/683 – Silkplan; 1412/890-891 – Slough Properties Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1126/514/R-515/R - Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/148/R, 151/R-152/R – CPRE; 1351/433-442/R – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd; 1411/192-194/R – Silkplan; 1485/92/R – Slough Estates plc.

Key issues

- *Is the employment strategy of the UDP Review consistent with the latest regional strategy, particularly in the context of the provision of Regional Investment Sites;*
- *Is there a continuing need to provide Regional Investment Sites to meet the economic objectives of the latest regional strategy;*
- *What is the current availability of suitable employment land to meet the objectives of RIS serving EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC, including brownfield sites within the urban area and greenfield/Green Belt land within Solihull, along with committed or emerging sites on land outside Solihull;*
- *Is there a need for further RIS land to be designated to meet the needs of EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC, and should that need be met in Solihull;*
- *What are the consequences of not designating additional land for RIS at this time, along with the economic impact of any shortfall in provision;*
- *Are there any exceptional circumstances which would justify the release of Green Belt land in Solihull at this time to meet any need for further RIS provision, and does the SUDPR provide sufficient justification for the release of such land, particularly at Blythe Valley Park;*
- *Are the amended site-selection criteria (¶ 4.1.3) appropriate, or do they place too much emphasis on the northern section of the M42;*
- *Does the Plan identify a geographic cluster of premium employment sites which would put pressure on the Meriden/Redditch Gaps in the Green Belt and result in overheating of the local economy;*
- *Should the dates of the documents referred to in the accompanying text be specified, and should Policy E1 be more specific about the definition of high quality business uses;*
- *Rev 4/3-4/4 (¶ 4.1.2-4.1.3): does the text adequately justify Policy E1 or conflict with the objectives of the SUDPR and Green Belt principles.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.14 Policy E1 confirms that land for high quality industrial research or office development within Use Class B1 will be designated, consistent with regional guidance and shown on the Proposals Map. The accompanying text sets out the background and context of such provision. The latest amendments [CD175] re-title this section *Provision of Regional Investment Sites*, and reword the Policy to designate land for this purpose, as well as updating the accompanying text to reflect the latest regional guidance and deleting the specific criteria for such sites set out in the RDUDP. These amendments would go a long way towards updating the context and underlying basis for the provision of RIS in Solihull and meet some aspects of the objections.

Consistency with the latest regional strategy

4.15 Like SMBC and many objectors, I see the provision of RIS as having a fundamental role to play in delivering the “step change” in the performance of the West Midlands economy envisaged in the latest regional strategy, particularly bearing in mind that the region lags behind other regions in the UK & Europe. Such sites comprise a key element in the portfolio of employment

land required under RPG11 Policy PA6 to ensure that a continuing supply and choice of the right amount of land, of the right type and in the right place is available to support existing economic activity and encourage diversification of the regional economy through the promotion of high quality businesses and the attraction of inward investment.

- 4.16 Of course, there is a need to temper this element of the employment strategy with environmental, Green Belt and other considerations, but it is clear to me that the latest regional strategy sees the provision of RIS as essential to the regional economy. There is little practical difference between the former PES and RIS, since PES essentially fulfil a similar role to RIS. It is also clear that the latest regional strategy sees Solihull playing an important part in the provision of RIS, both existing and proposed, particularly in terms of BBP & BVP and serving EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC.
- 4.17 The employment strategy of the SUDPR helps to provide employment land of the right type and in the right places, particularly in terms of RPG11 Policies PA1, PA6 & PA7. It concentrates the provision of employment land on existing sites within the MUA, and the only completely new greenfield site outside the MUA is the proposed extension to BVP (Proposal E1/4), which needs to be justified on its specific merits. I also understand that there is no criticism of the Plan's employment strategy from WMRPB. Consequently, I am generally satisfied that the SUDPR's employment strategy broadly reflects the latest regional strategy, with the amendments now proposed by SMBC.
- 4.18 However, I consider that some of the text accompanying Policy E1 (¶ 4.1.2) places too much reliance on the earlier regional strategy, with its emphasis on quantitative rather than spatial provision. Although this provides the background to earlier thinking on the SUDPR, it does not reflect the latest regional strategy on which the SUDPR should be based. The first part of paragraph 4.1.2 should therefore be replaced with text that better reflects the current regional strategy in terms of provision of RIS.
- 4.19 The means by which the provision of further RIS should be made largely depends on the site-specific merits of the competing sites, in particular, whether they meet the relevant criteria set out in RPG11 Policy PA7, including the relationship with EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC. I deal with these matters under the individual sites, later in this section of my report.

Need for Regional Investment Sites

- 4.20 At the RTS, SMBC and the developers agreed that there is a soundly-based case to provide more land for RIS, but other objectors, like CPRE & HHPC, argued that this may not necessarily be the case, given existing provision and future commitments. However, most parties agreed that the general need for RIS is established in the latest regional strategy, although some argued that this need did not necessarily have to be met in Solihull. Furthermore, an inadequate supply of employment land, including RIS, can constrain economic growth and development, and an appropriate portfolio of land is necessary to secure economic growth and a sustainable pattern of development.
- 4.21 The provision of RIS is clearly an important element of the latest regional strategy and the portfolio of employment land which has to be provided in each area. RIS is distinguished from other components of the portfolio which are to be provided within the MUA, recognising that some greenfield land may have to be released. The latest regional strategy indicates that further RIS provision is not needed to serve EB/NSRZ, but may be needed to serve CSW-HTC. Moreover, whilst Policy PA7 sets out specific criteria in terms of the size and characteristics of RIS, contrary to some objectors' view, it does not suggest that RIS provision can be disaggregated and made by providing several smaller sites, since RIS clearly need to have a "critical mass" to meet the necessary business requirements.

- 4.22 The purpose of Policy PA7 is to support the diversification and modernisation of the region's economy, particularly the development of the region's cluster priorities as identified in the *Regional Economic Strategy*, one of which lies along the south-eastern side of Solihull (CSW-HTC). Both BBP & BVP have a good track record of providing land for high quality inward investment, attracting new companies and enabling existing businesses to expand. WMRPB confirms that there should not be an automatic and unrestricted supply of RIS land merely because existing sites have been fully developed [O/E1/2/1412/890/3/Appx20]. However, the latest regional strategy clearly indicates the need for further diversification and modernisation of the regional economy, and a consequent need for additional RIS land. The provision of further RIS would directly help to meet the need for an adequate range, choice and supply of RIS land for the period of the current SUDPR and over the longer-term period of RPG11.
- 4.23 Some might argue that the provision of relatively spacious business parks may not represent the most efficient and sustainable use of greenfield sites, particularly in terms of prudent use of Green Belt land and natural resources. However, in order to attract inward investment and new businesses, sites of the highest environmental quality are often required, particularly given the competitive nature of this sector of the economy. If it can be clearly shown that there is no other suitable land available, including brownfield and other sites within the main urban areas, then the release of greenfield sites may inevitably be necessary. However, the understandable desire of footloose businesses and promoters of high quality business parks to establish such sites in pleasant parts of the Green Belt has to be tempered by the fact that this approach may not be justified on the grounds of locational necessity, particularly in view of the speculative nature of some of this development and the difficulties of forecasting demand for this type of land.
- 4.24 At the inquiry, there was some debate about the evolution of the proposals to release greenfield land for RIS in the SUDPR. I understand that the amount of land release was originally based on the quantitative provisions of the 1998 RPG11 [CD52], which required up to 100ha of PES to be provided in the Birmingham/Solihull sector. The original proposals in the First Deposit SUDPR were based on a 18ha shortfall in these aspirations, which made it difficult to justify a new RIS within the 25-50ha size range envisaged in 2004 RPG11 Policy PA7. This approach has some merit, since it means that a new free-standing RIS does not need to be identified, and would make good use of the presence and infrastructure at the existing RIS.
- 4.25 However, it is important to note that the previous quantitative guidelines in the 1998 RPG11 no longer apply, in favour of a spatial approach. Furthermore, the quantum of additional RIS land needed to keep pace with current trends (c.20ha) would not justify the identification of a completely new RIS. This approach is consistent with the latest regional strategy which does not require a new RIS for EB/NSRZ or CSW-HTC. It would also reflect the latest spatial strategy which seeks to minimise development on the edge of the MUAs and the release of Green Belt land. However, it inevitably focuses the search on the existing RIS at BBP/BVP and nearby land.
- 4.26 Some objectors argue that further provision of RIS land does not have to be provided in Solihull, since it could be provided outside the Borough boundary and still serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC. However, although Policy PA7 confirms that EB/NSRZ is currently adequately served by existing RIS, it indicates that additional RIS provision *may* be required in CSW-HTC and notes that BVP2 is included in an emerging UDP. No other proposals are being advanced through the development plan system to make good this requirement. I also realise that Solihull is not identified as an area where there is an urgent need or shortfall of RIS land, whilst certain other parts of the region are singled out as requiring specific RIS provision to meet particular needs or shortfalls.

- 4.27 However, although LPAs are not required to provide all elements of the portfolio, RPG11 Policy PA6 requires them to *provide and maintain* a portfolio of employment sites, including RIS, to meet the needs of the *regional*, rather than local economy. Although it is debatable whether this form of provision should continue indefinitely, the maintenance of a portfolio of sites and provision of a *series* of RIS (in Policy PA7) suggests the need for a *continued* supply of such sites at least within the timescale of the latest regional strategy. It is also important to ensure that desirable and necessary employment development is not lost due to lack of site availability.
- 4.28 Some objectors, like CPRE, argue that Solihull is “full up” and cannot accommodate further RIS land without compromising the Green Belt and the quality of its countryside, but this is more assertion than firm evidence. Solihull is attractive to new investment, with good accessibility, good quality housing and facilities, and is well placed to attract further investment, enterprise and employment. In my view, the location of future RIS provision largely depends on the availability and suitability of potential RIS land both within and outside Solihull, a matter that I now address.

Availability of existing and potential RIS within and outside Solihull

- 4.29 The availability of RIS land in Solihull is currently limited to BBP & BVP. New RPG11 acknowledges BBP as serving both EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC, whilst BVP serves CSW-HTC. However, as SMBC says, BVP also has a role in serving EB/NSRZ, as shown in its public transport links and training initiatives. Figures show that 18% of BVP employees live in EB/NSRZ, comparing well with BBP’s figure of 22%. Bus services from East Birmingham to BVP are reasonably good and current plans envisage improving bus services from the North Solihull part of EB/NSRZ.
- 4.30 At present, over 100ha of RIS exists in Solihull [UDP.144K]. BBP covers a total area of 60ha, with 6.5ha of landscaping/roads. During the last 15 years, about 39ha has been developed, leaving some 14.5ha remaining. This equates to a land supply of about 5-6 years, at an average take-up rate of 2.42ha/year, resulting in land being used up at BBP by 2010. BVP covers about 40ha, of which about 32ha is developable, with 13.7ha developed to date, leaving 18.3ha remaining. Of this, the remaining 16.5ha of land which is not presently developed or under option is expected to provide about 4.5 years supply of land at the current average take-up rate of 3.63ha/year. The available land at BVP is expected to run out by 2008-2009.
- 4.31 There is some dispute about the precise take-up rates, based on the particular circumstances of each business park, including loss of options at BBP and delays at BVP caused by access and infrastructure provision. I recognise that BBP and BVP are not yet fully completed, but there is currently a total of just over 30ha of RIS land remaining available at BBP and BVP which, at the current total rate of take-up of at least 6ha/year would probably be exhausted within about 5 years. Moreover, no objector has produced any evidence to contradict the view that the current supply of RIS land at BVP & BBP is likely to be exhausted before the end of the current Plan period.
- 4.32 Furthermore, these figures could be seen as a minimum provision, bearing in mind the reliance on past trends, which takes no account of the need for a step-change in the regional economy, the relatively long lead time to bring forward RIS land and the need to provide a range and choice of sites. Higher take-up rates in the future would advance the need to make further provision of RIS land. SMBC and most of the developers argue that, based on current take-up rates, there is a case to release up to 20ha of additional RIS land to serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC in the period to 2011 and immediately beyond. Moreover, most parties agree that it is better to extend an existing RIS than release greenfield land to create a completely new RIS.

- 4.33 At the inquiry, there was some discussion about the timing of bringing forward additional RIS land. Previous regional guidance [CD24] set a “trigger point” to release further RIS land when existing sites are likely to be 75% occupied within 3 years time, used when considering the release of BVP. This approach no longer features in more recent regional guidance, including the latest RPG11, being replaced by the need for a continuing supply and choice of RIS land. However, it provides a useful starting point to consider this issue, particularly given the relatively long timescale needed to bring forward such land, typically 2-4 years. SMBC and the developers agree that this point has now been reached in Solihull, with BBP about 60-70% complete and BVP about 44% complete, and having regard to current rates of take-up of RIS land.
- 4.34 SMBC has undertaken a full and comprehensive search of potential RIS land within this sub-region, both within and beyond Solihull’s MUA and in the surrounding areas outside the Borough boundary, informed by the RELS [CD78] and UCS [CD99-101], and summarised in the Background Paper [CD148]. Although there are some existing brownfield sites within the MUA (including the former British Gas & TRW sites), all are too small to meet the 25-50ha threshold in RPG11 Policy PA7, some are already committed for other uses, and none would fully meet the RIS criteria. Some sites, like the TRW site, have the potential to provide high quality business development, but not of the scale needed for a RIS, and some sites are not well located in terms of the motorway network and public transport. Even considered collectively, the potential sites would not fully meet the criteria for RIS. I also understand that the supply of existing employment land within the North Solihull part of EB/NSRZ is not particularly plentiful. Outside the MUA, the search effectively focuses on BBP, BVP and other nearby greenfield sites, including the possible expansion of BBP & BVP, Brickfields Farm, Blackfirs Lane, Light Hall Farm, Stratford Road, Damson Parkway and Arden Brickworks. I deal with these sites in detail later in this section of my report.
- 4.35 SMBC has also considered the availability and suitability of potential RIS land outside Solihull, including major brownfield sites such as Minworth Sewage Works, Coleshill Hospital, Hams Hall, Baddesley Colliery, Birch Coppice, Keresley Park and Ansty Park. Many of these sites are largely developed or committed for other types of employment, including “second-tier” sites, or are too small for a RIS and would not fully meet the RIS criteria or directly serve EB/NSRZ. Both SMBC & WMRPB have concluded that, apart from Ansty, none of these sites are available or suitable for use as RIS. The latest RPG11 identifies Ansty as a MIS or partly as a science park serving the nearby Regeneration Zone, but it could serve CSW-HTC as a RIS if the MIS proposals fail to materialise [CD78; ¶ 4.9] .
- 4.36 As for other possible sites, the former *Prologis* site at Coventry is mainly a Regional Distribution Site and would not meet the criteria for a RIS. Sites suggested by CPRE and other objectors, such as Longbridge or Kynoch in Birmingham, would not fully meet the RIS criteria or directly serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC. Birmingham Eastside & Heartlands, large regeneration projects within EB/NSRZ, are accessible by public transport from Chelmsley Wood and North Solihull, but would probably not meet the quality criteria needed for RIS land and would not directly serve CSW-HTC. Sites in North Staffordshire and the Black Country would similarly not meet the needs of EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC. Moreover, no objector has identified a site or sites within the MUA which would fully meet the RIS criteria and serve CSW-HTC & EB/NSRZ.
- 4.37 At the inquiry, there was some debate about the Bassetts Pole site, which was proposed for release in the emerging Birmingham UDP. However, the UDP inspector rejected the proposal on the grounds that it was not adequately justified, and consequently there is a question mark over this site. Most parties agreed that this site would be unlikely to come forward much before 2011, if at all. I realise that the loss of this site might increase the importance

of ensuring continued provision of RIS land elsewhere to serve EB/NSRZ. However, it is premature to argue, as some objectors do, that additional RIS provision is justified in Solihull because of the uncertainty about this site. WMRPB has confirmed that should Bassetts Pole not come forward, a sub-regional study should urgently review alternative options and in due course make amendments to RPG11 [CD78; ¶ 4.11]. Neither BVP nor BBP could make up for the absence of locational choice if Bassetts Pole does not come forward, and the release of further RIS land at this time to fill a temporary policy void could result in greenfield Green Belt land being needlessly released, undermining the latest regional strategy.

- 4.38 As a result of this detailed search, I can conclude that there is currently no suitable and available land within or outside the MUA, within Solihull or elsewhere, which would fully meet the criteria for RIS to serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC and come forward in the period up to 2011. I recognise that the provision of RIS has regional significance and cross-border implications, but RPG11 Policy PA7 clearly expects such sites to be brought forward through the development plan process. Although the future provision of such land in the longer term might more appropriately be subject to a comprehensive review at regional level, there is some urgency in terms of the Solihull area to serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC within the current SUDPR Plan period, given current land availability and take-up rates.
- 4.39 In view of the current supply and take-up of RIS land at BBP & BVP, I can also conclude that there is insufficient justification for the release of a major new greenfield site for a RIS at this time. Nevertheless, there may be a case for a limited extension of one of the existing business parks to maintain continuity of supply towards the end of the current SUDPR Plan period if suitable land can be found. However, in order to justify the possible release of greenfield RIS land within Solihull, it would be helpful if the text accompanying Policy E1 summarises the current supply of RIS land and SMBC's comprehensive search for alternative and potential sites within and outside Solihull.

Consequences of not designating further RIS land in Solihull

- 4.40 SMBC and the developers agree that RIS provision serving EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC will be exhausted before 2011, and there would be insufficient time to bring forward new sites in a future review of the UDP to ensure continuity of supply. There are several factors supporting the continued supply of RIS land in Solihull. Firstly, it is important to maintain the supply of RIS land, since this is a long-standing, consistent and successful element of West Midlands strategic planning policy, which has a long lead time in terms of delivery. Secondly, any break or slowdown in the supply and choice of readily available RIS land could result in lost inward investment, which would have to be located in other parts of the West Midlands or could be lost to the region. This could harm the economic competitiveness of the region with consequent impact on its communities due to less employment being created and loss of investment. Furthermore, the significance of cluster development and the potential synergies of associated businesses and markets in terms of CSW-HTC should not be forgotten. The concept of HTCs is business led, rather than a land-use concept, and the role of the planning system is to facilitate development through the identification of suitable sites.
- 4.41 Sufficient attractive RIS land also needs to be available to provide a range of suitable opportunities to attract inward investors and new companies, helping to modernise and diversify the regional and local economy. I realise that, in some cases, RIS land has been occupied by companies which are not new or new to the West Midlands region, but such land can enable existing local and regional companies to expand and be retained to prevent their relocation and loss from the region. Such companies have high standards and requirements, and if they are not accommodated in this region, they may go elsewhere.

- 4.42 Some objectors, like CPRE, argue that BBP & BVP do not contribute to EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC, but are resulting in decentralisation of office developments from the urban area, contrary to RPG11 (¶ 7.8). Although there may be some examples of this taking place, this does not take into account the impact of the loss of these companies if new high quality land is not provided. Given the importance of such land and the specific reasons for its release and designation, and taking on board the views of CPRE & HHPC, it is equally important to ensure that it used for the proper purpose, and not squandered by locating uses or businesses that do not need to be sited on high quality greenfield business parks. The best sites should be kept for the attraction of businesses and employment opportunities which help to diversify and increase the range of high-tech and high value-added companies in the region, in line with RPG11 Policy PA3 (¶ 7.37). To these ends, it would be helpful if the text accompanying Policy E1 confirms that development on RIS land will be restricted these uses, in line with the definition in the latest regional strategy [CD51G; Policy PA7; ¶ 7.37; Glossary: p.147].
- 4.43 I recognise that Policy PA7 does not specifically indicate that further RIS must be in Solihull, but given the existing supply of potential RIS within and outside Solihull, it is important that there is no serious break in the provision of such land in this part of the region. If such provision is not made in Solihull, it would have to be provided in other parts of the region, if suitable land could be found. A complete break in provision of RIS land could have serious consequences for the regional economic strategy and for the region as a whole, as well as for Solihull. Similarly, failure to make any new RIS provision would undermine the objectives of the latest regional strategy to provide a portfolio of sites, including RIS land, to serve EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC, as well as prejudicing local and regional economic and planning policies. It would also result in a shortfall of RIS land in Solihull before the end of the current SUDPR Plan period. Without the provision of additional RIS land in Solihull, the West Midlands economy could lose out to other regions, prejudicing the aims of the latest regional strategy, particularly the objectives of Policies PA1, PA6 & PA7.

Exceptional circumstances for justifying the release of Green Belt land in Solihull to meet the need for additional RIS provision

- 4.44 The latest regional strategy focuses economic development on the MUAs and resists the peripheral expansion of such areas, but in certain circumstances allows for regionally important employment where it supports urban renaissance. Policy PA1 specifically recognises that there may be a need to release land for high quality business development on the edge of MUAs or on other greenfield sites where no suitable alternatives exist on previously developed land within the urban areas, and allows adjustments to Green Belt boundaries where this is necessary to support urban regeneration.
- 4.45 Most objectors agree that the need to provide further RIS land could represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to release Green Belt land, whilst SMBC and the developers agree that the allocation of further RIS land is urgent as well as necessary. Some argue that the need for continuity and sustaining the growth of the region constitutes the exceptional circumstances necessary to release Green Belt land. However, in my view, the release of additional RIS should be related to the key objectives of the regional strategy in supporting the renaissance and regeneration of the MUAs. This test is correctly set at a high level, but the latest regional strategy confirms that the provision of further RIS is required and that it could represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to release Green Belt land if no other suitable sites are available. The key point is whether a rigorous search of potential sites has been undertaken, clearly demonstrating that no alternative brownfield sites are suitable and available within the main urban areas. SMBC also confirms

that it does not propose lightly to release Green Belt land for development and has resisted such releases in most other cases.

- 4.46 It therefore seems to me that, given the lack of any alternative suitable and available brownfield or other land within the main urban areas or elsewhere, the overall and specific need to provide further RIS land could represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the release of Green Belt greenfield land in Solihull, provided that it supports urban regeneration and serves EB/NSRZ & CSW-HTC. However, this has to be seen in the context of the site-specific characteristics of the proposed and potential sites, particularly the impact on the environment, Green Belt and amenity, along with traffic and other factors. These are best dealt with on a site-by-site basis, later in this section of my report. Furthermore, since all the proposed and competing sites are greenfield sites in the Green Belt, they would need to satisfy not only all the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7, but also those in Policy PA1(D).

Other considerations

- 4.47 At the inquiry, there was some discussion about the new site-selection criteria set out in the SUDPR (¶ 4.1.3) which new RIS would have to meet. The latest amendments [CD175] confirm that sites should meet the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7 and where appropriate Policy PA1. Sites should also meet the provisions of PPG2, as well as taking into account the impact of traffic congestion on surrounding roads and the M42, particularly near the NEC & BIA. Arlington and other objectors thought this did not give equal treatment to proposals affecting M6/M42(J6) and those affecting M42(J4). At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that this criterion relates to the need to consider the traffic impact along the entire M42 corridor, whilst highlighting the particular problems that are known to exist closer to the M6/M42 junctions. I am satisfied that these are reasonable and relevant local criteria to specify, but in view of the importance of the strategic criteria included in Policies PA7 & PA1, it would be helpful if these were actually spelt out in the SUDPR, as well as the additional factors that SMBC wishes to take into account.
- 4.48 In response to WMFOE, the SUDPR does not specifically identify a geographic cluster of premium employment sites, but acknowledges and complements the existing provision of RIS and makes use of existing infrastructure. This is fully in line with the latest regional strategy, which identifies a key node of the CSW-HTC on the south-eastern side of Solihull, encompassing BBP & BVP. This supports the regeneration and diversification of the regional economy by making limited provision of land for high quality business development. Neither WMFOE nor CPRE submit any firm evidence showing the possible overheating of the local economy, and I consider there is little sound basis for this element of these objections.
- 4.49 HIAS makes several criticisms of Policy E1 and the supporting text, but SMBC's latest amendments to the Policy and accompanying text address or overcome most of the relevant points. The references to the UCO and *high quality* business uses have been deleted in favour of RIS, and new RPG11 adequately defines this latter term in the Glossary [CD51G; p.147]. Policy E1 reflects the principal objectives of the SUDPR and the supporting text provides more justification for the Policy. With the deletion of the previous criteria (¶ 4.1.3(b)), I cannot see that there is any conflict with Green Belt policy, since exceptional or very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated to release Green Belt land for high quality employment development.
- 4.50 Consequently, I conclude firstly that the employment strategy of the SUDPR generally reflects the latest regional strategy, by concentrating most new employment provision within the MUA, with only one new greenfield employment site at BVP2. Secondly, there is a continuing need to provide a supply, range and choice of RIS land to serve CSW-HTC & EB/NSRZ in the

context of the latest regional strategy which, given the lack of suitable alternative sites available in the MUA and elsewhere, could provide the underlying basis for the exceptional circumstances justifying the release of greenfield Green Belt land. Thirdly, the consequences of failing to designate further RIS land at this time would be damaging to the regional and local economy. The issue of the location of such provision largely depends on the particular merits of the competing sites, which I deal with later. I am also satisfied that SMBC's latest revisions to the wording of Policy E1 and the supporting text, with the additional points I recommend, would adequately address the relevant points made by objectors and update the situation. Since most of the accompanying text (¶ 4.1.1-4.1.3) is factual, it is not directly affected by any of my later recommendations on specific sites.

Recommendation

- 4.51 I RECOMMEND** that the Plan is **modified** by:
- (i) amending the title of this section and Policy E1 to refer to **Regional Investment Sites**;
 - (ii) amending and updating the accompanying text to refer to the latest regional strategy, as proposed by SMBC [CD175];
 - (iii) amending the accompanying text (¶ 4.1.2-4.1.3) by:
 - (a) replacing the references to the previous regional guidance (¶ 4.1.2) with text that more appropriately reflects the latest regional strategy in terms of providing Regional Investment Sites;
 - (b) summarising the current supply of RIS land and SMBC's analysis of the availability of potential RIS land within and outside Solihull;
 - (c) confirming that employment development on sites allocated under Policy E1 will be restricted to high quality developments falling within Class B1 of the Use Classes Order, in line with Policy PA7 and the glossary in the latest regional strategy [CD51G; p.147];
 - (d) setting out the specific criteria for Regional Investment Sites in RPG11 Policies PA7 & PA1, as well as the additional factors to be taken into account.

PROPOSAL E1/1: BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS PARK

Objections to First Deposit

1144/1077 – Development Securities

Objections to Revised Deposit

1275/153/R – CPRE; 1351/438/R, 440/R – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd; 1485/92/R – Slough Estates plc.

Key issues

- Should the accompanying text (¶ 4.1.5) provide for landscaping and boundary treatment around the proposed extension to BBP, including making provision for the Midland Metro;
- Rev 4/5 (¶ 4.1.4): is the added text accurate in terms of the regional status of BBP;
- Rev 4/6 (¶ 4.1.5): should the Plan acknowledge the prospect of future expansion of BBP, including its growth and evolution into a third generation business park, contributing to the regeneration of North Solihull.

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.52 Proposal E1/1 designates 60ha of land at BBP as a PES, as approved by the Secretary of State in 1986 and shown on the Proposals Map. SMBC proposes to amend its designation to a *Regional Investment Site* and update the position in terms of RPG11 in its latest amendments [CD175]. Devt Securities'

original objection related to the extension to BBP proposed at First Deposit stage, which I consider under Proposal E1/2 below.

- 4.53 Rev 4/5 (¶ 4.1.4) explains that BBP represents the first phase in provision of premium business sites in the region, recognising that it was the first business park of its kind in this region. CPRE explains that it was a specific proposal made in the 1980's, unrelated to regional strategy, separately approved by the Secretary of State following a public inquiry, with no relationship to the wider and more recent regional planning framework. However, I understand the 1982 WM County Structure Plan introduced a commitment to the principle of releasing high quality business sites to attract modern high technology industry needed to diversify the industrial land portfolio, and BBP came forward in that context. This principle was taken forward in subsequent regional guidance [PPG10 & RPG11 (CD24/52/53)], where it is clear that BBP was to be one of several premium regional employment sites to be brought forward. The amended text accurately reflects the regional significance of BBP.
- 4.54 Matters concerning the possible future expansion of BBP (Rev 4/6: ¶ 4.1.5) largely depend on my conclusions on Proposal E1/2 and the extension proposed by Arlington (see below). Arlington's detailed points about the future role of BBP are also best considered in a similar manner.
- 4.55 I am therefore satisfied that Proposal E1/1 is relatively uncontentious, since it merely seeks to correctly designate the existing BBP as a RIS. However, at the inquiry, there was some discussion about the precise extent of the currently designated area. I understand that this is intended to reflect the 60ha boundary of the 1986 planning permission and continues the extent of the designation in the adopted UDP. However, it was clear from the debate and from my site inspection that the boundary includes a 5.3ha sliver of undeveloped land along the north-western edge of the present business park, partly used for peripheral landscaping around the edge of the developed area.
- 4.56 At the inquiry, SMBC thought this might be an error, but before the inquiry closed, further information was submitted which clarified the situation [UDP.144AG; CD179:67]. SMBC confirms that it did not intend to allocate more than the original permitted 60ha area stated in the adopted UDP and SUDPR, and that the boundary would be corrected at the SUDPR modifications stage. This matter should clearly be resolved before the SUDPR is formally adopted, to ensure that the precise extent of BBP, as originally permitted and in subsequent approvals, is accurately plotted on the Proposals Map and included within the Policy E1 designation. However, care should be taken to avoid unnecessarily including land in the Green Belt where this was not originally intended. I recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

- 4.57** *I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by amending Proposal E1/1 to designate Birmingham Business Park as a Regional Investment Site and update the position in terms of the latest regional strategy, as set out in the latest amendments [CD175];*
- I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the Council **reviews** the precise boundary of Birmingham Business Park designated under Policy E1, as shown on the Proposals Map, to ensure that the precise boundary reflects the full extent of the business park originally permitted and in subsequent approvals, and correct the boundary if necessary before the Plan is formally adopted.*

PROPOSAL E1/2: EXTENSION TO BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS PARK**Objections to First Deposit**

1054/1066 – Highways Agency; 1069/1042 – GO-WM; 1080/199 – WMFOE; 1144/1078 – Development Securities; 1275/124 – CPRE; 1353/675 – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd; 1411/685 – Silkplan; 1412/890 – Slough Properties Ltd;

Objections to Revised Deposit

1351/441/R – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd; 1144/191/R Development Securities; 1477/166/R – Advantage West Midlands.

Key issues

- *Should further justification be provided for this proposal, given the Green Belt status of the site;*
- *Does this site represent the most suitable and sustainable location for RIS provision, given its Green Belt status and performance against locational requirements;*
- *Would this proposal result in pressure for development in the Meriden Gap and lead to increased traffic generation in the M42 corridor and along local roads, with an adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and overheating of the local economy;*
- *Should the area of this site be increased to 5ha, with provision for landscaping and boundary treatment and the Midland Metro;*
- *Should the provision of a second access be subject to further traffic studies and would the proposed extension impede the full development of BBP;*
- *Should proposals for this extension be accompanied by a comprehensive transport assessment;*
- *Rev 4/7: Should this proposal be reinstated, in view of its potential contribution to the EB/NSRZ;*
- *Rev 4/7: Should the proposals to expand BBP be more appropriately located on land between Birmingham Business Park and Coleshill Heath Road.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.58 At First Deposit stage, Proposal E1/2 sought to designate 3ha of land as an extension to BBP, to round off the south-western corner and secure a second access to the business park. This would have involved a minor amendment to the Green Belt boundary to accommodate the extension. It was deleted at Revised Deposit stage partly in response to objections from GO-WM and because alternative access arrangements could be made (Rev 4/7).
- 4.59 Most of the objections opposing this proposal have been met by its deletion at Revised Deposit stage. Issues about its reinstatement or enlargement are considered on a site-specific basis later in this section of my report. Other potential sites, such as Brickfield Farm and land on the north-western side of BBP are also considered on a similar basis. However, I note that Highways Agency's objection could be met by amendments made at Revised Deposit stage to Policy T1 & para 5.1.1 (Rev 5/1-5/2), which confirm that transport assessments will be required for proposals that are likely to have significant transport implications, in line with PPG13.

Recommendation

4.60 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

PROPOSAL E1/3: BLYTHE VALLEY BUSINESS PARK

Objections to First Deposit

There were no objections to the First Deposit draft.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1378/51/R, 80/R-81/R – Hockley Heath Parish Council; 1275/134/R – CPRE; 1485/96/R – Slough Estates plc.

Key issues

- *Does the text accompanying Proposal E1/3 (Rev 4/8-4/10) fully justify the proposed extension to BVP, set out the reasons for selecting this site in preference to others, and accurately set out the factual position.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.61 Proposal E1/3 re-confirms the designation of 21ha of land at BVP as a PES. SMBC's latest amendments now propose to designate BVP as a RIS, approved by the Secretary of State in 1995, and update the situation in terms of RPG11 [CD175]. These objections essentially concern the justification for the proposed extension to BVP, rather than the existing business park, and are best dealt with under Proposal E1/4. I am generally satisfied that the text accurately reflects the current situation in terms of the location, development and evolution of the existing phase of BVP in regional and factual terms.

Recommendation

4.62 *I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by amending Proposal E1/3 to designate Blythe Valley Park as a **Regional Investment Site**, approved by the Secretary of State in 1995, and update the accompanying text in terms of the latest regional strategy, as set out in the latest amendments [CD175].*

PROPOSAL E1/4: EXTENSION TO BLYTHE VALLEY BUSINESS PARK

Objections to First Deposit

1048/93 – Cheswick Green Residents Association; 1054/1067* - Highways Agency; 1069/1043 – GO-WM; 1080/200 – WMFOE; 1275/125 – CPRE; 1378/519 – Hockley Heath Parish Council; 1411/681 – Silkplan; 1416/885 – Trustees of A L Lowe; see also Hockley Heath Schedule (Annex D).

Objections to Revised Deposit

1275/145/R, 147/R, 154/R, 368/R – CPRE; 1351/433-437/R – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd; 1378/183/R – Hockley Heath Parish Council; 1411/193-194/R – Silkplan.

Key issues

- *Should land to the west of Blythe Valley Business Park be allocated as a Regional Investment Site under Policy E1, particularly in view of its locational and physical characteristics, relationship to the existing business park, need to provide a continuing supply of RIS land, impact on the Green Belt, and as compared with other alternative potential sites;*
- *Should SMBC seek to negotiate appropriate levels of planning obligations in conjunction with granting permission so that any local impacts are minimised and compensated for;*
- *Would Proposal E1/4 result in a geographic cluster that would place severe development pressure on the Meriden/Redditch Green Belt Gap, leading to an overheating of the local economy.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.63 Proposal E1/4 proposes an extension to the existing Blythe Valley Business Park (BVP) on adjoining land immediately to the west of the existing boundary. The proposed development area, which would be removed from the Green Belt, covers some 21ha, with a net developable area of 17ha. A further 14ha of open land to the west and south would remain in the Green Belt, for use as landscaping and an extension to the existing country park. The extension site (BVP2) is included in the approved Green Belt in the adopted UDP. The amendments made to the text accompanying Proposal E1/4 (Rev 4/8-4/12) would help to address some of the objectors' original criticisms, including GO-WM & Highways Agency, and some further minor updating is also proposed [CD175]. However, the principle of this proposal is still very contentious.
- 4.64 SMBC considers it is imperative to deliver the regional strategy of providing RIS, and sees BVP and its extension as fulfilling this role, not only in relation to CSW-HTC, but also helping to achieve the needs of EB/NSRZ. Development at BVP is proceeding well, with developing public transport links and the innovation centre underpinning business development at the site. The take-up of land at BVP indicates that it will reach full capacity well before 2011, and because of the required lead time, an extension has to be considered in this UDP Review. SMBC maintains that further RIS land is needed to serve CSW-HTC & EB/NSRZ, and argues that BVP2 performs well against the site-selection criteria in Policy PA7 and is the only option that ensures continuity of supply, respecting local landscape, ecology and Green Belt purposes. These represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the release of Green Belt land, whilst the failure to release BVP2 would result in a shortfall of RIS, fundamentally prejudicing local and regional economic and planning policy.
- 4.65 BVP originally came forward in 1995, after public inquiries that considered several competing schemes. Some 111,600 sq m (1.2 million sq ft) of floorspace is currently permitted, with a maximum of 3228 car parking spaces. Development began in 1998, but new access arrangements were not put in place until December 1999, releasing the full capacity of the business park. Although less than half complete, it has had a good track record of attracting businesses during difficult market conditions. BVP has a master plan with specific objectives, including attracting inward investment, strengthening the local economy and providing jobs, with priority to research, development and high-technology. Since 1998, about £28 million has been invested in infrastructure, including new access arrangements, central support services, ancillary facilities, landscaping and a country park. A key facility is the *Innovation Centre* which encourages the creation and growth of new businesses, managed by the University of Warwick Science Park. Other facilities include *Grow-on units* and various employment/training initiatives, in line with RPG11 Policy PA4.
- 4.66 The current BVP was originally seen as the first phase of a larger development, as shown in the Deposit version of the adopted UDP, and the previous UDP inspector recognised that the situation would have to be reconsidered when the UDP was reviewed [CD128; ¶ 9.3.9]. It is also important to realise that the principle of a major new business park at BVP has already been established. BVP2 is recognised as an emerging proposal in new RPG11 [CD51G; ¶ 7.40], although it has to be tested and endorsed at this inquiry. BVP2 builds upon the success of BVP, exploiting the investment in infrastructure and other services that are capable of serving a larger business park than currently designated. It would also enhance the contribution that BVP makes to the economic cluster formation and wider economic objectives.
- 4.67 As a logical extension to BVP, BVP2 would share most of the locational advantages and merits of the existing business park and would meet most of the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7. It would enlarge the existing business park, but in terms of developable area, would keep it within the 25-50ha range

advised in Policy PA7 without being excessive in size. It would provide additional high quality sites attractive to national/international investors and, like BVP, is capable of being served by high quality transport links and broadband IT. With easy access from M42(J4) and A34/A3400, it is well related to the motorway and trunk road network. However, it lies some distance from EB/NSRZ and cannot be said to be within or close to areas of greatest need. Nevertheless, there are various initiatives to enable the local workforce to access education/training opportunities and ensure that employment benefits are available to the local workforce in EB/NSRZ. Consequently, BVP2 performs relatively well against the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7.

- 4.68 RPG11 (¶ 7.31) recognises that some greenfield land may be needed to provide employment land, and therefore BVP2 has to be assessed against the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA1(D). SMBC and the developers agree that there are no suitable alternatives available on previously developed land and buildings of the type and scale required within the built-up areas. Like BVP, BVP2 could be served by high quality public transport in the form of “showcase” bus routes, and although it is not far from local facilities along the A34, it is some distance from Solihull town centre and the nearest railway stations. I deal with Green Belt, landscape and environmental issues later. With these provisos, BVP2 performs reasonably well against the criteria in Policy PA1.
- 4.69 There is little doubt that BVP contributes to the regional and local economy. RPG11 confirms that it contributes to CSW-HTC, helping to achieve the objectives of the *Regional Economic Strategy* and the development of innovative business clusters, in line with RPG11 Policies PA3 & PA4. BVP has attracted key firms like Oracle and Vodaphone and provides a supportive environment for new and growing businesses through the Innovation Centre, with its benefits confirmed in the SQW analysis [CD134]. The indication in Policy PA7 that further provision *may* be required to serve CSW-HTC will soon become an imperative, as existing RIS land becomes exhausted. Provided that the appropriate firms are attracted, BVP2 would make a further contribution to CSW-HTC. Other sites, such as Ansty and other non-RIS land, may also serve CSW-HTC, but BVP2 would help to enhance the contribution that the existing BVP makes to this important high-technology corridor. Furthermore, high quality housing is available for key workers in the locality, including at nearby Dickens Heath and Knowle/Dorridge, although RIS land is not specifically intended to meet local employment needs.
- 4.70 BVP also makes a contribution to EB/NSRZ by providing jobs for the local workforce, along with training/education initiatives, in line with RPG11 Policy PA1(B). Some 18% (640) of the current 3,600 workforce at BVP live in EB/NSRZ and there are continuing efforts to increase this figure by improving accessibility by public transport, including subsidised bus services between BVP and EB/NSRZ. BVP2 would provide 3,200 extra jobs, of which almost 600 could be taken by residents of EB/NSRZ, at current rates. BVP currently provides a significant number of jobs for residents in EB/NSRZ, particularly in the areas of greatest need. Although overall numbers are limited and journey times are much longer than for sites closer to EB/NSRZ, it makes a significant, but limited contribution to urban regeneration, meeting the requirements of the latest regional strategy for the release of greenfield Green Belt land.
- 4.71 The contribution of BVP to EB/NSRZ is recognised in various studies, including the ZIP [CD68-70], where it is seen as one of the “bridges to success”. The apparent benefits of BVP/BVP2 to EB/NSRZ and the interaction between them emerged at a relatively late stage in the process of promoting BVP2 and were further developed at the inquiry, particularly in terms of the East Birmingham part of EB/NSRZ, where unemployment rates are relatively high. Although BVP/BVP2 lies nearly 7km from the nearest point of EB/NSRZ and over 13km

from North Solihull, commendable efforts have been and would continue to be made to improve the economic linkages and contribution to the regeneration of EB/NSRZ, in line with RPG11 Policy PA1(B-C). Jobs taken by residents in EB/NSRZ would not have been available if BVP did not exist. The positive contribution which BVP makes to EB/NSRZ is certainly a material consideration in its favour when assessing the possibilities for future expansion, even though its primary role is to serve CSW-HTC. It is also of further advantage to EB/NSRZ, given the uncertainty about the Bassetts Pole site.

- 4.72 I recognise that the SUDPR was originally based on the quantitative requirements of the previous RPG11, which might suggest that the original basis on which BVP2 was selected is somewhat flawed and outdated. However, the latest regional strategy requires the provision and maintenance of a range and choice of readily available land within the portfolio of employment land, including RIS. BVP2 would ensure that the supply of available RIS land is not interrupted or exhausted during the current Plan period. I realise that the rate of development of BVP has been relatively slow, but it has improved recently, and the take-up of RIS land is notoriously unpredictable, partly depending on the preferences of “footloose” businesses.
- 4.73 Some objectors criticise the presence of *Virgin Active* at BVP. This is a major indoor leisure and health/fitness centre, which is not the type of Class B1 high quality business use normally expected on RIS land. However, while it may not need to be located on an out-of-town greenfield site, it provides a useful amenity for employees and a status symbol for the business park, helping BVP to achieve a critical mass during its early stages. The *British Gas* call centre at BVP, which contains a large number of employees and also attracts considerable traffic, is a headquarters building which falls within the Class B1 business use. The restrictions on the use of RIS land at BVP2 recommended under Policy E1 (see above) would ensure that new RIS land is kept for this purpose and not squandered on ancillary uses.
- 4.74 In terms of land supply, BVP has a developable area of 32ha (excluding landscaping, country park, roads etc). To date, 13.7ha has been developed, leaving 18.3ha remaining and, of this, 1.8ha has detailed consent or is under option. The remaining 16.5ha is expected to provide about 4.5 years supply of land at the current average take-up rate of 3.63ha/year, exhausting the supply of RIS land at BVP before 2011. BVP2 would add 17ha of RIS land, enabling continued provision beyond the current Plan period. I recognise that after more than 5 years of effective development, little more than 36,500 sq m is occupied and only 44% of the total permitted floorspace at BVP has been completed. However, SMBC estimates that BVP will be 75% complete by mid-2007, so the “trigger point” in previous RPG has now been met. Predicting the take-up of RIS land is notoriously unreliable, but a few major occupiers can soon exhaust existing land supply. There is little doubt that without further provision, the supply of RIS land at BVP will run out well before 2011. It is also important to recognise that BVP already exists as a major new greenfield business park, and there is a case for capitalising on its existing success, subject to environmental and Green Belt constraints.
- 4.75 One of the main shortcomings of BVP2 is its impact on the Green Belt. In its present undeveloped condition, SMBC agrees that the site performs important Green Belt functions. It helps to prevent the outward spread of the built-up area of BVP, safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment and maintaining the separation between BVP and the settlements of Ilshaw Heath and Cheswick Green. Although the development of BVP2 would reduce the distance and degree of separation between BVP and the nearest settlements, it would not result in complete coalescence. A significant wedge of open land with woodland and substantial landscaping would remain, and the new buildings would be over 100m from the nearest houses in Ilshaw Heath and over 600m from those at Cheswick Green.

- 4.76 I realise that BVP2 would represent a further incursion into the countryside around Hockley Heath, breaching the existing well-defined Green Belt boundary, and that the outer boundary of the extended development area would have to be created afresh. However, I am satisfied that the surrounding country park and woodland belts would enable a firm and enduring Green Belt boundary to be provided, lessening the threat of further development in the future. BVP2 would result in a significant loss of open countryside, but this would be partially offset by the proposed landscaping and country park. More particularly, local impacts on the environment and Green Belt have to be balanced against the requirements of regional policy and strategic economic benefits. Other benefits, including increased access to the countryside, also have to be weighed in the balance. Furthermore, the proposed extension would be smaller than that suggested at the 1995 UDP inquiry and the previous Winterton Farm site, rejected by the UDP inspector and the Secretary of State. In the absence of any other suitable, acceptable and viable alternatives, I consider BVP2 would have the least impact on the objectives, functions and integrity of the Green Belt in this locality.
- 4.77 Bearing in mind that BVP is not yet complete, and that the need to provide additional RIS land would come towards the end of the current Plan period, I have considered whether it might be more appropriate to remove BVP2 from the Green Belt and designate it as safeguarded land to meet future development requirements. However, given that the supply of RIS is likely to be exhausted well before 2011 and in the absence of any alternative suitable land, I consider the decision should be made in this UDP Review, to avoid uncertainty and provide a firm long-term basis for the future provision of RIS land within and beyond the current Plan period.
- 4.78 Much preliminary work has been undertaken to ensure that BVP2 respects the local landscape and ecology. There is no doubt that BVP has been landscaped to the highest standards and provides an attractive setting for the prestige buildings that occupy the site. BVP also has several sustainable elements, such as building design, drainage and ecological management regimes, which would no doubt be reflected in the proposed extension. BVP2 is typical of the *Arden Pastures* landscape type, which although not seriously degraded, has been identified as needing some landscape enhancement. Blocks of woodland to screen new buildings would not be out of character with this landscape type [UDP.144.AB]. I recognise that landscape enhancement could take place without extending the existing business park, but this would be unlikely. The extended country park, an integral part of the project (and included as SUDPR Proposal R4/4), would also enhance opportunities for public access to the countryside, and most of BVP2 does not include higher-grade farmland. Existing hedgerows would be supplemented as the framework of the new development, whilst the additional landscaping, woodland and country park around the periphery would enhance existing landscape and habitat features.
- 4.79 Much of this work would be required to effectively assimilate and integrate a major development into the landscape and mitigate the loss of Green Belt and expansion of the existing business park into the surrounding countryside. SMBC accepts that the proposed outer edge of the extended development area bears no relationship to any natural features on the ground, but the boundary of the country park follows existing field boundaries and would contain and define the limits of the developable area of BVP2. The supporting text and Proposals Map would also provide sufficient certainty and identification of the extent of the development area and the new Green Belt boundary. Although some of the existing buildings at BVP are visible from the surrounding area, they are set in landscaped surroundings and visibility is restricted, as the photographs clearly show. The new buildings at BVP2 would also be visible from the surrounding roads, particularly from Ilshaw Heath, from the public footpaths and from the south and west of the site, as the illustrative material and my own site visits show. However, they would be similarly set in

landscaped and wooded surroundings, helping to mitigate the visual impact. Design measures are also available to deal with excessive light pollution.

- 4.80 At BVP2, the built development would be limited to the lower-lying land, avoiding the ridge line at Winterton Farm and land north of Ilshaw Brook where development was previously rejected. Although the proposed development would have a noticeable visual impact on the surrounding area and erode the pastoral character of the locality, I consider the proposed landscaping and adjoining country park would provide appropriate and sufficient mitigation in visual and environmental terms. The natural environmental capacity of the site would be effectively defined and contained by the extensive landscaping proposed. Overall, I consider the proposal would help to achieve many of the objectives of RPG11's environmental quality policies. However, it would be helpful if the text accompanying Proposal E1/4 recognises the need for the peripheral landscaping to be established at an early stage, to define and contain the new development area.
- 4.81 A considerable amount of evidence was submitted on accessibility and sustainability in transport terms, both for BVP, BVP2 and the competing schemes. Much of this evidence relies on various figures and assumptions about traffic generation and distribution, trip rates, modal split and public transport isochrones. Some of the information was confusing and needed correction, and further information was needed, leading to some agreement between the highway witnesses. However, it is clear to me that BVP/BVP2 is well located to the national motorway and trunk road network, with direct access to M42(J4)/A34, away from the congested M6/M42 junctions.
- 4.82 An initial transport assessment has been undertaken for BVP2 which indicates that M42(J4) and the nearby roads and junctions would operate within capacity, with only minor improvements being needed. Highways Agency's original objection has been withdrawn on the basis that a full Transport Assessment would be undertaken, and has confirmed that there is no objection to the principle of BVP2. Having considered all the evidence and submissions, I am satisfied that the original TIA for BVP was soundly based, and the detailed impact of BVP2 in traffic and highway terms could be examined as part of a comprehensive Transport Assessment, with appropriate mitigation and improvement measures. BVP2 is certainly a realistic possibility in terms of traffic and impact on motorway junctions, and consequently, there is unlikely to be a fundamental objection to the proposal on highway grounds.
- 4.83 As for accessibility by public transport, BVP is currently served by two regular bus services, linking to Solihull town centre/railway station and with bus services to Chelmsley Wood, as well as lunchtime shuttle services to the town centres. As part of BVP2, improvements and additions to the existing bus services are planned, including a new free express service from North Solihull and "showcase" routes to Solihull centre and along A34. This would improve public transport accessibility to the main centres of population and main/local railway stations, as well as significantly increasing the hourly public transport catchment area. BVP's current Green Travel Plan would be further developed, with enhanced car-sharing facilities and other initiatives helping to shift the modal split to non-car modes. The existing network of footpaths and cycleways from the surrounding locality would also be improved, including new and upgraded footpaths and cycle routes.
- 4.84 In terms of overall transport sustainability, BVP does not perform particularly well, since it suffers from relative isolation from the urban area which is difficult to rectify. BVP is predominantly a car-borne business park, with some 80% of employees using private cars for their work journeys, either alone, sharing cars or being dropped off and collected, and only 17% of employees use public transport. The lower car parking ratio provided (1:35 sq m) results in some off-site parking at peak times along Kineton Lane and at a nearby

supermarket car park, but this is capable of being addressed. Vehicular trip generation rates are less than originally forecast, and there have been commendable efforts to encourage employees to travel by public transport, including restricting car parking space and other transport initiatives. The package of transport improvements proposed as part of BVP2 might further improve modal split and encourage more sustainable travel patterns. Greater critical mass would also tend to assist rather than detract from BVP's overall sustainability.

- 4.85 I am therefore satisfied that, whilst BVP2 would represent a major traffic generator and would not actually reduce the need to travel by private car, measures could be put in place to ensure that the development would be as sustainable as it could be in terms of PPG13, transport and accessibility, given its peripheral location.
- 4.86 Much inquiry time was spent debating the relative merits of BVP2 and the competing alternative sites. All the major sites would perform reasonably well against the criteria in RPG11 Policies PA7 & PA1 and would meet the needs of high quality businesses. In locational terms, BBP & Brickfield Farm are much closer to EB/NSRZ and so are better placed to make a more direct contribution to the urban regeneration of this area. BBP also provides more jobs for residents of EB/NSRZ than BVP, whilst BVP/BVP2 has to rely on subsidised public transport to make the business park accessible from EB/NSRZ. However, BBP has probably done less to directly support CSW-HTC than BVP.
- 4.87 In Green Belt terms, BVP has some advantages over BBP2 & Brickfield Farm, since it lies outside the *Meriden Gap*, would not sever the continuity of the Green Belt or leave a vulnerable wedge of remaining Green Belt, and would not eliminate an important landscape strip and wildlife corridor. BVP2 lies in the countryside and would represent a further expansion of development into the Green Belt, requiring a new enduring Green Belt boundary to be created. However, the proposed landscaping, woodland and country park would help to minimise the impact on the Green Belt and surrounding countryside. Furthermore, unlike Brickfield Farm, BVP2 would not utilise higher-grade farmland.
- 4.88 All sites are readily accessible to the motorway and trunk road network, affecting M42 (J4) & (J6) respectively, and full Transport Assessments would be needed for all developments. BBP2 & Brickfield Farm are probably better located to BIA, NEC & Birmingham International Station, but improved bus links from BVP to these facilities would help to remedy this shortcoming. At the inquiry, there was some debate about the relative car parking provision at BVP & BBP, but both business parks are major generators of traffic and travel, requiring some car parking provision, and occupiers' demands have to be balanced against the need for more sustainable transport patterns. I have carefully considered all the criticisms of BVP2, but I cannot see that the potential alternative sites at BBP2 & Brickfield Farm have any overriding benefits or particular features which might render them more appropriate allocations for RIS land than BVP2. I deal with the particular merits of these and other competing sites later in this section of my report.
- 4.89 Hockley Heath residents are particularly concerned that the local impact of any extensions to BVP are mitigated and compensated for. Policy IM1 sets out the circumstances where developer contributions would be sought, including off-site highway improvements and environmental management and enhancement, which would be able to fully address these concerns. I have already dealt with WMFOE's points about the impact of BVP2 on the Green Belt and possible overheating of the local economy earlier in this part of my report.
- 4.90 I therefore conclude that the requirement of the latest regional strategy to provide a continuing choice and range of RIS land, particularly in serving

CSW-HTC and contributing to the needs of EB/NSRZ, as well as helping to achieve regional economic and urban regeneration objectives and the associated recreational, landscape and ecological benefits, represent the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the release of Green Belt land at BVP2. The site performs well against the site-selection criteria in RPG11 Policies PA7 & PA1, and I consider the loss of this area of open countryside would have the least impact in terms of the Green Belt, environment, landscape and ecology than any of its main competitors. In my view, none of the other competing sites would be preferable in planning, environmental, landscape, transportation or marketing terms.

- 4.91 From the evidence available, it seems that BVP2 is the only practical, realistic and acceptable option available to make further and continued provision of RIS land at this time in the Solihull area. Given the reasonably pressing need to make such provision, I consider SMBC is fully justified in proposing to allocate this site under Policy E1 as a logical extension to an existing RIS. The amended text in the Revised Deposit draft provides much more justification for this proposal, meeting some of the original objections. Apart from some additional clarification and updating of the supporting text, I consider no further amendments to Proposal E1/4 are needed to address these objections.

Recommendation

4.92 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by **amending** the text accompanying Proposal E1/4 to:

(i) **update** the references to the latest regional strategy [CD175];

(ii) **confirm** the importance of establishing the proposed peripheral landscaping around the outer boundary of the extension to the existing business park (BVP2) at the earliest opportunity.

POLICY E1 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Land between Birmingham Business Park and Coleshill Heath Road, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit

There were no objections to the First Deposit draft.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1351/433-437; 439/R, 442/R – Arlington Business Parks GP Ltd.

Key issues

- *Should land to the north-west of Birmingham Business Park be designated as a Regional Investment Site under Policy E1, particularly in view of its locational and physical characteristics and Green Belt status, its relationship to the existing business park, and in comparison with the proposed extension at Blythe Valley Park.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.93 This site lies between the north-western boundary of BBP and Coleshill Heath Road, and forms part of a 20ha wedge of mainly open land which currently provides a buffer strip between the business park and Chelmsley Wood. It covers some 12ha, of which 9.3ha are currently in the Green Belt in the adopted UDP, and includes some of the land beyond the business park where SMBC wishes to review the precise boundary of the Green Belt and the business park (see Proposal E1/1). Arlington seeks to remove this site from the Green Belt and allocate it as an extension to BBP, in addition to, but with priority over BVP2. A range of office, commercial and ancillary facilities is envisaged, to diversify the uses at BBP and encourage more integration with the adjoining community. As originally made, I understand these objections were not "duly made", since they did not directly relate to a change made at Revised Deposit stage. However, SMBC accepted them on the basis that the

provision of RIS land, including alternative locations such as BBP, would be considered at the inquiry. Previous objections promoting land west and south-west of BBP for housing have been withdrawn.

- 4.94 There is no doubt that this site would perform reasonably well against most of the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7. In terms of size, it would increase the area of the existing business park beyond the guideline figure of 25-50ha, but only marginally above the maximum size in terms of developable area, which need not be critical unless Green Belt land is involved. It would provide high quality land, attractive to national/international investors, building on the past success of BBP in attracting new and expanding businesses, and contributing to *business clusters*. It could be well served by multi-modal facilities and broadband IT, and easily accessed from the motorway network. It adjoins Chelmsley Wood, one of the most deprived parts of EB/NSRZ, and is well placed to provide employment for the local workforce and contribute to the regeneration of this area. BBP currently provides about 5,500 jobs, of which 22% (1210) of employees live in EB/NSRZ, and the extension site could also help to serve CSW-HTC. Furthermore, various existing and proposed initiatives could help to make BBP and the proposed extension accessible to education, community and training initiatives. The extension site would also help to diversify the local economy.
- 4.95 As a greenfield Green Belt site on the edge of the MUA, it also has to meet the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA1(D). SMBC & Arlington agree that there are no suitable alternatives available on previously developed land and buildings within the built-up area, and the existing supply of general employment land in the North Solihull part of EB/NSRZ is not particularly good. As an extension to BBP, it would benefit from the locational advantages of the existing business park, which is served by bus routes at peak times (which could be improved) and is not far from BIA, a main railway station and transport interchange. It is also close to Chelmsley Wood with its existing workforce and wide range of local facilities. I deal with Green Belt, landscape and environmental matters later. With these provisos, I consider this site performs reasonably well against the criteria in RPG11 Policies PA7 & PA1.
- 4.96 The extension site would also utilise the existing facilities and infrastructure of BBP, rather than creating a new free-standing business park, and enable closer physical and social links with Chelmsley Wood. This is a particular feature of the master plan, which proposes closer integration with the adjacent community, by providing jobs, leisure and educational facilities on the site, with amenities shared by business users and the community, including an "innovation centre" and "central hub". Access by pedestrians, cycle and bus could be improved, with direct links to Chelmsley Wood.
- 4.97 The main drawback of this site is undoubtedly its impact on the Green Belt. In its present largely undeveloped condition, it performs important Green Belt functions, by helping to prevent the outward spread of the main built-up area, separating Chelmsley Wood from BBP, and maintaining the separate identity of Marston Green. This is confirmed in the adopted UDP [CD111; p.121; ¶ 3.11], when BBP was formally removed from the Green Belt. The retention of this Green Belt area also helps to focus development opportunities on the main urban area, assisting urban regeneration.
- 4.98 I realise that the latest regional strategy allows adjustments to the Green Belt where it supports urban regeneration. However, the development of this site would not only significantly reduce the overall area of Green Belt on this vulnerable urban fringe, but also expand into the buffer area. More particularly, it would completely sever the Green Belt link from the open countryside to the north-east which penetrates the urban area and helps to separate Marston Green and Chelmsley Wood as well as separating the urban area from BBP. It would also breach the existing well-defined boundary of

BBP and lead to the urban area merging with BBP and beyond to the NEC. In the absence of any very special circumstances, I consider this would have unacceptable strategic consequences, undermining the overall integrity, principle and function of the remaining wedge of Green Belt.

- 4.99 At the inquiry, there was some debate about the background and purpose of the buffer zone along the north-western boundary of BBP. Arlington pointed out that this strip of land was merely left over after defining a 60ha site for the business park, and since it was of no use to farming, was offered as a landscaped buffer strip. SMBC argues that it is an essential landscaped buffer strip, separating BBP from Chelmsley Wood, helping to mitigate its physical and visual impact, and performing a vital Green Belt function. I share SMBC's view and consider that the loss of this Green Belt land would seriously erode the setting and integrity of BBP. I note that this landscaped buffer strip was one of the planning conditions recommended by the inspector and imposed by the Secretary of State when originally permitting BBP [CD166]. Moreover, the development of the northern part of the buffer strip would leave the remaining open Green Belt land south of Heath Farm very vulnerable to further development in the future.
- 4.100 BBP is very much a "child of its time", and when permitted in 1986, it was considered important to maintain physical separation from Chelmsley Wood. I recognise that Class B1 uses are not harmful to residential amenity and that there may be some argument for closer integration, particularly now that BBP has become established. However, I regard the physical separation of the business park from the adjoining urban area as an important feature of the concept and nature of this high quality business park, and the validity of the buffer zone is just as relevant now as it was in 1986. The extension of BBP into this vulnerable strip of open land, in places barely 150m wide, would not only remove the landscaped buffer between BBP and Chelmsley Wood, but also conflict with its original self-contained design concept and remove its context and setting in the surrounding landscape.
- 4.101 The promotion of mixed development, combining business, residential and leisure uses, is much more difficult on existing business parks like BBP. Moreover, closer integration with the adjoining community does not necessarily mean further built development; open air leisure and recreation facilities, an urban farm and pedestrian links could provide further amenities for the local community on this land in line with its Green Belt status. In my view, this buffer strip has a strategic and local role, not only in Green Belt terms, but also in providing the setting for this high quality business park.
- 4.102 In landscape terms, most of the site has a semi-rural character, providing a welcome contrast to the built-up nature of its surroundings, which would be lost as a result of the proposed extension. Some landscaping and tree planting has been undertaken in this buffer strip and the basic landscape structure remains sound. In ecological terms, the land has little value in itself, but it has a role as a wildlife corridor, linking the remaining wedge of open land between Chelmsley Wood/Marston Green, including Alcott Wood SINC/LNR, with the open countryside. It is also specifically designated as a wildlife corridor in SMBC's *Nature Conservation Strategy* [CD92]. Although some landscape and ecological features would be retained to the south-west of this expansion site, it would be difficult to enhance the ecological value of the north-eastern end with the extent of building envisaged, and the corridor would effectively be severed by built development from the open countryside. Consequently, development would significantly erode the natural environment in a strategically important location, leaving the remainder of the buffer zone south of Heath Farm very vulnerable to further development in the future.
- 4.103 There was considerable debate at the inquiry about the need to provide additional RIS land at BBP. Arlington is at the forefront of developing high

quality business parks, and BBP has been successful in attracting key investors and new businesses. BBP meets the particular marketing and business requirements of RIS and high quality business parks, particularly in terms of location, accessibility, master plan, landscaping, ancillary amenities, choice of tenure and building, strong management and commitment, size and IT links. In marketing terms, there are advantages in extending BBP, using existing infrastructure, building on its marketing position, giving more flexibility to the developer and adding to the “critical mass”. Market realism and sustainability are also important when allocating employment land. Furthermore, successful business parks can develop up to 100ha of land with up to 300,000 sq m of floorspace, and there is no economic or marketing reason why BBP should not expand further.

- 4.104 Nevertheless, as originally conceived, this is a 60ha business park, with firm boundaries and an overall concept. Permitted in 1986, with development commencing in 1989, the fact remains that BBP remains incomplete after 15 years of marketing, promotion and development. The latest brochure and web-site [O/E1/2/1353/675/10] confirm that several key plots remain undeveloped, and speculative office buildings remain unoccupied. About 39ha/130,000 sq m of floorspace has been completed, but 14.5ha/100,000 sq m remains to be developed or occupied. In the past, marketing at BBP has resulted in peaks and troughs of development, with successes and disappointments along the way, but there is little firm evidence of likely future demand for land. BBP is now 60-70% complete, and has already met the 3-year 75% “trigger point” to release RIS further land in earlier regional guidance. At current take-up rates, at least 5 years supply of land is available at BBP, and there is no doubt that the overall supply of RIS land is likely to be exhausted by the end of the current Plan period. However, allocating an additional 12ha of land at BBP would only marginally extend the continuity of overall supply of RIS land in Solihull and only slightly delay the time when a more comprehensive search for RIS land is necessary. It is also worth noting that, at present, EB/NSRZ is considered to be adequately served by RIS.
- 4.105 There may be a need to bring BBP up-to-date, to compete with the latest generation of business parks, but there are land and premises within the site available to achieve this aim. I also note that some of the ancillary uses envisaged at the BBP extension do not fall within the high quality Class B1 uses normally permitted on RIS land, and may not need a greenfield site next to this business park. The provision of uses directed more to the needs of the existing business park than to the requirements of inward investors and RIS land does not, in my view, provide the exceptional circumstances necessary to release this Green Belt land. Moreover, since BBP has already reached its “critical mass”, there is no compelling need to expand or enlarge the existing business park on the grounds of economic viability.
- 4.106 Furthermore, WMRPB has confirmed that the fact that a RIS has been completed does not mean that there should be an automatic and unrestricted supply of RIS land in the future. Continuity of supply at a particular RIS may not necessarily be relevant when that RIS is nearing completion, and this suggests that there will come a time when BBP is finally completed. I realise that there should be a choice of RIS, but this should be seen in a regional, rather than district basis, particularly given the regional significance of RIS provision. I am also aware of the long time scale necessary to bring forward such sites, but in my view, Green Belt land should not be released unless no other land or options are available when existing land is becoming exhausted. I therefore conclude that the case for extending BBP on to the adjoining objection site is overstated, particularly in view of the fundamental objections to development on Green Belt grounds.
- 4.107 At the inquiry, a considerable amount of evidence on transportation and accessibility was submitted, both for this site and as compared with BVP2.

The evidence relies on various figures, assumptions and estimates, including traffic generation and distribution, trip rates, modal split and public transport isochrones. Some of the information was confusing and needed correction, and further information was requested, leading to some agreement between Arlington & SMBC. There is no doubt that BBP is reasonably well located to the national motorway network, it could be served by bus services covering a larger catchment area than BVP, and has more potential employees living nearer the site. I realise that bus services directly serving BBP itself are limited outside commuting periods, but pedestrian/cycle routes and bus services could be improved, with a more up-to-date Green Travel Plan, and the Midland Metro is a longer-term possibility. As for car parking, BBP has a more generous provision than BVP, but the demands of the market have to be balanced against issues relating to sustainable transport and the appropriate mode of travel for work journeys. Overall, I consider that the proposed extension to BBP could be reasonably sustainable in transport terms.

- 4.108 During the course of the inquiry, Highways Agency confirmed that the primary concern at BBP is to protect the safety and free flow of traffic on the strategic road network, especially at M42(J6), whilst ensuring that any proposed development does not exacerbate the traffic issues at this location. Highways Agency raises no objection in principle to the development of this site, but confirms that a robust Transport Assessment would be needed, with an enforceable Travel Plan, to demonstrate that there is no impact on the operation of the network or to identify measures to mitigate any impact [O/E.1/2/1353/675/18]. I recognise that there may be capacity problems at M42(J6), but the impact of any additional development on the surrounding road network and motorway junctions would depend on many factors, including modal split and traffic levels. Much more detailed work would be needed, which could be examined as part of a full Transport Assessment. However, from the limited evidence available, I can see no fundamental objections to the extension of BBP on to this objection site on highway grounds.
- 4.109 A considerable amount of inquiry time was spent debating the relative merits of extensions to BBP and BVP. I have already dealt with these comparisons when considering BVP2, where I conclude that BBP2 has no particular benefits or features that should give it priority over BVP2 in terms of the selection of RIS land. In particular, the impact of BBP2 on the Green Belt is much more significant than that of BVP2.
- 4.110 Consequently, I conclude that this extension to BBP should be rejected as a proposed allocation for RIS land at this time, principally because of its fundamental impact on the Green Belt, completely severing the link between the open countryside and the wedge of Green Belt that penetrates the adjoining urban area. In my view, it is unnecessary to extend BBP beyond its original, now well defined limits, and the continuing general need to provide RIS land and the possible advantages of this site over BVP2 do not outweigh the loss of Green Belt and other objections to the proposed extension. Apart from reconsidering the precise boundary of BBP and the Green Belt along the north-western boundary (see Proposal E1/1), I consider no other modifications are needed to BBP in response to these objections.

Recommendation

4.111 I RECOMMEND NO FURTHER MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

Brickfield Farm, Chester Road, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1412/889-891 – Slough Estates plc/Slough Properties Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit Plan.

Key issues

- *Should land at Brickfield Farm be designated as a Regional Investment Site under Policy E1, particularly bearing in mind its locational and physical characteristics and Green Belt status, and in comparison with the proposed extension at Blythe Valley Park.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.112 Brickfield Farm lies immediately to the north-east of BBP, bounded by the M42 & M6 link road, A452 Chester Road and Coleshill Heath Road. Covering some 42ha, it comprises an elevated triangular area of arable and open grassland, with woodland in the south-eastern corner designated as a SINC. The site lies within the approved Green Belt, established in the adopted UDP and continued in the SUDPR. Slough Estates seeks to remove it from the Green Belt and allocate it as a RIS, with a developable area of about 14ha and a 200m buffer strip around the north-eastern/north-western sides, as an alternative to BVP2.
- 4.113 Dealing firstly with the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA7, the developable area of this site is significantly below the minimum threshold of 25-50ha. WMLGA confirms that this would not necessarily rule out smaller sites, but on its own, this site would clearly not have the "critical mass" to fully meet the needs of high quality businesses. It could only properly function as a RIS if associated or linked with BBP, and this would enlarge BBP well above the maximum threshold size. It is capable of offering an attractive site to investors, albeit on a smaller scale than envisaged, but it could probably not provide the full range of sites, buildings and facilities required. A landscaped setting would also have to be created, along with measures to mitigate traffic noise from the motorways. The site is reasonably well served by existing bus services, which could be enhanced, and there would be no problems with IT links. It adjoins the motorway network and is only a short distance from the nearest junctions with the M42 & M6. It is next to EB/NSRZ and so could serve an area of greatest need and contribute to urban regeneration, with employment benefits being readily available to the local workforce. It could also serve CSW-HTC.
- 4.114 Since this is a greenfield Green Belt site on the edge of the MUA, it also has to meet the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA1(D). As I have previously found, there are no suitable alternatives available on previously developed land and buildings within the built-up area. This site is capable of being served by existing and improved bus services, is no more than 3km from the nearest railway stations, and is close to Chelmsley Wood with its existing workforce and wide range of local facilities. I deal with Green Belt, landscape and environmental matters later. It therefore seems that, apart from its size and these other provisos, this site performs reasonably well against the criteria in RPG11 Policies PA7 & PA1.
- 4.115 The existing Green Belt boundary is clearly defined along Chester Road/ Coleshill Heath Road. Both the motorways, J7A and the countryside to the north and east are washed over by the approved Green Belt. Although physically separated from the open countryside by the adjoining motorways, in its present undeveloped condition, the site fulfils valid Green Belt functions by

helping to prevent the outward spread of the built-up area of BBP and Chelmsley Wood and safeguarding the adjoining countryside from further encroachment, as confirmed in the adopted UDP [CD111; ¶ 3.12]. At previous inquiries into this UDP and the NWLP, inspectors have confirmed that this site checks urban sprawl and serves Green Belt functions, and apart from the loss of the farmbuildings, little has changed since then.

- 4.116 At the inquiry, there was some debate about whether the site lies in the *Meriden Gap*, particularly given the Secretary of State's view that the M42 forms the eastern boundary of built development, which contrasts with the view in other documents [CD95/149/166]. Nevertheless, I consider the site contributes to the open character of the *Meriden Gap* and prevents coalescence between Solihull's main urban area and nearby existing development and settlements in the Green Belt, including the southern tip of Coleshill to the north.
- 4.117 The development of this site in the manner envisaged would breach existing well defined Green Belt boundaries and significantly extend the built-up area into the surrounding countryside. The deletion of the whole site would effectively sever the remaining Green Belt that separates Chelmsley Wood from Marston Green/BBP/Elmdon Trading Estate. This would not only seriously erode the integrity and function of this important green wedge, but also extend and merge the existing urban area with BBP. The fact that the M42 would provide an enduring and defensible Green Belt boundary is no reason to amend the existing equally defensible Green Belt boundary. Moreover, the removal of 42ha of Green Belt to provide only 14ha of developable RIS land is hardly a sustainable or efficient use of land. The impact would be reduced if only the developable area was removed from the Green Belt. Nevertheless, it would still result in urban sprawl, extending development into the surrounding countryside beyond the existing defensible Green Belt boundaries and creating a weaker long-term boundary. It would also reduce the area of Green Belt at a vulnerable location on the fringe of the existing urban area. Consequently, there is a fundamental objection to this proposal on Green Belt grounds.
- 4.118 In visual and landscape terms, this site is strongly influenced by the presence of the surrounding motorways and the proximity of BBP and Chelmsley Wood. It also lies in a relatively elevated position, astride a ridge line. Although physically well contained, much of the site visually exposed, with open views to the adjoining countryside and woodland beyond the motorways. Development would inevitably have a significant visual impact, particularly when viewed from the immediate surroundings, from the motorways and from points further afield. Unlike BBP, which is well screened from outside view by peripheral planting, the topography of this site would limit the effectiveness of any landscaping measures. As agreed at the inquiry, the topography and visual impact of development is one reason why more development is not envisaged. There are also other development constraints, such as the overhead power lines and adjoining woodland, designated as a SINC, and the site has some further ecological significance as a wildlife corridor.
- 4.119 As a relatively open site, it does not display many of the features typical of the *Arden Parklands* landscape type, but development would do little to conserve or enhance the existing landscape or environmental resources of the site. Contrary to the objector's view, it is not degraded or tarnished land which needs improvement in landscape terms. The creation of landscaped parkland could open up part of the site for public and recreational use. However, this would be of limited value due to the proximity of the motorways, and the site would be unable to deliver major benefits such as a country park or recreational facility. I also note that the site lies within the *Motorway Corridor Zone* in SMBC's *Countryside Strategy* [CD95], which seeks to resist new developments in gaps between settlements. Furthermore, almost 75% of the

site comprises higher-grade (2/3A) farmland, much of which is in active agricultural use and would be lost. The visual impact of development and the loss of high-grade farmland are important factors which militate against the allocation of this site as a RIS.

- 4.120 In terms of marketing, Slough Estates has significant experience and expertise in establishing and maintaining successful business parks of regional quality elsewhere, and would develop an appropriate marketing strategy for Brickfield Farm, drawing on the success of the adjacent BBP. However, this site is physically separated from BBP and would have separate accesses off different roads, emphasising the perceived separation of the two sites. At the inquiry, BBP confirmed that it did not see this site as a logical extension to BBP, and it is not designed to be extended beyond the A452. On an independent basis, Brickfield Farm would not fully meet the requirements for a RIS, and would be more akin to a second tier employment site in terms of RPG11 Policy PA6. It would also require new infrastructure, rather than utilising existing facilities. Its limited size would not be able to provide the full range, type and flexibility of sites and buildings, along with associated amenities, demanded by new business investors. It would therefore not meet the requirements for a fully-fledged RIS in strategic and marketing terms.
- 4.121 At the inquiry, a considerable amount of evidence on transportation and accessibility was submitted, both for this site and as compared with BVP2. The evidence relies on various figures, assumptions and estimates, including traffic generation and distribution, trip rates, modal split and public transport isochrones. Some of the information was clearly incorrect and confusing and had to be amended, and further information was requested on several points, including the transport assessment work undertaken for BVP & BVP2.
- 4.122 Slough Estates has examined the traffic situation in terms of Brickfield Farm, particularly the surrounding roads and junctions, and proposes some improvements, but has not examined the detailed impact on the motorway junctions. A Green Travel Plan would also be produced, with the emphasis on sustainable transport. At the inquiry, SMBC was concerned about the impact of development in terms of highways and traffic, particularly on the M6/M42 junctions and surrounding roads, referring to previous Directions from the Highways Agency for proposed developments near M42(J6), now withdrawn. It is clear that some roads and junctions are currently operating at or over capacity, but these matters could be addressed at the detailed stage as part of a full transport assessment. Furthermore, although traffic flows may be more unpredictable around M42(J6), some improvements would probably be needed to the motorway junctions as a result of the future expansion of BIA/NEC.
- 4.123 Before the inquiry closed, Highways Agency confirmed that the prime concern at Brickfield Farm is to protect the safety and free flow of traffic on the strategic road network, especially at M42(J6), whilst ensuring that any proposed development does not exacerbate the traffic issues at this location. However, Highways Agency raises no objection in principle to the development of this site, but confirms that a robust Transport Assessment would be needed, with an enforceable Travel Plan, to demonstrate that there is no impact on the operation of the network or to identify measures to mitigate any impact.
- 4.124 It is unnecessary for me to comment in detail about the precise figures and various assumptions used, since they essentially concern the details of each development. However, several key points emerge from the evidence and debate at the inquiry. Firstly, Brickfield Farm is much closer to EB/NSRZ than BVP2, has good public transport links to EB/NSRZ and elsewhere (which could be further improved), and the journeys between this site and the North Solihull part of EB/NSRZ would generally be shorter and less time consuming than those to and from BVP2. The location of Brickfield Farm immediately

adjoining the urban area and EB/NSRZ tends to make this site reasonably sustainable in transportation terms, with a greater potential to use public transport and greater accessibility to the potential workforce. The degree of use of the private car would depend on several factors, including the amount of on-site car parking and public transport initiatives. On the other hand, traffic visiting this site would probably tend to use M42(J6) and the surrounding road links, which currently suffer from overloading and congestion at peak times. However, these matters are capable of being addressed in a full Transport Assessment of the site, and there are unlikely to be any fundamental objections to its development as a RIS on traffic grounds.

- 4.125 I have dealt with most of the comparative advantages of Brickfield Farm and BVP2 earlier. Although it might be better located in terms of EB/NSRZ, development would have a major impact on the Green Belt, particularly in terms of the integrity of the green wedge extending between Chelmsley Wood and Marston Green, and have a greater impact on the landscape and ecology than BVP2. The transport and traffic impact of Brickfield Farm and BVP2 largely depend on the respective impact of each scheme on M42(J6) & (J4) and the surrounding roads, which could be addressed in a transport assessment. However, apart from its impact on the Green Belt, the critical shortcoming of Brickfield Farm is its limited size in terms of fully meeting the requirements for a new free-standing RIS and the fact that it would not be able to act as an extension to an existing RIS.
- 4.126 Consequently, I conclude that Brickfield Farm should be rejected as a proposed allocation for a RIS at this time, principally because of its restricted size and poor relationship to BBP, which would fail to fully meet the requirements for a RIS, its impact on the Green Belt, and its elevated location, making any development visually conspicuous on this prominent urban fringe. The continuing need to provide RIS land and the possible advantages of this site over BVP2 do not, in my view, outweigh the loss of Green Belt and other objections to the proposal.

Recommendation

4.127 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

Land adjoining Blackfirs Lane, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1144/1076-1078 – Development Securities.

Objections to Revised Deposit 1144/191/R – Development Securities.

Key issues

- *Should land adjoining Blackfirs Lane be designated as a Regional Investment Site under Policy E1, particularly bearing in mind its locational and physical characteristics and Green Belt status, and its proximity to Birmingham Business Park.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.128 This site comprises about 5ha of unused farmland adjoining the south-western boundary of BBP fronting Blackfirs Lane. At First Deposit stage, most of this site was allocated as an extension to BBP in order to secure a second access to the business park to relieve congestion (Proposal E1/2). However, this proposal was deleted at Revised Deposit stage, since alternative access arrangements could be made (Rev 4/7). In the adopted UDP, this site lies in the approved Green Belt, a designation now continued in the RDSUDPR. Devt Securities seeks its removal from the Green Belt and its allocation as RIS land,

effectively as an extension to BBP. The reinstatement of this site as RIS land is also supported by AWM (1477/166/R).

- 4.129 In terms of RPG11 Policy PA7, the small size of this site would clearly not meet the minimum size threshold for an independent RIS. Furthermore, on its own, it could not provide the type of high quality site demanded by inward investors, with the associated access, public transport and amenities. As an independent greenfield site, it is not currently well served by high quality public transport routes, but is within easy reach of local centres and facilities. However, it immediately adjoins BBP, is located near EB/NSRZ, one of the areas of greatest need, and could provide some limited employment opportunities for this area. As far as I am aware, there are no overriding physical, environmental, residential amenity or infrastructure constraints to its development, and there would be no direct loss of productive farmland or any direct adverse impact on Bickenhill Plantation SINC. I recognise that it would marginally increase the developable area of BBP over the maximum threshold set in Policy PA7, but this would not be significant in strategic terms. Provided that it was directly linked to, associated with, and developed as an integral part of BBP, it could provide useful additional development or expansion land which would share many of the locational advantages of BBP.
- 4.130 Contrary to Devt Securities' view, there is no suggestion in the latest regional strategy that Green Belt boundaries should be reviewed. Indeed, new RPG11 (¶ 3.14) confirms that the Green Belt is to be retained, with boundaries only being adjusted where necessary to support urban regeneration. I recognise that some of the qualities of this swathe of Green Belt have been compromised by major developments such as BBP, BIA & NEC. However, this site forms an integral part of the wedge of Green Belt which extends from the open countryside to the north of the M6 into the heart of Chelmsley Wood and Marston Green. In its present open condition, it helps to prevent the spread of the built-up area and maintains the separation between BBP and the isolated group of properties fronting Blackfirs Lane and Bickenhill Lane.
- 4.131 In this locality, the Green Belt boundary is currently formed by the south-western edges of BBP. The objection site covers an open field which extends to Coleshill Heath Road, and the release of the 5ha parcel of land proposed would require a new defensible Green Belt boundary to be formed across land where no boundary or landscape features exist at present. I recognise that the release of this relatively small area of Green Belt land would have less impact on the integrity and function of this green wedge than the larger parcel of land to the north-west of BBP or Brickfield Farm, and would probably be the least harmful way of extending or rounding-off BBP. However, it would erode a significant area of open land, and given the lack of any landscape features to the west, could create pressure to develop the remainder of this green wedge in the future, which would seriously erode the function and integrity of this part of the Green Belt. I realise that direct coalescence of BBP with the properties along Blackfirs Lane and Bickenhill Plantation could probably be avoided by careful design, but the development of this small area of open land would erode the degree of separation and bring built development much closer than that currently existing. Consequently, in the absence of any very special circumstances, I consider the release of this site would seriously compromise the overall function or integrity of the remaining Green Belt.
- 4.132 At First Deposit stage, the particular reasons justifying the release of much of this site related to the provision of a second means of access to BBP if it became necessary to alleviate traffic congestion at the main entrance. However, I understand that these circumstances no longer apply, and alternative options could be made available which do not require any of this objection site to be developed or released from the Green Belt. Consequently, the exceptional circumstances that applied at the earlier stage in the plan-making process are no longer applicable.

- 4.133 In its current open condition, a considerable amount of work would be required to provide a landscape setting to any development and create a defensible, enduring Green Belt boundary. The submitted plans represent a starting point, but indicate that the amount of actual development land would probably extend to no more than about 3ha. Although some might argue that it could represent a natural “rounding-off” of BBP, when seen on the ground, it would clearly breach the existing well-defined Green Belt boundary and represent a significant incursion into the surrounding open land, eroding the setting of the existing business park. Having carefully considered the possible release of this land, I conclude that it would have a detrimental impact on the physical and visual character and landscape of this vulnerable part of the urban fringe, which has little justification in economic or environmental terms.
- 4.134 At the inquiry, BBP & Devt Securities confirmed that they had not had any detailed discussions about this plot of land. Indeed, BBP was not positive about the idea of extending the business park in this direction, and argued that the site would not integrate well with BBP, a point confirmed on my own site visits. In development and marketing terms, the site could only be successful with agreement between the respective owners and there is no commercial imperative for BBP to purchase the site or enter into such an agreement. Consequently, there is no certainty that the land would be made available for the expansion of BBP within the current SUDPR Plan period. Moreover, allocating an additional 3ha of land at this site would only marginally extend the continuity of supply of RIS land at BBP and only slightly delay the time when a more comprehensive search for RIS land is necessary.
- 4.135 I therefore conclude that there are no exceptional circumstances which would justify releasing this objection site from the Green Belt and allocating it as RIS land at this time, particularly bearing in mind the adverse impact on the integrity and function of this important wedge of Green Belt land on the urban fringe.

Recommendation

4.136 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

Light Hall Farm, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit

1359/724 – Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd;
[C3]: 1386/816 – Marcity Developments.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and designating it as a Regional Investment Site.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

- 4.137 This site comprises an extensive swathe of over 60ha of farmland lying between the main built-up area of Solihull and Cheswick Green, on the southern fringe of the main urban area and bounded by A34 Stratford Road/Dog Kennel Lane/Tanworth Lane. It lies in the approved Green Belt, established in the adopted UDP and continued in this Review. Taylor Woodrow argues that it should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for PES/RIS purposes or safeguarded for that use in the longer term.
- 4.138 Dealing firstly with Green Belt issues, in its present largely undeveloped condition, the land performs important Green Belt functions, by preventing the

outward spread of the built-up area, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and maintaining the separation between the main built-up area of Solihull and Cheswick Green/Dickens Heath. Its designation as a RIS would represent a substantial extension of the MUA, leading to almost complete coalescence with the rural settlement of Cheswick Green. It would also breach existing well defined Green Belt boundaries and erode the function and integrity of this important area of Green Belt on the fringe of the main built-up area, as well as creating pressure for the development of similar land to the east. Apart from the general need to provide RIS land, no exceptional circumstances are advanced to justify this allocation, and so it would conflict with national policy in PPG2. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the release of this Green Belt land would contribute to urban regeneration, so it would not meet these aspects of the latest regional strategy.

- 4.139 Like SMBC, I recognise that this site is large enough to accommodate a new RIS, focused on Light Hall Farm and complementing the TRW site immediately to the north. There is also sufficient space for the necessary landscaping and, if necessary, a country park. Although the site contains attractive pastoral landscape with typical *Arden Pastures* features, there seem to be no overriding ecological or other development constraints. Designation as a RIS would require new infrastructure and site access, and there could be traffic implications on the main A34. The site is well located to existing residential areas, with ready access to regular bus services, particularly along the A34. However, although the proposal could bring some environmental benefits, these would be outweighed by the impact on Green Belt objectives. Moreover, development as a RIS would represent a significant expansion of the MUA, almost linking two discrete built-up areas extending into the surrounding Green Belt countryside and eroding the present rural character of the area.
- 4.140 Furthermore, in strategic terms, there is no need for the allocation of such a large area of land for RIS purposes, and the site would perform poorly against other criteria in RPG11 Policies PA1, PA6 & PA7. Consequently, I consider the allocation of this site as a RIS would not perform well against the employment objectives and policies of the latest regional strategy. Should further RIS land be needed in the longer term, then it is open to SMBC to reassess this site in future reviews of the SUDPR.
- 4.141 I therefore conclude that, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances or pressing need to allocate such a large site for RIS purposes, there is no justification for the designation of this land for this purpose, particularly given its valuable contribution to the Green Belt.

Recommendation

4.142 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Arden Brickworks, Coventry Road, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1402/971 – Redland Properties/McClean Estates.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the Plan recognise the potential importance of major developed sites in the Green Belt, such as Arden Brickworks, in meeting the employment land provision under Policy E1.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.143 This site comprises a former brickworks covering about 4ha of land on the southern side of the main A45, not far from M42(J6). It lies in the approved Green Belt, as established in the adopted UDP and continued in this Review. Redland/McClean argues that Policy E1 should recognise the need to promote the potential redevelopment of Arden Brickworks, as being capable of providing modern new employment opportunities. This objection is associated with others which seek to utilise the potential of this site (eg. Policy E4, E7, C2 & H1), which I deal with elsewhere in my report.
- 4.144 Dealing firstly with the Green Belt issue, although SMBC has acknowledged that part of this site comprises *previously developed land*, it does not intend to identify it as a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*. Consequently, at present, it is subject to national Green Belt policy as well as SUDPR Policy C2. Furthermore, it is remote from the main urban area of Solihull and other established built-up areas, and its designation for RIS purposes would represent an isolated incursion into a sensitive part of the Green Belt in the *Meriden Gap*, which could not be justified in the absence of very special circumstances. As such, it would conflict with long-standing national policy in PPG2 and perform poorly against these aspects of the latest regional strategy.
- 4.145 In any event, McClean accepts that this site is too small to constitute a RIS under the terms of RPG11 Policy PA7. Even if the adjacent brickworks were included, the site would barely exceed 10ha, much less than the 20-50ha envisaged in Policy PA7. It is also remote from the main urban area, existing residential areas and local facilities, and apart from bus services along the main A45, accessibility to public transport is poor. Adjoining land uses, such as the kennels and waste recycling depot, might not help to provide the high quality setting needed for a RIS, and there may be traffic implications for the A45 and M42(J6). New infrastructure would be required and the site would not have the critical mass to support additional public transport or other facilities. I recognise that parts of the site contain existing buildings, whose removal might represent an environmental and visual benefit, but in my view, this would not outweigh the Green Belt and other shortcomings of the site. In these circumstances, and bearing in mind the limited size of the site, it would not meet the criteria for a RIS set out in RPG11 Policy PA7.
- 4.146 Consequently, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances and in view of its limited size, I conclude that the site would not meet the requirements for a RIS set out in the latest regional strategy and there is insufficient justification to designate this site for this purpose.

Recommendation

4.147 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Land west of Damson Parkway, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1411/680-685 – Silkplan.

Objections to Revised Deposit 1411/192/R - Silkplan

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and designating it as a Regional Investment Site.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.148 This is an extensive swathe of land lying between the A45/BIA and the Land Rover plant on the eastern side of Solihull, enclosed by urban development on three sides with a rural aspect to the east across Damson Parkway. It covers Elmdon Park, with its historic House, church and woodland, along with fields, paths and two nature reserves. It lies in the approved Green Belt, established in the adopted UDP and continued in this Review. Silkplan argues that a fundamental review of the Green Belt should be undertaken, reassessing and establishing long-term boundaries, and allocating this site as a RIS with appropriate landscaping.
- 4.149 Dealing firstly with the Green Belt, contrary to Silkplan's view, the latest regional strategy does not envisage the need to undertake a fundamental review of Green Belt boundaries to find additional land for RIS purposes. One of its main objectives is to retain the Green Belt and only allow adjustments where this is necessary to support urban regeneration. In its present largely undeveloped condition, there is no doubt that the land performs important Green Belt functions, by preventing the outward spread of the built-up area, safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment and maintaining separation between the built-up area and settlements in this vulnerable part of the *Meriden Gap*.
- 4.150 The allocation of this site as a RIS would link the existing Land Rover complex with BIA/NEC, completely encircling and severing Elmdon Park from the countryside. Apart from the need to provide further RIS land, no exceptional circumstances or other reasons are advanced to support this allocation, and so it would conflict with long-standing national policy in PPG2. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the allocation of this site as a RIS would directly contribute to urban regeneration, so the proposal would not accord with these aspects of the latest regional strategy.
- 4.151 Much of this site is a well-established community resource, with both heritage, landscape and nature conservation value. Elmdon Park itself has significant heritage value and is well used by the local community, and several public footpaths cross the site. It also has a diverse mature landscape which is worth conserving, and has significant ecological and wildlife value, with a SINC and ecosite. It therefore seems to me that there are serious constraints to the development of much of this site as a RIS.
- 4.152 SMBC accepts that, technically, it might be possible to develop some 14-15ha of land adjacent to Damson Parkway, but this would not meet the size threshold of RPG11 Policy PA7. In locational terms, parts of the site are reasonably well served by public transport, with ready access to the main urban area, including EB/NSRZ, railway stations and bus services. New infrastructure and access would also be required, and there could be implications for the possible future expansion of BIA. Its development as a RIS would represent a significant expansion of the MUA, linking two discrete areas of urban development and extending the built-up area into the surrounding Green Belt countryside. Furthermore, there is no need for the allocation of such a large area of land for RIS purposes in strategic terms, and the site would also perform poorly against other criteria in RPG11 Policies PA1, PA6 & PA7. Consequently, the allocation of this site as a RIS would not perform well against the employment objectives and policies of the latest regional strategy. Should further RIS land be needed in the longer term, then SMBC could reassess this site in future reviews of the SUDPR.
- 4.153 I therefore conclude that, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances or pressing need to allocate such a large site for RIS purposes, and bearing in mind the significant site-specific constraints to the development of this swathe of land, there is no justification for the designation of this land as a RIS, particularly given its valuable contribution to the Green Belt and other environmental and ecological objectives.

Recommendation**4.154 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.**

Land at Stratford Road, Shirley**Objections to First Deposit** 1416/885 – Trustees of A L Lowe.**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit Plan.

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and designating it as a Regional Investment Site.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.155 This 6.3ha greenfield site lies on the southern side of A34 Stratford Road at Monkspath Street, opposite the roundabout with Monkspath Hall Road, adjoining existing housing fronting Creynolds Lane and open countryside. It lies within the approved Green Belt, as confirmed in the adopted UDP and continued in the SUDPR. The objector seeks to remove the site from the Green Belt and allocate it as a RIS, as a sustainable alternative to BVP2.
- 4.156 I have already dealt with the objections to its omission as a housing site in Chapter 3A of my report. Here, I concluded that the land performs important Green Belt functions, by preventing the outward spread of Shirley/Solihull, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and maintaining the separation between the main urban area and Cheswick Green. Its development would represent a significant extension of the main built-up area, breaching the well defined boundary of Stratford Road, eroding the open character of the Green Belt and reducing the gap between the urban area and Cheswick Green. It could also lead to pressures for further development on land to the west. Apart from the criticisms of BVP2, no exceptional circumstances are advanced to justify the removal of this land from the Green Belt, and consequently, its allocation for a RIS would conflict with long-standing national policy in PPG2.
- 4.157 In locational terms, I recognise that the site adjoins the MUA and is close to the main centres of population, readily accessible from the urban area, and not far from Junction 4 of the M42, with frequent bus services along the main A34 corridor. It also has few other development constraints, such as ecology or landscape. In comparison with BVP2, the site is reasonably sustainable, particularly in transport terms, although there may be traffic implications in terms of M42(J4) & A34, and public transport links to the EB/NSRZ would have to be improved. More particularly, in terms of the latest regional strategy (Policy PA7), the site is too small, on its own, to constitute a RIS, since it falls well below the 25-50ha threshold. It would not have the necessary critical mass to meet the requirements of this type of business development or provide the necessary facilities and transport services. To meet the size threshold in Policy PA7, it would have to be linked to adjoining land on the southern side of the A34, including the much larger *Light Hall Farm* site to the west. This would have a much greater adverse impact on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt countryside in this locality. In my view, the decisive factors against the allocation of this site for a RIS are its small size and Green Belt location.

- 4.158 Consequently, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances and since the size of this site would not fully meet the criteria of RPG11 Policy PA7, I can see no justification for allocating this site as a RIS at this time.

Recommendation

4.159 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

POLICY E2: GENERAL BUSINESS LAND

Objections to First Deposit [E2]: 1440/1009; [C1]: 1440/1007 – Mr M Wheeldon.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issues

- *Should the Plan include a policy covering warehousing and airport-related employment uses along the A45 corridor, particularly given the strategic location of Solihull and Birmingham International Airport.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.160 Policy E2 confirms the designation of land for general business development Use Classes B1, B2 or B8) as shown on the Proposals Map, and sets out the criteria for permitting such developments in other locations. SMBC proposes minor amendments to the text, updating the references to RPG11 [CD175].
- 4.161 Policy E2 includes warehousing (Class B8) within this designation and includes criteria for considering additional sites for this use. SMBC considers the Borough has an adequate supply of land for general business uses, including warehouses, supported by the latest employment land survey [CD150]. I note that some sites, originally identified for warehousing, are being developed for Class B1 uses. However, some facilities are already available at BIA for warehousing and storage related to airport and aviation, and other warehouses exist along the A45 corridor. I also note that previous objections suggesting a specific site south of the A45 to be allocated for warehousing/freight handling have now been withdrawn [O/E.4/1440/1009/1].
- 4.162 More particularly, most of the remaining land along the A45 corridor forms an integral part of the swathe of Green Belt between Solihull and Coventry in the heart of the *Meriden Gap*. As such, it performs valuable Green Belt functions by preventing the outward spread of the BIA/NEC complex, safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment and maintaining the separation between settlements in the Green Belt. The allocation of any of this land for warehousing would breach existing well-defined Green Belt boundaries and undermine the function of the wider Green Belt. Moreover, the further expansion of BIA depends on future regional work and is not for the SUDPR, and there is no certainty about having to amend the Green Belt boundary to accommodate further development of BIA. In this instance, no very special or exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the use of Green Belt land in this location for airport-related warehousing purposes.
- 4.163 Furthermore, the latest regional strategy does not suggest the need for a sub-regional centre for secure warehousing along the A45 corridor. Policy PA9 indicates that provision should be made for *Regional Logistics Sites*, but gives priority to previously developed land in North Staffordshire and Telford. Policy PA1(C) focuses economic development on the MUAs, and only allows growth opportunities elsewhere where it can help to meet the needs of the MUAs, with positive economic linkages accessible by sustainable forms of transport. This could hardly apply to airport-related warehousing on the fringe of the MUA in the Green Belt. On the limited evidence before me, there is no justification for

a specific policy or allocation for airport-related storage/warehousing on land south of the A45 at Bickenhill. In the meantime, the future need for warehousing, including for BIA, can be considered as part of the work on future employment needs in subsequent reviews of the SUDPR.

Recommendation

4.164 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by updating the text accompanying Policy E2 [CD175], but that no further modifications are made to the Plan to meet this objection.

POLICY E2 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Equestrian Centre, Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common

Objections to First Deposit

1246/510 – A J Richardson & Associates

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify designating this site for industrial/business uses to meet the needs of Balsall Common.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.165 This 2.7ha site lies at the rear of properties fronting Kenilworth Road on the southern fringe of Balsall Common. It comprises a former equestrian centre which has fallen into disuse, with part of the site occupied by exhibition contractors and a nightclub and the rest unoccupied. In the adopted UDP, this land lies in the Green Belt, a designation carried forward into the UDP Review.
- 4.166 I recognise that no specific provision has been made in the SUDPR to meet local employment needs in Balsall Common. However, this settlement is inset within the Green Belt, and so there may be some limited opportunities for infilling within the existing settlement boundary. I recognise that there are some buildings already on the site, but since it lies outside the present well-defined settlement boundary, I consider any future development should be considered in the context of SUDPR Policy C2.
- 4.167 Furthermore, Balsall Common is a rural settlement lying some distance from the main urban areas, and so a major employment development would not accord with the latest regional strategy or the employment strategy of the SUDPR, particularly in terms of sustainability. The allocation would not accord with RPG11 Policy PA14, which focuses economic development for rural areas on the main towns and other large settlements. It would also fail to meet the specific criteria in Policy E2 for additional employment land, particularly given its Green Belt status. In this instance, no exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the use of Green Belt land for employment purposes, and there is no suggestion that the proposed allocation would support urban regeneration. Consequently, I conclude that there is insufficient justification to allocate this site for industrial/business uses to serve local employment needs.

Recommendation

4.168 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Land at Light Hall Farm, Solihull
Land at Marsh Lane, Solihull
Land at Norton Green Lane, Knowle

Objections to First Deposit 1359/725 – Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify designating these sites for general business development, particularly bearing in mind their Green Belt status.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.169 This objection follows from a similar objection seeking to allocate the site at Light Hall Farm as a *Premium Employment Site* under Policy E1. Taylor Woodrow argues that these sites could be allocated for meeting employment needs up to and beyond 2011. *Light Hall Farm* could be suitable to meet general business needs, supplying a choice of competing locations; *Marsh Lane* could come forward as a mixed-use scheme, incorporating residential and commercial/leisure uses, forming the gateway to Solihull; and *Norton Green Lane* has the potential for both residential and commercial development, contributing to the provision of the Knowle Relief Road.
- 4.170 The issues relating to *Light Hall Farm* are similar to those considered under Policy E1, and I do not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that no exceptional circumstances are advanced to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and allocating it for general business uses, particularly in view of the present supply of general business land, as demonstrated in the latest employment survey [CD150].
- 4.171 Similar considerations apply to the other suggested sites. The land at *Marsh Lane, Solihull* is a 2.5ha greenfield site, lying on the eastern fringe of the main built-up area of Solihull, bounded by Marsh Lane, Solihull By-Pass and the A41 slip road. It lies within the approved Green Belt, confirmed in the adopted UDP and continued in the UDP Review. When considering a housing allocation on this site (see Chapter 3A), I have already concluded that the land performs important Green Belt functions, helping to prevent the outward spread of the urban area, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and maintaining the separation between the main built-up area of Solihull and Knowle/Dorridge. It also makes a significant contribution to the entrance to Solihull from the main road network in both visual and physical terms. Designation for business use would erode a sensitive area of open land on the fringe of the urban area and remove a vulnerable area of Green Belt between the existing built-up area and the major roads. No exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify this course of action, particularly given the current supply of employment land for general business use. It would also perform

poorly against the latest regional strategy, both in locational terms and since the loss of Green Belt would not directly support urban regeneration.

- 4.172 Similar considerations apply to the land at *Norton Green Lane, Knowle*, which comprises over 19ha of agricultural land lying to the rear of the houses in Knowle Wood Road and bounded by Blue Lake Road/Norton Green Lane/Grove Road on the eastern fringe of Dorridge. It also lies in the approved Green Belt and performs important Green Belt functions, by helping to prevent the outward spread of Dorridge, safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment and maintaining the separation between Dorridge and other settlements in the Green Belt. Designation for business uses would require a major amendment to the Green Belt boundary, eroding the open character of the Green Belt on the edge of Dorridge, representing a major extension into the surrounding countryside, and leading to the coalescence of Dorridge with the outlying groups of houses at Norton Green. It would also perform poorly against the latest regional strategy, both in locational terms and since the loss of Green Belt would not directly contribute to urban regeneration. No exceptional circumstances are advanced in support of developing this site for employment purposes.
- 4.173 These sites would not meet the criteria set out in Policy E2 for providing additional employment land, particularly given their Green Belt status. Consequently, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances or other compelling factors, I conclude that there are sound and clear cut reasons to reject the removal of these sites from the Green Belt and their designation for general business purposes, particularly in view of the current supply of employment land for general business uses and the conflict with national guidance in PPG2 and the latest regional strategy.

Recommendation

4.174 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Station Car Parks, Birmingham International Station

Objections to First Deposit 1401/364 – Railtrack Property.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the station car parks at Birmingham International Station be included in the designation of adjoining sites as being suitable for general business uses, including hotel development.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.175 This objection relates to the station car parks at Birmingham International Station. Railtrack believes that they have the potential for Class B1 and hotel development, subject to this not prejudicing the role of the station, its car park or the multi-modal interchange serving BIA. At present, these car parks are included within Proposal E4/2, and designated for NEC, Airport and Transport Interchange purposes. SMBC confirms that complementary uses may be appropriate, but the primary role of the land is to serve the railway station and interchange. It would therefore be inappropriate to promote this land for general business or hotel purposes, since this could conflict with its primary function. Any proposals which might come forward would therefore be better considered in the context of Proposal E4/2.

Recommendation

4.176 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Land west of Damson Parkway, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1411/682, 684 – Silkplan.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and designating it for general business purposes.

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.177 I have previously dealt with this large swathe of greenfield land lying between the A45/BIA and the Land Rover plant on the eastern side of Solihull as a potential RIS under Policy E1 (see above). Silkplan argues that a fundamental review of the Green Belt should be undertaken, reassessing and establishing long-term boundaries, and allocating this site for commercial development and associated landscaping. The issues relating to its possible allocation for general business purposes are similar, and my earlier conclusions are relevant to the objection under Policy E2.

4.178 Contrary to Silkplan’s view there is no requirement in the latest regional strategy to undertake a fundamental review of Green Belt boundaries to find additional land for general business uses, particularly since this land performs important Green Belt functions. Policy E2 provides land for general business uses in the context of the latest regional strategy, including the need to provide and maintain a portfolio of business sites. The latest employment survey [CD150] confirms that a supply of land for general business uses exists, and I do not consider that insufficient land has been designated to meet the requirements of new RPG11 or local needs. Although the designation of this land for general business use would contribute to the portfolio of employment land in Solihull, it would not meet the criteria for providing additional general business land in Policy E2 or the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA6, particularly given its location and Green Belt status.

4.179 Consequently, in the absence of any exceptional circumstances, I can see no justification for allocating such a large area of land for general business uses, particularly given its Green Belt status and the fact that its loss would not contribute to urban regeneration, contrary to the latest regional strategy.

Recommendation

4.180 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

Land at Stratford Road, Shirley

Objections to First Deposit 1416/888 – Trustees of A L Lowe.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit Plan.

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and designating it for general business purposes.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.181 I have previously dealt with this greenfield site on the southern side of the main A34 as a potential RIS under Policy E1 (see above). The issue relating to its allocation for general business purposes are similar, and my earlier conclusions are relevant to this objection. Suffice it to say that I can see no exceptional circumstances to justify removing this land from the Green Belt and allocating it for general business uses, particularly in view of the present supply of such land, as shown in the latest employment survey [CD150].
- 4.182 Although the site would have ready access to the motorway network and public transport, it would not meet the other criteria in Policy E2, particularly given its Green Belt status. It would also perform poorly against the latest regional guidance, since the loss of Green Belt would not directly contribute to urban regeneration. Although it could contribute to portfolio of employment land for locally based investment, it would not fully meet the criteria in RPG11 Policy PA6(B). Consequently, I can see no justification for allocating this site for general business purposes under Policy E2.

Recommendation

4.183 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E2/1: LAND AT HIGHLANDS ROAD, MONKSPATH

There were no objections to this proposal.

PROPOSAL E2/2: LAND AT BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL PARK**Objections to First Deposit**

1037/690 – Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the employment designation of this site be amended to permit it to be used for rail-based freight facilities.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.184 Proposal E2/2 reconfirms the designation of 17ha of land at Birmingham International Park, adjoining the WCML, for general business purposes. The purpose of this proposal is to continue the designation of this site for general business purposes. SMBC confirms that this would not preclude development of appropriate facilities for the transfer of freight by rail, associated with the business use of the site. I also note that Policy T7 (¶ 5.2.6) encourages measures to transfer freight from road to rail. In these circumstances, I conclude that there is no need to specifically indicate that this site might be suitable for rail-based freight facilities, particularly since I am not aware of any specific proposals for this type of use at present.

Recommendation

4.185 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E2/3: LAND NORTH OF “CLOCK” INTERCHANGE

Objections to First Deposit

1037/691 – Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the employment designation of this site be amended to permit it to be used for rail-based freight facilities.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.186 Proposal E2/3 reconfirms the designation of 8ha of land north of the “Clock” (A45/M42) interchange, east of Bickenhill Lane (including Trinity Park) and adjacent to the WCML, for business development within Use Class B1 and hotels. As with the previous site, the purpose of this proposal is to continue the designation of this land for general business purposes. SMBC confirms that this would not preclude development of appropriate facilities for the transfer of freight by rail, associated with the business use of the site, in line with SUDPR Policy T7 (¶ 5.2.6). However, the expansion of this designation to specifically include rail-based freight facilities could result in such development encroaching on to land designated to serve other needs, including BIA/NEC etc., which could lead to pressures to remove additional land from the Green Belt. Consequently, and in the absence of any specific proposals for this type of use at present, I conclude that there is no need to specifically indicate that this site might be suitable for rail-based freight facilities.

Recommendation

4.187 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E2/4: LAND AT SAXON WAY, FORDBRIDGE

There were no objections to this proposal.

PROPOSAL E2/5: LAND AT STRATFORD ROAD/DOG KENNEL LANE, SHIRLEY

Objections to First Deposit

1054/1068* – Highways Agency; 1420/677 - TRW Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the supporting text (¶ 4.2.8) confirm that the TRW complex can be redeveloped independently in isolation of the adjoining sites;*
- *Should the supporting text indicate that a comprehensive transport assessment would be required.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.188 Proposal E2/5 designates the TRW site at Stratford Road/Dog Kennel Lane, Shirley for business development within Use Class B1. The site extends to about 23ha, currently in employment use, but with the potential for further development. The accompanying text indicates that the development of this site for Class B1 uses (including research and development) could contribute towards a range of employment opportunities and, with the adjoining sites of a motor car showroom, restaurant and retail premises, could contribute towards a cohesive and comprehensive scheme.
- 4.189 I understand that not all of this site is owned by TRW, who are understandably concerned about the need for comprehensive development of the entire site. However, SMBC confirms that the land need not be developed at one time in a comprehensive manner, but could be developed on a piecemeal basis, by a variety of owners at different times. The requirement is merely that the developments contribute to a cohesive and comprehensive overall scheme. I understand that SMBC has approved a draft planning brief for the undeveloped (6.6ha) part of the site, which also confirms the development potential of other parts of the site. Discussions are ongoing and development of the site is now proceeding. However, there is no absolute requirement in Proposal E2/5 or the accompanying text for the TRW land to be developed comprehensively, and so I consider TRW's concerns are somewhat misplaced.
- 4.190 Highway Agency's objection has been conditionally withdrawn as a result of revisions made to Policy T1 (Rev 5/1-5/2). I deal with TRW's objection seeking the allocation of nearby land for housing in Chapter 3A of my report. Consequently, I conclude that no specific amendments are needed to the text accompanying Proposal E2/5 in response to these objections.

Recommendation

4.191 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

PROPOSAL E2/6: LAND AT BICKENHILL LANE, BICKENHILL

Objections to First Deposit

1352/773 – Cala Properties.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should this land be designated for general business development, bearing in mind that it is not needed for NEC purposes.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.192 Proposal E2/6 designates 4ha of land at Bickenhill Lane, near Elmdon Trading Estate, Birmingham International Park and NEC for general business use. This proposal does not feature in either the First or Revised Deposit drafts, but has been introduced as a result of objections to Policy E2 & Proposal E5/1 (1433/103-104) in the latest revisions to the SUDPR [CD175].
- 4.193 This 4ha site lies on the eastern side of Bickenhill Lane, adjoining the NEC, and is currently used as a haulage yard and storage of pallets. In the adopted UDP, it is included within the NEC boundary, and this designation is carried forward into the SUDPR, since SMBC understood that it was still needed for

NEC purposes. However, following an objection to Proposal E5/1 (NEC), SMBC reviewed the situation, and in June 2004 NEC confirmed that it could no longer justify the retention of this site within its boundary. SMBC therefore reconsidered its allocation and at a Cabinet meeting in August 2004 resolved to exclude the land from the NEC boundary and designate it for business use, including office, industrial and warehouse purposes within Use Classes B1, B2 & B8 [SOL-E2-4]. This amendment would fully meet the objections to both Policy E2 and Proposal E5/1 and I recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

4.194 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by including Proposal E2/6, designating land at Bickenhill Lane, Bickenhill for general business purposes, as proposed by SMBC [CD175].

POLICY E3: GENERAL OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

Objections to First Deposit

1095/379, 607 – Centro/WMPTA; 1275/128 – CPRE;
1084/219 – Catherine-de-Barnes Residents Association.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does Policy E3 reflect the Borough's office strategy and should it indicate the primacy of the Borough's town centres as the main office locations;*
- *Is the approach of Policy E3 towards out-of-centre office development, particularly in the rural Green Belt, too permissive;*
- *(¶ 4.3.2): Should the phrase "for the time being" be deleted.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.195 Policy E3 encourages general office development in Solihull, Shirley and Chelmsley Wood town centres and sets out the criteria for considering proposals for such development elsewhere. In the latest amendments [CD175], the heading of this section is to be retitled "*General Office Development (excluding Regional Investment Sites)*".
- 4.196 Centro is concerned about out-of-town office developments such as BVP & BBP, and considers the SUDPR should confirm the primacy of the Borough's centres as the main location for offices. However, as currently drafted, Policy E3 specifically encourages office development in the main town centres which are well served by public transport, but does not specifically encourage office developments in out-of-town locations. Development at the Borough's premium office parks, such as BBP & BVP, is restricted to "top quality" Class B1 uses and subject to accessibility by public transport. The latest regional strategy does not restrict new office development solely to town centres and recognises that there may be cases where high quality greenfield developments may be necessary to provide a portfolio of employment land, including RIS [CD51G; Policy PA6-PA7].
- 4.197 The criteria in Policy E3 would ensure that office developments outside the main town centres are subject to environmental and sustainability tests, including accessibility by public transport. Chapter 5 of the SUDPR also includes specific policies on transport, including increasing the role of public transport, providing adequate access to new development and securing financial contributions to the provision of bus services. Consequently, it is clear that, although the main focus for new office development is on the town centres, in line with PPG6 & new RPG11, Policy E3 recognises that such development may be appropriate in other locations, subject to environmental, transport and sustainability considerations.

- 4.198 CPRE is particularly concerned about the spread of office uses in rural Green Belt areas, especially in the *Meriden Gap*, listing examples including converted farm buildings, and asks for Policy E3 to be restricted to urban and non-Green Belt areas. However, Policy E3(vi) requires development to comply with other policies in the SUDPR, which would include Green Belt policies; office development in the Green Belt would be inappropriate unless it met the tests of Green Belt policy. National policy in PPS7 seeks to provide employment in rural areas and maintain the rural economy, but this has to be tempered by the recognised restrictions in the Green Belt.
- 4.199 On the evidence before me, I can find little to suggest in the Solihull context that it would be appropriate to go beyond the requirements of national policy and preclude office development in the Green Belt in every case, or restrict all office development to the urban areas. It seems that most office development that has occurred in the Green Belt has involved the conversion of existing buildings, which would have had to meet Green Belt policy, including SUDPR Policy C2 & SPG [CD162]. Future proposals would also have to meet sustainability and transport considerations (Policies T1/T2), as well as the specific criteria in Policy E3. I realise that office uses in the countryside may have a visual impact, not only the buildings, but also the associated traffic and parked cars, but it is important to realise that national policy does not preclude such development. It therefore seems to me that the policy framework in the SUDPR would provide a sound basis against which to apply a consistent approach to proposals for office development outside the main town centres, and the further restrictions suggested by CPRE are inappropriate.
- 4.200 CdBRA's disputed phrase in the supporting text (¶ 4.3.2) was deleted at Revised Deposit stage (Rev 4/16), so no further amendments are necessary to meet CdBRA's objection.

Recommendation

4.201 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

POLICY E3 – SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Land at Bickenhill Lane, Bickenhill

Objections to First Deposit 1352/774 – Cala Properties.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should this site be identified for employment use, particularly for Class B1 office development.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.202 This objection has essentially been met, by the late inclusion of Proposal E2/6, which specifically designates this site for general business purposes, including Use Classes B1, B2 & B8. This would include development for office purposes, and so no further amendments to the Plan or Policy E3 are needed.

Recommendation

4.203 I RECOMMEND NO FURTHER MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Land at Marsh Lane, Solihull
Land at Norton Green Lane, Knowle

Objections to First Deposit 1359/726 – Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify allocating these sites for general office or mixed uses to meet employment needs up to and beyond 2011, particularly given their Green Belt status.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.204 Taylor Woodrow argues that, if these sites are not required for general business land under Policy E2, they should be released from the Green Belt and allocated for office/mixed-use development, possibly as part of a mixed-use proposal including residential and leisure uses. Similar considerations apply to this proposal as for Policy E2, in that exceptional circumstances would need to be demonstrated to justify the use of Green Belt land for this purpose. The latest employment survey [CD150] confirms that sufficient land has been identified for general business purposes, including offices, and no exceptional circumstances have been advanced in support of these proposals. Consequently, I can see no justification for the release of these sites from the Green Belt and their allocation for office development at this time.

Recommendation

4.205 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Birmingham International Station

Objections to First Deposit 1401/363 – Railtrack Property.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should Policy E3 recognise the potential of locations other than town centres for office development, including Birmingham International Station.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.206 Railtrack argues that Birmingham International Station has potential for office development, particularly since it is highly accessible by means of transport other than the private car, and would also accord with Policy T1. However, the prime function of Birmingham International Station is a major transport interchange for BIA/NEC and other associated uses, in order to facilitate travel by rail. As SMBC says, complementary uses might be appropriate, but it would be inappropriate to promote the facility as a business/office location or destination in its own right, particularly since this would not accord with PPG6 or the underlying strategy of the SUDPR. It could also conflict with the locational strategy of the latest regional guidance.

Recommendation

4.207 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

Provident Park, Stratford Road/M42, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1306/1152 – Dorridge & District Residents Association;
 [E3:]: 1363/1104; [C1]: 1363/1102– Castlemore Securities

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should this site be designated for general office development under Policy E3, bearing in mind that the site has planning permission for this use.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.208 Provident Park lies on the A34 Stratford Road, close to the roundabout junction with the M42(J4). Both D&DRA & Castlemore argue that the Plan should acknowledge the fact that office development has been permitted on this site, and Castlemore also seeks its removal from the Green Belt.
- 4.209 SMBC confirms that the principle of office development on this site was agreed more than a decade ago, with an extant planning permission for 18,500 sq.m of offices approved in April 2001. A new access to the site has also now been constructed, and development could therefore commence without needing a specific allocation in the SUDPR. However, there are several other sites shown on the Proposals Map designated under Policy E2 for general business development which have planning permission or are partly developed. It therefore seems to me that, given the scale of proposed development and in the interests of consistency, this site should be specifically designated under a Proposal of Policy E2 for Class B1 office development, and shown as such on the Proposals Map. This would reflect the fact that the principle of office development is not in question and ensure that the site could be developed for these purposes should the existing planning permission become time-expired. It would also reflect the position of other similar sites designated in this way.
- 4.210 I realise that part of the site nearest the M42 motorway lies in the confirmed Green Belt in the adopted and emerging UDPs. I also note that the present Green Belt boundary follows an arbitrary line about 200m away from the M42. The inspector at the 1991 UDP inquiry recommended that the Green Belt boundary should follow the outer edge of the proposed office development [CD129; p.177-179]. The approved plans show much of the Green Belt land being used for parkland and car parking, and since no buildings are planned on this part of the site, there is no justification to remove this land from the Green Belt. However, the north-western part of the site is proposed to be developed with three office blocks, and I consider this should form the area allocated for office development. Furthermore, now that the extent of built development has been confirmed, it would seem appropriate to make a minor alteration to the Green Belt boundary to reflect the extent of built development on this site.

Recommendation

4.211 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by designating land at Provident Park, Stratford Road, Shirley as a specific Proposal under Policy E2 for business development within Class B1 of the Use Classes Order, as shown on the Proposals Map, and amending the Green Belt boundary to reflect the extent of built development currently permitted.

PROPOSAL E3/1: OFFICE DEVELOPMENTS IN MAIN CENTRES

There were no objections to this proposal.

POLICY E4: BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Objections to First Deposit

1054/1069* – Highways Agency; 1080/201 – WMFOE; 1091/106 - Balsall Common Village Residents Association; 1153/945-946 – Birmingham International Airport Ltd; 1275/129 – CPRE; 1305/227 – Berkswell Society; 1424/590 – Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd; 1440/1006; 1008 – Mr M Wheeldon.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1080/168/R, 170/R – WMFOE; 1126/522/R – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/146/R – CPRE.

Key issues

- *Should proposals for growth at Birmingham International Airport be accompanied by a comprehensive transport assessment;*
- *Does Policy E4 provide an appropriate basis for considering proposals for the future development of Birmingham International Airport;*
- *Should Policy E4 specifically support proposals to extend the main runway provided that they can be justified by rigorous assessment against specified criteria, and should the detailed criteria be included within Transport Policy T15;*
- *Should Policy E4 cover proposals for the major expansion of BIA, including a second main runway, as referred to in the Airports White Paper, and set out more stringent criteria for considering the impact of significant proposals to further develop the airport;*
- *Should Policy E4 specify that any further development will have to meet specific criteria, and should criterion (iv) be amended to limit noise impact so as not to affect residential amenity or interfere with the enjoyment of adjacent land uses;*
- *Should criterion (vi) be amended to indicate that reasonable measures will be adopted to further reduce dependence on the private car commensurate with the level of traffic generated by the proposal;*
- *Should Policy E4 be divided into two parts, covering proposals within the defined boundary and land required for extensions to the main runway separately, with separate boundaries defined on the Proposals Map, and should the Plan include a new policy for secure warehousing along the A45 corridor;*
- *Should the text accompanying Policy E4 also identify the disbenefits of aviation and include targets for reducing environmental impact;*
- *Should Policy E4 recognise the environmental and community impact of over-flying Balsall Common, imposing conditions on future development to ensure rigid adherence to the agreed flight corridor;*
- *Does the accompanying text (¶ 4.4.3) properly reflect the proposals and aspirations of the Airport company;*
- *Should proposals for off-site car parking in the Green Belt (¶ 4.4.4) be subject to more stringent policies;*
- *Rev 4/17 (¶ 4.4.1): Should the statement be more comprehensive, setting out the negative aspects of BIA and indicating that the aviation industry has not signed up to the Kyoto agreement;*
- *Rev 4/18 (¶ 4.4.2): Are the references to employment provision relevant and should the figures be more fully justified in the context of subsidies to the airport/aviation sector;*
- *Rev 4/19 (¶ 4.4.3): Is the reference to the “Airport Company” appropriate.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.212 Policy E4 supports further proposals to develop *Birmingham International Airport* (BIA) for passenger and freight service within the current airport boundary defined on the Proposals Map, and sets out criteria for ancillary and complementary facilities, along with criteria for assessing any proposal to extend the main runway. The supporting text sets out the background to the development and current status of BIA in the context of the 1995 Airport Master Plan [CD125] and outlines current proposals. I understand that BIA has outline planning permission for developments within its current boundary to

increase capacity to 10.5 million passengers/year. BIA is also preparing a new Airport Master Plan which should be out for consultation during 2005 and adopted in 2006. SMBC's latest amendments to the SUDPR [CD175] update and clarify the supporting text.

- 4.213 Highways Agency's objection has been conditionally withdrawn on the basis of amendments made at Revised Deposit stage to Policy T1 & para 5.1.1 (Rev 5/1-5/2). These confirm that transport assessments will be required for proposals that are likely to have significant transport implications, in line with PPG13, and would fully meet this objection.
- 4.214 SMBC confirms that Policy E4 only covers airport-related development within the currently defined boundary and does not enable, encourage or propose such development outside this boundary. The existing boundary of BIA, as shown on the Proposals Map, is excluded from the Green Belt and specific developments are covered by previous planning permissions and operational development. Outside the defined boundary, Green Belt policies apply. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that Policy E4 reflects the latest regional strategy [CD51G; Policy T11], and I can see no reason to disagree with this view. However, it would be appropriate to make some brief reference to RPG11 Policy T11 in the text accompanying Policy E4, if only to provide the regional context, as SMBC suggests [CD179:45]. With this addition, I consider Policy E4 provides a sound and appropriate basis against which to assess proposals for further development of BIA within the current defined boundary.
- 4.215 Policy E4 is neutral in terms of any extension to the main runway, but sets out criteria against which any proposals should be considered. I understand that any proposals to extend the main runway would involve land to the south of the A45, beyond the current airport boundary, and so, by implication, Policy E4 does not positively support such a proposal. Any such proposal would have to be justified in terms of Policy E4 (i)-(vii) and subject to environmental assessment and Green Belt considerations, balanced against commercial and economic factors, including growth in air transport. In my view, the SUDPR should go no further than setting out the criteria against which such a proposal should be considered, in the context of the current Airport Master Plan [CD125]. Should the new Airport Master Plan be published and approved before the SUDPR is formally adopted, SMBC may need to review Policy E4.
- 4.216 However, any proposal to extend the main runway would be more related to the operations and expansion of the airport in transportation terms. At the inquiry, SMBC agreed that this element of the Policy was more related to transport than employment. Although it might create additional employment and enhance the status of BIA, I consider this element of Policy E4 would be more appropriately located within Policy T15, which covers the transportation aspects of development at BIA, without in any way reducing the importance of this element of Policy E4. This would go some way to meeting HIAS' objection. However, given the economic importance of BIA in regional employment terms, I do not support the transfer of all elements of Policy E4 to the transport chapter.
- 4.217 The possible future major expansion of BIA envisaged in the Airports White Paper [CD23], including a possible second runway, is not addressed in the SUDPR. The latest regional guidance [CD51G; ¶ 9.86] confirms that this issue needs to be considered as part of a review of RPG11 (Policy T11) by the WMRPB. SMBC considers this issue should be guided by revised regional guidance, as confirmed in the Employment and Transport Background Papers [CD147; CD140], and I share this view. As CPRE says, any proposals for the major expansion of BIA would be likely to have profound implications for Solihull and the settlements surrounding the airport, both in environmental, Green Belt and traffic terms. In advance of this regional review and any firm proposals, I share SMBC's view that it would be inappropriate and premature

to specifically rule out or oppose such a proposal, or provide detailed criteria for considering proposals for the major expansion of BIA. However, in the meantime, SMBC agrees to include a factual update on the major expansion of BIA [CD179:45], reflecting the position in the Background Papers and RPG11. It would also be helpful for the supporting text to confirm SMBC's position on proposals for the major expansion of BIA, including a possible second runway.

- 4.218 *Following the close the inquiry, press statements have indicated that the provision of a second runway at BIA may be delayed by up to four years and may be postponed until after 2016 [BIA-High Level Statement of Intent; Planning; 11 February 2005]. This adds further weight to the need for this matter to be considered beyond the time frame of the current SUDPR.*
- 4.219 CPRE considers Policy E4 is too permissive, and argues that the criteria for considering extensions to the runway should apply to all development at BIA, with a strong steer on noise impact and night flying. However, some of the proposals set out in the second part of Policy E4 form part of the current Airport Master Plan and already have approval in principle. These and other elements are subject to stringent environmental and other tests, including air and noise pollution, as set out in the Policy. It is important to ensure that the SUDPR does not unnecessarily hinder legitimate proposals for ancillary and complementary facilities at BIA or prejudice its regional function, provided they are justified and appropriately located, as the Policy requires. Issues such as night flying are already controlled by a S106 Agreement and are associated with aviation controls, outside the remit of the SUDPR. CPRE also suggests various amendments to criteria (i)-(v), but these would make little difference to the practical application of the Policy, and in some cases would actually weaken the criteria and undermine its operation.
- 4.220 Berkswell Society raises no objection to airport development within the defined boundary, subject to various conditions including noise, but hopes BIA does not become a destination in its own right. It also argues that Policy E4 should rule out and specifically oppose any consideration of airport expansion beyond the present boundaries, particularly given the threat to the vulnerable *Meriden Gap*. The nature, scale and level of any ancillary or commercial development and associated parking would influence whether BIA becomes a destination in its own right, but I am satisfied that the criteria in the second paragraph of Policy E4 would enable this matter to be considered. BIA is obviously a major transport destination due to its role as an international and regional airport. Policy E4 would also cover issues regarding noise, road traffic, pollution and the overall impact on residents in Berkswell. At the inquiry, Berkswell Society agreed that it would be difficult for the SUDPR to specifically oppose the future expansion of the airport, and accepted that other policies of the SUDPR would protect the Green Belt.
- 4.221 Westbury Homes argues that Policy E4 should set out criteria for all airport development and amend criterion (iv) to limit noise so as not to affect residential amenity or interfere with the enjoyment of adjoining land. However, SMBC emphasises the importance of BIA to the regional economy, and I share the view that it is appropriate for Policy E4 to support in principle airport development within the present boundary. To set out further criteria against which such development should be considered would be unduly restrictive, particularly since BIA's current development proposals have already been approved. Policy E4 confirms that developments should seek to minimise any adverse environmental impacts, including noise, and I consider this is appropriate in these circumstances.
- 4.222 As for criterion (vi), this is intended to relate solely to proposals to extend the main runway of BIA, rather than development within the current boundary, which is covered by Policies E4 & T15. Contrary to BIA's view, I cannot see

any inconsistency between these policies. In terms of transport and traffic, SMBC explains that an extension to the main runway could lead to considerably higher levels of vehicular traffic to and from BIA, potentially increasing pressures for extra car parking, possibly in the surrounding Green Belt. In order to minimise these pressures, it is important to try and reduce the dependence on the private car, in line with national policies. Increasing and improving access by public transport for both passengers and staff is an important element in achieving this aim, particularly with any proposals for growth of BIA, including a runway extension. Consequently, I consider this is a wholly reasonable and relevant criterion of Policy E4 in these circumstances.

- 4.223 As for the possibility of considering proposals within the defined BIA boundary separately from proposals to extend the main runway, my recommendation to transfer the latter element to Policy T15 would help to address this matter. I have already dealt with Mr Wheeldon's point about the need to designate additional land in this locality for warehousing associated with BIA (see Policy E2 above). Previous objections suggesting land at Old Damson Lane, Bickenhill should be allocated for warehousing, aviation-related and freight handling uses have now been withdrawn [O/E.4/1440/1009/1].
- 4.224 In response to WMFOE, Policy E4 seeks to ensure that the environmental impact of BIA is minimised and addresses traffic and transport considerations. BIA may well have some disbenefits, but the factors raised by WMFOE are of a national/international nature. Fiscal measures, aviation fuel tax and setting targets for the aviation industry are outside the scope of the SUDPR and many of the matters can simply not be addressed in this Review. Similarly, the enforcement of flight corridors is not a matter for the UDP Review, and the use of planning conditions may not be enforceable under planning legislation. Whilst I recognise the potential environmental impact of over-flying villages such as Balsall Common and Barston raised by BCVRA, such matters are best addressed under the aviation controls and regulations.
- 4.225 The accompanying text (¶ 4.4.3) sets out details of the current (1995) Airport Master Plan. These reflect previous discussions and permissions already granted, and are included for information. However, if the emerging new Master Plan contains any additional elements and is approved before the SUDPR is formally adopted, SMBC may need to reconsider this section of the supporting text. In the meantime, I am satisfied that it represents the current proposals and aspirations of the Airport Company. The reference to off-site car parking (¶ 4.4.4) having to meet the test of exceptional circumstances in the Green Belt is the appropriate starting point, in line with PPG2. I cannot see that it is inadequate, as CPRE argues, since such proposals would probably also need to be considered against SUDPR Policy T9.
- 4.226 SMBC confirms that the purpose of Rev 4/17 is to provide more accurate statistics relating to BIA. It is a factual section, outlining what has happened since 1991 in terms of the development and growth of BIA. It would be inappropriate in this section to outline any of the less positive effects of BIA, particularly given the lack of much hard evidence and information, and irrelevant to make comments about the aviation industry in general. As regards the number of jobs provided (¶ 4.4.2), SMBC is satisfied that BIA supports about 7,400 jobs, reflecting BIA's views and recent studies. The purpose of Rev 4/18 is to more accurately reflect BIA's figures, and the additions suggested by WMFOE would be both irrelevant and fail to provide clarification on this point. In Rev 4/19 (& ¶ 4.4.2-4.4.3), the term "Airport company" is an umbrella phrase used by *Birmingham International Airport Ltd* to refer to all the different companies involved in *Birmingham Airport Holdings Ltd*. I understand that SMBC has interests in BIA, but I am satisfied that the phrase used in the SUDPR is appropriate for encompassing all the relevant companies involved in BIA. There is no suggestion that SMBC's involvement in the airport company has unduly influenced its planning policies for BIA.

4.227 I therefore conclude that Policy E4 is basically sound, but it should be amended, not only by updating and clarifying matters as already proposed and updating the factual position, but also by clarifying SMBC's position on the major expansion proposals at BIA, and transferring the criteria relating to any proposals to extend the main runway to Policy T15.

Recommendation

4.228 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by:

(i) amending the text accompanying Policy E4 to:

(a) update and clarify various matters, as proposed by SMBC [CD175];

(b) update the latest factual position on the major expansion of BIA, reflecting the position in the Background Papers and RPG11 and confirming SMBC's position in relation to proposals for the major expansion of BIA, including a possible second runway;

(ii) transferring the criteria relating to any proposal to extend the main runway to Policy T15 in the Transport chapter of the Plan.

POLICY E4 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Arden Brickworks, Coventry Road, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit 1402/970 – Redland Properties/McClean Estates

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should Policy E4 support further proposals to develop the airport for passenger and freight services on land identified as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt at the former Arden Brickworks site.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.229 Redland/McClean argues that Policy E4 should recognise the need to promote the redevelopment of Arden Brickworks, especially given the inter-relationship and close proximity to BIA. This objection is associated with others which seek to utilise the potential of this site (eg. Policy E1, E7, C2 & H1), which I deal with elsewhere in my report, and those conclusions are relevant in considering this objection. Although SMBC has acknowledged that part of this site comprises *previously developed land*, it does not intend to identify it as a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*. Consequently, this site lies within the approved Green Belt and, as such, would be subject to national Green Belt policy as well as SUDPR Policy C2.

4.230 I recognise that the site is reasonably close to BIA/NEC, along the main A45 corridor. However, the purpose of Policy E4 is to enable airport development within the current airport boundary, as defined on the Proposals Map, and set out the criteria against which such proposals would be considered. This site is certainly not part of the current confines of BIA and is physically divorced from it. In the absence of any firm justification or exceptional circumstances, it would be wholly inappropriate to designate this site for airport-related development, particularly given its Green Belt location. I am aware of the contents of the Government's White Paper on Airports, which suggests some growth of BIA may be necessary. However, this is a matter to be first considered at regional level, and as I have indicated before, is a matter for a subsequent review of this UDP. Consequently, I can see no soundly based argument or very special circumstances to justify including this site within the current policy framework for BIA.

Recommendation

4.231 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E4/1: BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**Objections to First Deposit** 1084/1148 – Catherine-de-Barnes Residents Association.**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issues**

- *Should Proposal E4/1 preclude any development of the airport outside the designated boundary, due to its impact on the Green Belt and rural environment.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.232 Proposal E4/1 reconfirms the designation of land for future development of BIA within the boundary shown on the Proposals Map. CdBRA supports the confirmation of the designated development boundary for BIA, but wishes to preclude any development of the airport or its support services outside the designated area. SMBC confirms that the SUDPR does not propose to take Green Belt land for airport purposes or extend the current development boundary of BIA. The SUDPR is neutral in respect of any extensions outside the present development boundary, including an extension to the main runway, and the question of any major expansion of BIA in the future is not a matter for the SUDPR at this time, pending further work at regional level. My conclusions on Policy E4 (see above) are relevant to this issue, and I am satisfied that Proposal E4/1 helps to provide an adequate basis for considering airport development proposals within the current boundary.

Recommendation

4.233 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E4/2: WEST CAR PARK, BICKENHILL LANE**Objections to First Deposit** 1126/329-330 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1401/362 – Railtrack Property.**Objections to Revised Deposit** 1080/416/R – West Midlands Friends of the Earth.**Key issues**

- *Is Proposal E4/2 clear in its purpose and should it be included as a Transport proposal;*
- *Should Proposal E4/2 either relate solely to the West Car Park or include reference to the potential for office and hotel uses either in association with the transport interchange or development of the car park serving BIA/NEC;*
- *Rev 4/20 (¶ 4.4.5): Does Proposal E4/2 conflict with the overall transport policy of the SUDPR, and should it aim to reduce car parking associated with BIA and replace it with enhanced public transport.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.234 Proposal E4/2 designates 16ha of land adjacent to Birmingham International Station for NEC, Airport and Transport interchange purposes, in line with SUDPR Policy T4.

4.235 HIAS argues that the underlying purpose of Proposal E4/2 is to create a transport interchange, primarily for BIA/NEC, and it should therefore feature as a transport rather than employment proposal in the SUDPR. SMBC sees this land as having a wider purpose than solely a transport interchange, possibly for airport terminal related activity and a multi-purpose function for BIA/NEC and transport interchange facilities at Birmingham International

station, including commuter parking. As confirmed at the inquiry, it is an “opportunity” site which could relate to proposals other than transport, and is therefore appropriately included in the employment chapter.

- 4.236 Following the inquiry session, SMBC suggested amendments to the text (¶ 4.4.5) [CD175; CD179:44], which confirms that: *the potential for the land to provide important transport interchange facilities should also be protected; reasoned proposals for developments that are ancillary, or complementary to the use of the land for NEC/Airport/Interchange purposes may also be allowed; and development of land which can be demonstrated to be surplus to these requirements will be allowed subject to the other policies and proposals of this plan.* These revisions would make the Proposal more explicit and provide an appropriate context for considering development proposals on this land for transport interchange or associated proposals.
- 4.237 Railtrack’s objection is related to earlier site-specific objections to Policies E2 & E3 (see above), and my conclusions on those objections are relevant here. Although complementary uses might be appropriate to serve the transport interchange, it would be inappropriate to promote office or hotel development on this land or promote it as a business/commercial location. This might conflict with the primary purpose of the land, would not accord with PPG6 or the underlying strategy of the SUDPR, and could also conflict with the locational strategy of the latest regional guidance.
- 4.238 In response to WMFOE, Rev 4/20 actually only corrects the title of *Birmingham International Station* in the supporting text (¶ 4.4.5), so it is doubtful whether this objection is valid at Revised Deposit stage. In any event, Policy E4 requires proposals for significant growth at BIA to reduce dependence on the private car. It is important to ensure that West Car Park retains its potential for use for airport terminal related activity as well as its importance as a commuter car park, helping to facilitate its primary use as a transport interchange, providing access to sustainable transport modes. Consequently, I cannot see that Proposal E4/2 necessarily conflicts with the main transport strategy of the SUDPR or would increase dependence on the private car.

Recommendation

4.239 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by *amending the text accompanying Proposal E4/2 (¶ 4.4.5), to indicate that “the potential for the land to provide important transport interchange facilities should also be protected; reasoned proposals for developments that are ancillary, or complementary to the use of the land for NEC/Airport/Interchange purposes may also be allowed; and development of land which can be demonstrated to be surplus to these requirements will be allowed subject to the other policies and proposals of this plan”, in accordance with the amendments suggested by SMBC [CD175; CD179:44].*

POLICY E5: NATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTRE

Objections to First Deposit

1054/1071* – Highways Agency; 1095/613 – Centro/WMPMTA; 1233/381 – NEC; 1275/130 – CPRE; 1352/775 – Cala Properties.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should proposals for growth at the NEC be accompanied by a comprehensive transport assessment;*

- Does the Plan make sufficient reference to the need for any NEC expansion plans to be accompanied by contributions towards more sustainable travel patterns;
- Should the Plan consider the designation of a special policy area covering the NEC & BIA, and refer to Policy PA12 in the emerging regional guidance;
- Should Policy E5 seek to “address” rather than “minimise” any adverse environment impacts, and “will need to” rather than “should”;
- Should land off Bickenhill Lane, Bickenhill be removed from the NEC boundary, as shown on the Proposals Map.

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

- 4.240 Policy E5 supports proposals to develop within the NEC boundary shown on the Proposals Map, and specifies the nature of such proposals, along with locational and design criteria. Highways Agency’s objection has been conditionally withdrawn on the basis of the amendments made at Revised Deposit stage to Policy T1 & para 5.1.1 (Rev 5/1-5/2). These confirm that transport assessments will be required for proposals that are likely to have significant transport implications, in line with PPG13.
- 4.241 In response to Centro, Policy E5 confirms that significant proposals for growth at the NEC would have to include measures to reduce dependence on the private car. Policy T2 aims to ensure access to developments in a sustainable manner, Policy T5 requires Travel Plans for significant developments, in line with PPG13, and Policy T8 (¶ 5.2.8) requires developers to make a financial contribution to bus provision. In my view, these policies adequately address the need for major expansion at the NEC to achieve sustainable transport and travel patterns.
- 4.242 NEC generally supports Policy E5, but suggests that it should be covered by a special policy area, allowing more detailed SPG to be prepared, along with reference to Policy PA12 in the draft WMRPG. The text accompanying Policy E5 includes much background information on the NEC, acknowledging its importance to the regional economy and recognising that there are plans for major expansion. In my view, Policy E5 provides an appropriate basis for considering such proposals without the need for a special policy area or subsequent SPG. Policy PA10 (& ¶ 7.67) in the latest regional strategy [CD51G] specifically mentions the NEC in the context of supporting the development and success of key regional tourism and cultural assets. In view of its regional importance and to provide a more complete picture of the planning policies applying to the area, it would be helpful if a brief reference to RPG11 Policy PA10 was made in the text accompanying Policy E5.
- 4.243 CPRE’s suggested changes to the text of Policy E5 would not noticeably strengthen the Policy or assist in its application. The aim is to *minimise* rather than *address* any adverse environmental impacts, and the word *should* expresses an obligation or intention, which is the objective of the policy.
- 4.244 Cala Properties’ concerns about the inclusion of land off Bickenhill Lane within the NEC boundary have been met by SMBC’s late amendment to the SUDPR, [SOL-E5-2] allocating it for general business development under Proposal E2/6 (see above).

Recommendation

4.245 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by **amending** the text accompanying Policy E5 to refer to Policy PA10 of the latest regional strategy.

PROPOSAL E5/1: NATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTRE

Objections to First Deposit 1233/382-3 – NEC; 1275/130 – CPRE; 1433/103-105 – Mr J Higginson.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- Should the Plan include a special policy area for the NEC/BIA and include “visitor attraction” in the list of complementary developments (¶ 4.5.4);
- Should the word “contain” be replaced by “include” in the accompanying text (¶ 4.5.4);
- Should land off Bickenhill Lane, Bickenhill be removed from the NEC boundary, as shown on the Proposals Map.

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.246 Proposal E5/1 reconfirms the designation of land for future development of the NEC shown on the Proposals Map. I have dealt with NEC’s points about designating a special policy area under Policy E5 (see above). The accompanying text (¶ 4.5.4) already refers to enhancing *visitor expectations and experiences* at the NEC, and outlines the improvements proposed, so it is unnecessary to specifically refer to the NEC as a *visitor attraction*.

4.247 In response to CPRE, I consider the use of the words *contain* and *contained* in the last sentence of para 4.5.4 does not read well. If the sentence is intended to mean that the expansion proposals will *include* development and redevelopment, which will be *confined* to the designated area, the text should say just this, and I recommend accordingly. SMBC also proposes a minor amendment to para 4.5.4, replacing *200 hectare* with *NEC [CD175]*, which is an appropriate clarification of the site.

4.248 Mr Higginson’s objections to the inclusion of land off Bickenhill Lane within the NEC boundary have been met by SMBC’s late amendment to the SUDPR [*SOL-E5-2*], allocating it for general business development under Proposal E2/6 (see above). For completeness, the land should also be excluded from the NEC policy area designated under Proposal E5/1, and no further amendments are therefore needed in response to these objections.

Recommendation

4.249 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by:

- (i) *replacing the words “contain” and “contained within” in the last sentence of paragraph 4.5.4 with “include” and “confined to”, and replacing “200 hectare” with “NEC” [CD175];*
- (ii) *amending the Proposals Map to exclude land at Bickenhill Lane, Bickenhill from the NEC policy area.*

POLICY E6: LAND ROVER

Objections to First Deposit 1054/1072* – Highways Agency.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- Should proposals for growth at Land Rover be accompanied by a comprehensive transport assessment.

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.250 Policy E6 supports the modernisation and development of the Land Rover factory at Lode Lane, Solihull, as shown on the Proposals Map, and sets out the criteria for considering development proposals. Highways Agency’s

objection has been conditionally withdrawn on the basis of the amendments made at Revised Deposit stage to Policy T1 & para 5.1.1 (Rev 5/1-5/2). These confirm that transport assessments will be required for proposals that are likely to have significant transport implications, in line with PPG13. No further amendments are therefore needed to Policy E6 or the supporting text.

Recommendation

4.251 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

PROPOSAL E6/1: LAND ROVER

There were no objections to this proposal.

POLICY E7: HOTEL DEVELOPMENT

Objections to First Deposit

1091/107 – Balsall Common Village Residents Association; 1275/131 – CPRE; 1305/228 – Berkswell Society; 1402/966 – Redland Properties/McClean Estates.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should Policy E7 provide more flexibility to enable the redevelopment of existing sites in the Green Belt for hotels, especially eyesore sites;*
- *Should Policy E7 confirm that hotel development, including extensions, in the Green Belt is inappropriate and unacceptable;*
- *Should Policy E7 recognise the potential for the Arden Brickworks site to accommodate a hotel development, associated with BIA/NEC.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

4.252 Policy E7 permits new hotels and extensions in appropriate locations, subject to specific criteria. BCVRA is particularly concerned about a site at Marsh Lane, Balsall Common (Lincoln Farm café), which might benefit from redevelopment for hotel purposes to remove an eyesore. However, hotel development is normally inappropriate in the Green Belt, as PPG2 (¶ 3.4) & SUDPR Policy C2 confirms. Rev 4/21 to the supporting text (¶ 4.7.2) changes *unacceptable* to *inappropriate*, and would seem to go some way towards meeting this objection, as well as bringing the text more into line with PPG2 and reflecting GO-WM's original objection. The removal of an eyesore might be one of the factors to take into account when considering future proposals for the redevelopment of sites in the Green Belt, and I consider no further amendments are necessary to meet this objection.

4.253 Both CPRE & Berkswell Society consider Policy E7(iii) is not strong enough and should confirm categorically that hotel developments and extensions are inappropriate and unacceptable within the Green Belt, as in the current adopted UDP (Policy E4). As PPG2 (¶ 3.1) confirms, national policy precludes inappropriate development in the Green Belt except in very special circumstances, which is reflected in SUDPR Policy C2. Proposals for hotel development or extensions in the Green Belt would have to meet the stringent criteria of SUDPR Policy C2, which would provide sufficient control against inappropriate forms of hotel development in the Green Belt. In any event, the text accompanying Policy E7 (¶ 4.7.2) specifically confirms that hotel development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and, at the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that no relaxation of the previous policy was intended. I have

4.259 Consequently, no amendments are needed to Policy E8 or the supporting text in response to this objection.

Recommendation

4.260 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.

**POLICY E9: RETENTION OF LAND IN BUSINESS USE
(CLASS B1, B2 OR B8 OF THE USE CLASSES ORDER)**

Objections to First Deposit

1039/1129 – Persimmon Homes (South Midlands) Ltd; 1354/605 – Asda Stores Ltd; 1379/1036 – J J Gallagher Ltd; 1380/46 – House Builders Federation; 1423/997 – West Midlands RSL Planning Consortium; 1424/599 – Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd; 1447/984 – Mr P J Frampton; 1450/83 – Mr R Clinton.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1450/35/R – Mr R Clinton

Key issues

- *Should Policy E9 allow alternative uses, such as housing, where land becomes obsolete, redundant or unwanted;*
- *Should Policy E9 allow sites currently allocated or in employment use to be developed for residential uses, including affordable housing, in line with PPG3 (¶ 42);*
- *Should Policy E9 allow redevelopment for alternative town centre uses where a site is within or on the edge of a designated centre;*
- *Should Policy E9 specify that there will be no reduction in local employment opportunities and no requirement to sustain employment levels through the development of greenfield land;*
- *Should Policy E9 provide an exception where development would represent a major inward investment of national/international status;*
- *Has Policy E9 been rationalised with the objectives of the Urban Capacity Study, and should it recognise that older employment premises are unlikely to make a significant contribution to housing windfall sites;*
- *Should Policy E9 allow proposals for the redevelopment of employment land to be considered on their merits, taking account of the character and nature of adjoining land and premises;*
- *Rev 4/24: Should the amended Policy embrace all employment uses, including sui generis uses.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

4.261 Policy E9 seeks to retain land currently or previously in business use or allocated for employment uses, and sets out the criteria for considering proposals for the development or redevelopment of such land for other purposes. Rev 4.24 specifies that the Policy relates to Use Classes B1, B2 &

B8. In support of Policy E9, SMBC refers to the latest employment land survey [CD150] and the Background Paper on Employment and Prosperity [CD147].

- 4.262 Dealing firstly with the possibility of using employment land for residential purposes, as drafted, Policy E9 allows alternative uses: where there is little prospect of employment use continuing, resuming or being attracted; where alternative uses would contribute more to creating more sustainable patterns of development; and where it does not conflict with other policies in the SUDPR. This does not reflect the terms of national guidance in PPG3 (¶ 42) or the latest revisions to PPG3 on the reallocation of employment and other land for housing (*Supporting the Delivery of New Housing; January 2005*). The Policy does not include any test of employment need by reference to current employment land supply, and includes no reference to the position in the latest (March 2004) employment land survey in the supporting text (¶ 4.9.1). Although I recognise that there should be no case for creating an exception for affordable housing, it seems to me that Policy E9 requires some amendment to bring it into line with the latest national policy, as well as reflecting Policy CF4 of the new regional strategy. The supporting text also requires updating to reflect the conclusions of the latest survey of employment land [CD147; 3.3.2] and reflect the most recent amendments to national policy in PPG3.
- 4.263 As for allowing alternative town centre uses on existing and allocated employment land, the criteria set out in Policy E9 would enable this to take place, provided that the criteria are met, particularly the tests of prospect of employment re-use and sustainability. No amendments are therefore needed to allow for this possibility. There is no requirement to sustain current employment levels in Policy E9, either within the urban area or on greenfield sites; all proposals would be considered on their merits and subject to the specific criteria. As for allowing an exception on the grounds that the development represents a major inward investment from a national/international company, I cannot see that this would represent a valid exception, since it could lead to inappropriate development being permitted, perhaps in the Green Belt. As SMBC says, the purpose of Policy E9 is to retain business land and premises in employment use in order to retain the diversity of businesses and employment land in the Borough, rather than to specify the types of development that might be appropriate on employment sites.
- 4.264 In response to HBF, although the UCS [CD99-101] examined the possibility of reusing existing employment sites, it is appropriate to retain the diversity of business uses, whilst providing the flexibility of allowing alternative development in appropriate cases, as SMBC confirms. From the limited evidence before me, I cannot see any obvious mismatch between the results of the UCS and the need to retain existing employment land and premises in the context of Policy E9. Since the main purpose of Policy E9 is to retain premises in employment use, this reflects the difficulties of using older employment premises for alternative uses, including housing.
- 4.265 The suggested deletion of the test of need in criterion (i) has little justification, since it would widen the possibilities for alternative development and weaken the application of the Policy. To simply assess alternative proposals on the basis of their effect on the character of the area and adjoining land/premises would provide insufficient protection for existing and future employment land and premises, and undoubtedly result in the loss of more employment land. As regards Rev 4/24, the restriction of Policy E9 to Class B1, B2 & B8 uses reflects the main business classes in the Use Classes Order. Although many *sui generis* uses contribute to the Borough's employment base, widening the Policy to include such uses (which cannot be specified) would unduly weaken the aims of the Policy.
- 4.266 I therefore conclude that although the broad aims of Policy E9 are soundly based and worthy of support, the detailed criteria setting out exceptions where

alternative development may be permitted should be amended to bring them more in line with the latest regional strategy (Policy CF4) and the recent amendments to PPG3 in the latest (January 2005) national guidance.

Recommendation

4.267 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by amending Policy E9 to bring the criteria for considering alternative development on existing and allocated employment land more into line with the latest regional strategy and recent amendments to PPG3 in the latest national policy (January 2005).

POLICY E10: THE NEEDS OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Objections to First Deposit 1275/127 – CPRE

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Is Policy E10 too permissive of development for small businesses in the Green Belt, and should the criteria ensure that the traffic and environmental impacts do not result in a net loss of residential or other amenity.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 4.268 Policy E10 encourages the retention and creation of opportunities for local employment in small business developments, subject to specific criteria. CPRE considers the Policy is too permissive towards development in the Green Belt, and argues that opportunities for small businesses in the countryside should be limited to those that need to be located in the countryside and fulfil the criteria for farm diversification.
- 4.269 Firstly, it is important to recognise that Policy E10 is designed to provide a policy framework for small business throughout Solihull and not just in Green Belt locations. As with other employment policies, it has to be read in conjunction with other policies in the SUDPR, including Green Belt Policies C2 & C7 where applicable, as clause (v) confirms. These policies seek to prevent harm to the Green Belt and the character of the countryside, whilst accommodating legitimate developments. The latest regional strategy (Policy PA14; ¶ 7.70) shows how economic and environmental considerations can be balanced by supporting the rural economy through the growth of existing businesses and creation of new enterprises.
- 4.270 The text accompanying Policy E10 (¶ 4.10.1) recognises that small businesses can contribute to the portfolio of employment land in both urban and rural areas, and provided that the proposals in the rural area are tempered and considered against the stringent requirements of Green Belt policy, I cannot see that Policy E10 provides an unduly favourable or permissive approach to small businesses in Green Belt locations. CPRE's suggested amendments would go beyond national policy in PPG2 & PPS7 and cannot be justified in the context of Solihull's Green Belt. Consequently, I conclude that no amendments are needed to Policy E10 or the supporting text.

Recommendation

4.271 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet this objection.
