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Oxford Local Plan 2036

Joint Statement of Common Ground: Oxford City Council and Unipart Group

Parties:

- Oxford City Council
- Unipart Group (Unipart)

Date: 27 January 2020

Introduction

1. This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared in response to a request from the Inspectors that Oxford City Council and the Unipart Group (the Parties) prepare a Statement of Common Ground to resolve the issues around the lawful use of the Unipart site.
2. For context the draft modifications agreed to date for SP8 are:

Policy SP8:Unipart

Planning permission will be granted for B1 and B2 employment uses at Unipart. Additional B8 uses will be permitted where they support the employment activities at the site or another Category 1 site within the city. ~~Planning permission will not be granted for any other uses. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits. A reduction in car-parking provision on site will be required and~~ Opportunities should be sought to enhance and promote more sustainable travel modes to the Unipart site.

The Unipart Group's position

3. The Unipart site is identified as a Category 1 employment site within Oxford City, as defined by the submitted Local Plan. The Council acknowledges that Class B8 uses are included within Category 1 sites and that these are for specific reasons linked to nationally and regionally important employers. Unipart is such an employer and this is acknowledged by the Council.
4. Unipart is a storage and distribution business (Use Class B8). The Cowley site accommodates over 1,000,000 sq. ft. of Class B8 floorspace in addition to Unipart House (Class B1(a)).
5. Unipart submitted a statement to the Inspectors outlining that the Unipart Cowley site is a Class B8 site with no restrictions on occupation in planning terms. The existing use of the site is a material planning consideration, which would clearly outweigh the draft policy in the determination of any planning application for the redevelopment of the site. Accordingly, the proposed draft policy is unsound because it is not justified, it is not effective and is inconsistent with national policy.

6. The Unipart Group therefore requested that Policy SP8 be amended to simply state that planning permission will be granted for Class B1, B2 and B8 employment uses at the Unipart site. The City Council have now acknowledged the site's established use and this matter is agreed.
7. However, there remains disagreement about the level of protection this acknowledgement means the site can attract in the Local Plan. Unipart Group does not consider that this acknowledgement to the site specific policy to have an impact on the wider employment land policies contained within the submitted Local Plan. Unipart Group consider that the Unipart site is correctly identified as a category one employment site and it is appropriate for the site to have a specific policy – SP8. The downgrading of the site to a category 2 site is not appropriate and is inconsistent with the scale and importance of this well established and key employment site for the city. The City Council has acknowledged there is not an evidence base to support a restriction on Class B8 uses. Unipart consider there is an evidence base to support Policy SP8 with Class B8 uses unrestricted and that this is logical conclusion to arrive at and not to downgrade a major employment site.
8. Unipart do not consider it unsound to support Class B8 development on the site. Such a policy is simply supportive of employment redevelopment and Class B8 uses play an important part of this.

Oxford City Council's Position

9. The City Council has undertaken a thorough investigation of the planning history of this site and can confirm that the lawful use of the site is for B8 uses. This is a matter of agreement between the parties.
10. The matter of disagreement lies in how to soundly represent this in the Local Plan. The City Council proposes the deletion of policy SP8 and the re-allocation of this Category 1 site to a Category 2 employment site. The reason for this is because the strategy of the Plan is not to promote and then protect the expansion of general B8 uses within the city. The original SP8 was specifically drafted to support the continued expansion of a key employer either itself or uses that support their activities or those of other category 1 employment sites. Therefore, given the plan is not able to link expansion of B8 on this site to the existing key employer Unipart or other

category 1 employment sites it means that general B8 e.g. distribution centres or general warehousing could be developed on the site. If this was to occur it would be unsound for the plan to protect that B8 floorspace as a Category 1 employment site given the constrained nature of the city. This would be wholly inconsistent with the strategy of the plan and other sites of this nature in the city.

11. This is particularly important given the limited land available within Oxford upon which there are competing demands and the constrained transport network in the city. These uses require large amounts of land usually with a low jobs ratio to land area and are not an appropriate use to have protected as a Category 1 site in such a constrained city. Category 2 employment sites have the flexibility sought by the main tenant on the site, Unipart Group, in their representations. This category also offers flexibility to the landowner for other non employment uses to come forward if the number of employees in B class uses on the site when the site was at full capacity is retained; and more efficient use of land can be demonstrated. This therefore provides longer term flexibility to make more efficient use of the land for a range of uses whilst still supporting employment. As such, the City Council suggest that in order to make the plan sound Policy SP8 should be deleted and Unipart added to the list of Category 2 employment sites set out in Appendix 2.2 of the Plan.

City Council suggested modifications relating to Policy SP8 and Appendix 2

Deletion of Sp8 and supporting text

Unipart

Site area: ~~30.63 hectares/75.69 acres~~

Ward: ~~Lye Valley~~

Landowner: ~~Unipart Group~~ Cowley Investments

Current Use: ~~Unipart Group~~

Flood Zone: ~~FZ1~~

~~9.79 This large Category 1 employment site is an important site in providing employment land to deliver the objectives of the Local Plan 2036.~~

Policy SP9: Unipart

Planning permission will be granted for B1 and B2 employment uses at Unipart. B8 uses will be permitted where they support the employment activities at the site. Planning permission will not be granted for any other uses. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits. A reduction in car parking provision on site will be required and

~~Opportunities should be sought to enhance and promote more sustainable travel modes to the Unipart site.~~

Amendments to Appendix 2, 2.2 Category 2 employment sites

Cowley Road, Cowley, Watlington Road, Horspath, Sandy Lane West

Cowley Road Workshop 100a Cowley Road
Harrow Road, Industrial Estate, Watlington Road
Cowley Business Centre
Ashville Way, Watlington Road
The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road
Pony Road, Horspath
Former Blackwells Publishing, Marston Street
County Trading Estate, Watlington Road
Bullingdon House, 174B Cowley Road
Oxford Bus Company, Watlington Road
Crown House, 193 Cowley Road
Bridge View, 12 Watlington Road
Newtec Place, Magdalen Road
2-3, 5-1- Chancerygate Business Centre, Transport Way
21 Between Towns Road
Church Missionary Society, Watlington Road
St Luke's Church Temple Road
1-3 Watlington House, Watlington Way
213,244 Barnes Road
Former Pickfords Site, Sandy Lane West and Spring Lane
Fenchurch Court, Bobby Fryer Close
Lazarus House and Bishop Mews Transport Way
Nuffield Industrial Estate, Sandy Lane West
Horspath Industrial Estate
Chiltern Business Centre, 198 Garsington Road
Unipart

Signed on behalf of Oxford City Council

Name: 
Carolyn Ploszynski

Position: Planning Policy and Place Manager, Oxford City Council

Date: 28 January 2020

Signed on behalf of Unipart Group (Unipart)

Name: 
Mark Jackson MRTPI

Position: Partner, Cushman & Wakefield

Date: January 2020