

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

PREFERRED OPTIONS (NOVEMBER 2021)

WOLVERHAMPTON AIRPORT, HALFPENNY GREEN, BOBBINGTON

ON BEHALF OF LILACTAME LTD

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

Prepared by: Pegasus Group



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This representation is made by Pegasus Group on behalf of Lilactame Ltd in regard to the South Staffordshire Local Plan – Preferred Options Consultation. It specifically relates to Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport which Lilactame Ltd owns and is promoting for a mixed use development designed to facilitate and support the continued aviation and employment operations at the Airport site.

1.2 These representations respond to the following documents including addressing the questions set out within the Preferred Option document:-

- The Preferred Option (November 2021)
- Duty to Cooperate Paper 2021
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2021
- Rural Services and Facilities Audit 2021
- Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2021

1.3 These representations are prepared in the context of the requirements of the Local Plan to be legally compliant and sound. Paragraph 35 of the NPPF sets out the tests of soundness. For a plan to be sound it must be:

- a) Possibly prepared - providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the areas objectively assessed needs (such needs should be assessed using a clear and justified method); and is informed by agreement with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

- b) Justified – an appropriate strategy taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the Statement of Common Ground; and
- d) Consistent with national policy – enabling delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

1.4 These representations also give consideration to the legal and procedural requirements associated with the plan making process.

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The South Staffordshire Local Plan comprises of the Core Strategy (adopted December 2012) and the Site Allocations Document (adopted September 2018).

2.2 Policy SAD1 of the Site Allocations Document requires the Council to carry out an early review of the Local Plan, which must be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by the end of 2021. The review must be comprehensive and consider of the need for additional growth and plan appropriately for it. This plan review will, as a minimum, consider the following matters:

- South Staffordshire's own objectively assessed housing need.
- The potential role of housing supply options within the District to meet unmet cross-boundary needs from the wider Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (GBHMA), including the Black Country.
- Employment land requirements for South Staffordshire, as identified through a comprehensive Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA).
- South Staffordshire's potential role in meeting wider unmet employment needs through the Duty to Cooperate.
- The appropriateness of the existing settlement hierarchy and strategic distribution of growth in light of new housing and employment needs
- The need for further additional safeguarded housing and employment land for longer term development needs, and the role of safeguarded land in meeting housing shortfalls across the GBHMA, including South Staffordshire's own needs.

- Gypsy, traveller and travelling show people provision.
- A comprehensive Green Belt review undertaken jointly with the Black Country Authorities to inform any further Green Belt release to accommodate new development within the District.

Local Plan Review

2.3 South Staffordshire District Council commenced an Issues and Options Consultation between Monday 8th October and Friday 13th November 2018. Representations were made by Pegasus Group on behalf of Lilactame to this consultation in respect of Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport. This document was followed by the Spatial Housing Strategy and Infrastructure Consultation Document which was consulted upon towards the end of 2019. Again, Pegasus Group made representations on behalf of Lilactame and specifically in connection with Wolverhampton Airport.

Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport – Current Policy Context

2.4 The adopted Core Strategy makes numerous provisions for supporting development at Wolverhampton Airport. Core Policy 12 of the adopted CS specifically relates to Wolverhampton Airport, along with Policies EV13 and EV14. This policy context provides support for the continued aviation use of the site and the continued occupation of buildings by established non-aviation uses, where consistent with national planning policies. Within the developed area, the Council will support proposals for aviation uses including the replacement of existing outdated buildings and high quality infill development where the proposals are consistent with national policy and other local planning policies and will not have a detrimental impact on the environment and nearby residents.

2.5 The adopted Site Allocations Document (Inset Plan 43) also identifies Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport. Inset plan 43 details the specific areas referred to in Core Policy 12 and Policies EV13 and EV14 of the CS.

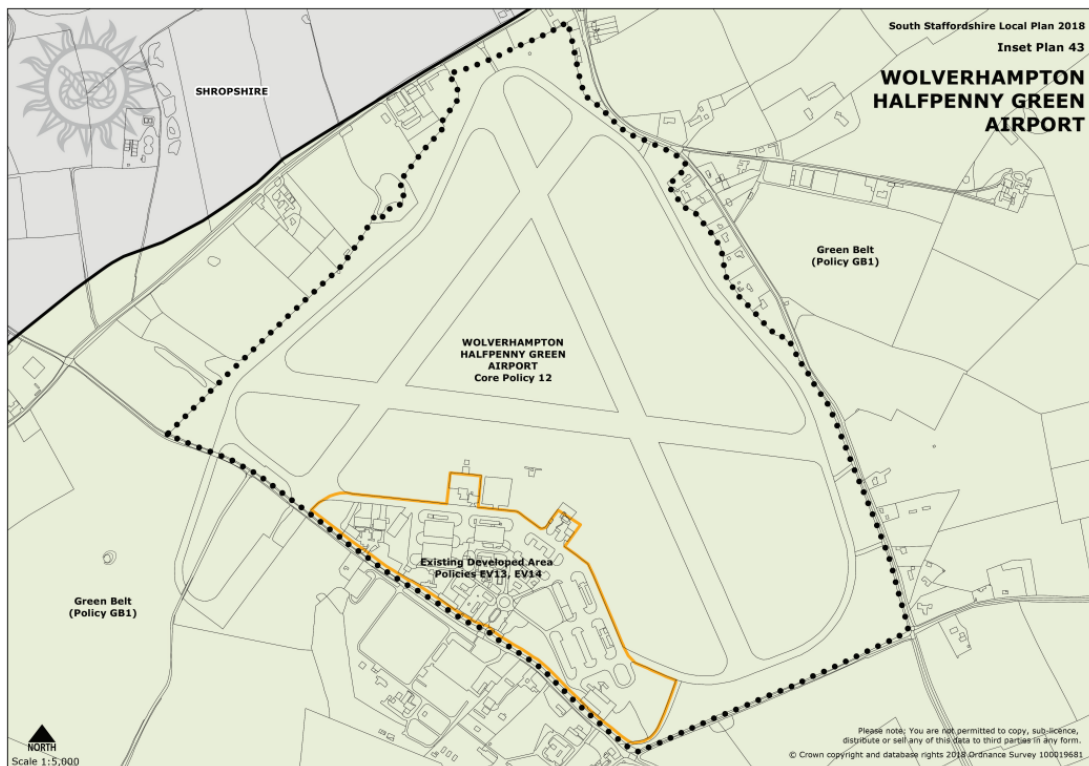


Figure 1 : Site Allocations Proposals Map Inset Plan 43, Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport

The Emerging Local Plan

2.6 The Spatial Housing Strategy and Infrastructure Delivery document, which was published in 2019, sets out the Council's preferred spatial strategy for distributing growth, identifying that the District would provide a 4,000 home contribution towards unmet needs within with GBHMA. The preferred spatial option for distributing the growth was to focus development on large strategic sites that would deliver new and improved infrastructure including in areas near to the source of unmet housing needs in the Black Country, as well as limited growth in smaller villages to ensure the Council's requirement to delivering 10% of homes on small sites is met. It also included a proposed infrastructure led development with a garden village area of search beyond the plan period.

2.7 The current Preferred Options Consultation follows on from the previous

iterations of the Local Plan. It includes the proposed site allocations to meet the preferred strategy, including what additional infrastructure may be required. It also fully identifies the development strategy and site specific policies as well as setting out the direction of travel for Development Management Policies.

3.0 THE PREFERRED OPTIONS

- 3.1 Map 1 on page 13 of the Preferred Options identifies the South Staffordshire Context Map and Proposed Settlement Hierarchy which would include strategic employment sites. It is notable that Wolverhampton Airport (referred to as Bobbington Airport) is identified on this key diagram.

Question 1: Do you agree that the evidence base set out in Appendix A is appropriate to inform the new Local Plan?

Please provide comments on the content or use of the evidence base set out in Appendix A referencing the document you are referring to.

- 3.2 In the context of Wolverhampton Airport it is notable that the site, whilst being recognised as one of the 30 employment sites which were assessed in the EDNA, it did not feature in any more detailed assessment carried out as part as the EDNA process. In addition, the EDNA identified the site as being 11.67 ha. whilst the subsequent Employment Site Assessment Topic Paper 2021 referred to it as having an area of 1.7 ha. It is unclear why the figures have changed so significantly nor why the site was not considered in further detail bearing in mind its scale and in particular the uniqueness of having a business airport within the District along with supporting aviation related employment uses. The special status of the Airport has been recognised previously in the Core Strategy and it clearly also gained recognition in the emerging plan through identification on Map 1. However, the evidence base relating to both the employment and economic elements of the plan including the Economic Development and Needs Assessment and Employment Site Assessment Topic Paper found do not properly reflect or assesses the Airport's significance. This failure is also found in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA 2021). It is important that the Airport is properly reassessed in the evidence base bearing in mind its significance.

- 3.3 In view of the above it is not considered that the evidence base is appropriate as things stand.

Question 2:

(a) Do you agree that the correct infrastructure to be delivered alongside proposed site allocations has been identified in the IDP?

(b) Is there any other infrastructure not covered in this consultation document or the IDP that the Local Plan should seek to deliver?

- 3.4 The evidence base and the emerging Preferred Options Document do not identify Wolverhampton Airport for any form of growth. As a consequence no additional infrastructure has been identified to support growth at the Airport. For the reasons stated throughout these representations, there is a unique opportunity at the Airport to secure appropriate growth to support the existing facilities and support specialised employment in the aviation sector. As a result of the Airport site not being identified for growth and development to deliver these objectives, the IDP cannot be properly developed to support such aspirations.

Question 3:

(a) Have the correct Vision and Strategic Objectives been identified?

(b) Do you agree that the draft policies (Chapters 4 and 5) and the policy directions (Chapter 6) will deliver these objectives?

- 3.5 Strategic objective 7 identifies the need to support the vitality of rural areas

by enabling the sustainable growth and diversification of rural businesses including supporting tourism and agriculture. The Plan also identifies the need to diversify the rural economy which can in turn help reduce the need to travel. Wolverhampton Airport being an existing large employer within a rural area provides a clear opportunity to meet with these objectives which the preferred option has failed to grasp.

- 3.6 Detailed responses are made later in these representations to the draft policies and policy direction set out in chapters 4-6.

Development Strategy

- 3.7 Paragraph 4.3 of the Development Strategy states that the Council has looked to allocate suitable brownfield sites to reduce pressure on the District's Green Belt but has indicated that these are very limited due to the largely rural nature of the District and that most large scale site options on brownfield land are either in isolated rural locations or form part of the District's employment land supply and need to be retained.

- 3.8 As set out earlier in these representations, the evidence base does not suggest that Wolverhampton Airport has been properly assessed in the context of this statement. It represents a large brownfield site which would be used to meet growth requirements.

Question 4: Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS1 – Green Belt and Policy DS2 – Open Countryside?

If not, please explain how these policies should be amended.

- 3.9 Policy DS1 ought to be amended to make explicit the benefits that can accrue from the redevelopment of previously developed sites located in the Green Belt. The policy already provides further guidance in regard to infilling in

villages and this could be expanded to make reference to previously developed sites and the benefits that can accrue both in terms of openness but also other environmental benefits.

Question 5: Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS3 – the Spatial Strategy to 2038?

If no, please explain how this policy should be amended.

- 3.10 The Spatial Strategy relies solely on identifying new residential development in connection with existing settlements or on the edge of existing settlements which are located outside of the District e.g. the West Midlands conurbation of Stafford. The policy identifies that other than the forms of residential development identified as being acceptable in rural areas in the NPPF, isolated housing growth away from the District's rural settlements will not be supported. This approach does not reflect the benefits that can accrue from residential development on certain previously developed sites, which could be utilised to fund improvements to key employment sectors. It is particularly relevant in regard to Wolverhampton Airport which supports a range of aviation associated businesses. The Airport is in need of capital investment which could come about as a result of enabling residential development and Policy DS3 should be amended to reference this particular unique circumstance.

Question 6: Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS4 – longer term growth aspirations for a new settlement?

If no, please explain how this policy should be amended.

- 3.11 The policy identifies a long-term aspiration of the Council to explore options

for an independent new settlement. The policy identifies that the focus for this new settlement should be formed by the A449 and West Coast Mainline between Wolverhampton and Stafford.

- 3.12 The policy as drafted fails to recognise the potential to utilise other locations within the District to provide similar facilities. This could include Wolverhampton Airport which represents a substantial area of brownfield land. The redevelopment of the site could result in environmental benefits albeit this would be assessed against the harm to economic objectives of losing the Airport and its particular aviation role along with the existing associated employment operations.

Question 10: Do you support the proposed allocation in Policy SA7?
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- 3.13 Policy SA7 refers to the West Midlands interchange which is being progressed through a Development Consent Order (DCO) which was granted permission in May 2020. This represents the only strategic employment allocation within the District and it already has planning permission.

- 3.14 An additional employment policy should be developed to specifically steer new development at the Wolverhampton Airport site. This represents a unique opportunity to foster aviation related employment at a site already established as suitable for such a role. There is a need for additional investment at the site which could be enabled through associated housing development. A specific policy which would promote this approach it required in the Preferred Options if this opportunity is not to be realised. Without such encouragement in policy terms, the restrictive nature of Green Belt policy is likely to stifle any new investment at the site. This needs to be remedied through an additional employment allocation at Wolverhampton Airport which would also allow for enabling residential development to facilitate investment.

4.0 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES IN PREFERRED OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Preferred Options include Policy EC1 which will be aimed at ensuring there is a sufficient supply of employment land to meet the needs of the economy, to encourage inward investment and support identified potential growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing including Auto Aero and Agri-Tech. The policy identifies that preference be given to the use of previously developed land.
- 4.2 Policy EC2 seeks to protect existing designated employment areas which would include Wolverhampton Airport.
- 4.3 The Preferred Option summary of Policy EC8 – Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport states it will maintain the existing approach set out in adopted Core Strategy Policy EV13. The text within the new Policy EC8 states the Council would support development proposals related to general aviation and existing businesses but only within developed areas of the site as defined on the current policies map. However, the adopted Core Strategy includes 3 policies dealing with the Airport (Core Policy 12, EV13 and EV14). The Preferred Options only refers to EV13 and this Policy only supports development directly related to the General Aviator's role of the Airport. EV13 also states that replacement of existing buildings will be permitted along with 'high quality infill development where proposals are consistent with national and other local planning policy'. This approach does not remove the NPPF's policy requirement for new development on PDL sites to not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt. This could inhibit development options.
- 4.4 In addition, as drafted the Preferred Options does not refer to Policy EV14 of the CS. Policy EV14, as well as referring to existing aviation businesses, also states that the continued occupation of the site by existing non-aviation uses that support the viability and sustainability of the Airport will be accepted where it is consistent with national policy.

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- 4.5 New policies in the emerging Local Plan must recognise, as did EV14, that non-aviation businesses also have an important role to play at the Airport. If the Airport is to make a suitable contribution towards meeting employment need in the south of District, it will require a more flexible approach to non-aviation employment uses. If the Airport is to continue fulfilling its General Aviation role it is essential it secures investment to allow for the repair and upgrade of runways and buildings at the site. This can only be achieved through new development, both related to the Aviation Sector but also other commercial uses which can complement the existing site. The policy should be drafted to reflect this objective.
- 4.6 For the reasons previously set out, Wolverhampton Airport represents a significant opportunity to provide employment in the south of the District and particularly in the aviation sector. Continuing with a more restricted version of the previous policy approach in the Core Strategy will not deliver the significant investment in the site which is needed or the opportunities which could be progressed in association with aviation or other commercial sectors. The Council have identified in draft policy EC1 that they seek to foster growth in sectors such as advanced manufacturing including Auto-Aero. The Wolverhampton Airport site represents a significant opportunity to deliver this objective, if adequate investment in buildings and infrastructure can be secured.
- 4.7 The Council's approach in retaining the existing Green Belt policy context set out in the Core Strategy, and particularly Policy EV13, will not realise these significant opportunities. The policies within the adopted Core Strategy are all caveated by stating that new development must comply with national policy set out in the NPPF. As Wolverhampton Airport is in the Green Belt Green Belt policy would apply, which in turn would prohibit the development of any new buildings or structures which could have any adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt. This does not deliver the flexibility required to sustain the Airport, as very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated for every new building which impacted on openness. The Council should take a more proactive approach in making clear that new development at Wolverhampton Airport which supported the role of the Airport and its economic significance,

particularly in emerging high-tech sectors such as the Auto-Aero sector, would be acceptable in principle development. Such a policy, which makes clear that Green Belt policy would not restrict such key economic initiatives, would foster investment at the Airport site, create jobs in the rural area in the south of the District and would potentially reduce the need to travel.

Potential Improvements to Access to the Airport

- 4.8 The main access route to the airport is along Crab Lane and on Six Ashes Road from the east which joins the B4176. The site frontage on Crab Lane is a relatively straight alignment with a verge area and this provides an opportunity for introducing new access points into the site. Transport consultants, Vectos, acting on behalf of Lilactame Ltd have considered a potential off-site mitigation strategy to improve the Six Ashes Road / Crab Lane and Crab Lane / Gospel Ash Road junctions, as well as an outline proposal for introducing some traffic calming measures for Crab Lane to improve road safety and provide a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists around the site.
- 4.9 A 2km walk catchment from the existing main site access on Crab Lane is to the centre of Bobbington Village and the associated amenities in line with the maximum acceptable distance for walking trips set out in the Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) guidance document 'Providing for Journeys on Foot'. It is considered that there are potential opportunities for providing improvements to footway provision on Crab Lane and Six Ashes Road between the airport site and Bobbington Village.
- 4.10 The owners of the airport have explored public transport options to improve travel choice to the airport, to provide alternatives to the private car. A community based rural Dial-a-Ride scheme has been reviewed in more detail by Vectos including engagement with Staffordshire County Council Highways. The proposal could potentially comprise of a service to be operated by a local taxi company using a larger size taxi vehicle (8 seater). The Dial-a-Ride service could be available to the wider community with opportunities for patronage from Bobbington Village, and the Dial-a-Ride service could also be linked to Home to School transport service provision. The commercial aspects of a Dial-

a-Ride public transport proposal have been initially reviewed and it is considered that it could be established as a long-term service (10 to 15 years) to serve the airport. A mini-bus service operated by the airport is also a proposal that Lilactame Ltd are supportive of in principle.

- 4.11 In addition, to support and promote sustainable travel practices amongst employees at the site, a Travel Plan would be implemented as part of any future development proposals. The Travel Plan would include a package of measures that will be implemented to encourage travel to / from the site by sustainable transport modes. This would include promoting car sharing and ultra low and zero emission vehicles, which are defined as sustainable modes of transport in the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021).

Enabling Development

- 4.12 It has already been established in previous representations (and through the submission of a planning application) that the Airport may require enabling development if its potential is to be realised. The site represents one of the few general aviation airfields which is operational within the West Midlands area. With investment it could become a significant economic asset to the District, assisting in rural diversification and providing high-tech skilled employment opportunities. To achieve these objectives requires a bespoke policy approach which the Preferred Option does not currently achieve.

Conclusions on Policy Approach

- 4.13 A revised policy approach which would address many of the issues in these representations would be as follows:

New development of Wolverhampton Airport within the Existing Development Area will be supported in principle where it complies with the following principles.

- The development would directly support the general aviation role of the Airport, or
- The proposal would provide opportunities for the expansion of existing businesses present at the Airport or other businesses located in the local area, or
- The development would directly secure investment in the existing aviation related facilities at the Airport which would support its role as an Airport and its long-term viability and
- It would provide for improved access to the Airport site by modes other than the private car.

5.0 SUSTAINIBILITY APPRAISAL

5.1 The LPR Consultation is supported by a Sustainability Appraisal, prepared by Lepus Consulting¹ ('the SA'). The purpose of the SA is stated as being to appraise the sustainability performance of all potential site allocations for development. The potential sites are assessed in relation to each of the stated objectives in the SA Framework as follows:

- **SA Objective 1. Climate change mitigation:** Minimise the Plan area's contribution to climate change;
- **SA Objective 2. Climate change adaptation:** Plan for the anticipated impacts of climate change;
- **SA Objective 3. Biodiversity and geodiversity:** Protect, enhance and manage the biodiversity and geodiversity asses of the Plan area, including flora and fauna;
- **SA Objective 4. Landscape:** Conserve, enhance and manage the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening its distinctiveness;
- **SA Objective 5. Pollution and waste:** Ensure sustainable management of waste whilst minimising the extent and impacts of water, air and noise pollution.
- **SA Objective 6. Natural resources:** Protect, enhance and ensure the efficient use of the Plan area's land, soils and water;
- **SA Objective 7. Housing:** Provide a range of housing to meet the needs of the community;
- **SA Objective 8. Health:** Safeguard and improve physical and mental health of residents;
- **SA Objective 9. Cultural heritage:** Conserve, enhance and manage sites, features and areas of historic and cultural importance;
- **SA Objective 10. Transport and accessibility:** Improve choice and efficiency of sustainable transport in the Plan area and reduce the need to travel;
- **SA Objective 11. Education:** Improve education, skills and

¹ Sustainability Appraisal of the South Staffordshire Local Plan Review – Preferred Options Plan, Regulation 18 (III) SA Report, August 2021

qualifications in the Plan area; and

- **SA Objective 12. Economy and employment:** Support a strong, diverse, vibrant and sustainable local economy to foster balanced economic growth.

5.2 The SA also appraises the draft development management policies and their likely outcomes.

5.3 The significance of effects is scored as follows:

Significance	Definition (Not Necessarily Exhaustive)
Major Negative --	The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanently degrade, diminish or destroy the integrity of a quality receptor, such as a feature of international, national or regional importance; • Cause a very high-quality receptor to be permanently diminished; • Be unable to be entirely mitigated; • Be discordant with the existing setting; and/or • Contribute to a cumulative significant effect.
Minor Negative -	The size, nature and location of development proposals would be likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not quite fit into the existing location or with existing receptor qualities; and/or • Affect undesignated yet recognised local receptors.
Negligible 0	Either no impacts are anticipated, or any impacts are anticipated to be negligible
Uncertain +/-	It is entirely uncertain whether impacts would be positive or adverse
Minor Positive +	The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve undesignated yet recognised receptor qualities at the local scale; • Fit into, or with, the existing location and existing receptor qualities; and/or • Enable the restoration of valued characteristic features.
Major Positive ++	The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and redefine the location in a positive manner, making a contribution at a national or

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> international scale; Restore valued receptors which were degraded through previous uses; and/or Improve one or more key elements/features/characteristics of a receptor with recognised quality such as a specific international, national or regional designation.
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Table 5.1: Guide to scoring significance of effects

- 5.4 The SA represents an update to previous iterations of the SA which have supported previous consultation versions of the LPR.
- 5.5 Wolverhampton Airport as a site is not directly assessed within the SA. Instead, the impact of Policy EC8 *Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Business Airport'* is assessed. This assessment is reproduced in Figure 6.1 below.

Policy Reference	1 Climate Change Mitigation	2 Climate Change Adaptation	3 Biodiversity & geodiversity	4 Landscape & Townscape	5 Pollution & Waste	6 Natural Resources	7 Housing	8 Health & Wellbeing	9 Cultural Heritage	10 Transport & Accessibility	11 Education	12 Economy & employment
EC8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+

Figure 5.1: Significance of effects of Policy EC8

- 5.6 As set out previously within this Representation, Policy EC8 seeks to maintain the existing approach set out in adopted Core Strategy Policy EV13. This would support development proposals related to general aviation and existing businesses but only within developed areas of the site as defined on the current policies map.
- 5.7 Given that this Policy is pro-development, albeit limited to general aviation and existing business, it is not understood how all but one of the 12 objectives could be considered to score '0'. A score of 0 suggests that *"Either no impacts are anticipated, or any impacts are anticipated to be negligible"*.

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- 5.8 These scores are duly contested by Lilactame. For example, the development or expansion of existing business premises (which, it should be noted, are in a poor state of repair and confined to historical aircraft hangars) represents an opportunity for the provision of increased levels of green infrastructure, energy efficiency and reduced energy usage. These would all be of benefit to sustainability objective 1 – Climate Change Mitigation.
- 5.9 Similarly, development represents an opportunity to deliver net gains for biodiversity (objective 3), remediate any existing pollution or waste (objective 5) and re-use previously developed land (objective 6).
- 5.10 It is therefore submitted that the SA has not appropriately considered the positive impacts of Policy EC8, notwithstanding comments elsewhere within this Representation regarding how Policy EC8 could be further improved.