

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ORDER SEQUENTIAL TEST CONSIDERATIONS

1. Introduction

The draft East Sleekburn and Bates Local Development Orders seek to permit uses which are defined as 'main town centre uses', in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

As the sites to which the LDOs apply are in 'out of centre' locations, this paper outlines the Council's application of sequential test considerations.

2. Local Development Order Proposals

The Local Development Orders have been prepared as part of a wider initiative to create the conditions for economic growth in south east Northumberland. A number of available development sites around the Blyth Estuary, including those covered by the LDOs, are being promoted for employment led development. More specifically, they are being promoted for certain industries including the renewable energy sector. The intention is to help facilitate development which will optimise the locational advantages of Blyth and its Port facilities and help to create a cluster of businesses or supply chains which will help drive competitiveness, innovation and ultimately sustainable economic growth.

The Bates Site is a brownfield, out of centre site. It is relatively accessible from Blyth Town Centre via bus and within around 10 – 15 minutes on foot. The site is around 8 hectares in size. It is currently underutilised hosting only a small Port operation relating to recycled glass. The site has Port facilities (jetties and conveyor systems) and is readily accessible to deep Port facilities at Wimbourne Quay. The site benefits from Enterprise Zone status and is partly Operational Port land with associated Permitted Development rights. A range of opportunities have been identified for the site including turbine component manufacturing and a logistics/ handling base. It is expected to be of particular interest for such uses given its proximity to testing / research and development facilities at Narec (National Renewable Energy Centre).

The East Sleekburn sites are two 'out of centre' sites. Whilst they are in the urban area, they are around 3km north of Blyth Town Centre separated by the River Blyth. The surrounding area is not well populated therefore has limited public transport connections.

East Sleekburn Site 1 is a greenfield site currently partly used for agriculture and partly operated as a motor-cross circuit. The site is around 44 hectares in size. It has good access to the A189 spine road and access to Battleship Wharf. It is considered the site is suited for a range of uses including manufacturing operations associated with the Port and off shore renewables.

East Sleekburn site 2 is a vacant brownfield located on the site of a former power station. It benefits from direct port access via the former ash barge dock and access to Battleship Wharf within 1km. The site similarly has potential for a range of uses

and particularly for manufacturing operations associated with the Port and off shore renewables.

The LDOs permit Use Classes B1 (a) B1 (b), B1(c); B2; and B8 (and ancillary Use classes A1, A3). The development permitted is subject to various criteria (including development being in the target sectors) and development conditions.

3. Sequential Test Considerations

The uses permitted by the LDOs include A1-retail use and B1(a)-office use. These uses are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as main town centre uses. The Local Planning Authority's objective is to give preference to 'town centre' locations for such uses, wherever this is possible. Consideration therefore needed to be given to whether the proposed town centre use elements of the LDOs were best located in the LDO areas of whether they could viably be located in more sequentially preferable sites.

4. Conclusions

The 'town centre' uses permitted by the Local Development Orders were identified on the grounds of the needs of the target sectors and site specific considerations. They are intended to be secondary uses, supporting the business/industry uses which can optimise the sites' locational advantages – i.e with Port facilities and access to off-shore sectors including Round 3 off-shore wind farms.

To help ensure that the permitted 'town centre uses' were supporting and would not have adverse impacts on existing centres, various criteria and conditions were imposed, including:

- Use Class B1(a) is not permitted in isolation – i.e it must be associated with B1(b), B1(c), B2 or B8 uses. Furthermore Use Class B1(a) must not exceed 2,500 sq m unless an impact assessment is undertaken and can demonstrate the development would not be likely to have a significant adverse impact on other town centres including Blyth.
- Use Class A1 can only be developed after the completion of a B1, B2, or B8 use. It must provide for the sale of predominantly convenience goods and must be limited to prescribed floorspace limits¹.

In the context of these objectives and development parameters, sequentially testing alternative sites would not be appropriate or meaningful. Even if sequentially preferable sites could be identified for the town centre elements this would necessitate disaggregation of the activity i.e. separating what are intended to be supporting uses to other unconnected sites. This is not considered to be a viable option particularly given the distances from the sites to the nearest town centres of Bedlington and Blyth.

Furthermore, by not permitting supporting uses on the LDO sites, the appeal of the sites to businesses could be prejudiced and could ultimately influence investors decisions to locate in south east Northumberland.

Sequential Test Considerations for 'Town Centre Uses' Permitted by Local Development Orders

ⁱ The prescribed floor space limits were informed by various considerations including the capacity of the sites, the size of a range of existing convenience retail units and the potential impacts of development such as on the local highway network.