



## **REQUEST 19391**

I am requesting all information held by Wigan Council relating to the pre application stage of the proposed development at Gibfield Park, including land north of the existing industrial estate and the areas adjacent to Schofield Lane and surrounding residential properties.

This request covers all information held from the earliest internal or external discussions up to the date of your response, regardless of whether a formal planning application has been submitted. Each section of this request should be considered independently.

### **1. Pre application discussions, advice, and engagement.**

Please provide:

- All pre application advice given to the developer, landowner, or their agents regarding the Gibfield Park proposals.
- Notes, minutes, or summaries of any pre application meetings, calls, Teams/Zoom discussions, or site visits.
- All correspondence (emails, letters, messages) between planning officers and the developer or their representatives relating to pre application engagement.
- Any internal briefings or preparatory notes created for pre application meetings or discussions.

## **RESPONSE**

The information you seek relates to proposed development and associated environmental matters. It is therefore environmental information and has been considered under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) rather than the Freedom of Information Act.

For context, the site is allocated in the adopted Places for Everyone plan (PfE), which took effect on 21 March 2024 and now forms part of Wigan's statutory development plan; the allocation for West of Gibfield requires development to proceed in accordance with a Council-agreed masterplan (Policy JPA37).

1. We hold some information within scope of this part of your request. However, we are withholding it under the EIR for the following reasons. First, Regulation 12(5)(e) applies because pre-application material commonly contains information provided in confidence by third parties and/or material of commercial sensitivity; disclosure at this stage would be likely to adversely affect legitimate economic interests. Secondly, Regulation 12(5)(f) applies because pre-application engagement is voluntary; disclosure would be likely to prejudice the interests of providers and deter the future voluntary provision of information that supports effective decision-making. Thirdly, to the extent the material comprises drafts, working notes or incomplete analyses prepared to inform the developer-led master planning and any future applications, Regulation 12(4)(d) (material in the course of completion/unfinished documents) and Regulation 12(4)(e) (internal communications) are

engaged. Personal data within any correspondence would also be withheld under Regulation 13 where disclosure would contravene data protection law.

These are qualified exceptions; following a public interest test, we consider that, at this pre-application stage, the balance favours maintaining the exceptions for the reasons summarised above, noting that transparency is substantively delivered at the application stage through full publication on the planning register.

For background that is already publicly available, we refer you to the adopted PfE and JPA37, which set the masterplan requirement and key development principles, and to the Topic Paper for West of Gibfield. If and when any planning applications are submitted, the application documents and consultee responses will be publicly available on the Council's planning register. For completeness, you may also wish to note the developer's own public consultation website for the emerging masterplan (hosted by Peel Land), which is third-party material outside the Council's control.

## **2. Internal communications and early assessments**

Please provide:

- Internal emails, memos, Teams messages, or notes discussing the Gibfield Park proposals at the pre application stage.
- Any early scoping documents, officer notes, or preliminary assessments relating to environmental, traffic, noise, air quality, lighting, contamination, drainage, or safety considerations.
- Any internal analysis of policy alignment or conflict with Places for Everyone (PfE), the Local Plan, Green Belt policy, industrial land allocations, or environmental policies.
- Any early-stage risk registers or internal risk assessments relating to the site or the emerging proposals.

2. We hold some information falling within this limb of your request. We are withholding it under Regulation 12(4)(e) (internal communications), which covers emails, drafts, internal advice and working notes exchanged between officers at the formative stage. Regulation 12(4)(d) is also engaged where documents are unfinished or comprise material in the course of completion. Where early scoping or officer notes incorporate third-party material or commercial insights, Regulation 12(5)(e) applies; where the information was provided voluntarily by external parties in confidence, Regulation 12(5)(f) applies. Any personal data would be withheld under Regulation 13. Having applied the

public interest test, we consider that maintaining a safe space for candid, iterative technical work at the pre-application stage, and avoiding prejudice to ongoing commercial discussions, outweighs the general interest in disclosure at this point, noting that significant transparency will occur if/when an application is made and published on the planning register.

For published context and the policy framework that currently applies, please see PfE, Policy JPA37 – West of Gibfield and the associated Topic Paper, which collectively summarise the master-planning requirement, development quantum, infrastructure and environmental considerations identified to date.

### **3. Communications with external bodies during pre-application stage**

Please provide:

- Correspondence with statutory consultees (e.g., Environment Agency, National Highways, Natural England, HSE) relating to the Gibfield Park proposals at the pre application stage.
- Correspondence with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Mayor's office, Transport for Greater Manchester, or any GM level planning or economic development bodies.
- Correspondence with local councillors, MPs, or political offices regarding the emerging proposals.
- Correspondence with landowners, commercial partners, or third party consultants involved in shaping the pre application work.

3. We hold some correspondence with external parties within the broad scope of this limb. To the extent that such communications contain commercial insights, negotiation positions or information provided in confidence by third parties, Regulation 12(5)(e) and Regulation 12(5)(f) apply; disclosure would be likely to adversely affect legitimate economic interests and deter the voluntary provision of information important to high-quality decision-making. Where communications form part of the Council's internal advice chain (e.g., officer notes of discussions), Regulation 12(4)(e) applies, and where drafts or preliminary scoping documents are unfinished, Regulation 12(4)(d) applies. Personal data is withheld under Regulation 13. On the public interest test, we again consider that the balance favours maintaining the exceptions at this stage, while recognising that formal consultee responses and supporting documents will be published if/when a planning application is submitted. Those materials, together with officer reports and decisions, will be accessible via the Council's online planning register. For

current adopted policy context, please see PfE and the JPA37 allocation (with supporting evidence in the associated Topic Paper).

#### **4. Land ownership, agreements, and financial considerations**

Please provide:

- Any land option agreements, memoranda of understanding, or commercial discussions relating to land within or adjacent to the Gibfield Park masterplan area.
- Details of any council-owned land within or bordering the proposed development area.
- Any early viability assessments, financial modelling, or discussions relating to potential Section 106 or CIL contributions associated with the emerging proposals.

4. The information you seek relates to proposed development and associated environmental matters. It is therefore environmental information and has been considered under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) rather than the Freedom of Information Act.

Regarding land ownership, agreements and financial considerations at the pre-application stage, the Council may hold limited information of this nature. However, any such information is withheld under Regulation 12(5)(e) of the EIR because disclosure would be likely to adversely affect the confidentiality of commercial or industrial information, where such confidentiality is protected by law to safeguard legitimate economic interests.

Where information has been voluntarily provided in confidence by third parties (including developers, landowners or their agents), Regulation 12(5)(f) applies. To the extent that internal officer notes, draft documents or early scoping material form part of this category, Regulation 12(4)(d) (material in the course of completion) and Regulation 12(4)(e) (internal communications) also apply, and any personal data is withheld under Regulation 13. These are qualified exceptions, and the public interest test has been applied. On balance, given the commercial sensitivity of early-stage discussions and the importance of preserving the voluntary flow of information needed for high-quality plan-making, the Council considers that the public interest favours maintaining these exceptions at this time.

For wider transparency, the adopted Places for Everyone (PfE) plan, which took effect on 21 March 2024, forms part of Wigan's statutory development plan and contains the strategic allocation for West of Gibfield under Policy JPA37. That policy includes the requirement for development to be brought forward through a Council-approved masterplan and outlines the key principles for housing, employment floorspace, access, landscape and mitigation. More detail on the background evidence, transport assessment, environmental constraints and master-planning considerations is available in the West of Gibfield Topic Paper.

If and when a planning application is submitted for this site, all supporting documents, consultee responses, and assessment reports will be published and publicly accessible on the Council's planning register, which provides the appropriate route for transparency at the formal application stage.

Land ownership information, including details of freehold and leasehold title, is not held by local planning authorities for the purposes of regulatory disclosure and is instead maintained by HM Land Registry. Anyone seeking definitive ownership information for land within or around the Gibfield Park area can obtain official Title Registers and Title Plans directly from the Land Registry. These can be accessed online at the following Government website where further information can be found:

<https://www.gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry>

Finally, for completeness, the developer (Peel Land) is currently undertaking its own public consultation on the emerging masterplan. This information is hosted independently on Peel's dedicated consultation website and

does not constitute Council-held information.

## 5. Safety, contamination, and environmental constraints (pre application stage)

Please provide:

- Any known contamination reports, historic land use assessments, or environmental constraints documents relating to the Gibfield Park site.
- Internal discussions regarding safety zones, HSE consultation requirements particularly in relation to the gas pipe on the site, or the proximity of proposed industrial uses to existing residential properties on Schofield Lane and surrounding streets.
- Any baseline data, scoping work, or early modelling relating to noise, air quality, lighting, biodiversity, drainage, or environmental impact.

5. The Council recognises the public interest in environmental constraints. However, at the pre-application stage the Council's holdings typically include preliminary, incomplete or draft technical scoping material prepared to inform the developer-led master-planning process and any subsequent application. Such material is withheld under Regulation 12(4)(d) (material in the course of completion/unfinished documents) and Regulation 12(4)(e) (internal communications). Where third-party technical inputs have been voluntarily provided in confidence, Regulation 12(5)(f) applies; where disclosure would adversely affect commercial interests, Regulation 12(5)(e) applies; and Regulation 13 would apply to any personal data. The public interest test has been applied and, on balance, favours maintaining the exceptions at this stage, noting that completed technical reports and consultee responses will be published if an application is submitted.

That said, the adopted allocation policy (JPA37) and the published associated Topic Paper already set out key expectations and baseline considerations for West of Gibfield, including master-planning, access, utilities easements, and ecological mitigation, and remain the authoritative public sources at this stage.