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For and on behalf of  
**Bedfordia Developments Ltd**

**BEDFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040 –  
DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY OPTIONS AND DRAFT POLICIES CONSULTATION**

**Town Farm, Stocking Lane, Souldrop – LPA Ref: 1245**

**Prepared by  
DLP Planning Ltd  
Bedford**

September 2021





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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF REPRESENTATIONS

- 1.1 This representation has been prepared by **DLP Planning Ltd (DLP)** on behalf of **Bedfordia Developments Ltd (Bedfordia)** in response to Bedford Local Plan 2040 – Draft Plan Strategy Options and Draft Policies (Regulation 18) Consultation.
- 1.2 This representation relates to Town Farm, Stocking Lane, Souldrop. The site is currently utilised for agricultural purposes and is approximately 0.4ha in size. The site fronts onto Stocking Lane, with an agricultural building being located on the northern portion of the site. There are no constraints or site-specific designations that would prevent the use of the buildings / site for development purposes. A Location Plan identifying the site is provided at Appendix 1.
- 1.3 DLP, on behalf of Bedfordia, welcomes the Council's decision to review and update the various elements of the extant development plan and provide for a new Local Plan document that will fully reflect the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and provide for the up-to-date development needs of the Borough and its residents in a sustainable manner.
- 1.4 DLP wishes to make a number of comments on the consultation document as part of the background context to the representations we are submitting on the site itself.
- 1.5 Bedfordia have concerns over the past failings of the Borough to capitalise on its locational context and the previous long-standing planning strategy that saw a concentration of development on the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston and the parallel restraint of development in rural areas. This as we have detailed elsewhere has failed to recognise the potential and capacity of rural settlements and their need for growth, and a corresponding reduction in rural service provision and the consequences of that.
- 1.6 This representation specifically addresses those elements of the Council's policy and development strategy consultation proposals that fail to support appropriate opportunities for growth across the settlement hierarchy and fail to support choice and flexibility in supply through provision for small sites. This representation should be read alongside other submissions relating to our client's wider interests that provide more detailed comments on the approach to the emerging Plan.

- 1.7 **Section 2.0** addresses specific comments on the Council's Preferred Strategy Options and Preferred Option Policy Proposals together with their supporting evidence.
- 1.8 **Section 3.0** discusses the suitability of our client's land for development including a response to the Council's Site Assessment Proforma.

## **2.0 OBSERVATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS – PREFERRED STRATEGY OPTIONS AND PREFERRED OPTION POLICY PROPOSALS AND EMERGING EVIDENCE**

2.1 This section addresses the Council's the Published Consultation Document.

### ***Paragraphs 1.47-1.48 (Neighbourhood Planning) – Object***

2.2 The Council's consultation document considers the role for development allocations to be identified in Neighbourhood Plans (as a result of the strategy in the Local Plan 2030) in the context of updates to the development strategy explored via the Preferred Options.

2.3 These representations identify that the consultation fundamentally fails to assess the role and ability of Neighbourhood Plans in meeting the requirements for sustainable development (including housing delivery) in the period to 2030. The consultation proposals also provide no clarity on the impact of meeting additional requirements for growth in terms of whether the policies in 'made' Plans will remain in general conformity with the development strategy nor how further allocations in other defined settlements such as Souldrop might be provided for in an effective and positively prepared manner.

### **Reasoning**

#### ***(i) Relationship with Delivery of the Area's Strategic Priorities***

2.4 At paragraph 1.48 the Borough Council only provides vague indications of where further engagement might take place with Parish Councils to meet additional requirements for growth where a range of suitable sites are identified.

2.5 This paragraph is inconsistent with the intentions for a stepped trajectory and the NPPG for reviewing NDPs (which should encourage early review when strategic policies have changed). That is an inevitable consequence of the development plan in Bedford given its current failure to address levels of growth in accordance with the Standard Method. The Borough Council's own evidence indicates the strong likelihood of sites where early delivery can be prioritised. This does not demand that meeting increased requirements for growth should extend beyond 2030.

2.6 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF2021 reaffirms the role for Neighbourhood Plans in providing for non-strategic allocations. Paragraph 29 confirms this must be within the context of

Neighbourhood Plans that do not promote less development than set out in adopted strategy policies (which in this case will be replaced in the Local Plan 2040). Paragraph 66 of the NPPF2021 outlines that strategic policies should set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations. This is an important distinction from the 2012 version of the Framework.

- 2.7 The Council's options test no distribution of requirements to other defined settlements whatsoever, which continues to overlook opportunities for sustainable settlements such as Souldrop to make a commensurate contributions towards the increased needs for development in the period to 2030 and beyond.
- 2.8 This fundamentally fails to accord with the current requirements of national policy and guidance and, importantly, has currently precluded the Council from considering 'hybrid' alternatives to the spatial strategy that would allow appropriate levels of sustainable development to be prioritised across the settlement hierarchy.

*(ii) Identification of Housing Requirements for Designated Neighbourhood Areas*

- 2.9 The Council's proposed approach is contrary to paragraphs 66 and 67 of the NPPF2021. For Souldrop, these provisions apply in the context that there is currently no designated Neighbourhood Area, and the defined settlement is not included within the scale and distribution of growth to be met through Neighbourhood Plans as part of the strategic policies of the LP2030 (Policy 4S).
- 2.10 Paragraphs 66 and 67 of the NPPF2021 should form part of positive discussions between qualifying bodies and the local planning authority, recognising the ability of Neighbourhood Plans to sustain and increase housing delivery. Any indicative requirement figure would take into consideration relevant policies such as an existing or emerging spatial strategy, alongside the characteristics of the neighbourhood plan area and should minimise the risk of Neighbourhood Plan figures being superseded when new strategic policies are adopted (ID: 41-102-20190509). Rolling forward the distribution of growth in Policy 4S as suggested by the Council in its testing of strategy options for village-related growth is a flawed approach:
- The figures were determined arbitrarily, without reference to the OAN in place at the time or strategies for individual settlements;
  - In any event the Council's OAN knowingly represented a significant shortfall

against the government's policy for calculating housing need, culminating in this immediate review;

- The figures are applicable only in the context of a foreshortened plan period to 2030; and
- Figures are provided only for certain settlements, with no requirement indicated for levels of the settlement hierarchy below Rural Service Centres (despite these having been considered in earlier rounds of plan-making for the LP2030).

2.11 By extension this means that any evidence produced by groups preparing Plans (for example assessments of local rural housing needs and whether relating to settlements listed in Policy 4S or not) would need to be considered in the context of the overall result of the Standard Method to 2040.

#### Remedy

2.12 The solution to issues identified in these representations necessitates the Council complying with the requirements of paragraphs 66 and 67 of the NPPF2021. In doing so, we consider that a 'hybrid' development strategy must remain supported throughout the plan period, including recognition of the contribution that this would make towards the shortfall against local housing need for the period 2020 to 2030 i.e., through 'top up allocations'.

2.13 Outside of the approach to identification of a housing requirement for Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres the Council should adopt a flexible approach to supporting development opportunities at other defined settlements such as Souldrop in order to sustain and enhance their role. This is necessary to reflect the longer-term plan period to 2040 and that such settlements were omitted from provision towards the scale and distribution of growth required to support the LP2030.

#### ***Paragraphs 3.26 – 3.28 (Small Sites) –Object***

2.14 The Council's proposed approach to enabling the development of small sites as a source of flexibility in supply and to provide diversity within the construction sector is misconceived and inconsistent with national policy, ineffective and not justified. The Council is simply seeking to ignore the requirements at paragraph 69 of the NPPF2021 and undermine the Government's objectives to support *inter alia* SME builders, prosperous rural communities, and measures to address affordability.

#### Reasoning

2.15 The Council seeks to rely on evidence of past and expected future trends in windfall



development in place of the requirement in national policy to identify, through the development plan and brownfield registers, land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare.

2.16 The reasoning for the approach in national policy is simple: the development plan is the most appropriate vehicle to set out positively prepared policies to support the delivery of small sites and enable small and medium developers (who often face the greatest barriers to entry in the sector) to secure implementable planning permissions more easily.

2.17 The Council's own evidence in the Small Sites Topic Paper demonstrates a year-on-year fall in trends in the completion of small windfall sites against the Local Plan 2030 requirement of 970dpa. This is illustrative of issues affecting the sector. The Council must also be mindful of the fact that more recent policies in the development plan (particularly those within Neighbourhood Plans) provide a further barrier to bringing forward appropriate proposals on unidentified sites.

2.18 The evidence from past trends fails to support the Council's contention that windfall supply will provide for 10% of the higher requirement based on minimum annual local housing need for the period 2020 to 2040. The Council relies on expected future trends but the justification for its proposed approach fails for the following reasons:

- The Council's reference to extant commitments takes no account of any potential lapse rate or double-counting with assumptions of future supply
- Expected trends take no account of changes to Permitted Development Rights (including restrictions upon office-to-residential conversions and a reduction in the number of potentially suitable sites)
- Extant small-site commitments take no account of those that are effectively 'one-off' schemes that would not be accessible to the SME sector (e.g., backland plots or subdivision)
- The likely supply from Neighbourhood Plans, which is a tiny proportion of the 2,260 dwellings required from this source and illustrative of these Plans often focusing development on a limited number of challenging sites, is dwarfed by the resulting restrictions on additional growth.

### Remedy

2.19 The Local Plan 2040 should also offer substantially greater support for the delivery of small sites in rural areas. This advances the case for the strategic policies of the Local Plan 2040:

- Setting out indicative requirements for all settlements within the Borough's hierarchy (outside of Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres) to

- encourage provision for appropriate levels of smaller-scale growth
- Proactively support the delivery of rural exception sites
- Proactively support the re-use and redevelopment of sites with built form in the wider rural area, such as our client's land at **Town Farm, Souldrop**.
- Where Policy 4S of the Local Plan 2030 is superseded in terms of the scale and distribution of growth required at Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres ensure that any increased need for development to be provided through reviews of Neighbourhood Plan also has regard to NPPF2021 paragraph 69

2.20 The opportunity for the Local Plan 2040 and any Neighbourhood Plans to be prepared taking a more flexible approach towards the requirements of national policy is supported in principle. Our client's land at Souldrop would comfortably satisfy the 1 hectare threshold and assist in addressing the requirements of national policy to support small sites.

***Paragraphs 3.15 – 3.17 (Spatial Strategy Options) – Object***

- 2.21 The emerging preferred options put forward by the Council have an urban focus and the four variations all focus development on the urban area, A421 corridor, and existing and planned rail stations. This approach relies heavily on rail investment and also focuses growth to the south of the town, with very little growth planned to the north of the Borough.
- 2.22 Representations addressing our client's interests elsewhere in the Borough endorse a 'hybrid' approach making provision for village-related development outside of the 'east' and 'south' corridor parishes. Reassessment of **Option 3c** provides an appropriate starting point for such an approach.
- 2.23 Within this strategy option the Council has applied arbitrary 'one size fits all' totals to Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres but made no provision for a contribution towards the strategy totals from locations outside these settlements.
- 2.24 This is inconsistent with the approach to other strategy components where a more flexible approach is applied e.g., non-specific estimates of urban capacity. Utilisation of other appropriate sites would add flexibility to the strategy and reduce any of the harmful effects that the Council associates with testing non-specific levels of village-related growth. This includes incorporating defined settlements such as Souldrop within the testing of site options.

### 3.0 RESPONSE TO SITE ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA (CALL FOR SITES ID 1245)

#### Introduction to Site and Proposals

- 3.1 The site was previously submitted to the Council for consideration as part of the Council's 'call for sites' exercise in August 2020. The land area being promoted is shown below.

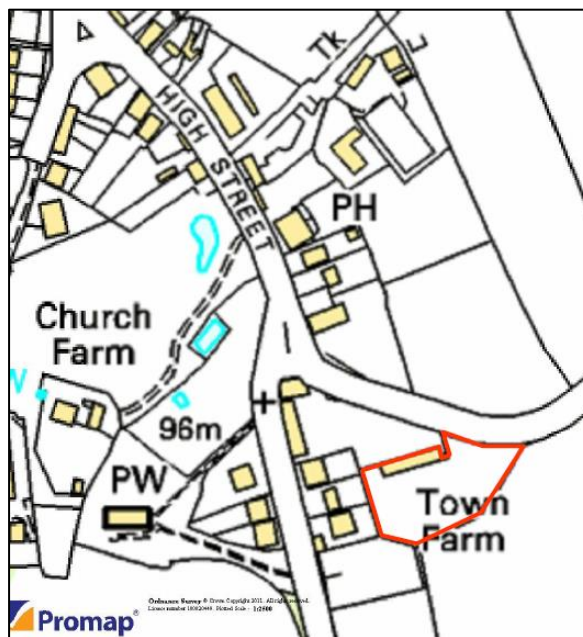


Figure 1: Site Location Plan (Appendix 1)

#### Site Context and Description

- 3.2 The site extends to approximately 0.4 hectares and lies at the edge of the present built form for the village of Souldrop, adjacent to Stocking Lane.
- 3.3 The western boundary of the site abuts the defined Settlement Policy Area Boundary under Policy 5S of the adopted Local Plan 2030. There are no known designations or constraints on the site that would inhibit development being brought forward on the site.
- 3.4 The site is accessed via an agricultural access off Stocking Lane, to the north-east.
- 3.5 To the west of the site, albeit some distance from it, there are two Grade II Listed Buildings and a Grade II\* Listed Church, but there is built form and boundary treatments between the site and these assets, such that there would be little if any impact on their significance

(including the contribution made by their setting). Furthermore, to the north of the site there is a Grade II Listed Building, but views of this from the site are obscured by dense vegetation.

- 3.6 The site, historically, was in agricultural use but is no longer fit for modern farming practices. There is a Dutch barn and a large area of hard standing present on the site.
- 3.7 The site is within a short walk of the centre of the village of Souldrop and within reach of local amenities, facilities, and services such as the village green and the Bedford Arms, a public house, and the Crossweir Farmyard business area. A bus route connects Souldrop to Bedford, Rushden, and surrounding villages such as Riseley and Sharnbrook. Sharnbrook is a main rural service centre and is some 2 km from the village. Residents of the village are also able to utilise the services available in Sharnbrook.

#### **Proposed Development Options**

- 3.8 The land provides an opportunity to provide for either a carefully considered residential development of up to 10 dwellings, well located relative to the core of the village, village green and existing services, or be fully used for business purposes.
- 3.9 This site provides a sustainable location and natural extension to the village of Souldrop, which is well related to the existing pattern of development along Sharnbrook Road. Similar development has been seen elsewhere in the village, such as at the High Street – Green intersection.
- 3.10 The proposed site would be developed to provide a potential mix of dwelling types that will respect and strengthen the structure, form, and character of the village. The site would, in principle, be capable of accommodating either one, or a combination of the following uses:
- Market housing.
  - Affordable housing.
  - Starter homes.
  - Self / custom build plots.
- 3.11 Special attention will be paid to selected design and construction materials, to ensure the development respects the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings and reflects the traditional, rural character of the village. Appropriate landscaping and screening will ensure the residential amenity of neighbouring properties is maintained. This will ensure the development integrates seamlessly into the existing settlement.

- 3.12 Allocation for self or custom build plots would allow the site to come forward at a pace that meets local need in the area, with the flexibility of price and design to suit local circumstances. It also accords with the Government's commitment to promoting self-build and custom build opportunities, as set out in the UK Housing Strategy.
- 3.13 The site could also accommodate a small office (Class E) or storage or distribution (B8) development, with associated landscaping and parking, or be developed as an additional business location fully utilising the land. Special attention would again be paid to design and construction materials and landscaping and screening would be appropriate to ensure the residential amenity is maintained and the development is compatible with the surrounding area.
- 3.14 The site is in single ownership and is available for development and should therefore be considered deliverable with a realistic prospect some housing or employment use could be delivered within 5 years.

### **Response to Borough Council's Site Assessment Pro-Forma (Site ID: 1245)**

#### ***Site Assessment Criteria***

- 3.15 We have reviewed the Council's assessment of the site and wish to make a number of comments below.

#### **Impact on Highways**

- 3.16 No access or capacity issues are identified, reflective of the site's location and existing use. The findings of the site assessment proforma are endorsed, including the potential to extend pedestrian/cycle footway connections, if required.

#### **Agricultural Land Classification**

- 3.17 The assessment notes that the site consists of the best and most versatile land, but the proforma fails to reflect that the submitted site does not farm part of a larger agricultural field. The land instead provides existing agricultural buildings in a location well-related to the built settlement that would result in no greater spread of built development southwards or eastwards. The characteristics of our client's small site, and its existing condition (providing mainly scrub and boundary vegetation), do not indicate that any adverse effects would be likely in terms of impacts upon the supply of best and most versatile agricultural land.

### **Previously Developed Land (PDL)**

- 3.18 The Council's assessment of the site notes that it is not PDL. Whilst the use of the site is agricultural, it is important to highlight that there is a substantial building on the northern boundary of the site and a significant area of hardstanding. This reflects the prospects for redevelopment of the land in a manner that would be sympathetic to the existing character and condition of the site and its relationship with the village.

### **Impact on designated or non-designated heritage assets or their setting**

- 3.19 The assessment proforma found that the proposal has the potential to cause harm to heritage assets, which may range from low to high. This is a standard response that the Council has applied to a large number of the assessment pro-forma.
- 3.20 In this case our client's land at Town Farm, Souldrop there are no designated heritage assets within the site itself or in close proximity to the site. To the west of the site there is two Grade II Listed Buildings and a Grade II\* Listed Church, but there is built form and boundary treatments between the site and these assets, mitigating the impact of development on their significance (including the contribution made by their setting). Furthermore, to the north of the site there is a Grade II Listed Building, but views of this from the site are obscured by dense vegetation.
- 3.21 There will be options to avoid, reduce or mitigate this harm where sites have not been ruled out altogether for other reasons. In the case of our client's land further assessment will be undertaken to more fully explore impacts on significance (including the contribution made by the setting of any affected assets) and to ensure that any impact would represent less than substantial harm in terms of Paragraph 202 of the NPPF, which is the expected outcome given the context described above.
- 3.22 A sensitively designed scheme for redevelopment, subject to suitably worded policy criteria, would form the basis to secure acceptable outcomes with the requirement for suitable technical evidence.

### **Protected Species and Ecological Value**

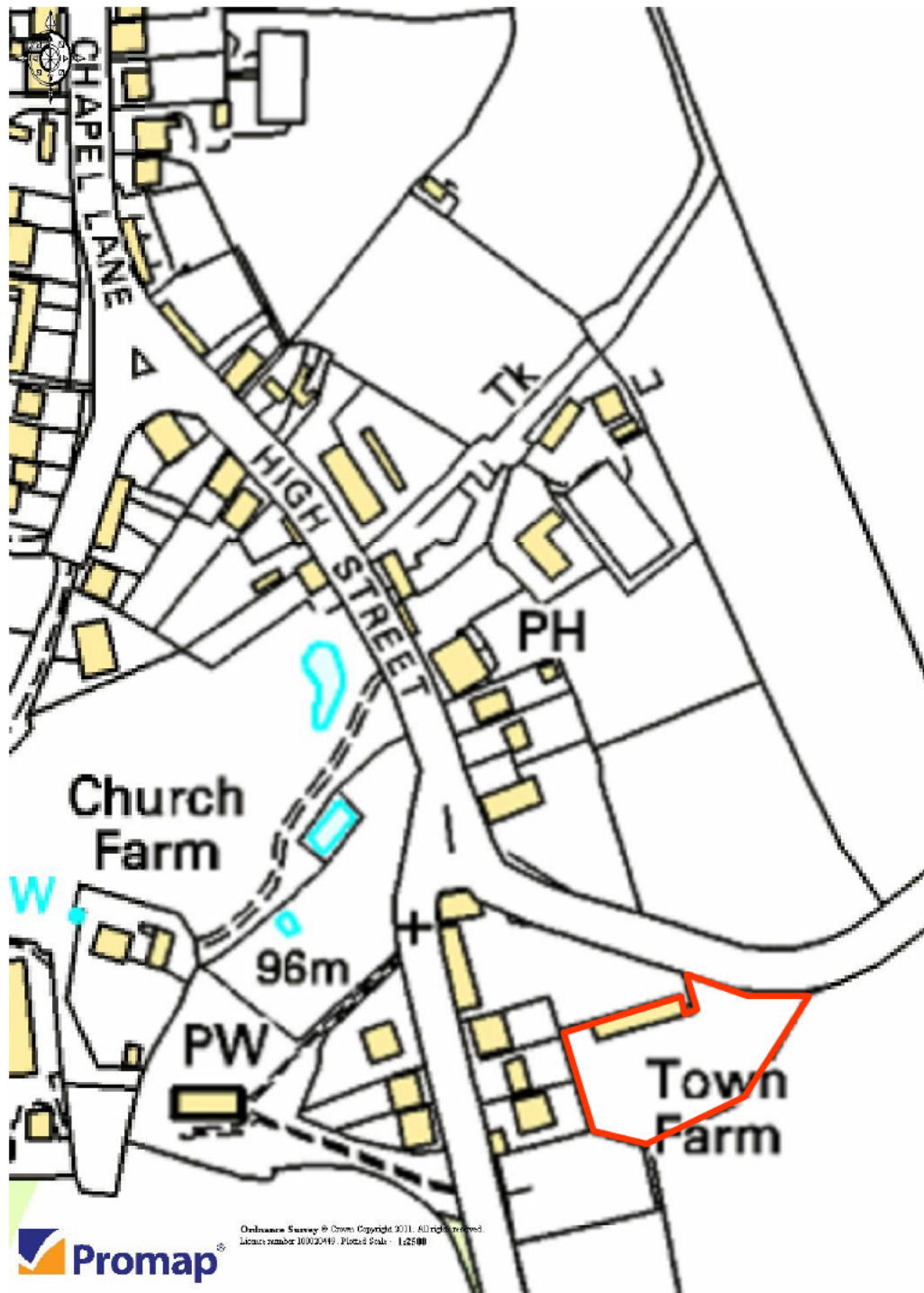
- 3.23 The Council's assessment records a potential uncertain impact but recognises that the land is not within or adjacent areas of nature conservation importance. The proforma does not

reflect that the majority of the site area comprises land occupied by hardstanding or existing agricultural buildings. The Council's assessment states that protected species have been recorded on the site.

- 3.24 As part of future development of the site it would be appropriate to seek preparation of an Ecological Impact Assessment comprising a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and assessment of potential site features supporting the presence of protected species.
- 3.25 This would be an appropriate basis assess the impact of the development proposal and set out mitigation measures required to ensure there is no net harm to ecological features and where possible identify any opportunities available for integrating ecological features within the development.

**Appendix 1 Location Plan (Town Farm, Stocking Lane, Souldrop – ID: 1245)**





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**PROJECT**

TOWN FARM, SOULDROP

Date	January 2012	OS Ref.
Scale	1:2500@A4	Drawing no.
Job no.	BE1149	Rev.

Drawn by	AB
Checked	MB

**DRAWING TITLE**

SITE LOCATION



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