

INFRASTRUCTURE BOARD

2nd July 2020

STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT LAND APPRAISAL

Purpose

This report summarises the findings of an SCR wide Strategic Employment Land Appraisal, which has been undertaken in liaison with the SCR Heads of Planning Group. It presents some key findings and recommendations, seeking endorsement by Board members and advice on future work.

Freedom of Information and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

This paper would be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme.

Recommendations

Board members are asked to:

1. note the completion of the Strategic Employment Land Appraisal report and discuss the key findings and their implications for the city region;
2. Endorse the final report and comment on the proposed work in view of both Covid-19 and the emerging new SCR Strategic Economic Plan.

1. Introduction

- 1.1** As part of the Duty to Cooperate, Heads of Planning from across SCR meet on a regular basis to share information and expertise on strategic planning issues and undertake joint pieces of work where these have been agreed as mutually beneficial. Their aim is to support the work of individual Local Planning Authorities and inform decision making, with a view to also provide consistently high-quality planning services across the city region.
- 1.2** Within this context, the MCA commissioned the consultant Litchfields to support us in undertaking a Strategic Employment Land Appraisal (SELA) covering the SCR, which was undertaken in liaison with the SCR Heads of Planning Group. This is a shared piece of evidence which appraises the overall supply of employment land across the city region; provides understanding of the quality of this land and of major strategic sites; and appraises how well the land supply helps to meet the shared ambitions for growth set out in the SCR Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).

2. Proposal and justification

- 2.1** As reported to previous meetings of the Board, work on the SELA commenced early in 2019. As such, it reflects the wider geography of SCR (ie nine districts rather than the four South Yorkshire districts) and the growth targets and priorities defined in the SEP and its accompanying documents at that time. The various recommendations of the study

will therefore need to be considered by local authorities as appropriate and respectively in the SCR and D2N2 areas following the changing geography of LEPs since April 2020.

- 2.2** Despite the changes in LEP geography over the period of the study, the SELA work has benefitted from full engagement and support by all nine districts in the former wider SCR city region. Together with external support from consultants, this has involved a number of stages of analysis:
1. Bringing together evidence from existing employment land reviews, economic development assessments and similar evidence across the nine local planning authorities, identifying sites and summarising this to set out the totality of employment land supply;
 2. At a high level, appraising sites alongside the priorities in the SEP, matching against priority industrial sectors, etc;
 3. Identifying employment sites and areas which offer the greatest potential to attract higher value jobs or jobs;
 4. Identifying whether any current areas of employment land supply are surplus or may be deficient to meet the needs of the economy in the future.
- 2.3** Based on this work, a final report has now been agreed by Heads of Planning and is attached at Appendix 1. An accompanying slide pack is also attached at Appendix 2 which summarises the findings of the study.

Key Results

- 2.4** Focusing specifically on strategic employment sites (broadly defined as sites of 5ha or larger for business, commercial, industrial and storage/distribution uses) the SELA considered over 150 separate sites. Drawing together some high-level results from this, the report suggests that:
- Overall, SCR has sufficient employment land to meet our growth ambitions – current need is 1,469 ha, whilst supply (through Local Plan allocations and existing planning permission) is 1,524 ha, meaning a slight surplus which is particularly evident in the northern part of SCR and Bassetlaw.
 - Whilst employment growth has been very positive and in line with (previous) SEP targets, the nature of these new jobs may be of concern as many have been in lower skilled sectors with less rapid growth in higher skilled sectors.
 - Whilst all the districts have sectors where they are currently strong, overall SCR is weaker in “white collar” sectors, notably Financial and Professional Services.
 - Complementing Local Plans, which define local Functional Economic Market Areas (FEMAs), it could also be helpful to see the wider SCR area as a strategic FEMA when considering highly footloose and mobile land uses like logistics.
 - The seven Major Growth Areas defined in the previous SEP and Integrated Infrastructure Plan (ie Dearne Valley, Doncaster-Sheffield Airport, Markham Vale, A61 Corridor, the City Centre, the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation District and DN7) remain critical to the economic future of SCR.
 - The Growth Areas are served by some attractive employment sites, but there are also opportunities to expand thinking in some areas to bring in new sites – eg strengthening links between AMID and Templebrough or extending Dearne Valley to link to Wentworth Industrial Park.
 - There is a good correlation between strategic sites and areas of multiple deprivation, with the potential for growth to benefit some of the most deprived communities if delivered sensitively.

Recommendations and further work

- 2.5** Economic growth over the next 5 years and its impact on employment land is difficult to predict with any accuracy – especially as the economy responds to the impacts of Covid-19. However, the SELA focusses on the economic prospects of SCR over a longer timeframe covering successive business cycles and this suggests the inherent strengths of the SCR economy are likely to show resilience similar to the recovery following the 2008 recession.
- 2.6** The report concludes that all the strategic sites considered in the SELA will therefore have a role to play in this recovery, including in the delivery of higher value jobs. However, in order to ensure that this potential is maximised, the SELA also sets out several recommendations for Local Planning Authorities to consider, particularly where these can help to address the need for more higher value jobs. The recommendations include:
- Developing a collaborative vision or masterplan to help ensure that sites in growth areas like the Dearne Valley are not to be dominated by lower skilled (eg logistics) uses and can attract a broader range of employers;
 - Major growth areas are reviewed to better reflect the location of strategic sites, with specific recommendations for each area;
 - To protect some sites for higher grade uses such as advanced manufacturing, Local Planning Authorities should work together on a collaborative strategy to steer footloose uses to the most optimum locations, eg this may mean focusing logistics along the East-West M18 corridor;
 - Information from the SELA is used alongside an analysis of gaps in skills and educational attainment to help communities in deprived areas access the new jobs created on some key strategic sites;
 - Neighbouring authorities should work together (eg through Statements of Common Ground) to exploit some of the opportunities identified for balancing local areas of deficit and surplus land on strategic sites.
- 2.7** The SELA has already been used to inform the development of the emerging new SCR SEP and will prove useful for informing a number of other pieces of SCR research and activity; for example, the Energy Strategy will look at the potential for energy from former mines and exploratory work for this can now be focused on sites identified in SELA. Similarly, work to attract inward investment will also be informed by the report which provides a much more comprehensive picture.
- 2.8** However, the report is very much a “point in time” analysis. Employment land supply is dynamic and several of the sites considered in the study are likely to have been changed or developed since the work was carried out. With this in mind, the Heads of Planning Group are currently considering how to respond to the recommendations and the views of the Board would be welcomed on this.
- 2.9** A separate but related commission is currently being considered with local authority officers and the Public Assets Delivery Board to review the whole land situation within the SCR to both deliver the ambitions of the new Strategic Economic Plan and respond to a post-Covid-19 economy. This will include understanding the changes in public sector organisations due to, for example, more working from home, and the opportunities this may present for releasing more public sector land and building for housing and economic development. It will also seek to identify changes in the land and building requirements of a post Covid-19 economy, and what interventions may be required to respond to these changes and unlock new growth opportunities. It is proposed to commission this work as soon as possible due to the urgency of Covid-19.

3. Implications

3.1 Financial

All activities set out in this report will be delivered from within existing resources. Where any further external work needs to be commissioned, funds for this will need to be identified.

3.2 Legal

The work was undertaken within the usual planning regulations and guidance.

3.3 Risk Management

Three key risks have been identified by the Heads of Planning Group:

- Individual authorities dropping out of the work programme or unable to support further collaboration.
- Evidence or recommendations conflicting with National Planning Guidance or current and emerging Local Plans.
- Disagreements between individual Local Planning Authorities on contentious issues.

This work is not mandatory and will only be successful if it receives continued support from Heads of Planning and participating Local Planning Authorities. All risks will therefore be managed in liaison with the Heads of Planning Group on a regular basis.

3.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion

Local Planning Authorities are required to meet the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. The work summarised above is designed to enhance and support this at the local level by adding value and creating some economies of scale.

5. Communications

- 5.1 The SELA would usually be made publicly available on the MCA website and on council websites alongside other forms of Local Plan evidence.

6. Appendices/Annexes

Appendix 1 – SELA Final Summary Report

Appendix 2 – Presentation pack for meeting

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Background papers used in the preparation of this report are available for inspection at: 11 Broad Street West, Sheffield S1 2BQ

Other sources and references: