



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 15 MARCH 2021

AIRFIELD FARM DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

MINUTE EXTRACT

The Commission considered a report which sought comments on the proposed further development at Airfield Business Park in Market Harborough and proposals to seek Cabinet approval for the allocation of resources necessary to support the scheme, to submit a planning application for light industrial units covering a further 96, 717 sq. ft of the site and to proceed to tender to construct part of the space (81,376 sq. ft) as the next phase of the development. A copy of the report marked Agenda Item 9 is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Director reported that:

- In support of the Council's environmental approach and Property Energy Strategy targets, the proposed units would be built with the benefit of electric car charging points and photovoltaic panels.
- To reduce risk, marketing of the units would likely begin earlier than currently set out in the report to secure pre-lets wherever possible (i.e. agreements to lease the units before construction).

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) This was a good scheme making excellent use of the site that would generate employment opportunities in the area. Although the return on investment was estimated to take 20 years, it was hoped that this would be significantly reduced by securing lower build costs following the planned tender exercise and increased rental figures on completion.
- (ii) It was not yet known what type of businesses might be attracted to the new units. The site had already attracted a wide range e.g. printers, bakers, storage facilities. Members noted that five out of ten of the tenants occupying the units completed under phase 2 of the scheme were local to the area and had been looking to expand. The other five had invested into the County from outside the area.
- (iii) It was not clear where future employers/employees occupying the units might live. A travel plan would be undertaken as part of the usual planning process. Members noted that as this was a County Council development on County Council owned land this would be a Regulation 3 application considered by the County Council's Development Control and Regulatory

Board. It was hoped that a planning application would be submitted next month.

- (iv) Like with any commercial development, there were risks related to the scheme. However, these were as expected for this scheme and not regarded as significant or unusual despite current economic uncertainty. Steps would be taken to reduce and manage risk including, for example, undertaking the planned fixed cost tender exercise for the next phase. Members noted that ultimately, the Council would benefit from rental income from the site if the scheme were delivered but would also benefit from capital growth if planning permission was secured, making this a marketable investment should the Council wish to sell.
- (v) A member alerted the Director to parking issues leading up to the site which stemmed from the neighbouring Innovation Centre. It was suggested that parking for the site would be addressed through the planning process.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made by the Scrutiny Commission be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 23rd March 2021 for consideration.