

# South Marston Airfield (Honda) Planning Policy Position Statement

Planning Committee

13<sup>th</sup> August 2019

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Author:	Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage
Wards:	All, but particularly St Margaret and South Marston Ward
Parishes Affected:	All, but particularly Stratton St Margaret and South Marston Parishes

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## 1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a clear position statement on the application of planning policies to the potential future uses of the Honda manufacturing site at South Marston Airfield.

## 2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note and endorse the contents of this report as a planning policy position statement on the potential future use of the South Marston Airfield (Swindon Honda Manufacturing Plant) site.

## 3. Detail

- 3.1 On 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019, Honda UK Manufacturing confirmed the intended closure of the South Marston manufacturing plant in 2021.
- 3.2 The manufacturing plant is sited on the former South Marston Airfield. In total the site is 152 hectares, although approximately only half the site is developed, with the remainder consisting of the former airstrip (currently used for parking vehicles), vacant land, landscaping and flood alleviation. There are currently three access points to the site; North and South Gate with access to the A419 and a third through Key Point accessed from the A420 (currently used by HGVs). Theoretically, and subject to highways approval, a fourth access point could be made from South Marston Industrial Estate to the north.
- 3.3 The whole site is owned by Honda and their plans for land disposal, upon closure of the plant, are not yet known.
- 3.4 For avoidance of doubt, the lawful use of the site is Use-class B2 (General Industrial Uses) and will remain as such on closure of the plant, until such time as an alternative use is permitted.
- 3.5 Current Planning Policy
- 3.6 Adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan Policy EC1 states that inward investment and the growth and retention of existing business will be enabled by, *inter alia*,

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protecting the best employment sites under Policy EC2 for employment use (B-class).

- 3.7 The Swindon Employment Land Review 2017, undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, assessed 36 employment areas across the Borough for their quality and suitability to meet the future development needs of the local economy. The Honda site was ranked joint highest (with 4 others) with a rating score of 28 out of 30.
- 3.8 Policy EC2 states that the Key Employment Areas shall be retained primarily for employment generating uses within the classes B1, B2 and B8. Planning permission will be given for Class B1, B2 and B8 uses, and for sui generis uses, in these areas, subject to the Class B1(a) office development not adversely impacting upon the regeneration of Swindon Central Area. The Honda site is identified as a key employment area to which Policy EC2 applies.
- 3.9 Policy EC2 then sets out the criteria to be met for a change of use from employment to be supported. In the application of this policy it is considered the entire Honda site is currently in employment use.
- 3.10 Planning applications for alternative uses which are not in accord with Policy EC2 depending on the scale, will constitute a departure from the Local Plan and in such circumstances may be called in by the Secretary of State for his or her determination.
- 3.11 Emerging Planning Policy
- 3.12 The Council is currently reviewing the Swindon Borough Local Plan. At Council on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019 (Item 6 refers), approval was given to consult on emerging options to inform the final draft of the Plan due to be submitted for independent examination early in 2020.
- 3.13 Through the Local Plan Review, it is proposed to strengthen the policy in relation to the Honda Site by identifying it as a 'Core Employment Site', at which proposals for alternative uses other than B-use and employment generating 'sui-generis' uses will not be supported unless there is an exceptional justification.
- 3.14 National Policy
- 3.15 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019) states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

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- 3.16 However, the revised NPPF emphasises that ‘substantial weight’ should be given to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for ‘homes and other identified needs.’ It also confirms that planning policies and decisions should promote and support the development of underutilised land and buildings (especially to meet housing needs where land supply is constrained), (Para. 118). It also states applications should be refused which fail to make efficient use of land. (Para. 123).
- 3.17 Whilst it is acknowledged that the Council is unable to demonstrate a deliverable five-year supply of housing in accordance with the NPPF, it is not considered that the overall land supply is constrained to the extent that brownfield sites of this size should be realised for housing. In total 17,740 additional dwellings have planning permission or are allocated on sites in the adopted Local Plan of made Neighbourhood Plans.
- 3.18 Pre-application consultation is emphasised within the revised NPPF, stating that ‘Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.’ (para. 128). In this respect, it is critical that future uses of the site recognise and utilise the social capital of the present Honda Plant particularly in relation to skills of the current workforce.

## Next Steps

- 3.19 This report will serve to provide a clear position statement on the application of planning policies to alternative uses for the Honda site, and in doing so augments the provisions of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan. It does not seek to pre-determine the outcome of consultation on the replacement Local Plan, which will be subject to independent examination at the appropriate stage in 2020.

## **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to provide a planning position statement on the site, and instead continue to rely solely on the adopted Local Plan having regard to the Revised National Planning Policy Framework. However, this could potentially weaken the Council’s position when considering proposals for development.

## **5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial and procurement implications as a result of this Report, however there maybe an impact on planning fee income, positive or negative which will be monitored.

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## Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights implications were taken into account in preparing this report. It is considered that the recommendations are consistent with Convention Rights.

## All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 Any future planning application(s) for the site may require an Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

## Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)

- 5.4 The Swindon Borough Local Plan has been subject to a DIA, as will the on-going Local Plan Review,

## Risk Management

- 5.5 The Local Development Scheme (March 2019) presents a detailed risk assessment to the Local Plan Review Production.

## **6. Consultees**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance - Section 151 Officer and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 None.

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 None