

SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN INQUIRY
Notes of the Economy Round Table Session – 6 January 2006

Mr Brian S Rogers (BR) – Inspector
Mr Robert Sexton (RS) – Assistant Inspector

Representatives

Representing

Mr David Cowie (DC)	South Holland District Council
Mr Robert Lewis (RL)	On behalf of South Holland District Council
Nigel Ozier (NO)	Brian Barber Associates
Neil S Osborn (NSO)	Development Land & Planning Consultants Ltd
Annette Hewitson (AH)	Environment Agency
David Wilson (DW)	Geoffrey Collings & Co
Paul Tame (PT)	National Farmers Union
Robbie Doughty (RD)	Robert Doughty Consultancy
Keith Williams (KW)	Stansgate Planning Consultants

Abbreviations

RSS Regional Spatial Strategy
RSS8 Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands
SFRA Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Economy - Topics for discussion

- Does the Plan allocate sufficient land for employment development? Is there an adequate supply of employment sites in terms of distribution, location, size and quality?
- Is the issue of the rural economy adequately dealt with in the Plan? Do the policies provide for sufficient and appropriate employment development in the rural areas?

General

RS opened the proceedings by welcoming everybody to the meeting. RS advised that questions could be put across the table.

The Council were asked to provide the Inspector with a schedule of all EC1 sites and a plan of the Wardentree Lane estate.

Topic 1

The topic was broken down into separate areas:-

- **Does the Plan allocate sufficient land for employment development?**

RS advised that the RSS and Structure Plan indicated a sufficiency generally. NSO agreed and stated that there was a quantitative deficiency in parts of Spalding but the Council always progressively sought to emphasise Spalding. Businesses which were setting up were looking for sites to take up immediately. NSO pointed out that it would be dangerous to say there was sufficient supply without looking at factors for sufficient land available to deal with the demand that could arise. This suggested that there was probably an insufficiency in Spalding. DC stated that with the land the Council had allocated at Barrier Bank, Spalding, the provision was adequate.

BR asked if Wardentree Lane, Spalding was considered to be serviced. DC advised that the key areas of land were regarded as being serviced.

In response to NSO, KW referred to the Council's monitoring report 2004, table 30, which showed the amount of land identified for employment, the amount with planning permission and the total area developed since 1997 as at 31 March 2005 on the allocated employment sites. There were 87 hectares of land with planning permission and 47 hectares of land with planning permission that had not yet been started. KW referred to paragraph 6.6 "Between 1997 and 2005 37 Ha of employment land had been developed on the allocated sites, at an average of 4.1 Ha per annum and stated that even Spalding alone was looking at close to 20 years supply.

RS advised that DC had previously mentioned the Council's view was that the supply of land was generous, although did appear to have some concern for the Enterprise Park/Wardentree Lane area, where some firms have kept land for expansion purposes. DC advised that the Economic Development Task Group had gathered information from a number of sources which gave an indication of the amount of land tied up for expansion. KW stated that his clients specific interest was to develop their land but they did not have consent for development.

NO pointed out that everyone had an interest in promoting their land and South Holland District Council had acknowledged that there was land available but they did not have access to it. NO agreed that there was a need to allocate land. NO suggested splitting the Enterprise Park/Wardentree Lane area in to three parts where there was land serviced. Many of the land sales in that area had already been agreed. NO stated that some of the issues that had been raised were issues for the Local Development Framework and not for the Local Plan.

DC advised that there were going to be further issues to look at. In respect of the site at Barrier Bank the Council had increased the range and given certainty for further use of that land to increase employment.

NO advised that he was aware of the proposals for the Marina therefore, South Holland District Council had looked at a site further down the ladder than sites that were available and ready for development. NO stressed that the Council should be looking at sites that were specific to the nearest towns.

RD agreed with NSO. They should be able to facilitate everyone and all needs that come along. They should look at the routes into the town. KW recognised the need to have land available for employment companies in the area. The Council's aims should be to continue to ensure Spalding remains as an individual hub, which was why they were looking at allocating Barrier Bank. KW stated that it seems the Council were looking to allocate additional land without considering land that does not meet requirements. KW believed it was the RSS and Structure Plan which suggested why the Council was looking at de-allocating land.

DC advised that the figures in the monitoring report indicated a slow take up of large employment areas. Whether that should lead to de-allocating was another matter. It was the Council's decision not to re-allocate or de-allocate any land. They had resisted that through consideration of the representations. DC felt the need to maintain a balance between homes and jobs. The Council was concerned not to restrain existing employment areas. There was a need to retain options for future growth.

RS stated that there were major allocations identified as high risk in the SFRA. Quite a number of allocated sites appeared to be in a high risk area. DC advised that the Council had prepared a response to the Environment Agency. DC referred to the draft Planning Policy Statement, Annex D, from the previous round table meeting. DC felt that the exception test was very relevant in the case of South Holland. The specifics on individual sites would be examined later.

BR pointed out that some of the sites might not be able to overcome problems from the Environment Agency. DC advised that there may be sites that would be difficult to develop at all, or they may be constrained in ways they can be developed.

RD stated that South Holland was a target for discussion regarding the Flood Risk Assessment. A practical solution was needed to deal with the risk assessment. Most applications for South Holland had to have a risk assessment done and they had to go through the process with the Environment Agency. RD advised that flood risk did not cause as much concern as it might elsewhere in the country.

DW referred to the comments from RD regarding the site at Sutton Bridge (eastern district). DW pointed out that the perception of flood risk concerns people who were looking to buy properties in the district. DW had recently been able to resolve most concerns by referring buyers to the SFRA. In terms of the site at Sutton Bridge, DW had not been able to do that as the risk assessment places the area at high risk. DW asked that if anyone was looking to develop a factory in the area, would they? DW stated that the land at Wingland was to be opened up to the power station. Had the Local Planning Authority allowed the power station to double in size in return for a contribution to deal with the risk of flooding at Sutton Bridge?

DC explained that the proposal was being made for a second power station to be built next to the current station. The Council would need to look carefully to consider improvements that were required. It might require flood defence. DW advised that the previous proposal was made before the SFRA came in.

DW was puzzled by the response of the Council, paragraph 2.2 which states "There is an adequate supply of employment sites in terms of distribution, location, size and quality." DW asked if it was the original power station or new one that would provide those benefits. DC advised that it was the original station.

RS asked if there were any further points relating to sufficiency of employment. There were none.

- **Is there an adequate supply of employment sites in terms of distribution, location, size and quality?**

RS stated that as there was no recommendation in RSS or Structure Plan regarding the specific amount of employment land to be allocated in South Holland and the county, how were they best to judge that the amount of land provided was adequate?

KW advised that there had now been studies on the quality of land. Studies had shown a general over-supply. KW felt that it would be appropriate regarding quantum and quality.

DC stated that the process gone through during preparation of the Redeposit Local Plan was guided by the RSS. BR asked what was lacking about the other sites, rather than Barrier Bank. DC explained that the Barrier Bank site is envisaged in providing high quality business park development. In terms of the layout of the site they need the scope for other sites. BR asked if high visibility was one of the criteria.

NO stated that there were policies in RSS8 and Structure Plan which identified the Brownfield and Greenfield sites. NO asked if a flood risk analysis had been done on the Barrier Bank site or had the Council chosen from the best of two sites. DC advised that the approach taken had regard to the objection sites referred to. In looking at two sites, they had drawn up the best one to fulfil their needs and had identified other opportunities that could be used. The roads were a key reason for the location of the business park.

RS referred to the location and asked if it was something raised as a strategic issue or something closely related to the individual sites. DC advised that it was for distribution and location.

RS commented upon the size of sites in terms of their relationship with villages such as Donington and Little Sutton. DC advised that the site at Little Sutton lies between two areas and adjacent to one existing area of employment. The Council felt the need to provide for sufficient employment land and they were looking to do this through policy EC1. DC referred to paragraph 5.9 and highlighted the fact that there were some major employers in the district which would not be regarded as suitable allocation areas for future growth. The Council wants to provide a sustainable area for industries.

BR pointed out that some sites were very large. BR asked how the Council would address the issue of piecemeal development when the whole site was allocated. KW advised that Spalding was considered to be a third tier employment area in regard to the county level and second tier to the district. KW felt that a lot of growth should go to the principal urban areas within the district, starting at very high level in Spalding. DC pointed out that the plan had not attracted objections from the County Council at this point.

DW was concerned regarding the Little Sutton area and the area that the Council has in mind to work on. The new allocation was in excess of what local food processing factories were likely to require. DC stated that the policy was not to provide for existing premises. There were opportunities for a different range of plot sizes. DW pointed out that the size of Little Sutton's allocation has changed several times since the Local Plan in 1987 when it was described as 8 hectares.

RS asked if there were any points to be made regarding quality. NSO commented on the Council's reasons for locating the Barrier Bank site. NSO pointed out that what made a quality business park was the relatively low employment numbers, the factors which affect the quality of business opportunities, the proximity of housing and even public transport. It would be less well related to the existing facilities in town.

RD considered the strategic overview. RD did not want to downplay Spalding too greatly but did want to look at other settlements such as Holbeach. RD pointed out that it was important for Spalding to maintain its growth pattern. RD felt that Barrier Bank was not only about employment in the business park sense but of hotel and leisure facilities too. There had been a number of considerations on how to get that sort of development in Spalding.

NO asked if the ability there to have good quality employment in association with other areas. NO asked what the latest position was in terms of the hotel at the Springfields retail area. DC informed NO that the new hotel was a very recent proposal and that a planning application had not yet been sent to the Council.

Topic 2

Is the issue of the rural economy adequately dealt with in the Plan? Do the policies provide for sufficient and appropriate employment development in the rural areas?

The topic was broken down into separate areas:-

- **Is the issue of the rural economy adequately dealt with in the Plan?**

PT said yes. PT referred to paragraph 5.4 of the Local Plan and said that it was correct. PT pointed out that the area was extremely good for growing crops. The agriculture industry in most

other areas in the country was declining but in South Holland it was thriving, but South Holland will need to change in some ways as the industry changes over time. Regarding policy EC4, PT understood what point the Council was trying to make but PT wondered whether it was necessary.

DC had no comment to make.

- **Do the policies provide for sufficient and appropriate employment development in the rural areas?**

RD stated that there was a policy in place limiting the re-use of farm buildings, they were not allowed any form of commercial use. DC explained that the Council had set out a statement in response to paragraph 4.1 and onwards of the Local Plan. DC advised that policies EC1, EC2, EC3 and EC4 in particular explained how development could be provided beyond the sites. EC2 was a general policy in respect of developments. DC drew attention to paragraph 4.6 of the Local Plan, which may provide many opportunities for uses.