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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- i. This report for Oswestry Borough Council reviews the supply and demand for employment land in the town and Borough of Oswestry to 2026. It assesses how much employment land is needed; considers whether the existing employment land meets this need; and then reviews the possible options to bring forward new and alternative development sites. Given that there is both limited budget and timescale for this study it relies on desk-top research, review of existing study data and reports, and consultation with key stakeholders.
- ii. According to emerging RSS guidance the Borough should have 28.8 ha of employment land for the period 2008 to 2026. Taking into account that some sites are not viable; together with the fact that some land is going to be developed for alternative uses, there is actually only 13.8 ha of employment land available in the Borough. There are also two atypically large, immediate company relocation requirements for which there are currently no suitable sites, they require 9.5-12.8 ha of freehold land.
- iii. The Borough therefore needs 38.3-41.6 ha gross of employment land. Given that there is 13.8 ha currently available, an additional 24.5-27.8 ha net is required for the period 2008 to 2026.
- iv. Oswestry's largest allocated employment site, Weston Farm, is not going to come forward for development. This 12 ha site is financially unviable to develop, and affected by too many other issues. Both the public and private sector have failed to deliver it despite numerous attempts. To maintain the Borough's employment land supply it needs to be replaced. Although unallocated, the Smithfield has been viewed as an obvious future solution to Oswestry's shortage of employment land. However its owners are pursuing higher value uses which mean it will not be available for development until 2010; and even then, should the retail/leisure aspirations have failed, it may still not come forward as it remains an operational cattle market site.
- v. Oswestry Borough Council has identified four potential locations to accommodate new employment land, these have been considered in terms of meeting the short-term needs (for the two large employers needing to relocate) and long-term needs (to 2026) of the Borough:
 - North of Whittington Road – 12.9 ha

- Mile End – 12.4 ha
 - Park Hall – 8.6 ha
 - North of Shrewsbury Road – 3.4 ha.
- vi. The preferred solution is to allocate an additional 27.8 ha of employment land to meet need through to 2026. The unviable Weston Farm and poorly located Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech should be de-allocated. To meet the short-term employment land needs of Oswestry the Council should bring forward 12.4 ha of employment land at Mile End (the second choice being Park Hall). In meeting the long-term employment land needs the Council should also allocate both North of Shrewsbury Road and North of Whittington Road to provide the balance through to 2026 (assuming Mile End does also come forward).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report for Oswestry Borough Council reviews the supply and demand for employment land in the Borough of Oswestry to 2026. It assesses how much employment land is needed in the town and the Borough as a whole; considers whether the existing employment land meets this need; and then reviews the possible options to bring forward new and alternative development sites.
- 1.2 There are a number of important employers in Oswestry looking to expand and modernise their premises. Land is needed in the short-term, and the risk is that they may leave the town if suitable sites cannot be brought forward for them. Oswestry Borough Council (the Council) and its public sector partners have been working to service existing land but for various reasons these efforts have stalled. This report therefore also looks at the reasons for why these efforts have stalled and the viability (and deliverability) of existing sites, which means alternatives are needed to replace them. These alternative sites are then assessed to ascertain their capacity and suitability to meet Oswestry's short and long-term employment land needs.
- 1.3 The two key tasks as outlined in the Council's brief are the assessment of:
- The availability and viability of existing approved and allocated sites for employment development
 - The suitability, availability and viability of other (currently unallocated) potential sites for employment development, as possible departures to the Local Plan and/or longer-term opportunities.
- 1.4 Given that there is both limited budget and timescale for this study it relies on desk-top research, review of existing study data and reports, and consultation with key stakeholders. A list of consultees is provided at Appendix 1. The three main reports reviewed, and upon which this study relies, are:
- BE Group's Oswestry Employment Land Study 2006
 - Arup's Mile End, Oswestry Evidence Report 2007
 - Shropshire County Council's Promotion of Land at Park Hall Report 2007.
- 1.5 The report has been compiled by BE Group, economic development and property consultants based at Ingot House, Kelvin Close, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 7PB.

2.0 EMPLOYMENT LAND NEED

Introduction

- 2.1 This section considers how much employment land is needed in Oswestry. It takes guidance from the latest Regional Spatial Strategy guidance that indicates how much land the Borough as a whole needs. It then reviews and updates BE Group's Employment Land Study for the Borough from 2006, using the 2007/08 Planning Land Use Monitoring System (PLUMS) data from Shropshire County Council. Finally it considers this against the immediate needs of local businesses in the town for employment land.

Regional Spatial Strategy

- 2.2 The West Midlands Regional Assembly is reviewing the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). As a result of this it is proposing housing and employment land allocations for each local authority area. The West Midlands Land Advisory Group (WMLAG) has considered a number of methodologies to estimate future employment land requirements. WMLAG considers the most effective and reliable methodology is a five-year minimum reservoir approach based on an analysis of past employment land take-up trends.
- 2.3 For the Borough of Oswestry the minimum reservoir suggested is 8 ha. This is the proportion of the overall RSS requirement that should be readily available for development at any one time during the RSS/Local Development Framework period. The overall land requirement for the period 2006-2021 is 24 ha. The extrapolation of these figures for the period 2008-2026 (which includes an extra five years 2021 to 2026, but starts from 2008 rather than 2006, to meet this study's timescale) therefore suggests that the Borough needs 28.80 ha of employment land.

Employment Land Study Update

- 2.4 BE Group's Employment Land Study considered the land supply situation over the period 2006 to 2021. The starting point for the assessment was Shropshire County Council's PLUMS data that identified 30.79 ha in the Borough (see Table 1). PLUMS includes windfall sites, but these were mostly excluded from the analysis (those sites of less than 0.1 ha as well as those poor quality sites of 0.1-0.3 ha). It was felt these windfall sites are generally property expansion, redevelopment and landscaping areas that are minor additions. The study considered just the new, large sites that are needed to accommodate the growing and diversifying economy.

Table 1 – PLUMS Land Data Analysis

Scenario	Cumulative Total Land Supply, ha	
	2005	2008
PLUMS Baseline	30.79	30.48
Remove small windfall sites, 0-0.1 ha	30.17	29.63
Remove larger, poor quality windfall sites, 0.1-0.3 ha	29.66	28.88
Remove expansion land sites	29.36	28.88
Remove potentially unviable land	15.78	15.30
Remove land lost to alternative uses	15.78	13.80

Source: Shropshire County Council/BE Group 2008

- 2.5 In 2005 there was a headline figure of 30.79 ha, once the windfall sites are removed, as well as sites held for expansion, the land supply fell to 29.36 ha. Furthermore the study also highlighted that two sites Weston Farm and Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech were also unlikely to come forward due to their limited viability. This left a potentially available land supply of only 15.78 ha.
- 2.6 In 2008 the land supply profile is very similar to 2005, although there is slightly less land in total. The baseline figure for 2008 is 30.48 ha. Again this includes the same two sites identified as potentially unviable in 2005:
- Weston Farm, Oswestry - 12.00 ha
 - Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech - 1.58 ha.
- 2.7 Removing the windfall sites leaves a total of 28.88 ha. As an aside, all but 7.26 ha of this is in and around Oswestry town itself. However 3.52 ha at Rod Meadows, Oswestry is now marketed as Oswestry Gateway and has secured planning permission for a hotel, motel, car showroom, day nursery, light industries and offices, so some of it (approximately 1.5 ha) may now be lost for employment purposes.
- 2.8 Accepting these assumptions (i.e. the removal of unviable sites identified in para 2.6 and those potentially going to alternative use) means that the realistic available employment land supply in the Borough is reduced to 13.80 ha. Of this total, 5.68 ha is not actually in (or around) the town of Oswestry itself.

- 2.9 The Employment Land Study then considered how much land was needed. To do this it rolled forward the historic employment land take-up rate of 1.4 ha/year. Applying this methodology current joint Structure Plan guidance of maintaining a minimum land supply of 15 ha, plus 1.4 ha each year from 2008 to 2026 to meet this study's timescale suggests that the Borough would need 40.2 ha.
- 2.10 The Employment Land Study also found substantial latent demand that would need around an additional 10-15 ha of employment land above and beyond that dictated by historic take-up rates. As the next sub-section shows this latent demand still exists.
- 2.11 Other findings of the Employment Land Study included: the focus of demand is for industrial space, there is a minimal office market; demand is concentrated in Oswestry town, as opposed to the rural hinterland; most property requirements are for up to 100 sqm; there is a lack of freehold plot and property availability. These findings were reiterated by the Mile End, Oswestry Evidence Report 2007.

Local Demand

- 2.12 As well as the ongoing need for employment land from companies modernising, relocating and starting-up (which equates to historic land take-up), there are also currently two unusually large requirements. These two companies have immediate requirements for employment land and are important local employers which the Council wish to see in stay in Oswestry.
- 2.13 There is no land available for these companies. Existing employment land in the Borough, as recorded by PLUMS, is either not readily available for development (e.g. Weston Farm and Land adjacent to Maesbury Lane, 2.1 ha); not in Oswestry (e.g. Bank Top Industrial Estate, St Martins and Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech); not suitable for such uses (e.g. Rod Meadows, which is being marketed as Oswestry Gateway for higher quality development including hotel, trade counters and offices); or the sites are too small.

Richard Burbidge & Co

- 2.14 Richard Burbidge & Co employs 300 people in Oswestry. It needs to modernise and would like to consolidate its two sites on Whittington Road to the north of the town. It needs a 3.5-4.8 ha freehold site for a 21,000 sqm good quality factory which would incorporate a 2500 sqm office block. This is to be used for the design, sale, manufacture and assembly of timber products. A use that would enable it to sit

alongside other commercial uses. Ideally the company would like to progress its relocation in 2009/2010.

- 2.15 The company needs an accessible, prominent site and ideally, reasonably close to town and its local workforce. The preferred site is North of Whittington Road, as it is close to its existing operation; second choice would be sites close to Oswestry Industrial Estate. It does not like the Park Hall or Weston Farm sites because of their lack of prominence.
- 2.16 Should the company not find a suitable site it may have to move away from the town. In the past it has looked at options in Wales and Telford.

Elements Europe

- 2.17 Elements Europe manufacture modular pods, e.g. bathrooms, kitchens, etc for sectors such as hotels, care homes, student accommodation, etc. The company is growing very quickly, and needs to expand beyond its current premises on Oswestry Industrial Estate.
- 2.18 The preference is to stay in Oswestry, as it is a local business, but to do so need a 6-8 ha freehold relocation site. It also needs to be made available soon, as the desire is to be operational there by the end of 2009. As construction is likely to involve a nine months build period, and planning must be secured, action is needed now. The site will need to accommodate a 20,000 sqm factory, of which 15,000 sqm will be built immediately, with a further 5000 sqm built very soon afterwards. Such a site would also allow for car parking, substantial outside storage, a 2000 sqm office block, roads and circulation space. Approximately 2 ha will be retained as medium-to-long term expansion land. There is currently no such site available for such a relocation in Oswestry. All it needs is the land as it is part of The Pickstock Group that has other construction divisions that can service the land and build premises.
- 2.19 The new facility is likely to see an increase in employment from 100 to 400. The company is currently being courted by inward investment agencies in Wrexham and Telford, but would prefer to remain in Oswestry.
- 2.20 The company's preferred site is Mile End, second choice would be North of Whittington Road. Although there is concern over the latter about the effect of their industrial building in the context of the nearby Hill Fort. Park Hall would also be a satisfactory location.

Summary

- 2.21 According to emerging RSS guidance the Borough should have 28.8 ha of employment land for the period 2008 to 2026. 8 ha of this should be immediately available.
- 2.22 There are also two atypically large immediate company relocation requirements. The Council wish to keep them in Oswestry because they are large employers. In total they require 9.5-12.8 ha freehold for manufacturing facilities. However there are currently no suitable sites available for them.
- 2.23 Taking into account that the Weston Farm and Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech are not viable; together with the fact that some of The Rod Meadows site is going to be developed for alternative uses, there is only 13.8 ha of employment land currently available in the Borough.
- 2.24 In total the Borough therefore needs 38.3-41.6 ha gross, given that there is 13.8 ha currently available, an additional 24.5-27.8 ha net is required for the period 2008 to 2026.

3.0 EXISTING EMPLOYMENT LAND SUPPLY

Introduction

- 3.1 This section assesses the two key existing potential employment land opportunities in Oswestry. It shows why they are unlikely to come forward for development in the short-term and that alternatives are required to replace them. The section looks at their existing characteristics, development history and future plans for them. Site plans are provided at Appendix 2.

Weston Farm

- 3.2 Weston Farm is a 12 ha allocated greenfield site adjacent to Oswestry Industrial Estate. Although contiguous with this industrial estate it is separated from it by the former Cambrian Railway Line. Flat, agricultural land, it is bordered to the west and north by green wedge.
- 3.3 To date this has been viewed as Oswestry's main solution to its shortage of available employment land. However recent attempts by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and its public sector partners to deliver this site have failed. This follows a number of (similarly failed) attempts by the private sector over the last decade or so.
- 3.4 AWM has worked on bringing the site forward for 12 months. This has failed due to there being a number of issues constraining development. A key issue is that the site is in multiple ownerships, and AWM has been unable to negotiate an amicable solution between all parties as to its sale. The owners are now proceeding to try and find private sector partners independently. This has been tried before, and also come to nought.
- 3.5 Fundamentally there is also a significant funding gap to be overcome, estimated at approximately £2 million. The funding gap is the amount of money a private sector developer would lose (assuming normal development costs and open market land and property values) in building a typical commercial property scheme. At open market values a developer would expect to achieve receipts of £1 million on the sale/rental of premises built assuming a typical 20 percent profit rate. However against this it would cost £3 million to acquire and service the site and build the premises. Hence there is a £2 million funding gap.
- 3.6 The £3 million is needed to overcome the following abnormal costs (amongst others):

- Bridge access over the railway line - £1 million
 - Acquisition (and relocation) of a third party land interest in order to access Measbury Road - £450,000
 - Off-site highways improvements - £800,000.
- 3.7 Other costs are due to the fact that the site also sits on a major aquifer, which would require protection should development occur. There are electricity capacity issues for which the cost was never clarified. There is also a ransom strip situation in having to cross the railway line – as this is owned by Shropshire County Council, it was assumed that Shropshire County Council would not expect a payment to overcome this. The funding gap could therefore be even higher than £2 million.
- 3.8 AWM was willing to subsidise the site’s development by putting in the money to negate the funding gap because of the severe need for employment land in Oswestry. However AWM can only provide such subsidy on public sector owned land. As the owners are now unwilling to sell to the public sector, the funding gap will remain and the site will prove undevelopable. Having spent 12 months working on bringing it forward, it does not feel it is possible to deliver employment land there. A view shared by other stakeholders.

Smithfield

- 3.9 The Smithfield site is on the northern edge of Oswestry Industrial Estate fronting the B4579. Although not allocated, this has long been viewed as a natural expansion area for the industrial estate, dependant upon the future of the livestock market. However it is not zoned as employment land.
- 3.10 The site is owned by Oswestry Town Council, and held on long lease by Oswestry Livestock Auctions. The 14 ha brownfield site is under-developed and there is scope to intensify its use.
- 3.11 The current plan for the Smithfield, being promoted by a consortium led by Liberty Mercian, is to improve and consolidate the livestock market to the eastern undeveloped part of the site, leaving a prime 7 ha development site. This is being promoted for retail and leisure uses, including a supermarket and cinema, together with a 2000 sqm office campus (equating to approximately 0.5 ha of employment land). Such uses would maximise the value of the land and provide Oswestry Town

Council and Oswestry Livestock Auctions with income that could not be matched by industrial and office development values.

- 3.12 Although higher value end-uses are not guaranteed, for example there are a number of sites pursuing supermarket interest in Oswestry, for the next two-to-three years this land will be stymied as the development partners try and secure higher value uses on it.

Summary

- 3.13 Oswestry's largest allocated employment site, Weston Farm, is not going to come forward for development. This 12 ha site is financially unviable to develop, and affected by too many other issues. Both the public and private sector have failed to deliver it despite numerous attempts. To maintain the Borough's employment land supply it needs to be replaced.
- 3.14 Although unallocated, the Smithfield has been viewed as an obvious future solution to Oswestry's shortage of employment land. However its owners are pursuing higher value uses which mean it will not be available for development until 2010; and even then, should the retail/leisure aspirations have failed, it may still not come forward as it remains an operational cattle market site.

4.0 EMPLOYMENT LAND SUPPLY – POTENTIAL NEW SITES

Introduction

- 4.1 Oswestry Borough Council has identified four potential locations to accommodate new employment land:
- North of Whittington Road
 - Mile End
 - Park Hall
 - North of Shrewsbury Road.
- 4.2 This section considers their marketability, availability, suitability and viability as regards meeting the shortage of employment land in Oswestry. It considers the planning and access issues, the extent of any abnormal development costs, and other issues affecting them. The Council need to bring some of this land forward in Oswestry at an early stage and that is a key factor in choosing a preferred site (or sites). Site plans are provided at Appendix 2.
- 4.3 There are two issues to be considered. Firstly, to provide suitable land to meet the immediate requirements for Richard Burbidge & Son and Elements Europe for 9.5-12.8 ha of freehold land for their manufacturing facilities. Secondly, to provide land to meet the Borough's need for 38.3 to 41.6 ha gross of employment land through to 2026.
- 4.4 All four sites are outside the development boundary for Oswestry as outlined on the Oswestry Borough Local Plan Adopted July 1999.
- 4.5 The Mile End, Oswestry Evidence Report 2007 (referred to in the Introduction) assessed three of the sites against national planning policy (PPS1, PPG4 (now superseded by PPS4), PPS7, PPS9, PPG13, PPG16, PPS22 and PPS25) as well as regional and local guidance. All three meet the criteria set. The fourth, Park Hall, is very close to Whittington Road (approximately 1000 metres) and reasonably close to existing employment and residential areas – therefore it is suggested also meets this guidance. Complete information on biodiversity issues and highways costs is lacking (and beyond the remit of this report).

North of Whittington Road

- 4.6 This is a triangular greenfield site to the north east of the town centre. It is prominent to the A5 (part of the Trans-Europe Network) that runs along its eastern border. To the south is the B4580 Whittington Road, with the B5069 Gobowen Road to the west. To the west of the site is Jones of Oswestry's depot, Kwik Fit and other commercial uses; and beyond that, residential areas. Opposite the site, south of Whittington Road, is housing, a car dealership and an electricity substation.
- 4.7 The site can be accessed relatively easily off the B4580 Whittington Road, although would be affected by the overriding strategic highways capacity issues along the A5.
- 4.8 The site is generally flat, agricultural land with no obvious development constraints (although overhead power lines cross the eastern side). It is in a prominent gateway location to the town. However it is just to the south east of the Iron Age Hill Fort – and development would require careful treatment so there was no adverse visual impact on this historic landscape feature – a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It would also need to consider the Green Corridor Urban Green Network that runs along its western boundary.
- 4.9 The land is owned by G F Kempster & Son, farmers based at Oldport Farm on part of the wider development area being promoted through the LDF. Its intention is to promote all its landholding in a combined employment and housing development, which would prevent them being left with a small amount of (consequently) unviable piecemeal agricultural land. However it would bring forward just the employment land site on its own if required.
- 4.10 A substantial amount of work has been carried out to promote this site, which G F Kempster & Son see as balancing employment land provision in the town. It would provide employment land to the north of the town, rather than it mostly being in the south, as at present. Various investigations have been carried out and there are no abnormal development constraints – environmental, ecological, archaeological, ground conditions, etc. A Landscape and Visual Assessment has also been undertaken to show how the location next to the Hill Fort can be managed. There are believed to be no abnormal costs associated with providing utilities (drainage, telecoms, gas, electricity, water) to the site. Although the site is gently sloping, this can be overcome with terraced development. The indicative masterplan nets the 17.1 ha gross site area down to 12.9 ha.

4.11 There could also be an opportunity to expand the employment area, as Jones of Oswestry is potentially looking to relocate and redevelop its adjoining site. The company has recently been bought by Technocover, based in Welshpool. It is Technocover's intention to relocate Jones of Oswestry's galvanising plant to its Welshpool factory. However this requires Technocover to buy adjacent premises, relocate the occupier and secure planning permission first. Consequently it is not expected that the Oswestry site will be released for 2-3 years. Technocover has had preliminary discussions with the Council and Advantage West Midlands about developing the front 0.8 ha for trade counter/retail uses, leaving the rear 2 ha for employment uses (including potentially an Enterprise Centre).

Mile End

4.12 This 12.4 ha greenfield site is to the south east of Oswestry in a gateway location. The A5 (part of the Trans-Europe Network) runs along the western and southern boundary. It is opposite Mile End Services, and diagonally opposite Oswestry Industrial Estate. North and east is open countryside, primarily grazing land.

4.13 The site is currently used for grazing and is mainly grassland with some hedgerows. It is generally flat, levels vary by 4.2 metres. Overhead power lines cross the site, running in a southeast/northeast direction. There are also some small ponds beyond the northern boundary. There are believed to be no abnormal costs associated with providing utilities (drainage, telecoms, gas, electricity, water) to the site. However, as mentioned, power lines cross the site (this issue could be designed out by providing a spine access road underneath the power lines corridor). There are no known major ecological or archaeological constraints.

4.14 Although to the east of the A5, and so could be perceived to be outside the natural development boundary to the town, it has limited visual impact on surrounding areas due to its proximity to existing development.

4.15 There are difficulties associated with accessing the site due to the need to upgrade the roundabout at the junction of the A5/A483(T)/B4579. Alternatively access could come off the A5. The Highways Agency states that if access is to come off the trunk road network, the only realistic solution, it needs to be carefully considered. This could come off the Mile End roundabout or the A5(T) depending on the scale and nature of development. It must allow the free flow of traffic and safety.

- 4.16 Although some distance from the housing areas in Oswestry it is near the area of proposed housing growth for the town – North of Shrewsbury Road.
- 4.17 Owned by the Council, a proactive owner, it is willing to bring forward the land in line with its economic development remit in conjunction with Shropshire County Council and AWM.
- 4.18 Arup's Mile End, Oswestry Evidence Report considered the masterplanning of this site. It assessed the developable area, and due to various constraints (e.g. power lines, need for access roads) netted the site down to just 5.03 ha. If this remains the case, and a redesigned masterplan cannot increase the net figure, the site may need to be enlarged to create a more feasible development opportunity. This should be possible given the nature of the surrounding area, however this land is not owned by the Council or another public sector organisation (which may impact on delivery timescales).

Park Hall

- 4.19 The greenfield, 8.6 ha Park Hall site is flat, agricultural land to the north of the A495 which runs from Oswestry to Whittington. Although only 1000 metres from the Land at Whittington Road, it is not prominent to the A5, and therefore obviously also slightly further away from Oswestry town, its housing areas and workforce.
- 4.20 The site is surrounded by employment uses to the west; housing and leisure to the north; and a travellers camp to the east. The land is owned by Shropshire County Council and it is willing to bring forward the land for employment uses in line with its economic development remit. There is believed to be no development constraints, and there are no planning issues identified in the Local Plan constraining development. However the site is likely to share the same issues over strategic highways capacity and the need for improvements to Whittington roundabout as for the site North of Whittington Road, albeit Park Hall is slightly smaller (8.6 ha compared to 12.9 ha net) and therefore unlikely to generate as much extra traffic.

North of Shrewsbury Road

- 4.21 This greenfield 3.4 ha site is to the south east of Oswestry. It is opposite Oswestry Industrial Estate, and diagonally opposite Mile End Services. The A5 (part of the Trans-Europe Network) runs along its eastern boundary, the B4579 runs along its

southern boundary. North and west is agricultural land, a large proportion of which is owned by the Tomley family. Beyond this there is new residential development, the Walford & Shropshire College and a leisure centre.

- 4.22 The site is currently used for grazing and is mainly grassland with some hedgerows. It is generally flat, levels vary by around five metres. It has limited visual impact on surrounding areas due to its proximity to existing development.
- 4.23 The site is owned by Oswestry Borough Council. There are believed to be no abnormal costs associated with providing utilities (drainage, telecoms, gas, electricity, water) to the site. There are also no known major ecological or archaeological constraints. The Council are a proactive owner, looking to bring forward the land in line with its economic development remit. There are however difficulties associated with accessing the site due to the need to upgrade the roundabout at the junction of the A5/A483(T)/B4579 (according to Shropshire County Council). Alternatively access could come off the B4579. Indeed the Highways Agency prefers that this should come off the B4579, at a reasonable distance from the Mile End roundabout. The preferred solution would be a new roundabout at the Shrewsbury Road/Maes-y-Clawdd junction. This would however require the access road to come through land owned by the Tomley family.
- 4.24 As mentioned above, the Tomley family own 23 ha surrounding the Council's site. This land is optioned to J. Ross Developments. J. Ross Developments is promoting an approximately 40 ha mixed-use development of housing, employment and ancillary retail and leisure facilities through the LDF process. Although there will be some employment land included in this scheme, it is intended to be for high quality uses, e.g. offices, car showrooms, light industrial, etc, which will sit comfortably alongside the housing proposed. The employment element is expected to be of between 4 and 6 ha, running along the Shrewsbury Road and A5 frontages. The intention is for this 4-6 ha to include the Council's 3.4 ha site (North of Shrewsbury Road), but there is no formal agreement in place as yet for this to happen.
- 4.25 In light of these circumstances the Council do not see this site being considered for development for at least two or three years. The Council will require clarification as to what is happening (and the development) of the surrounding land, i.e. when the wider area is masterplanned, in order to proceed further. This masterplanning is unlikely to happen before 2010.

Summary

- 4.26 Given that the Council need to deliver 9.5-12.8 ha of freehold B2 use employment land as soon as possible, there are only two possible options, Mile End and Park Hall. Both are public sector owned, which allows control and removes third party decisions and vagaries of the market. It is the only way the Council can be certain of providing employment land, freehold, for manufacturing use quickly. The other two sites are private sector controlled, and may be affected by developer aspirations and the credit crunch, meaning they may not actually come forward as expected or freehold options, for example, may not be offered.
- 4.27 Mile End is preferred, based on the fact that it is more commercially attractive than Park Hall – it is prominent, close to Oswestry Industrial Estate and not affected by neighbouring uses. The planning considerations are more circumspect, Mile End seems to be a significant break to the town's natural development boundary; Park Hall scores worse in terms of a sequential test approach.
- 4.28 Mile End can deliver 12.4 ha of employment land to meet the immediate business needs and is a reasonably close fit to the amount of land required by Richard Burbidge & Co and Elements Europe.
- 4.29 Future land needs could be met by North of Whittington Road, 12.9 ha (including up to a further 2 ha regenerated on Jones of Oswestry's site); Park Hall, 8.6 ha; and North of Shrewsbury Road, 4-6 ha potentially.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Employment Land Need

- 5.1 There is a headline land need to 2026 of 28.8 ha. This is based on regional guidance, which is informed by historic employment land take-up rates.
- 5.2 There are also two short-term atypically large land requirements totalling 9.5-12.8 ha that need satisfying if Oswestry is to retain the jobs in the town. Although this might equate to the average historic take-up rate over the long-term, equally they are so large that the take-up rate would be pushed substantially upwards over time. To be safe this additional 9.5-12.8 ha should be added to the overall RSS land need stated above.
- 5.3 The overall gross land need for the Borough of Oswestry is therefore 38.3-41.6 ha. Previous guidance suggests most of this should be provided in the town of Oswestry itself.

Existing Employment Land Supply

- 5.4 There is 13.8 ha in the Borough, this excludes Weston Farm (12 ha) and Old Coalyard, Llanymynech (1.58 ha) which are not capable of being developed viably. Furthermore Smithfield (which was previously seen as an obvious future allocation) is unlikely to come forward for development over the next 2-4 years as it is being promoted for higher value retail and leisure uses.
- 5.5 Therefore there is a need to find extra employment land. Both to meet the overall additional land need for the Borough and to replace unviable sites (including Weston Farm). This results in a need for a further 24.5-27.8 ha net of land to 2026.
- 5.6 There are two issues to be considered in providing suitable land. Overall there needs to be enough to meet requirements to 2026; and there needs to be land that can be serviced and made available quickly, i.e. within the next 12-24 months, to meet the needs of Richard Burbidge & Sons and Elements Europe. This 'quick' land, or at least 9.5-12.8 ha of it, must be available freehold.

Future Employment Land Supply

- 5.7 Four options have been considered to satisfy this overall land need. Although it can contribute to the long-term supply, Land North of Shrewsbury Road cannot satisfy the

'quick' need as it is stymied by the need to masterplan the wider area before it can be accessed and serviced. There are also issues with Land North of Whittington Road with regards to this. Although the agent says just the employment land site can be sold independent of the other housing sites that surround it, this still involves a third party private sector interest, reducing the level of control and certainty the Council will have in guaranteeing the delivery to market of this land. The owner's aim is to maximise the value of the land, and this could delay proceedings.

- 5.8 Consequently in order to satisfy the 'quick', short-term needs, there are two remaining choices: Mile End and Park Hall. Both are owned by the public sector, and both Oswestry Borough Council and Shropshire County Council are willing to bring these sites forward for employment and provide freehold plots at open market value. Both are outside the natural development boundary that is the A5, although Park Hall is surrounded by existing development. However Mile End is the more attractive, marketable site, and it is also closer to Oswestry's existing concentration of industry. In terms of a sequential test approach Mile End is also preferred over Park Hall. Public sector ownership is crucial as this ensures maximum control and reduces the risk of abortive work where third parties delay the delivery of development land as happened at Weston Farm.
- 5.9 The preferred 'quick' choice is therefore Mile End. This can provide 12.4 ha of land soon to meet the immediate needs of Richard Burbidge & Sons and Elements Europe of 9.5-12.8 ha. The only caveat to this is to review Arup's work that netted the developable area down to only 5 ha. If this can not be remasterplanned it would mean needing to enlarge the site onto non-public sector owned land that could lead to complications and delays.
- 5.10 However there is a need for a further 12.1-15.4 ha (on top of the 12.4 ha highlighted above) to provide sufficient land to 2026. It is assumed that 4-6 ha will come forward at Land North of Shrewsbury Road in time. This means that land at Whittington Road (12.9 ha) will also be needed to deliver enough employment land through to 2026. This land should respond to market conditions, providing a mix of office and industrial options. It should also offer both leasehold and freehold land and premises.
- 5.11 The Park Hall site is not preferred because it is more isolated from the residential areas of Oswestry than the other options. It is also less marketable, given its lack of prominence and mixed surroundings. However it is a suitable employment land site,

should further land be needed, or other options not come to fruition – it is just not as good as the alternative options.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Oswestry Borough Council should deallocate Weston Farm and Old Coal Yard, Llanymynech.
- 6.2 The Council should then allocate an additional 27.8 ha of employment land to meet need through to 2026.
- 6.3 To meet the short-term employment land needs of Oswestry the Council should bring forward 12.4 ha of employment land at Mile End to meet the urgent, immediate requirements of two of the town's key employers. Should the development of this site prove problematical, the second choice would be to bring forward Park Hall. As this is also public sector owned, control and delivery can be guaranteed. However it is not large enough to completely satisfy the demands of the two key property requirements, and so is not an ideal solution.
- 6.4 In meeting the long-term employment land needs of Oswestry the Council should also allocate both North of Shrewsbury Road and North of Whittington Road to provide the balance through to 2026 (assuming Mile End does also come forward). (Note: Park Hall is not included here, as it is less attractive than these two sites in meeting Oswestry's long-term needs. However it remains suitable for employment use, and may in fact be needed to provide for the town's short-term requirements, should Mile End not come forward, or for the longer term needs should the other sites not come forward as planned).

Appendix 1

Consultees

Appendix 2

Site Plans