

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: HEAD OF NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

REPORT NUMBER: G197

TO: DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 6 FEBRUARY 2008

PLANNING POSITION STATEMENT: EON, WHERSTEAD OFFICE PARK, WHERSTEAD

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to seek the adoption of the Planning Position Statement for the Wherstead Office Park, currently occupied by E.ON, who intends to relocate away from the site. The site employs some 300 people.
- 1.2 The Statement (Appendix A) summarises the current relevant policy and development control issues surrounding the site and Babergh's approach to the reuse of the site, and the adjacent allocated land (Policy EM05 of the Local Plan), following consultation with relevant bodies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Development Committee to recommend to Strategy the adoption and publication of the attached Planning Policy Statement.

The Development Committee is asked to make a recommendation to Strategy Committee who is able to resolve this matter.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 This report is not closely linked with any of the Council's Significant Business Risks. Key risks in this case are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
No detailed planning framework is provided to steer the sites future development; leading to "hostile" development proposals.	D. Low risk	II Critical or III Marginal	Produce document in the timeframe needed before any development proposals come forward and consult to secure consensus.

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The site is allocated through the Local Plan for employment/commercial use and this will be the requirement of any proposals for reuse (or redevelopment). The purpose of this new planning statement is to set out detailed guidance that builds upon the Local Plan Policy. The guidance will help to steer and shape any planning applications that come forward and it provides a lot of helpful information for developers and anyone else with an interest in the site.
- 5.2 Consultation has been undertaken with the key stake holders of the locality including, the Parish Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and the site owners and those of the adjacent land which has been allocated under Policy EM05 of the Adopted Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2. The attached Statement reflects this consultation.
- 5.3 The Wherstead Office Park is a significant employment site in Babergh. There are some 300 jobs at risk with the withdrawal of E.ON UK Plc. from the site; complete withdrawal is envisaged by the summer of 2008. It is seen as essential to publish the Statement as soon as possible.
- 5.4 Reuse of the site will contribute to Babergh's priority of maintaining a safe, clean and sustainable environment.
- 5.5 Following adoption of the Statement further consultation will be undertaken. It is proposed that more in depth documentation will be available later in the year.

6. **APPENDICES**

- (a) Wherstead Office Park, Wherstead: Planning Position Statement

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Wherstead Office Park, Wherstead

Planning Position Statement



1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Wherstead Office Park is a substantial employment location of 7.1 hectares on the southern edge of Ipswich, adjacent to the A14 trunk road at its junction with the A137. The site's historic buildings combined with modern buildings, located within the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty offer a unique environment of high quality office space in a great rural location. There is the opportunity to expand onto the adjacent 3.3 hectares of land, which is allocated for employment purposes.
- 1.2. This Planning Position Statement has been prepared by Babergh District Council to provide supplementary guidance in relation to the future use of the site, following the announcement that the current occupiers (E.ON UK Plc.) are to relocate. It discusses the relevant planning considerations and provides extra detail on Babergh District Council's planning policy position. It has been prepared in consultation with Wherstead Parish, Ipswich Borough and Suffolk County Councils and the Highways Agency.
- 1.3. The content of the Statement should be read in conjunction with the adopted Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 (2006), in particular Policy EM05. This Policy also provides for the allocation of an adjacent 3.3 hectares of land to the west, land which is in separate ownership. Ideally, Babergh would like to consider any development proposals for both sites simultaneously.

2. Background

- 2.1. More than 300,000 people live within 12 miles of the centre of Ipswich. The area is the home of 'IP-City', one of Europe's biggest hi-tech clusters and home to Adastral Park, the science park where BT has established its world class research base.
- 2.2. The site lies just 3 miles from the Waterfront in Ipswich, which is changing rapidly. At least £1 billion will be invested, including new businesses, new homes and new leisure facilities. This regeneration has the backing of the East of England Development Agency and the Suffolk Development Agency.
- 2.3. A new university has been established in central Ipswich, University Campus Suffolk, which will provide a substantial boost to the Haven Gateway Partnership, created to channel investment into this part of the East of England to develop economic opportunities. The Haven Gateway Partnership is aiming to increase provision of education and training, from basic skills training to university level, for the area's important shipping, logistics and transport sector.
- 2.4. The Wherstead Office Park (7.1 hectares), located in and around the grade II listed Wherstead Park House, has been in use as offices, at least in part, since before 1949.

The current building dates from 1792, although an earlier house is known to have existed. There is a history of conversion of existing buildings, extension to various buildings and erection of separate additional office accommodation, including the stables, which are also listed grade II (dating from the late 18th Century).

- 2.5. The site lies within the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Policy EN08 relating to the Stour and Orwell Estuaries also applies. There are several listed buildings adjacent to the site and The Street is picturesque.
- 2.6. Wherstead Office Park is located adjacent to the A14 and close to the A12.
- 2.7. E.ON UK Plc, the current occupiers, has approximately 300 staff located on the site, however, at its peak of operation, the site accommodated some 600 staff.
- 2.8. The site contains recreational facilities to the east and one building fulfils the purpose of village hall for the local community.
- 2.9. The site is not designated as contaminated land. The planning history of the site indicates an underground petrol tank and an effluent disposal site (to the east of the land shown in pink on the map). Whilst these are unlikely to limit the future re-use of the site in principle, their location should be considered during the preparation of any proposals, and any necessary investigation works carried out.
- 2.10. An additional allocation of 3.3 hectares of land for employment purposes was made through the recently adopted Babergh Local Plan, immediately to the west of the subject site (currently in separate ownership). Policy EM05 of the Plan states the opportunities for both Wherstead Office Park and the adjacent allocation and sets out the requirements for development.

3. Key Objectives

- 3.1. The future use of Wherstead Office Park should be guided by the following objectives:
 - To address the site's future comprehensively;
 - To retain the site for employment purposes and provide for the future sustainable development of the site, which is compatible with the site's constraints and the local community; and,
 - To safeguard the future of the historic buildings and structures on and around the site and the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through appropriate management, thereby maintaining the built and natural environmental quality of the area.
- 3.2. These key objectives have been augmented through the Local Plan process.
- 3.3. The Council therefore seeks to achieve these objectives by:
 - Only allowing development that accords with current planning policy (primarily EM05); and
 - Encouraging the submission of a comprehensive package of measures for the site and the allocation land.

4. Site Analysis

- 4.1. The A14 connects Felixstowe and Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge, The Midlands and The North. It also connects with the A12, which runs from Lowestoft down the east coast of Suffolk, through south Suffolk and Essex to London and The South East.
- 4.2. The site lies to the south of Ipswich, south of the main part of Wherstead village, on The Street, accessed from the A137. The A137 connects the site directly to the A14; to the immediate north of the site.
- 4.3. Ipswich train station lies only 3 miles from the site, with London a little over an hour away with trains to Cambridge taking a little longer. Bus services run between Wherstead and Ipswich. Stansted Airport is a little over an hour's drive away.
- 4.4. The existing access is not ideal but, there is a need and an opportunity to improve this, via a new access road through the adjacent allocation land to the west.
- 4.5. The existing site and the allocation site provide a significant opportunity to any prospective user for relocation and/or expansion of their business. The total site area, identified in pink on the plan is some 10.4 hectares, although development of the whole site will not be possible due to the existing site constraints.

4.6. Wherstead Office Park



The Modern Main Entrance/Reception Building



Part of the landscaped gardens with the football pitch and Church beyond



The Stables Building



The East front of the historic Wherstead Park House

The site is relatively flat and level with trees to the north and a mixed tall evergreen/deciduous hedge to the south running along the lane to the Church. The offices are located in landscaped gardens and parkland, with mature trees and hedges in a rural location.

Wherstead Park House is listed grade II, which includes the interiors, associated structures and structures within the curtilage of the house, with some exceptions. The building offers a series of meeting rooms and has been significantly extended in more recent years. The modern extension currently operates as reception and offices. There would be the opportunity to redirect visitors to a reception area in the northern entrance of the old house with its historic ambiance created by the full height entrance hall and staircase (please note that any works resulting from the reorientation, or other works, including repairs or maintenance will need to be discussed in detail, to protect the character of the historic house).

The Office Park lies within the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and although the site is level, the land surrounding the site is undulating dipping towards the coastline and the River Orwell, with countryside views and wildlife much in evidence. Care will be needed to protect the AONB setting where any new development is proposed.

A public footpath to the Church and on towards the River Orwell runs along the southern edge of the site and another adjacent to the western boundary of the staff car park. Dense mixed holly hedges and trees separate the footpaths from the site.

Due to the nature of the current occupier's business, the site offers all the services required to run a modern operation, including: mains electricity supply and two back-up generators; 24 hour surveillance; broadband; and, telephone. A private effluent treatment plant is located to the east of the area indicated pink on the map, to the north of the Church. A telecommunications mast is also located on the property.

The Office Park is set in maintained gardens and parklands with great old trees, possibly dating from the time of the original building, or subsequent build periods, of Wherstead Park. Specialist advice should be sought regarding the age, status and health of these trees, where works are proposed in close proximity. It is likely that most of the significant trees are located outside of areas suitable for development.

In addition to the gardens, the site provides recreational facilities for members of staff, which are not generally open to the public. There is a small pavilion, football pitch, bowling green, former croquet lawn and tennis court.

E.ON currently operates a Green Travel Plan which includes provision of a 20/23 seater bus to and from Ipswich and its train station. Some 40 persons currently use this service.

Remnants of a tall red brick wall enclosure, close to the house, survive, incorporating many modern single storey buildings. Several of these ancillary structures are likely to be Victorian, and may be of architectural or historic interest. Others, however, would provide the opportunity for refurbishment or small scale new build development, perhaps separately let.

Parking is available on the site with visitor spaces currently located adjacent to the modern reception building to the south east of the stables building.

The former stables building, part two storey, has been extended and altered and incorporates a former single storey lodge building to the north, a new courtyard and new parallel range to the east. This element of the site offers the potential for residential conversion under Policy EM05 as detailed below. It should be noted that this complex is listed, although the modern elements offer the greater opportunity for alteration. Part of this complex is the powerhouse for the site.

4.7. Allocation Land



Overview of new allocation site looking east, with walled garden in background



Northern area looking west with walled garden to left and junction of A137 and A14 just beyond the trees



Walled garden and tower with the entrance to the staff car park to right, footpath and potential site linkage point in the middle distance

The land to the west of the existing employment site is approximately 3.3 hectares in size and is currently laid to grass. There is evidence of agricultural activity on the site. The site is relatively flat and level and surrounded by a mixed hedge and trees, providing some concealment of the site.

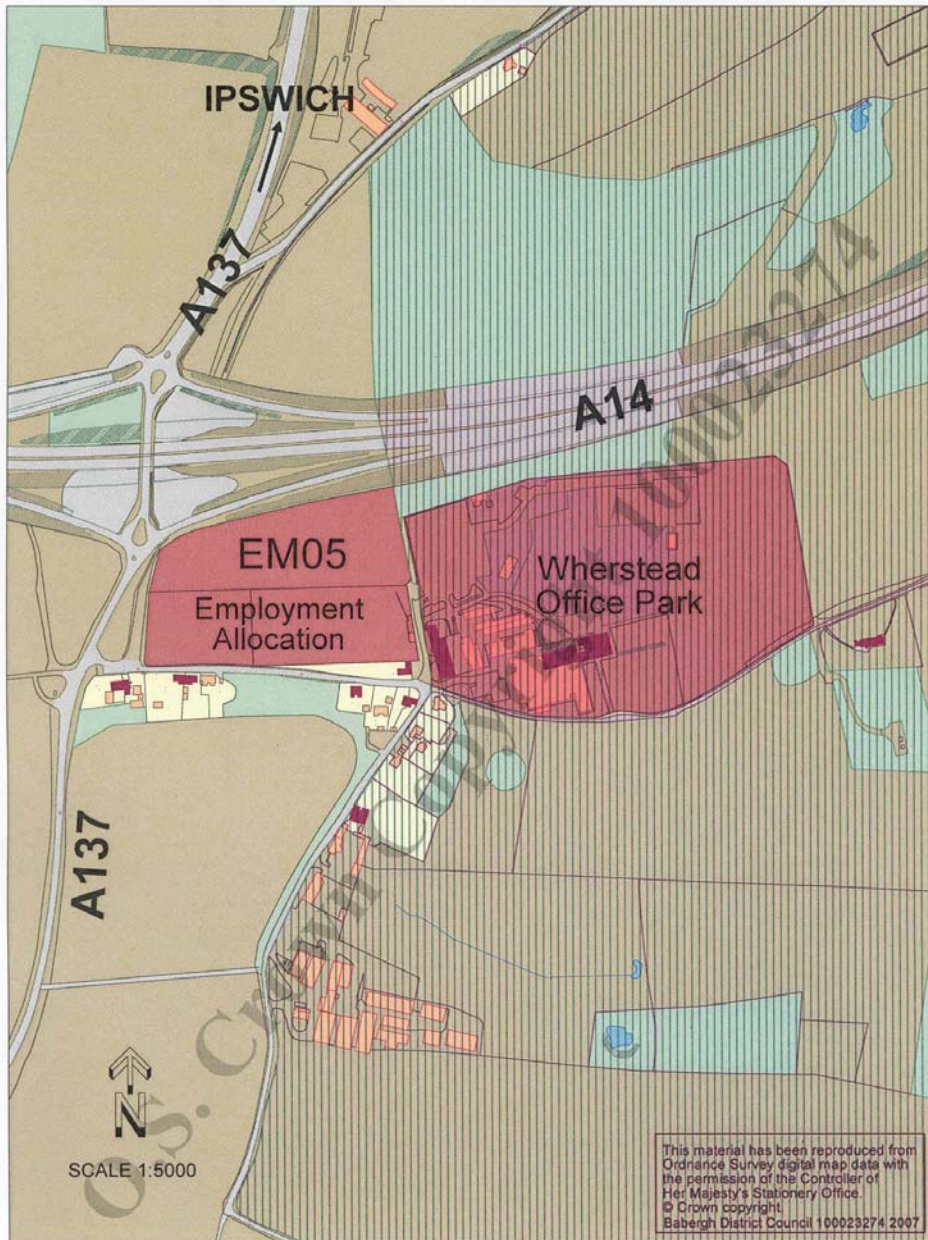
This site lies outside of the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB, but is directly adjacent to it. A public footpath runs along the boundary (north-south) between the allocation land and the Wherstead Office Park to the east. The diversion of the footpath is not recommended, and should be considered in line with requirements of proposals to design out crime.

One area of the allocation site is bounded by a tall red brick wall (2.5-3 metres high) and contains a tower building to the eastern entrance; this was a walled garden to Wherstead Park. The wall and tower are deemed to be listed as the Gardener's Cottage adjacent has associations with the walled garden and is listed grade II.

There is an existing entrance to the walled garden adjacent to the two storey tower, sufficient for vehicular access (approximately 5 metres wide). A pedestrian access is located at the eastern end of the northern wall and there is some evidence of a blocked/rebuilt section of this wall further west (which may be able to provide a further access point). Significant breaches of the walled garden wall, to provide additional vehicular access, will not be permitted due to the impact on the character of the architectural or historic interest of the wall.

New vehicular access directly from the A137 may be possible, but would require discussion with Suffolk County Council. The impact of a new vehicular access from the A137 on the A14 and its junction with the A137 should also be discussed with the Highways Agency. The route through the site should be designed to maintain the integrity of the walled garden, which forms the south eastern parcel of the EM05 allocation land (see map below). The access to the allocation land will also form a new entry point to the existing Wherstead Office Park, with an appropriate new entrance.

5. Site Constraints



Site Constraints Map

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www.babergh.gov.uk

KEY	
	Listed Building
	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
	Policy EM05

6. Development in Accordance with Current National and Regional Planning Policies

6.1. National Policy

A comprehensive approach to the sustainable reuse and/or redevelopment of the site is required. Reference should be made to the following national Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG):

- PPS1 Sustainable Development;
- PPG4 Industrial & Commercial Development and Small Firms;
- PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas;
- PPG13 Transport;
- PPG15 Planning & The Historic Environment; and,
- PPG16 Planning & Archaeology

6.2. Regional Policy

The East of England Development Agency produced its Regional Economic Strategy in 2004. The Wherstead Office Park falls within the Haven Gateway policy area. The Policy looks to revive and broaden the base of the local economy. These themes are carried through into the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (Secretary of State's Proposed Changes and Further Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, October 2007).

At the time of writing, the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy is at an advanced stage and warrants substantial weight being attached to elements of it.

6.3. Ipswich

The Wherstead Office Park lies close to the town of Ipswich, with its concentration of businesses in the information communications technology, insurance, manufacturing, pensions, port/transport and publishing sectors. Ipswich Borough Council's Economic Development Strategy to 2010 aims to reduce unemployment and inequality and increase enterprise, investment and skills through a variety of opportunities and programmes. Many of these programmes are now well underway with both the County Council and Borough Council Offices relocated to Ipswich Village and the opening of the University Campus Suffolk in the town centre in September 2007.

7. The Babergh Local Plan

7.1. The site is covered by the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 (2006). Together with a few saved policies from the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001, these sources form the key elements of the Development Plan for the area.

7.2. Policy EM05 (a site specific policy) of the adopted Babergh Local Plan is the most relevant in this instance. It states:

At the existing Wherstead Office Park, Wherstead and a further 3.3 hectares of land immediately to the west, proposals for B1 development, as defined in the Town and Country Planning Act (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended), will be permitted. Residential development will not be considered acceptable at this site, apart from the conversion of the existing gatehouse buildings at the entrance of the Office Park from The Street. The new allocation must be developed in context of proposals for its adjacent site. Permission will only be granted subject to:

- *Protection of the setting of the listed buildings;*
- *Protection of the playing field;*
- *Retention of mature landscaping belts;*
- *No adverse landscapes on the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;*
- *Provision of a new access from the A137 (designed and constructed to adoptable standards) to serve both the existing and new employment site, and closure of existing access from The Street to all but cyclists, pedestrians and emergency vehicles;*
- *No adverse impacts on neighbouring residential amenity;*
- *Production of a green travel plan; and*
- *Contribution(s) to provision of local bus services.*

7.3. Other policies in the Babergh Local Plan relevant to the site are those relating to the environment, countryside, listed buildings, employment, recreation and transport. These policies can be reviewed in detail via Babergh's web site: www.babergh.gov.uk

7.4. General

Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provision of, or contributions towards highways / transport measures would be required, dependant on the type of proposal, where these impose direct costs or burdens on the local community by over-stretching existing, or requiring new services, facilities or other improvements to support them, in line with Babergh District and Suffolk County Councils' adopted guidance. The above is not intended as an exhaustive list of potential contribution requirements but merely reflects the likely known areas.

7.5. Environment

The Local Plan also aims to encourage sustainable patterns of development, encouraging the conservation of water and energy and the prevention of pollution along with the protection of the character and ecology of the local natural habitats. Policies EN08, EN09, EN13, EN15 and EN17 provide further information.

7.6. Countryside and the Rural Economy

The Local Plan's chapter on Countryside and Rural Economy aims to safeguard the rural character of the District and to promote rural enterprise in appropriate locations. Policy CR02 advocates strict control of development where the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty may be affected.

7.7. The Built Environment and Conservation

Babergh's policies discuss design, listed buildings and conservation areas and the need for archaeological assessment. Paragraph 7.43 of the Local Plan identifies the Wherstead Park and The Street as a potential conservation area, therefore, care should be taken to respect the special character of the village when considering proposals. It should also be noted that the walled garden immediately to the west of the site, which forms part of the newly allocated employment land, is considered to be listed through its attachment and connection to the listed Gardeners Cottage. The site has not been the subject of any archaeological investigation; a desktop study will be required. Specific reference should be made to policies CN01, CN02, CN04, CN05, CN06, CN07 and CN17 on these matters.

7.8. Recreation and Tourism

This Local Plan chapter looks to encourage retention of existing recreation facilities and to retain the character of the AONB when considering improvements.

7.9. Transport

The site is located close to the A14 and located adjacent to the residential area of Wherstead, on a narrow road. Increased traffic along this access road 'The Street' is to be minimalised and ideally prevented. The opportunity to improve access arrangements for the site through the adjacent site allocation (to the west) should be taken when this arises. The impact of the A14 of an improved access should be assessed in accordance with Department of Transport Circular 02/2007 Planning and the Strategic Road Network. Other mitigating measures might also be appropriate, and should be identified through a Green Travel Plan. Further reference should be made to the Transport chapter of the Local Plan.

8. Planning Application Requirements

8.1. Babergh District Council would fully expect to see the following listed items included as part of any planning application to be submitted for the site, although this is not an exhaustive list:

- Full Plans;
- Development Brief/Comprehensive Master Plan;
- Design and Access Statement (Statutory requirement);
- Transport Assessment and Green Travel Plan or documents as otherwise agreed with the Highways / Transport Authority
- Flood Risk Assessment or similar document as otherwise agreed with the Environment Agency;
- Landscape Analysis including landscaping proposals;
- Supporting Planning Statement, which explains the proposals and addresses relevant policy issues;
- Open book accounting to show financial justification for approach taken;
- Section 106 draft "Heads of Terms", which reflect the development proposals;
- Ecological Assessment;
- Arboricultural impact assessment of any trees in the vicinity of any proposed development;
- Archaeological desk top study, and any necessary mitigation or trial trenching, as required under PPG16 where alterations are proposed; and,

- Assessment of the impact on the listed building and adjacent listed buildings and their settings by a suitably qualified and experienced person. This should include a repair and maintenance strategy for the historic buildings on the site.

NB: Potential developers are advised to consult with the Local Planning Authority regarding these requirements, as the introduction of "1 APP", (one application form for planning approvals and consents) will be introduced nationwide on 1st April 2008.

9. Relevant Contacts/Consultees

Inspection of the Wherstead Office Park Site should be arranged through the E.ON UK Plc. Facilities Management Team at the Site on 01473 688688. Further inquiries regarding the site should be made to the planning agent acting for E.ON UK Plc, Ben Hootton, Turley Associates, 9, Colmore Row, Birmingham, West Midlands B3 2BJ Tel: 0121 233 0902

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- Planning Policy and Historic Building Conservation: Clare Vint, Conservation & Design Officer
- Development Control: Fiona Bradley, Principal Development Control Officer
- Environmental Health: James Buckingham, Principal Environmental Protection Officer
- Countryside: Peter Berry, Countryside Officer
- Trees: David Pizzey, Arboricultural Officer
- Economic Development: Neil Henry, Economic and Community Development Manager
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- Economic Development: Jai Raithatha
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Web: www.highways.gov.uk

10. Relevant Information Sources

- Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.2 (2006)
- Babergh Local Development Scheme (2007)
- Babergh District Council *Developing a Local Strategy for Shotley Peninsula*, DTZ (March 2005)
- Babergh Economic Development Strategy:
- Haven Gateway Publications (see: www.haven-gateway.org for further details)

11. Conclusion

- 11.1. This statement sets out the main approach to the future re-use of the Wherstead Office Park, which is considered acceptable in principle to Babergh District Council.
- 11.2. Development that accords with the Development Plan, and specifically, Policy EM05, would be acceptable. As such the retention of the site for employment-related purposes is the primary aim of the Council. A 'piecemeal' approach will not be considered acceptable – a comprehensive package must be delivered.
- 11.3. In support of a comprehensive approach, it is a requirement that a full Development Brief or Master Plan will be prepared prior to the submission of any planning application.
- 11.4. Babergh will welcome any approaches for early discussions with potential users of both the existing Wherstead Office Park and the new allocation site of Policy EM05.

Produced by:

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