Strengthening planning policy for brownfield development

26 March 2024

Summary

- The logistics sector believes that fundamental reform of the planning system is required to ensure better efficiency of freight movements and to support decarbonisation.
- Logistics UK is concerned that a presumption towards building housing on brownfield land will make the situation worse, harming growth and leading to communities without the core infrastructure they need to thrive.
- Local planning authorities must be resourced and equipped with the right level of expertise to engage with the logistics industry, to both ensure the sector has space to grow and that other developments are conducive to freight efficiency.

About Logistics UK

Logistics UK is one of the country's largest business groups, supporting, shaping and standing up for safe and efficient logistics. We are the only organisation representing the entire logistics sector.

We represent a sector delivering an increasingly innovative, productive and sustainable system of essential national infrastructure. This system ensures the availability of the products that households, businesses and public services rely on every day, and is supporting the UK's transformation for the future. Our membership of over 21,000 includes global, national and regional businesses and SMEs spanning the road, rail, sea and air industries as well as the buyers of freight services, such as retailers and manufacturers.

Response to consultation

Planning reform is vital for enabling logistics to invest in and develop sites in a swift and agile way. This is currently inhibited by slow decision-making and local plans not sufficiently protecting space for logistics sites. The planning system has, according to a 2022 Savills report, already suppressed growth in the industrial and logistics sector by 29%, and we are concerned that a presumption towards building housing on brownfield land will make the situation worse, harming growth and leading to communities without the core infrastructure they need to thrive.

The planning system must ensure that it achieves a fair balance between housing needs and industrial usage. During consultation with Logistics UK members last year, many examples were cited of local plans that had spoken positively about the needs of the freight sector, but subsequent revisions had removed site protections and allocations in favour of housing developments, with the London Plan a prime example of this. While there is an inherent need for flexibility in local plans, this must not come at the expense of logistics sites, which are ultimately needed to service growing communities.

There often exists a poor understanding of the current and future needs of the sector and its role in the local economy. There needs to be a far stronger level of engagement between planning authorities and the logistics sector, as well as a thorough review of the data collected and utilised in setting local plans, to ensure they allocate sufficient space for the expansion and future development of logistics sites as well as anticipating economic trends and infrastructure requirements. In doing so, local plans should achieve the balance outlined above.

While we recognise the need to provide an adequate housing supply for communities, without adequate protection for logistics sites, or land suitable for their development, there is a real danger that ability of the logistics industry to operate efficiently and sustainably will be harmed.

It is therefore essential that the proposed policy changes towards brownfield land contain safeguards to ensure that new developments do not come at the expense of land which has either previously been earmarked for logistics, or which

could support the growth of the sector. This is particularly the case where housing could be delivered on alternative sites within a local area.

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