

Ref PL/2024/05527 – Compliance with Core Policy 37 (Military Establishments)

1. Core Policy 37 (Military Establishments) of the Core Strategy has two purposes. Its first purpose is to provide support for development at operational military establishments whilst its second purpose is to provide a framework for considering proposals for the redevelopment, conversion, or change of use of now redundant military facilities.
2. Whether or not this policy is applicable to the subject site is a matter that has been raised in a number of comments from members of the public.
3. It was also a matter that was considered by the Planning Inspector in allowing the appeal for 81 homes across the application site in April 2021 (ref. APP/Y3940/W/19/3243873). Paragraph 13 of the Inspector's Report was very clear on this point, and included the following commentary:

*'The original buildings on the site were constructed during WWII for military purposes, either by the Ministry of Works or the Ministry of Defence (MoD). They were then most likely used in the post-war years for accommodation for displaced persons, linked to the aftermath of WWII. Since their demolition in either the late 1950's or 1960, the site has lain vacant. **The origins of the site are clearly military. The most recent use, although a long time ago, was also linked to the military. Consequently, the site is a former military establishment.** I am aware that the Inspector in an appeal decision in 19891 did not place any great weight on the former use of the site during WWII. However, this decision pre-dates the adoption of the current CS and the policies within it relating to military sites.'* [Emphasis added]

4. Paragraph 20 of the Inspector's Report then considered the proposed residential development against the tests set out in Core Policy 37 and concluded that the proposals were acceptable.
5. The above commentary shows that the site was considered a former military establishment by the Planning Inspector in April 2021. There are no events since then that would mean that a different conclusion should be reached. There is also no reason for a different conclusion to be reached for the current application and therefore Policy CP37 is applicable.
6. For proposals for the redevelopment of former military establishments, Core Policy 37 (Military Establishments) effectively sets out a series of tests that need to be satisfied for proposals to be in accordance with the policy. Whilst worded as text rather than a series of numbered specific tests that need to be satisfied, the commentary below breaks the policy wording down into these tests and considers the performance of the site and the proposed development against these:

Test 1 – Whether Site is well related to an existing settlement in terms of location

7. This test seeks to ensure that sites are well related to existing built form and are sustainably located with the policy wording then going on to discuss sites that are remote from settlements or now well located to an existing settlement.
8. Paragraph 15 of the Inspector's Report for the allowed appeal considers this matter, concluding that:

'Westwells is a relatively small village. Two borders of the appeal site are shared with the edge of the village. Beyond the residential core of the village are large commercial areas and development, running north-west along Westwells Road. The appeal site sits at the junction of these two different character areas and directly borders the nearest commercial development to the west. It is also previously developed land and has fairly extensive existing fixed surface infrastructure across the majority of the site in the form of access roads and concrete bases.'



9. Given that the site is considered to adjoin a settlement, directly bordered by commercial development, and sits at the junction of two different character areas, the conclusion can be reached that the site is well related to an existing settlement.

10. This aligns with Paragraph 17 of the Inspector's Report which confirms that

'the appeal site is not isolated...'

11. As a result of the site being considered to be well related to an existing settlement, the sentences relating to sites remote from settlements or sites that are not well located to existing settlements are not applicable.

Test 2 – Whether Site is well related to an existing settlement in terms of scale

12. This is a matter that was considered in the Committee Report when the application was presented to Strategic Planning Committee on 16th December. Page 22 of the Committee Report reached the following conclusion:

*'It is inevitable that a building of this scale will be able to be seen particularly in the years before the proposed landscaping reaches maturity, none the less in the long term **given the substantial nature of the landscaping proposed and the distances involved to nearby properties and the wider landscape it is considered that the proposal is acceptable.**'*

[Emphasis added]

13. Importantly, this paragraph concludes that whilst the building will be visible, its scale and massing (given the landscaping proposed, the separation distances from receptors, and the wider landscape) is such that the proposal was considered acceptable in terms of scale and mass by the Landscape Officer. Given that the Committee Report concludes that the building is acceptable in terms of scale and mass, it therefore follows that it is sufficiently well related in scale to the existing settlement.

Test 3 – Whether The focus will be on employment-led development

14. The second paragraph of Core Policy 37 states that the "focus" will be on employment-led development and clearly the development of a data centre campus. Given the nature of the use which has been accepted by Wiltshire County Council as falling within Use Class B8 this clearly aligns with these aspirations. An Economic Benefits Infographic prepared by Savills and submitted as part of this application identifies the economic benefits of the proposed employment use.

15. As a result of the proposal being for an employment use, the requirement for a masterplanning approach with the local community is not applicable.

Test 4 - Development at operational or redundant sites should enhance the overall character of the site

16. As a starting point, the character of the site was considered in the allowed residential appeal across the site with Paragraph 16 of the Inspector's Report commenting that, since 1989:

'...much of the commercial development to the north-west has been constructed, changing the character and appearance of the area and the relationship between the residential part of the village, the appeal site, and the commercial areas'

17. The impact of the proposed development on the local character was considered in the Committee Report when the application was presented to Strategic Planning Committee on 16th December with Page 16 of the committee Report reaching the conclusion that:

'The development has to achieve the difficult task of fitting with three distinct character areas including the industrial development to the North with which it primarily relates whilst also giving

*due consideration to the residential area to the east of Westwells Road along with consideration of the more open landscaped area to the west and south. **It is considered that given the nature of the building, the landscape proposed and the materials and colours proposed the development complies with this policy and achieves the balance required.***’ [Emphasis added]’

18. The site clearly is positioned at a junction of different character areas where commercial development to the north west affects the site’s character. The Committee Report is clear in its conclusion, and it follows that the proposals can be seen as maintaining the character of the area.

Test 5 - All development at operational or redundant sites should mitigate any adverse impacts on local infrastructure, and not erode the character of the surrounding area

19. When the application was presented to Strategic Planning Committee on 16th December, the Committee Report included a comprehensive assessment of the proposed development against the following technical and environmental matters:

- Climate Change and sustainable design;
- Impact on historic environment/landscape, heritage assets;
- Landscape impact;
- Amenity;
- Land contamination / air quality issues/ Noise;
- Impact on parking and highway safety;
- Ecology; and
- Drainage and Flood risk.

20. The Committee Report confirmed that there were no outstanding objections on any of the above matters and that the proposals were sound on technical and environmental matters. This resulted in no adverse impacts.

Test 6 - All proposals must ensure that the cultural and historical significance of the military facilities located on the site are understood and inform the scope of future development of that site

21. Given that the previous military buildings onsite have been demolished, incorporating features in the design process is not possible. Nevertheless, the proposed development limits built development to those parts of the site which are previously developed land and were previously associated with the military operations on the site. The remainder has been landscaped or used for onsite drainage.