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Date: 2nd September 2021



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Local Plan 2040 Consultation
Planning Policy Team
Bedford Borough Council
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Submitted via email to: planningpolicy@bedford.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam,

Bedford Borough Council (Draft) Local Plan 2040 Strategy Options and Draft Policies Consultation (September 2021).

Publication under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

[REDACTED]

I write on behalf of [REDACTED] (the client') in response to the emerging (draft) Local Plan ('LP') 2040 for Bedford Borough which has been published by Bedford Borough Council ('BBC') for the purposes of public consultation under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

To ensure full disclosure, our client has an interest in land at Luton Road, Wilstead which lies adjacent to the settlement and is largely surrounded by existing built form. The site is referenced within the Site Assessment Document (June 2021) as Land east of east of Luton Road, Wilstead (Ref ID: 714) within the evidence base which has informed the consultation document. For the purposes of this letter, the site is referred to as 'Luton Road'.

The following is structured to provide succinct representations, on behalf of our client, to those pieces of literature which have been published by the Council for the purposes of this consultation. To this end, some contextual details are provided in respect of the Luton Road site, thought is then afforded to the Council's evidence base: namely, the Development Strategy Topic Paper (2021), the Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report (2021) and the Council's Site Assessment (2021) publication.

Representations are then provided in response to the Local Plan 2040 – Draft Plan Strategy Options and Draft Policies Consultation (2021), which has been published for the purposes of public consultation. Those comments are largely constrained to the proposed spatial options for growth and the proposed development management policies.

The Site and Recent History.

A site location plan which clarifies the extent of that land which is under the control of our client is set out at Plate 1.

The approximately 9-hectare site lies centrally on the eastern flank of the settlement of Wilstead to the south of the urban area of Bedford and is surrounded on its north, south and western boundaries by existing built form which is dominated by residential properties. The site assessment document suggests that the site has capacity for circa 250 dwellings.

Access to the site is taken from Luton Road where the site has a significant road frontage. There are high quality and regular public transport links to the site and the wider offer is bolstered by its proximity to Kempston Hardwick train station which lies approximately 3km to the west.

Plate 1: Luton Road Site Location Plan (Extract).



Our client has engaged with the LPA throughout the course of their efforts to produce the adopted Bedford Borough Local Plan (2030), they have also remained engaged in the efforts this far to commence the production of the Local Plan Review which will ultimately result in the adoption of the Local Plan 2040.

As part of their ongoing engagement the Client has made submissions to the Call for Sites invitation and their land holding has been positively assessed by the Council as part of that process. Whilst the findings contained within the Call for Sites (ID: 714) Pro Forma are discussed later within the submission, it is considered prudent to rehearse that the site remains available for development. The site is also suitable, available and achievable and there are no barriers which would preclude its development in the near term.

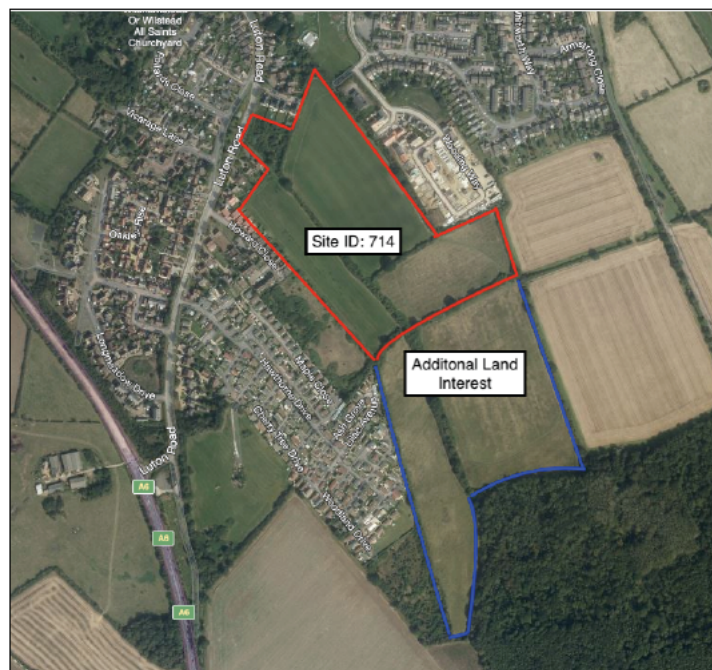
Aside from engagement in the development plan production process there have been no recent planning applications for the development of the site and therefore no history which is material to the consideration of the site through the Council's efforts to produce and adopt the emerging LP.

I can confirm that those conclusions, which are set out within the pro-forma for the site, as contained within the Site Assessment Pro-Formas (2021) document, are largely true. However, feasibility testing and technical work is currently being progressed and the conclusions of those works are expected to bolster the Council's initial desk-based assessment and confirm the site's suitability for future residential development.

A final point of note which the Council may be interested in as they move forward in developing the LP and seeking to allocate sites to meet future growth requirements is the availability of additional land at Luton Road, Wilstead.

Our client has an interest in an additional parcel of land which is shown at Plate 2.

Plate 2: Additional Land at Luton Road, Wilstead



For information, this parcel has not previously been submitted to the LPA through the Call for Sites or LP process.

Should you require any further information on this additional land then please do not hesitate to contact CC Town Planning via any of those channels listed above.

Development Strategy Topic Paper (2021) ('DS').

The DS rightly identifies the step change in housing delivery which is required in Bedford Borough up to the horizon of the emerging plan period to 2040.

This step change results in an annual increase in housing delivery of 33% which elevates the requirement for an annual delivery rate (within the adopted plan) of 970 additional dwellings per year to 1275 per annum for the emerging document.

It is however considered that this annualized requirement should be yet further increased to allow for a contingency or buffer which will serve as a safety valve as wider regional and national strategies are progressed.

A built-in contingency will allow for the LP to react to national and regional changes to the planning system associated with Government's agenda for planning reform and the wider implications of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, respectively.

The DS makes a case for the strategic target of 25,500 net additional dwellings over the life of the plan. The document also states that current commitments are 13,000 with a balance of 12,500 dwellings to be planned for through the emerging LP – there are concerns that the remaining requirement could be grossly under-estimated at the point at which the LP will be adopted. As set out in the NPPG, the local housing need

figure is calculated at the start of the plan-making process, but this number should be kept under review and revised, when appropriate, until the document is submitted for examination.

Importantly, and further to the thoughts above, the minimum local housing need figure for the Borough may change as the LPA enter discussions with neighbouring LPAs under the duty and as further information emerges in respect of planning reform and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Whilst the evidence is not currently clear, it is considered that 'circumstances' could potentially exist which would justify the adoption of a significantly increased strategic housing target above and beyond that which is contained within the consultation document.

Once again, it is accepted that the current position is such that the LP must concentrate on meeting those evidenced growth requirements for the Borough and that the plan is based on the most up to date available evidence. However, allied to the above it is urged that the next iteration of the LP include a 'safety valve' which will serve to meet any issues which arising from the aforementioned processes. The only alternative to continued revisions to the strategic target will be yet another immediate post-adoption review.

Our client has reviewed the discussion of those various growth options set out within the DS document and is supportive of the conclusions which the document reaches, particularly in respect of those growth options along the 'Transport Corridor' which do not involve the creation of new settlements.

Whilst further commentary is provided in respect of the growth options later within this submission, it is urged that the Council remain mindful, from the outset, of the implications for the emerging LP arising from the recently published National Planning Policy Framework which was revised in July 2021 after the launch of the current public consultation.

Para 22 of the revised NPPF is clear; where a new settlement forms part of the strategy, policies should be set within a vision that looks further ahead (at least 30 years) to consider the likely timescale for delivery. As such the client's position is that the emerging LP is not the correct document to allocate land for a new settlement and any such proposals should be considered over the longer term and catered for within a future LP or alternative DPD.

To this end, the client is largely supportive of growth Option 2a and the conclusions of the DS confirm this to be a suitable option for the future strategic development of the Borough. However, it is considered that minor revisions to the strategy posed by Option 2a could be suitably undertaken to ensure that the overarching strategic growth targets up to 2040 can be achieved.

Local Housing Needs Assessment (2021) ('LNA')

It is urged that the LNA is kept under constant review as additional evidence comes to light. It is further urged that the document be reviewed as further detail becomes clear regarding the Government's agenda for planning reform and information relating to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc is released.

The document undertakes a thorough assessment of those individuals and households who are considered to be in housing need currently and provides detailed forecasting in regard to those housing needs which will need to be met up to 2040.

Page 9 of the document makes it clear that over the life of the emerging plan there is a need for 6170 affordable dwellings, which equates to a delivery rate of 309

affordable dwellings per annum. This is a step change from the 238 affordable dwellings per annum which were constructed in the Borough between 2014 and 2019.

It is considered that to increase the delivery of affordable housing a step change in overall housing delivery is required. Between 2016 and 2019 the MHCG Live Table 1800C shows that the average number of affordable properties as a percentage of overall housing delivery in the Borough was 20.875%.

The LNA states that 6170 affordable dwellings are required between 2020-2040 this is representative of 49.36% of the total strategic housing requirement (12,500) up to 2040. Clearly, this is a significant increase which will need to be pragmatically addressed.

When taking into consideration the requirements of adopted policy 58S Affordable Housing, which sets the affordable housing requirement of 30% on sites over 10 dwellings, there would need to be 20,566 dwellings constructed (on sites over 10 dwellings) during the period 2020-40 to ensure that these affordable housing needs are met. Subsequently, it is considered that the emerging LP's strategic housing target should be revised in light of this significant need for affordable housing.

In further assessment, the LNS provides an evidenced based calculation which seeks to establish an overall housing need figure for the Borough up to 2040 and concludes that the plan should seek to deliver 26,100 dwellings up to 2040. Accounting for the current commitments (13,000) this leaves a balance of 13,100 dwellings which is 600 dwellings greater than the amount planned for within the emerging LP.

Notwithstanding the comments relating to affordable housing delivery, the evidence base contains sufficient justification for the adoption of an increased housing target. It does however suggest that the target within the emerging plan should be more ambitious to ensure a boost to the housing supply is achieved.

Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report (2021) ('SA')

The client has afforded their consideration to the content of the draft SA and welcomes its publication at this stage.

The document has clearly considered the development options set out within the LP and has afforded consideration to all those reasonable alternatives at this stage.

However, the client does reserve the right to provide commentary on the content of the SA at Regulation 18 and 19 consultation stages as it is anticipated that its content will be updated as the content of the final LP becomes clear.

Site Assessment Pro-Forma (ID: 00714): Land at Luton Road, Wilstead.

Given the client's land interests at Luton Road, Wilstead, they have afforded considerable attention to the content of the pro-forma which has been completed by the Council in their assessment of the future deliverability of their site for residential purposes.

It is accepted that the pro-formas are a fluid / working document and it is urged that the Council re-assess their land holding as further information becomes available.

Whilst it is not the intention to rehearse the positive conclusions which the Council has reached up to this point, it is considered prudent to highlight several points which will hopefully serve to assist Officer's in their future discussions surrounding the deliverability of the site.

It can be confirmed that the site is under single control and therefore no land assembly is required which would of course lengthen the lead in times to development. The site is suitable, available and achievable and initial feasibility testing is clear that the site is a viable opportunity for residential development.

In terms of technical constraints, it is considered that these are nonexistent. There is no legacy of uses at the site which could have caused contamination. The site is in Flood Zone 1, as shown on the Environment Agency Flood Risk Map for Planning, and as such there are no arising technical constraints in this area. The land is of Grade 3 agricultural value and does not have any underlying mineral assets.

Whilst the landowner will make technical information available as it is progressed for the site, there are currently no indications that a residential development at the site will be unachievable.

Well related to Wilstead the development of the site will not result in sprawl or coalescence of settlements and will provide a positive development opportunity which will compliment, rather than compete with, those larger sites which are currently under construction or planned for the Borough.

The site could be delivered in advance of those marquee infrastructure items which the emerging LP will seek to deliver. Notably, the site serves to make contributions towards the proposed new train station and improvements to the A421 which are proposed within the Transport Corridor.

Whilst evidence is only anecdotal at this stage, it is urged that the Council remain mindful of the client's site when considering the allocation of land to deliver the strategic housing targets which will be expressed within the LP.

Local Plan 2040 – Draft Plan Strategy Options and Draft Policies Consultation Document ('LP')

Our client commends the significant work and undertaking which BBC have embarked upon to produce and publish the emerging LP consultation document and we welcome the opportunity to comment on its content at this stage.

The following comments are largely set out in order of their appearance within the document and are made in the context of our client's land interests as well as the content of national planning policy and guidance.

With a holistic appreciation of the draft LP, since its publication, the Government have published an updated and revised National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021). Having reviewed the document in the context of this new publication, the LP appears to be largely in alignment with its content. However, references within later iterations of the emerging DPD will need to be revised to reflect the most up to date national policy. It is also urged that the Council remain mindful of the progression of the Government's agenda for planning reform.

The Vision appears to align with the wider objectives of the Council and the corporate priorities for the Borough. However, the clients' comments regarding Para 22 of the NPPF remain, whilst it is considered that this emerging plan should not seek to deliver

new settlements, if this is to be the case then the vision needs to cover a period up to 2050 at the earliest.

Section 3 of the document is of considerable interest to our client. For those reasons set out above it is our position that the overall housing target should be increased to account for several external factors. These factors have been discussed at length in the comments provided on the content of the DS and the LNA. However, our client does take comfort from Para 3.3 of the LP which acknowledges that the local housing need figure will change as necessary at the point of the plan's submission.

The reference to the Council's current affordable housing policy (Policy 58S) as outlined at Para 3.6 is welcomed. The relationship between that policy and the viability of the entire plan will be an important factor in ensuring the success of the document and will further inform the level of development required to meet the affordable housing needs profile of the Borough.

In considering the proposed spatial development options, the client has discounted those which seek to deliver a new settlement as the time horizon of the plan is not in alignment with the provisions of Para 22 of the NPPF. Furthermore, the Council were right to discount preliminary options 1a and 1b due to the constraints such approaches would face in and around the urban area of Bedford.

It is yet further clear that the approaches advocated within Options 2b-d, 3a-c and 5-7 would not achieve the ambitious level of growth which is required in the Borough by 2040.

The client is largely supportive of the approach set out within Option 2a. However, it is considered that this strategy could be revised to provide a more realistic and positive approach to achieving the growth, which is required, particularly in terms of residential development.

In assessment of Option 2a it is considered that the Rail Based Growth Parishes should be revisited with a greater spatial analysis of those settlements which lie in proximity to both existing and proposed rail terminals.

The option quite rightly highlights Kempston Hardwick, Stewartby and Wixams as settlements which should be developed based on their proximity to existing and proposed rail stations. However, in assessment, it appears that the sustainability credentials of Wilstead have been overlooked along with its proximity to Kempston Hardwick Train Station. Similar arguments could be made for Houghton Conquest and Marston Moretaine which are comparable settlements with good public transport links including proximity to the station.

Therefore, it is urged that the list of Rail Based Growth Parishes be re-assessed and lengthened to allow for the inclusion of further settlement. Such an approach would reduce reliance, and the resultant pressures, for residential housing growth at Wixams, Kempston Hardwick and Stewartby.

Whilst it is acknowledged that a new station at 'Stewartby Hardwick' could be a catalyst for growth, this realistically will not be achieved until later within the plan period and development directly related to its delivery will be required for funding purposes. To this end, an increased level of development at Wilstead could assist in achieving the delivery of such infrastructure.

Wilstead itself is acknowledged within the settlement hierarchy as a sustainable Key Service Centre and it is considered that its role could be elevated to account for its spatial relationship with the Rail Based Growth Parishes.

Notwithstanding the above, if Option 2a is carried forward into future iterations of the LP, it is considered that the proposed levels of growth within the option should be re-apportioned to redistribute growth in a pattern which reduces reliance upon certain settlements and provides a more positive pattern and subsequent approach to growth.

It is considered that Option 2a should be re-apportioned to acknowledge the sustainability credential of those settlements in the southern part of the transport corridor. The following table shows the current pattern of distribution within Option 2a and the client's revised approach which reduces reliance upon the urban area which is already under significant pressure.

Table 1: Option 2a (Distribution Proposed within LP)

Location	Number of Dwellings	Apportionment
Urban Area	1500	12%
Adjacent to Urban Area	1500	12%
Transport Corridor (Rail Based Growth)	7500	60%
Transport Corridor (South)	2000	16%

Table 2: Option 2a (Re-apportioned Distribution)

Location	Number of Dwellings	Apportionment
Urban Area	500	4%
Adjacent to Urban Area	750	6%
Transport Corridor (Rail Based Growth)	7500	60%
Transport Corridor (South)	3750	30%

Please note that the above figures are set against the backdrop of the housing target contained within the emerging LP, as set out in the NPPG, the local housing need figure is calculated at the start of the plan-making process, but this number should be kept under review and when appropriate revised until the document is submitted for examination. Importantly, and further to the thoughts above, the minimum local housing need figure for the Borough may change as inputs are variable.

The client has also afforded thought to the proposed development management policies as set out at Section 7 of the LP. In response to SB1, our client recognizes the need to provide custom and self-build plots and appreciated the LPA's efforts to include this policy within the draft LP. However, there are concerns that the approach taken could stifle certain development sites, particularly those held by larger volume housebuilders, where self and custom build plots do not form part of their business offer at this point in time.

In terms of residential space standards, the client holds concerns over the proposed approach advocated within draft Policy DQ1. Footnote 49 on page 39 of the NPPF is clear that "*policies may also make use of the NDSS where the need for an internal space standard can be justified*". In line with Para 31 of the NPPF, policies such as DQ1 should be underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence, which should be adequate, proportionate and focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned and this is expanded by the NPPG which rehearses that "*where a need for internal space standards is identified, the authority should provide justification for requiring internal space policies. Authorities should take account of the following areas need, viability and timing*". The evidence base which supports the consultation document is currently void of any such evidence.

Regarding the other issues which the emerging LP will seek to address, the client reserves the right to comment on these during the course of future public consultation events.

In conclusion, the efforts of BBC to produce the consultation document are to be commended and the thrust and content of those initial draft policies contained therein is largely welcomed. Whilst the client is supporting of growth Option 2a, it is their position that the sustainability credentials of Wilstead be considered in greater depth and the role which it can play in contributing to the future growth of Bedford Borough be pragmatically assessed.

It is hoped that those revisions referred to above will be positively considered by the Council and we would be more than happy to answer any questions which you may have.

In light of the above, if you require clarification on any of those points which have been raised above or require any further information in respect of the client's site then please do not hesitate to contact me via any of those channels listed.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Associate