

Response on behalf of The Alton Society

We welcome the employment opportunities that these plans brings to the town, especially given the mix of industrial use envisaged. However, we have serious concerns about some key aspects of the application:

1. Landscape and town setting.

The visual impact of the proposed development and its adverse impact on Alton's skyline are in our view unacceptable.

- Whilst we accept that the land allocated for employment use in the Local Plan extends right up the south side of Lynch Hill we are concerned that the Illustrative Masterplan shows plans for office buildings, up to 12 metres high, on the very peak of the hill. We feel that such substantial buildings should be confined to the lower slopes. (The northern limit of the 'employment use' area, following the course of an overhead power line, seems totally arbitrary, and ignores the hill's contours).
- There are claims throughout the Design and Access Statement (DAS) that the visual impact will be mitigated by the proposed landscaping and screening, but we have real doubts about this. It is true that the hill is quite well hidden from nearby viewpoints on the western side, and from most of the by-pass, but it is certainly visible from the south, for example parts of Windmill Hill, and adjacent roads. Indeed, the applicant's own photograph of views from Lynch Hill looking south-east (p19 of the DAS) clearly demonstrates just how exposed the site is.
- We would also take issue with references to there being 'few visual receptors' in terms of views into the site. We consider these to be misleading if they are simply based on the number of dwellings at the various viewpoints. The attractive walks in the surrounding countryside that increasing numbers of residents enjoy are very much part of what makes Alton's setting special – it is not simply dependent on where people happen to live.
- It is also the case that existing screening (comprising almost entirely deciduous trees) will not be effective through the winter months, and views from the hills north of both Alton and Holybourne would certainly be impacted. (Brockham Hill is mentioned by the applicant).
- Quite apart from the immediate visual impact of these plans, we believe that breaching the skyline in this way would set a dangerous precedent for the future. Alton's Neighbourhood Plan rightly describes the town's setting as "a defining feature", and states in policy DE1: "Development has been constrained from breaking the green skyline formed by neighbouring hills...". We believe any breach of this principle would have severe implications for the future.

2. Access

The only reason we can see for including the extra land to the north* seems to be the need to facilitate access from Montecchio Way, and we are firmly of the view that such an access road is totally impractical.

- Having two 'industrial' access points into Montecchio Way (this and Mill Lane, and so close to the A31 roundabout) is unacceptable in terms of the likely traffic congestion, especially given the anticipated traffic growth from the imminent Cadnam's Farm and Anstey Road Playing Field developments.
- Given the huge likely increase in traffic, the only suitable access point would seem to be from Mill Lane, perhaps combining with Waterbrook Road. Not only does the applicant admit that "a Waterbrook Road access is preferable", but we are quite sure that development up the southern hill-slope was historically always assumed to be a logical extension to the Waterbrook Estate itself.

*Since the Joint Core Strategy (Policy CP3) requires only 7ha of employment land for the whole of Alton, we would question why the northern section of this site needs to be included at all.

For the above reasons we strongly object to this application as presented.