



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 April 2025

by **C McDonagh BA (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/B4215/W/24/3354068

The Astrodome, Bradnor Road, Manchester M22 4TE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Airport Parking and Hotels Ltd against the decision of Manchester City Council.
- The application Ref is 137427/FO/2023.
- The development proposed is described as 'the reinstatement of various historic features on the listed former bus garage, the demolition of a warehouse and the erection of a car park on the adjoining land'.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I understand that a separate application for Listed Building Consent for the works to the Grade II* listed Wythenshawe Bus Depot has been approved since this appeal was lodged. I will return to this matter later in this decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the Council's economic strategy for the Wythenshawe area with regards to employment land.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the Sharston Industrial Estate and includes a car park, office building and warehouse. On the adjacent plot, the site includes the former Wythenshawe Bus Depot. The proposal includes the demolition of the existing warehouse building, which would be replaced by a 5-storey parking structure to expand the number of spaces available to users of Manchester Airport.
5. Policy EC10 of the CS¹ states that Wythenshawe is expected to provide 55 hectares (ha) of employment land within classes B1a, B1b/c and B8 within the plan period (2012 - 2027). This includes within the East Wythenshawe Development Corridor which includes the Sharston Industrial Estate. The CS defines employment land as land for the development of light industry and business premises (use class B1), general industry (use class B2) and warehouses (use class B8).
6. The supporting text of policy EC10 advises that Wythenshawe is still one of the most deprived areas in England and that access to a range of employment opportunities is important. To that end, a key objective of the area is to fully realise

¹ Manchester's Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Adopted July 2012)

the economic and other benefits of proximity to the Airport for Wythenshawe residents.

7. Policy EW13 of the UDP² is much more specific in stating that the use or development of sites at Sharston Industrial Estate for long-stay off-airport car parking will not be permitted where proposals would involve a significant loss of land capable of attracting good-quality employment generating industrial activity. I understand that much of the UDP was replaced by the policies of the CS upon its adoption in 2012, although some policies, including EW13, were saved and remain extant in the determination of planning applications.
8. The proposal would not change the use of the site and there is seemingly no objection in principle to the demolition of the warehouse building from the Council. I also note that the existing use has planning permission³ ('the 2001 permission'). The main dispute between the parties relates to the intensification of parking at the site and whether the development proposed would lead to a loss of employment generating industrial land.
9. The multi-storey parking structure would increase the capacity of parking spaces by 438 (21%) over the existing provision. Despite the appellant's claims that 21% does not constitute an intensification, it is unclear how it could not be. This is a significant increase in parking capacity and requires a substantial building in order to accommodate these additional spaces. Moreover, the multi-storey structure would require a considerable redevelopment effort to demolish and make the site suitable again should the existing use cease. Given its size, I disagree that it could be demolished easily, and this would likely render the site lost to industrial uses in future.
10. I am directed to an extract of the Council's Annual Monitoring Report for 2023 which details that up to the date of the report 46.58ha of employment land had been developed in Wythenshawe, or an average of 4.66ha per annum. I understand that more recent figures were not available at the time of the appeal. However, there is no guarantee that this average would continue to ensure that the 55ha target is met and the previous yearly delivery figures show some large fluctuations in delivery. This includes a high of 18.23ha in 2021/22 but a low of 0.24 in 2014/15. As such, the loss of employment land cannot be supported in this manner.
11. I have had regard to the 2001 permission. This use has been established on the site and has operated in this manner since, as the appellant points out. However, this was prior to the adoption of the CS and the extract from the report I have been given is clear that the Council considered the change of use would generate more employment opportunities than the existing situation at that time. Moreover, since the adoption of the CS, I see only one planning application has been approved which was on an adjacent cricket pitch. That site would not be subject to the same assessment as the proposal before me. As such, it would seem that the previous policy compliance would have been with EW13 rather than EC10. In any event, this is a proposal for new development which is to be assessed on its own merits.
12. The appellant's business evidently employs some 34 staff with aspirations to increase this to 48. Some employees have retrained in other areas such as bus

² Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (adopted July 1995)

³ 060298/FO/SOUTH2/00

driving. There is little indication of what ‘good quality employment generating industrial activity’ means in relation to policy EW13 and I have no reason to doubt that the business is a good employer. By the same token, I also cannot be certain that previous uses were not good quality as the appellant contends. Regardless, the uses which the policies seek to encourage would not be met by the proposal and I note that the appellant agrees the jobs are not of a traditional industrial type. Going back to the site planning history, I see that the previous changes of use referred to by the appellant are from B8 to sui generis use. As such, despite employing people at the site, this would not meet the requirements of policies EW13 or EC10.

13. There may be support from other policies but overall, the proposal would conflict with policies EC10 of the CS and EW13 of the UDP. These seek to ensure the provision of 55 hectares (ha) of employment land within classes B1a, B1b/c and B8d in Wythenshawe as a driver of economic activity and employment opportunities whilst also seeking to avoid further loss of the same land.

Other Matters

14. The Wythenshawe Bus Depot⁴ is a grade II* listed building located on the opposite side of Harling Road. The proposal includes repairs and refurbishment to the depot and is also subject to an application for listed building consent⁵ which has been approved since the appeal was lodged. I note that the Council does not take issue with these elements of the proposal, although as decision maker I have a statutory duty under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) to ensure that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
15. I have had regard to the Heritage Statement⁶ which details the proposed repairs and refurbishments and concludes much of the scheme in relation to the depot would result in an improvement to its overall condition and character. I observed on the site visit that externally, the building appeared to be in need of some repair albeit overall it seemed in good condition. Based on all that I have seen and read I conclude that the proposal insofar as it relates to the depot would preserve the listed building.
16. The Council did not refuse the proposal based on concerns relating to the living conditions of occupiers of nearby properties, although I note objections to the proposal on the basis of noise, privacy, outlook, parking and air quality. However, in its statement of case the Council advise that I observe the site from within to give consideration to these concerns. I did not observe the site from within and I have dismissed the appeal on other grounds regardless. In any event, I have limited information on any of these matters from the Council. If the Council has additional concerns, it should raise them alongside substantive evidence rather than as an afterthought during the appeal process.
17. I also note the appellant’s concerns regarding the Council’s handling of the planning application. Be that as it may, this has no bearing on my consideration of

⁴ List Entry Number: 1389256

⁵ 137428/LO/2023

⁶ Atelier Heritage – June 2023

the planning merits of the appeal, and the Council will have its own complaints procedure to follow should the appellant feel aggrieved.

Planning Balance

18. I have concluded that the proposal would conflict with the aims of the development plan to further economic development in Wythenshawe by increasing employment land in the area. This weighs against the proposal considerably.
19. The Council found no harm with regards to ecology, flooding and highway safety among other things. Moreover, there were no objections from relevant consultees. Be that as it may, a lack of harm is neutral in the planning balance rather than weighing in favour.
20. The proposal would provide economic benefits in the form of construction during the redevelopment of the site. However, it is unclear how additional parking capacity would benefit Manchester Airport given there is nothing before me to indicate that this is in short supply, nor is it clear how a lack of parking would act as a barrier to the growth of the airport. There is reference to the creation of 14 additional jobs created by the expansion of the facility, although details are somewhat vague and there is little to explain what these jobs would entail. As such, the economic benefits are worthy of moderate weight in favour of the scheme.
21. The proposal would utilise previously developed land and repair parts of the listed building which is worthy of some additional limited weight. The existing warehouse is utilitarian but indicative of its location on an industrial estate. Although the proposed replacement multi-storey structure may not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, it would not be of particular architectural merit either. Solar panels are referenced as a future development in conjunction with electric buses to transport customers to and from the airport. While it would no doubt be welcomed, this is not part of the proposal before me, and I cannot assign it additional weight.
22. I am informed that the site may be oversubscribed in terms of the number of parking spaces during busy periods. However, there is nothing before me to indicate that this is a particular issue across Manchester given other similar operators would offer the same services. My attention is drawn to unscrupulous operators which exist in this sector, and the appellant business evidently has good levels of customer care. However, looking after customers would be expected in most businesses and I would not regard it as a social benefit as such.

Conclusion

23. In conclusion, the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole. There are benefits of the proposal, although these would not outweigh that conflict. As such, the appeal is dismissed.

C McDonagh

INSPECTOR