

Report on the BAE Design Workshop – 13th to 18th June 2011

Some 38 people attended the first day but not all came to each of the remaining sessions. About 30 stayed through the five sessions. They included local councillors from both Stockport and the adjoining NE Cheshire parishes, local residents, a very significant local land owner (Michael Kingsley), some developers, representatives from Stockport and E Cheshire NHS trusts, the Headmistress of Poynton High School and two representatives from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), a Government quango. WCC was represented by Robin Berriman and myself, with Bryan Leck there in his role as Councillor. Ken Coxey, former WCC Chairman, also attended.

The lead facilitator was Stephen Gleave with other staff from Taylor Young who led the group through a series of exercises to tease out relevant aspects of the design options. I confess to entering the process in a sceptical frame of mind, believing that we were likely to be led down a garden path (or perhaps a runway) to an inevitable conclusion that was BAE's or SMBC's preferred option. Having tested this out on a number of occasions I abandoned conspiracy theory and concluded it was a relatively free flowing exploration of options.

The overall proceedings are well described in the blog set up by TY: <http://woodfordaerodromedesignworkshop.wordpress.com/> but in brief consisted of:

Day 1 Exploration of expectations and concerns, coach tour of site, feedback, then a presentation from Richard Cass on the exhibition and way forward.

Day 2 A design exercise sorting a series of images into what would be suitable and what would be unsuitable for the site. There was pretty good agreement between the two teams over what was good for Woodford. Following a presentation on sustainability in relation to development there were separate table discussions covering "Character and Identity", "Movement and linkages", "Landscape and green infrastructure" and "Uses and activity".

Day 3 Some frustration had set in about what we were doing or achieving and so the objectives were reviewed – it was about defining options and general principles rather than a masterplan. The issue of MEDS was discussed and there was general agreement that the design should be about the site as a whole rather than being constrained by MEDS in their current places. Although it was accepted that in planning terms SMBC were at least a year ahead of E Cheshire, this was not significant in terms of the development time for the site. There followed, at first sight, a rather strange presentation on the "Magic and mystery of place making". It was basically about how important it was to make a design 'work' within its environment. This was probably somewhat out of place since this will be very much the responsibility of the final developers rather than the SPD. It did however bring to the fore the importance of developing and maintaining sight lines to natural features surrounding the site such as Lyme Park, White Nancy, the Edge etc, as well as perhaps the reverse views.

We then had the opportunity of designing our own individual site concepts. There was some commonality of ideas, probably from local residents. I suspect the more radical proposals came from non-locals such as the HCA representatives. The concept of splitting MEDS B between A and Poynton was common, as was the use of the runway as a road with relief links to Adlington and Chester Road.

Finally there was an expert panel giving presentations on a wide range of topics, as well as some hard information in written form, which went into the four 'Resource Boxes', one on each table. This was useful in showing what information was NOT available as well as what was. The most controversial aspect were statements on 'affordable housing' from Stockport Planning. This was later 'clarified' by Paul Lawrence.

Day 4 There was an opportunity to review available information as well as what was missing or conflicting. These were logged for feedback to the Authorities. Following a discussion, participants were able to select the group they wished to join out of four options:

1. Those who only wanted to develop within the existing MEDS (major existing development site) – 1 person
2. Those who only wanted to develop the same amount of land defined by the MEDS but consider other locations in the Stockport Council area only – 3 persons
3. Those who only wanted to develop the same amount of land defined by the MEDS but consider other locations across the site (including Cheshire East) – 13 persons
4. Those who wanted to be free thinking and develop the whole site without the MEDS constraints – 2 persons

Note: I may be slightly out on the numbers on each table but Option 3 was overwhelmingly the most popular.

Key themes were:

- Desire to protect green space and make use of views and vistas;
- Ensure good connections with links to Poynton and/or Adlington in three out of four groups;
- Mixed uses: employment and housing;
- Sustainable development;
- Bridle, cycle and footpaths across and around site;
- Development of a 'Woodford centre' with a tendency towards middle to higher value housing, possibly with a 'retirement village'.

Day 5 was the wrap-up, starting with a review of Day 4's designs where pairs posted strengths and weaknesses on post-it notes for each design.

In the concluding discussion the participants agreed the exercise had been worthwhile and that the group should be reconvened at key moments in the future. Affordable housing policy on the site needs to be resolved.

Afterthoughts It was a significant commitment of time, hence the preponderance of retired persons or those with potential business interests in the developments. The Taylor Young team, particularly Stephen Gleave, did a very good job in maintaining a flow and structure to

the process, giving plenty of opportunity for issues and ideas to be expressed whilst controlling dominance on any single issue.

I went through various stages of scepticism, frustration and enthusiasm but finally believed it was worth attending. One could perhaps argue some details of the process, particularly the information available, which there was not time to examine closely. I tried to request a 'Resource Box' for WCC but the four were allocated to SMBC, Cheshire East, BAE/Cass and Taylor Young. However, I was told that all the information would be made available on a website sometime shortly.

Finally some thoughts for WCC on this topic:

- It is a very long-term project - 5 to 30 years;
- This phase is only background for the SPD and hopefully BAE/Cass in selecting/advising potential developers;
- SMBC's feedback on the process will be instructive on how they view the results;
- WCC should be involved in future phases;
- Whatever future path is taken the first and biggest impact on Woodford is likely to be site preparation particularly if a significant amount of runway/hard standing has to be removed. WCC should be prepared to negotiate with SMBC particularly regarding positioning and operating hours of crushers (eg in a Site B hanger away from houses); access routes for materials entering and leaving the site etc.

David Buszard

7th July 2011