

Examination of Breckland Local Plan 2011-2036

In respect of Policy EC02 – Snetterton Heath and
Snetterton Employment Allocation

Representation on behalf of Snetterton Park Limited



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This representation is submitted on behalf of Snetterton Park Limited who own 70 acres (29 hectares) of land at Snetterton Heath. The site at Snetterton Park offers one of the largest possible development sites in the Cambridge-Norwich technology corridor.
- 1.2 To put Snetterton Heath in context, it is worth noting the opening words of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor report: *'The Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor will create over £500m of innovation-led growth, investment in infrastructure, housing and skills. We have all the ingredients for the growth: emerging sectors, low cost space, infrastructure (including the recent dualling of A11), networks and a fast growing economy.'*
- 1.3 Over the last two years, the landowners have invested substantially in improving and developing the land and buildings for varied employment uses, predominantly B1 and B2, to optimise employment potential in this important location on the A11 technology corridor (see Section 4 of this report).

2.0 Statement of Common Ground

- 2.1 A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has recently been signed between Breckland Council and Snetterton Park Limited. The Statement confirms that the approach being taken by Breckland Council in their Local Plan is supported by both parties.
- 2.2 The parties agree that a further allocation in this area is the most appropriate strategy, and amended wording re Snetterton Park's remaining land. Originally it was an allocation of 11 hectares. The policy team decided that this should be removed (following topic paper and our original representation); they then suggested wording and finally a combination of some allocation of 4.2 hectares and wording for the rest of the land.
- 2.3 The Statement, attached at Appendix I, demonstrates that the site is deliverable and will come forward in the short term and it is summarised here.
- 2.4 The purpose of the Statement of Common Ground is to identify areas of agreement and areas of disagreement, if any. The Statement proposes modifications to the Plan as summarised here.

2.5 Modification to EC02 Snetterton Heath and Snetterton Employment Allocation 3.

General: deletion of first sentence.

2.5.1 Modification 1:

Reason for modification – To ensure that the policy provides the certainty for the landowners to encourage proposals that are associated with motorsport, automotive and advanced engineering where possible.

Proposed modification – Revise policy wording to include LP[087]011A as defined on the policies map.

2.5.2 Modification 2: (see new paragraph 3 in Policy EC02)

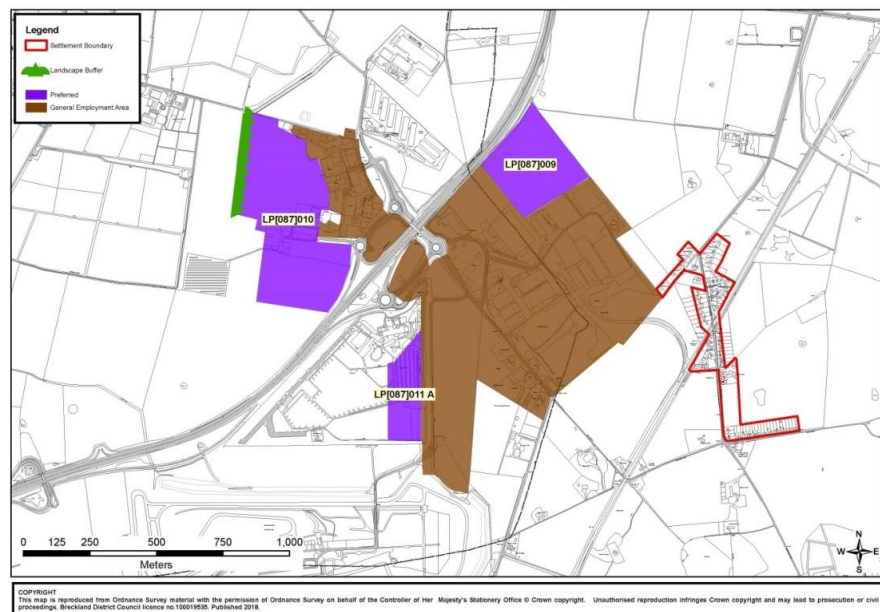
Reason for modification – To ensure that land at Snetterton Park has the certainty to come forward for B1 and B2 class uses (including associated storage) within the plan period.

Proposed modification – Insertion of a new policy, Snetterton Employment Allocation 3.

2.5.3 Modification 3:

Reason for modification – To provide clarification on the policies map and Figure 6.1 as to the areas where Policy EC02 and Snetterton Employment Allocation 3 apply.

Proposed modification – It is proposed to replace Picture 6. 1 on page 188 of the Pre-submission Local Plan (LP/S/1) with the following map. This would also be reflected within the Policies Map for Snetterton Heath (*map also attached at Appendix III*).



2.6 Conclusion

With regard to the areas of agreement, the Council have put forward proposed modifications to policy EC02, including a new proposed allocation (see Appendix III). It is considered that this Statement of Common Ground, and the amendments proposed, overcomes the objections raised by Snetterton Park Limited through the representation RS.9. T

2.7 This approach is considered to be the most appropriate strategy and seeks to ensure that Snetterton Heath remains a key employment site within Breckland over the entire plan period and provides certainty to the landowners of Snetterton Park.

3.0 History of the Site

3.1 The site was formerly part of the RAF wartime airfield at Snetterton.



Aerial view of Snetterton Park

3.2 It can be seen from the Ordnance Survey base and from aerial photographs that in addition to the principal buildings adjacent to the A11 roundabout, there are a multiplicity of hard-standings, parking areas, lorry parks, previous market stalls of a semi-permanent nature, and at least two residential properties on the site.

- 3.3 The site has a long and complicated planning history. From the late 1980s to 2012, Kilverstone Markets ran a large and successful weekly Sunday market, which was one of the largest markets in the UK, with over 250 stalls employing hundreds of stallholders, between 10,000 and 15,000 visitors every Sunday, and turning over approximately £750,000 a year.
- 3.4 The director of Kilverstone Markets (Mr Warner) gradually came to the view that markets would die out and he started a process of trying to gradually convert the site into a tourist destination. This was achieved by the introduction of live music events, then model car racing.
- 3.5 Simultaneously, Mr Warner realised that he had land to spare, and with the new road infrastructure and the dualling of the A11, the site was suitable for commercial development. He sought to bring this forward by securing an outline planning permission for development (3PL/2007/1820/OUT).
- 3.6 Initially this was a very ambitious scheme, but following negotiations it was reduced to four B1 units, located on the eastern edge of the site. The permission was granted in 2010.
- 3.7 Mr Warner wished to retain sole ownership of the site but he was unable to find the required financing to develop the units. It was not a lack of demand by occupiers that led to the application lapsing, simply a lack of funding.
- 3.8 Mr Warner sought to regularise his existing buildings and expand his tourist destination with the Model Toy and Expo retail planning application (3PL/2009/1204/F) submitted in 2009 and implemented. This was a very ambitious project and the weight of investment and the Section 106 Agreement winding up the Sunday market activities put the organisation under severe financial strain.
- 3.9 By 2014 the business was losing money dramatically and Mr Warner became terminally ill. The initial meetings for the Landlords Consortium took place at about this time but Mr Warner was too ill to attend and state the case for his site.
- 3.10 Following his father's death in March 2015, James Warner took up the business. Struggling to fill the gap in his company accounts, he entered into a deal to sell land in the south west corner of the site to a bio plant operator. Planning permission was applied for but was withdrawn at the eleventh hour in March 2016.

- 3.11 The application had received the backing of the Local Planning Authority, but the developers became worried that changes in the renewable payments schemes were making the project unviable and decided to withdraw the application.
- 3.12 In December, the MacSwineys (who had been silent shareholders in Kilverstone Markets since the 1990s but had no involvement in the running of the business) realised the extent of the problem.
- 3.13 The toys business was closed in January 2016, the site was cleared and the units were stripped.
- 3.14 In spring 2016 James MacSwiney attended the first Landlords Consortium meeting to discuss the new power supply project and the planning policy allocations for Snetterton Heath.
- 3.15 At this point the plan was already substantially developed. Arriving late to the table, Snetterton Park Limited gave importance to not overtly 'shaking the tree' and fighting for a planning allocation. It was deemed more important to secure and support the new power project than to risk a fall-out. This position was very much supported by the policy team and the economic development team.
- 3.16 In November 2016 the three-acre island site was sold to Eurogarages Ltd. Planning has been sought on the site and Eurogarages are in the process of constructing a service station, two fast food outlets and a retail shop on the land.
- 3.17 It is uncertain the level of employment these businesses will generate, but it is thought to represent 40+ jobs. This development will form a very smart and respectable gateway site for the southern part of Snetterton Heath.
- 3.18 Snetterton Park Ltd and Reads Property Developments
In June 2017, as the Warner family had no capital to invest in the redevelopment of the existing units and did not want to be involved in property development, they sold their shares to Read Property Developments (Diss Business Park etc.).
- 3.19 Read Property formed a partnership with the MacSwineys to form Snetterton Park Limited, and with the business now properly financed and an expert builder on the team, work at Snetterton Park has progressed quickly.

- 3.20 Stage one was to finish clearing the site. Stage two was to refurbish the buildings and raise the profile and look of the existing units. The aim was to attract B1 type occupiers on a permanent basis, as opposed to short-term, low-value storage type operations. The project is 50% completed.
- 3.21 Investment by Snetterton Park Limited to date is around £750,000, with a further £800,000 budgeted to complete the existing units and surrounding car parks etc.
- 3.22 A plan of all the units is attached at Appendix IV. Approximately 50% of the units are occupied (see Section 4 and Appendix V), the majority of the space being used for B1 activity. The site currently has 100 people working on it, of which 85 are office based. This has exceeded all expectations.
- 3.23 The change of use to buildings is being addressed via a planning application {ref: 3PL/2018/0116/F} which has support from the Local Planning Authority and is under consideration.
- 3.24 In addition to the main parcel of the site, there is an island site now being promoted for a roadside vehicle service station, as shown on the photograph below.

Proposed service station



- 3.25 In recent years, the planning status of Snetterton Park's site, which is predominantly previously developed land, has undergone a 'rough ride' with the Local Planning Authority.

- 3.26 In July 2016 the whole site was designated as retail (see plan attached at Appendix III in our March 2018 submission).
- 3.27 By the time the Plan was submitted for Examination, the site was not zoned for anything at all. Hence we made robust representations that the site should be included within the GEA.
- 3.28 In response to questions raised by the Inspector, the Local Planning Authority presented in early August a proposal which identified the whole of Snetterton Park as 'a Broad Location for Employment Development' (see plan at Appendix II).
- 3.29 However, they accompanied this 'allocation' with a caveat that development within this area would not be permitted until the land allocated by Snetterton Employment Allocation 1, 2 and 3 had been implemented.
- 3.30 This caveat put Snetterton Park in the untenable position whereby even if the Local Planning Authority granted planning consent on the Snetterton Park site, it would be open to legal challenge by the owners of the other employment allocations.
- 3.31 The Statement of Common Ground was reached as a result of eleventh hour negotiations to ensure that development on Snetterton Park's site could proceed unchallenged (see Appendix III) and that the Local Plan would not be found unsound.

4.0 Current occupation

- 4.1 The schedule at Appendix V shows the current position relating to occupation of the site. It can be seen that just over 30,000 square feet of space is occupied, with a total of 100 people employed on the site, and another 32,621 square feet of space is currently unlet and available to rent.
- 4.2 In addition to the occupiers identified on the schedule at Appendix V, there are current enquiries for space from both existing and prospective tenants.
- 4.3 Currently there are enquiries from:
- A recycling organisation (admin)
 - Homecare Group (admin)
 - A technology company – 20 employees, multi-branch, £2.4 billion turnover

- 4.4 Demand for office units is strong, both for small 100sq.ft. one-man offices and 2,000sq.ft. large units. Units are being let as soon as the landowners can complete the works.
- 4.5 In addition, there is a strong demand for development projects. The landowners currently have two live enquiries from manufacturing firms interested in buildings of more than 100,000sq.ft and three further enquiries for builds of 20,000-30,000sq.ft.
- 4.6 They also have three live enquiries for units of 10,000-15,000sq.ft. These can be partly accommodated in existing units and partly in new build space.
- 4.7 And finally, there are two enquiries for firms wanting to purchase two-acre plots, on which to build their own units.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 In the present economic climate it can be difficult to attract commercial development to remote locations; this is not the case with Snetterton Heath. It can be seen from this report that the landowners have made a great success of developing the site to date, with almost 50% of existing space already let and market demand remains strong and consistent.
- 5.2 For development to come forward, the following issues are being addressed:
- The required services are being worked on and will be in place by 2020
 - Planning is under review
 - Although major banks are not lending for speculative building, they are lending against long leases, and the directors of Snetterton Park Limited are well placed to raise funding from private individuals and other finance companies
- 5.3 The landowners, Snetterton Park Limited, are grateful to Breckland Council for engaging in discussions regarding the site and future allocations for employment, and pleased that agreement has been reached via the Statement of Common Ground on amendments to the emerging Local Plan to extend the allocations of employment and enable further development to proceed. This will help to meet demand for employment units and provide essential employment in the area.