

# PARKSIDE UPDATE

Parkside Action Group  
Newsletter - June 2009  
[www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk](http://www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk)



## Background

In 2006 Astral Developments, part of the Prologis group, submitted plans to develop (on Green Belt land) the **biggest warehousing distribution centre ever built in Europe**. Proposals include a container handling depot, waste recycling plant, a retail park and a power plant. The location is at the former Parkside Colliery Site, Newton-le-Willows [between M6 junctions 22 and 23].

The planned development extends into a massive area of natural countryside. The size equates approximately to 670 football pitches - around 80% the size of Newton-le-Willows and Earlestown combined or the whole area of Pennington Flash Country Park.

## How will this affect the area?

An operation of this scale will fundamentally change the nature of the immediate area and surrounding communities making them unrecognisable.

In addition to the traffic already flowing each day on the M6 there will be an extra 6 million HGV vehicles per year - this equates to an extra HGV every 5 seconds at peak times. There will also be modifications at 17 local road junctions, some significant and with restricted access. The operation will run continuously 365 days a year 24 hours per day. The increased traffic, noise, air and light pollution will bring total misery to thousands of residents across the boroughs of St Helens, Warrington, and Wigan and to commuters on the M6, M62, M56 and A580.

An element of the marketing is the bringing of local jobs. However this remains uncertain as is explored opposite and overleaf.

## Parkside Action Group Working for You

Parkside Action Group (PAG) has kept you informed of the development since first proposed and though it may appear matters have gone quiet there have been some very important developments, in particular with regards the Local Development Framework (LDF).

This newsletter aims to bring you up to date with these developments and to examine some of the claims and facts of the proposal.

## Latest Key Developments

- ❖ This appears to be a “Road to Road operation” not “Rail to Road”. Rail paths available to freight are likely to be very limited over the next few years and the slowdown in rail investment (due to recession) will mean this situation will prevail. Other factors are Virgin’s increased projections for use of the network for passenger traffic and the difficulties of the existing network servicing the high length freight trains needed. Also note Daventry (an equivalent operation) has only 6% of rail freight movements associated with warehousing and if Parkside really is a rail freight terminal warehousing of magnitude planned would not be required.
- ❖ Wigan Council has objected to the application due to lack of clarity and traffic implications. St Helens continue to work with the Highways Agency particularly with regards the traffic impact. Warrington Council is expected to object. West Lancashire Council has already objected because of concerns over job relocations from Skelmersdale.
- ❖ St Helens Council has recently issued a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is a very important public document setting the vision for the development of the borough until 2025. Part of the LDF is the Core Strategy which mentions removing Parkside and **ALL** the surrounding land from Green Belt status. **See the LDF section overleaf.**
- ❖ Prologis have issued recent business plans to their shareholders. These indicate postponements in any new activity and potentially the developer is now awaiting improvements in the economic environment. However, this does not mean that they will not pursue their current planning application.
- ❖ The North West Development Agency informed PAG of a funding shortfall in the proposal. Estimates are that £150m (40%) increases are required. This will amplify the business risk for the developer and require increased business volumes to make the operation viable.
- ❖ Newton-le-Willows has recently had two areas designated as ‘Air Quality Management Areas’. This suggests concerns over air quality in the area already. **See the AQMA section overleaf.**
- ❖ Highways Agency have approved the relocation of Junction 22 at Winwick on condition traffic is restricted leaving the site at peak times. However Highways Agency is only responsible for motorways and trunk roads. Overspill to local roads has been disregarded which completely invalidates Astral’s traffic assessment. Note further traffic pressure will be placed on Junction 23 at Haydock.

## **Air Quality Concerns (AQMA)**

St Helens Council has recently designated two areas of the borough "Air Quality Management Areas" (AQMA).

These are both in Newton-le-Willows; one at Southworth Road by the M6 and the other at Newton High Street. These locations now exceed national objectives and are being monitored.

The levels of Nitrogen Dioxide are a prime contributor to this and are derived from motor vehicle emissions. These emissions have potential serious respiratory and other health implications for people in the locality and particularly vulnerable are children and older people.

This underlines PAG's previous position that this development is right in an area of already poor air quality. The impact of overlaying this with unimaginable future traffic increases is unanswered at this stage.

## **The creation of new jobs**

All Astral job creation claims to date are based on theoretical modelling only, not specific business ventures.

But we do know the distribution business in the North West is now in severe overcapacity made even worse now by the recession. Indications are Astral have had no success at all so far in generating site occupancy from new business.

The business model now appears to be almost totally reliant on consolidating existing road freight businesses into one North West base. This is a fact not lost on Warrington, Wigan and West Lancashire Councils, who have already objected and are likely to be concerned about these aspects.

Given the relatively short distances involved most employees will relocate rather than new jobs being created. This would create further traffic congestion. In addition, it is accepted that warehousing generally is not a labour intensive activity and is likely to be even less so with increasing automation.

## **The Country Park and the Green Belt**

Wild farmland and countryside and the air and open spaces of the Green Belt are to be replaced by a Country Park – a much smaller manicured strip of land within a warehousing complex within sight of containers, waste processing plant and freight noise and air / light pollution.

## **St Helens Local Development Framework (LDF) and Core Strategy.**

In May 2009 St Helens MBC issued a draft LDF / Core Strategy.

There is a proposal within the Core Strategy to remove the Parkside Colliery site and outwards from Green Belt Status. Note the limit of 'outwards' is not defined and hence all the surrounding land and beyond could be removed from Green Belt. There is also a proposal that the land can only be used for a Rail Freight Terminal.

Even though the development has not received planning permission and there is uncertainty as to its future St Helens MBC are planning to "ring fence" the area. This would work totally in Astral's favour.

The public have opportunity to respond to these proposals however this is not well publicised by St Helens MBC.

There is a defined process to comment on these proposals which must be submitted by **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009** to St Helens MBC. Instructions how to submit this are provided with this newsletter.

Alternatively please view PAG website below for details and further information.

**[www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk](http://www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk)**

## **Completed LDF Objection Forms**

Forms can be returned to the Spar shop - 105 / 107 Newton High Street. **Please do this before Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July.**

## **Contacting Us**

Email: [Help@parksideactiongroup.org.uk](mailto:Help@parksideactiongroup.org.uk)

Or write to:  
Parkside Action Group, PO Box 17,  
Newton-le-Willows, WA3 3WX.

## **Monthly Meeting**

Parkside Action Group meets on the first Wednesday of every month at 8:00pm at Winwick Leisure Centre. Everyone is welcome, whether you just want to find something out, or you want to join in and help. It would be wonderful to see you there.

**Please view our regularly updated website for new developments and how you can help.**

**[www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk](http://www.parksideactiongroup.org.uk)**

***When the Green Belt goes - it's gone forever! Do something about it and make a difference!***