

Matter 2A/Airtrack Railways Limited (8116)

DRAFT SOUTH EAST PLAN
Examination in Public

AIRTRACK RAILWAYS LIMITED (8116)

REVISED Matter 2A
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

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MATTER 2 SPATIAL STRATEGY
Sub-matter 2A SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Airtrack Railways Limited (ARL) is a pan European property company with a unique approach. It seeks permission to develop significant sites and uses part of the uplift in land values to fund infrastructure of national or regional significance.
- 1.2 ARL is pursuing development on land between Bracknell & Wokingham that would allow the company to fund 'Airtrack' - the proposal to construct a new 4.5 km twin track rail link running from the Western access of Heathrow Terminal 5 to the main South West line.
- 1.3 The Airtrack railway has wide support in Government and from local authorities across the South East of England, because
- it will relieve congestion in the Thames Valley, particularly on the M4 and other roads serving Heathrow, and help to cut CO₂ emissions
 - it will contribute to sustainably underpinning the economy of the SE region.
- 1.4 The Government has stated a firm commitment to Airtrack but is unable to fund the capital costs involved. The only realistic way Airtrack can happen, without recourse to the debt market, is if the funding gap is met by development. ARL can provide these missing funds.
- 1.5 This approach is widely supported by a number of bodies, including the Airtrack Forum (a group of interested local authorities in the South East that will benefit from the Airtrack railway).
- 1.6 ARL proposes to do this by developing land to the west of Bracknell with a mixed-use commercial and residential scheme. This development can provide the funds to deliver Airtrack. The site is bisected by a direct link to the M4 motorway and the railway line and is thus physically connected to the Airtrack project (see attached plan). A proposed new railway station and major park and ride facility will pull traffic off the M4 and significantly enhance the local economy.
- 1.7 ARL considers that the provision of significant new railway infrastructure to allow growth should be a major plank of the SE Plan. **Consequently ARL is calling for the draft SE Plan to state that any potential development allocations with the ability to deliver infrastructure of regional importance should be afforded high priority by LPA's as they allocate land through their LDF's.**

1.8 In addition, ARL seeks recognition that the land to the west of Bracknell is a sustainable site for new housing that both Bracknell Forest and Wokingham should consider.

1.9 Representations were made by ARL to the draft South East Plan in June 2006 and continue to be made at the local level to Bracknell Forest and Wokingham in respect of their emerging Local Development Framework documents.

2.0 Consideration of Sub Matter

2.1 2A.5 Hypothetically, if a case were made for higher regional housing levels, what would be the most appropriate approach to distribute the additional dwellings arising from these, taking account of economic, environmental and social implications?

2.1.1 It is considered that if the case were made for higher regional housing levels, the same strategy should be taken to distribute the units as is proposed under the current drafting of the South East Plan.

2.1.2 Draft Policy CC8a: Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance states that the prime focus for development should be urban areas, in order to foster accessibility to employment, housing, retail etc and to avoid unnecessary travel. The draft policy encourages local planning authorities to formulate policies to concentrate development in urban areas and to seek to achieve at least 60% of all development on previously developed land and through conversions of existing buildings. In particular, policies at the local level should seek to:

“iii Ensure that development in and around urban areas, including urban infill/intensification and new urban extensions are well designed and consistent with the principles of urban renaissance and sustainable development.

iv Use urban potential studies to identify the scope for redevelopment and intensification of urban areas, seeking opportunities for intensification of urban areas, seeking opportunities for intensification around transport hubs and interchanges.”

2.1.3 Draft Policy CC8a puts forward the potential for intensification of development around transport hubs and interchanges, and for urban extension. Specifically, the concept of hubs as centres of economic activity and transport services is supported (paragraph 1.22, p.48) but, the reference to Regional Hubs (Box CC1, p48) should not exclude the potential for an intensification of development at those locations with the ability to deliver sustainable development supported by appropriate transport infrastructure.

2.1.4 It is considered however that in order to accommodate a greater number of dwellings draft Policy CC8b will need to be amended to state that development should be promoted and supported at both regional but also sub-regional hubs and where there is potential for sustainable development allied to significant infrastructure provision.

2.2 2A.6 Hypothetically, what would be the implications of higher regional housing levels on:

- **water supply and waste water treatment;**
- **transport infrastructure;**
- **landscape, heritage and biodiversity assets;**

and to what extent could these be addressed?

Water supply and waste water treatment;

2.2.1 The problems caused by water shortages in the south east have been well publicised particularly during the recent drought. It is also apparent that the existing utility services infrastructure does not have sufficient spare capacity to be able to serve a large scale increase in population.

2.2.2 The South East Implementation Plan states however that levels of investment to support the implementation of the plan are in overall terms sufficient at present. It warns that the legacy of past under investment will require the level of investment to be sustained over time so as to be able to deliver the necessary increases in capacity.

2.2.3 The implication of increased levels of development would mean that higher levels of planned growth to that assumed within the SE Plan, particularly in respect of planned levels of housing would require a higher level of public sector investment.

Transport Infrastructure

2.2.4 In terms of the impact on transport infrastructure, it is self evident that increased levels of housing development will result in increased travel demand and that measures and policies proposed in the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) will come under increasing pressure from such demand. The thrust of the RTS is to “Manage and Invest”

2.2.5 RTS defines the “manage” aspect in considerable detail and the key policies for coping with increased travel demand are

- Policy T4 - Investment in communications technology - aimed at reducing the need to travel

Matter 2A/Airtrack Railways Limited (8116)

- Policy T5 - Investment in mobility management - aimed at rebalancing the transport system in favour of non car modes (eg travel plans, bus systems, charging initiatives, ITS, demand management etc).
- Policy T6 – Charging – aimed at road charging to reduce traffic congestion (and by implication finance improvement to public transport).

2.2.6 Increased travel demand will place an even greater need on the successful realisation of such management policies and it is clear that (i) additional funding will be needed to implement the policies and (ii) there will need to be a strong political commitment and higher levels of public information as to potential issues and benefits (the recent public reaction to road user charging illustrates the point) – nevertheless, the management policies offer a realistic way forward.

2.2.7 Whilst the directions for transport management are well defined in the RTS, much less direction on “investment” is presented. Despite effective management policies, it is inevitable that there will need to be increased investment in transport infrastructure – both for new schemes and for system renewal and enhancement. In particular, investments to improve mass transit modes (rail services, busway systems, possibly LRT etc) are already vital having regard to current development plans and will become more intense and urgent if housing targets are raised”.

Landscape, heritage and biodiversity assets

2.2.8 It is evident that any increase in housing levels will impact on landscape, heritage and biodiversity assets if not sustainably located. The highest suggested level of housing would have the greatest effect on these assets as more housing requires more land and there is higher potential for infringement onto areas with high value for landscape, heritage and biodiversity. Adverse effects on these assets can be avoided or mitigated as far as possible by ensuring that sustainable locations for housing are prioritised.

2.2.9 As discussed in the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-regional policy WCBV2: *Development and Environmental Protection*, land within the existing built-up areas will be the foci of development but sustainable urban extensions can help to meet housing targets where sufficient housing cannot reasonably be accommodated within built-up areas. New housing located within built-up areas should also have regard to any existing built heritage assets and be designed to be in keeping with the townscape so as to respect their setting. Similarly, existing urban open space and sites of biodiversity interest may also be affected by urban housing development, so due consideration should be given to these when locations are selected.

2.2.10 As stated at paragraph 2.4.6 of the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-regional policy, minimising the take-up of greenfield land is not a consideration which overrides all others. Selecting locations for housing must consider what is best for all three tenets of sustainability: economy, society and the environment

Matter 2A/Airtrack Railways Limited (8116)

and if sustainable greenfield sites are chosen, effects on landscape, heritage and biodiversity assets can be minimised.

- 2.2.11 Central to locating housing on greenfield sites in a sustainable manner will be choosing areas that do not have statutory designations for nature conservation or landscape value and which do not compromise built heritage assets such as Listed Buildings. As stated in Policy WCBV2, incursions into areas of regional, national or international environmental importance should be avoided. Where development occurs on greenfield land without statutory designations, the opportunity may exist to retain and possibly enhance landscape and biodiversity assets.
- 2.2.12 Retaining pockets of woodland and green corridors, for example, within new developments would be a means of maintaining biodiversity value and landscape features whilst also improving public access to, and enjoyment of, the landscape. Sensitive landscaping strategies which mirror and respect existing biodiversity and landscape form can also play a part in ensuring that existing assets are retained.