

BEDFORD BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2040: PLAN FOR SUBMISSION (REGULATION 19 STAGE)

REPRESENTATION REGARDING THE BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN 2040 – PLAN FOR SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIPS PLC JULY 2022

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following paper has been prepared on behalf of Countryside Partnerships Plc in response to the Bedford Borough Local Plan – Plan for Submission (Regulation 19 Publication Stage) consultation.
- 1.2 This paper will provide our clients' comments on the proposed policies in the Local Plan 2040 and seeks to constructively contribute to the plan making process.
- 1.3 The enclosed provides comments in respect of policies DS2(S), DS3(S) and DS5(S) of the Local Plan 2040 Plan for Submission, with regard to our client's interest in Land west of the village of Great Barford south of the A421 site ID 878.
- 1.4 This paper is set out as follows:

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Representations

3.0 Summary

2.0 REPRESENTATIONS

2.1 This section details our client's representations, and is presented in the Council's preferred format as set out in Part B of the Representation Form:

2.2 <u>Policy DS2(S) – Spatial Strategy</u>

3. To which part of the Local Plan does the representation relate?							
Paragraph	Policy	DS2(S)	Policies Map				
4. Do you consider the Loc	al Plan is:						
4 (1) Legally Compliant		Yes	No				
4 (2) Sound		Yes	No	✓			
4 (3) Complies with the operate	Duty to co-	Yes	No				

5. Details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate:

In our opinion, the Council's proposed Spatial Strategy, as defined under Policy DS2(S) is undermined by the risks we have identified in the Stepped Trajectory set out in Policy DS3(S). We wish to raise concerns that the Spatial Strategy does not sufficiently address the potential for delays in the delivery of East-West Rail, and other key infrastructure required to support the proposed strategic allocations on the East-West Rail / A421 transport corridor. Paragraph 4.3 concisely captures the main elements of the Council's strategy and states:

"The completion of EWR will result in the creation of highly accessible locations around new rail stations. By concentrating on accessible locations, the spatial strategy aims to minimise the need to travel by car and therefore reduce the emission of carbon dioxide in line with the objectives of the plan. The growth locations are as follows:

A. Within the urban area

B. At strategic locations adjacent to the urban area which contribute to the delivery of key green infrastructure projects

C. At new growth locations focussed on the EWR / A421 transport corridor with the potential for rail based growth, particularly in the south of Bedford area and at a new settlement at Little Barford."

Given the slow progress of detailed proposals for East-West Rail between Bedford and Cambridge, and uncertainties surrounding when this piece of major infrastructure will eventually be delivered, the reliance on the Stepped Trajectory to meet the identified housing and employment needs, set out in Policy DS3(S), appears to be highly optimistic, and does not positively plan for the potential of a slower rate of housing delivery, or a delay in the commencement of development on the identified new settlements South of Bedford and at Little Barford.

The Council's proposed residential development trajectory in the years 2030-2040 is therefore not realistic nor deliverable. We would contend that East-West Rail will take longer to come forward, and that the Council is likely to fall far short of achieving the requisite 1,700 dwellings per annum in the years 2030-2040.

The risks surrounding the delivery of EWR are acknowledged in the 'Development Strategy Topic Paper' (June 2021). In the analysis of the 'Option 2' sub-options i.e. Development in and around the urban area, plus A421 transport corridor with rail based growth plus one or two new settlements. In the 'Weaknesses and delivery challenges' assessment of the reasonable alternatives for Option 2 the Topic Paper states:

• Viability and land assembly challenges for urban land and timing of delivery in some cases dependent on EWR delivery;

Delivery of new rail stations is proposed, but not yet confirmed."

While we recognise that the Council is acknowledging these risks stating it will monitor the provision and delivery of infrastructure and, if necessary, bring forward a review of the Local Plan, we would contend that for the plan to be positively prepared and effective, the plan should attempt to mitigate these known risks through an appropriate policy framework to be put forward now, in the Local Plan 2040, rather than postponed for another review.

This Spatial Strategy is therefore not effective, nor is it positively prepared to address the potential weaknesses in the strategy during the plan period. We would contend that this would make the plan, as submitted, **UNSOUND**.

6. The modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant and sound, in respect of any legal compliance or soundness matters you have identified at 5 above.

In order to mitigate against this risk, we would request that the Council allocate and/or reserve additional land at Great Barford for residential development. Our clients have an interest in land west of Great Barford, part of which has been allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan, identified as "Great Barford West".

The land contained within the boundaries of the site allocation has been the subject of an independent site assessment (by Aecom on behalf of Great Barford Parish Council) and has then been reviewed by an Examiner in respect of its suitability for allocation.

The extent of the allocation offers greater capacity than the 500 dwellings currently identified for development in the Neighbourhood Plan, and we would request that the Council removes this upper limit from the current policy framework or allocates the land for additional development.

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The additional housing could be delivered in a phased approach following the delivery of the initial 500 units. We are currently in the process of preparing a Development Brief for Great Barford West, which will provide a clear direction on how the 500 dwellings is to be accommodated within the allocation. Until this process is completed, we cannot provide a definitive housing number on the remaining capacity but expect there to be a potential range of 200 to 400 additional dwellings. We therefore reserve the right to provide details on the capacity once the Development brief is agreed. We would contend that the allocation of additional numbers to this site will make a meaningful contribution towards housing numbers in the Borough, delivering quicker than the proposed new settlements and not reliant upon the strategic infrastructure that underpins the stepped trajectory.

If the Council does not want to lift the cap on housing numbers, nor to allocate the balance of the land for additional housing, then we would strongly contend that the land should be identified as a "strategic reserve site" to be brought forward if the spatial strategy and stepped trajectory fail to deliver.

The Great Barford West allocation is shown on Policy Map 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan, reproduced below:



Allocation Plan – Great Barford Neighbourhood Plan

Our clients' interests extend to land beyond the confines of the Great Barford West allocation and includes two farms (Davison and Thompson) to the immediate west of the village. The additional land, covered under Call for Sites ID 878 (Land west of the village of Great Barford south of the A421), and indicated in the Broadway Malyan plan CS103 reproduced below, could also be allocated or identified as a "strategic reserve site" that can be brought forward should the Council fail to achieve its residential development trajectories. This wider parcel of land offers a deliverable strategic alternative to the two new settlements, with direct access to the A421 and the strategic public transport network, without being reliant upon the delivery of East-West Rail. Identification of this land as a strategic reserve site would offer significant mitigation against a failure in the spatial strategy and stepped trajectory.



additional policy (or policies) covering these as further allocations (with a phasing mechanism), or identification as Strategic Reserve Sites, and a mechanism for bringing these forwards. This could include a review mechanism that is linked to the Council's Annual Monitoring Reporting or evidence of delays in the delivery of the East-West Rail / A421 transport corridor infrastructure.

Finally, in respect of the findings of the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment and Site Assessment, in respect of our client site (ID 878), we would object to the Borough Council's approach to discounting the site at Stage 1, and the failure to properly assess the sites suitability, availability & achievability. This would appear short-sighted and does not appear to give proper consideration to the alternative site options that could support the strategy going forward.

In the site assessment on pages 550 and 551 of Appendix 5 Part 1, there is limited reference to the relationship of the wider site with the part allocated under the Neighbourhood Plan, nor any consideration of the interaction between future phases of development and the allocation of 500 dwellings which will deliver enhancements to connectivity and access to social infrastructure. Statements made that the site is not with 400m of open space or 800m of sports provision exclude the provision coming forward within the allocation. The statement on heritage and archaeological impact ignores the work undertaken in support of the allocation and the limited impacts likely to occur. The statement "The site is not within or adjoining the urban area or a defined settlement policy area, or within the built form of a small settlement" is simply false. The statement "The development will not meet identified needs e.g. elderly, care, travellers" appears to make an assumption that wider needs could not be delivered, when our client will be more than happy to discuss specific needs identified.

With matters such as renewable energy or "extra energy efficiency standards", the assessment scores the site down, but this is entirely arbitrary to the process of site selection. Energy provision and energy efficiency will be addressed by the staged changes in the Building Regulations that will alter during the plan period and most likely exceed local requirements adopted today.

The highways comments are useful, but it is important to note that there are no fundamental concerns regarding the capacity of the A421, or the site's ability to integrate with the existing highway network. Conversely, the commentary draws on the potential connectivity via footway and cycleways back towards Bedford, the ability to move vehicular traffic quickly onto the major road network without impacting the village of Great Barford. It also highlights the potential for a high level of integration with the existing high-frequency bus services that cater for the village, linking west into Bedford and east into St Neots. The bus connection east to the proposed location of the new East-West Rail station is a significant benefit to the site's location, that could act as a foundation for strategic growth in the longer term.

We would therefore encourage the Council to reconsider this site in light of our representations and move the site forward to a Stage 2 assessment. Our clients are available to discuss the merits of the site and provide supporting information as required. For example, if a Transport Assessment was desired to confirm the suitability of the location in highway terms, this work could be commissioned.

7. If your representation is seeking a modification to the plan, do you consider it necessary to participate in examination hearing session(s)?

No , l do not wish	\checkmark	Yes, I
to participate in		wish to
hearing		participat
session(s)		e in
		hearing
		session(s)

8. If you wish to participate in the hearing session(s), please outline why

you consider this to be necessary:

Our objection to the soundness of the plan is based upon objections to the fundamental housing strategy being proposed by the Borough Council in the Local Plan. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to speak at the examination to debate the grounds of objection, to expand on our reasoning and our supporting evidence base; and to advocate the merits of our client's land, and how the proposed modification would make the plan sound.

2.3 <u>Policy DS3(S) – Stepped Trajectory</u>

5. To which part of the Local Plan does the representation relate?							
Paragraph	Policy	DS3(S)	Policie	es Map			
6. Do you consider the Local Plan is:							
4 (1) Legally Compliant		Yes		No			
4 (2) Sound		Yes		No	\checkmark		
4 (3) Complies with the operate	e Duty to co-	Yes		No			

5. Details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate:

Following on from our representation in respect of Policy DS2(S), the proposed Stepped Trajectory under Policy DS3(S) is optimistic and carries with it a high risk of failure, with no mechanism evident to mitigate that risk. The Council is adopting a stepped approach to housing delivery, where the current Local Plan 2030 provides for 970 dwellings per annum to 2024/25, then a marginal uplift is planned for 2025/26 to 2029/30 (following adoption of the Local Plan 2040), and then the expectation of a significant increase to 1700 dwellings per annum, from

2030/31 through to 2039/40.

The Council's strategy for increased delivery in the years 2030-40 is a risky one because the majority of the additional circa 12,000 new dwellings, that are needed, are coming from the two new settlements in the plan, i.e. South of Bedford and Little Barford. Both sites are allocated to provide at least 4,000 homes and each to a large extent are underpinned in transport terms by the delivery of the new East-West Rail route.

The stepped trajectory assumes a sudden and immediate increase in housing delivery in the year 2030/31. This assumption is based on a further assumption that the identified infrastructure to support this growth is in place prior to 2030, however, in terms of East-West Rail, the plan states at paragraph 4.23:

"The potential of EWR to offer improved connectivity and create economic growth will be a critical catalyst for delivery and pivotal to achieving the plan's vision. The new links and stations however will not be operational until 2030 and other essential infrastructure (principally improvements to the A421) are expected to be delivered on similar timescales."

In respect of the two new settlements the plan states that in respect of "South of Bedford", accessibility to the new settlement relies on the East-West Rail station but delivery is unlikely before 2030 (see the South of Bedford Area Topic Paper (April 2022)); and in respect of Little Barford the supporting technical note states that it is proposed to increase public transport frequency considerably to meet demand, and that a public transport hub is necessary with the new station at the heart of this new settlement. The Little Barford settlement appears to be highly reliant upon significant changes to the wider infrastructure network to accommodate the projected growth, without such improvements it is unclear that the existing highway network could accommodate the projected growth without significant adverse impacts in the area immediately south of St Neots.

In our opinion, there are contradictions within the plan, where it assumes a

massively increased development trajectory from 2030 onwards but at the same time states that the new East-West Rail and other key road infrastructure will not be ready before 2030. It does not therefore appear to plan for the possibility that the critical supporting infrastructure, that this approach relies upon, will not be ready until into the 2030s, either on current evidence or more so if there is a delay.

Given that the trajectory may well slip the Council should take account of this risk and seek to mitigate through the improved use of existing identified sites, such as Great Barford West allocation of additional sites, or the identification of strategic reserve sites, that remain inline with the adopted strategy, and could come forward in the late 2020s should this strategic infrastructure be delayed.

The NPPG states the following in respect of reserve sites (emphasis added):

"Where strategic policy-making authorities are unable to address past shortfalls over a 5 year period due to their scale, they may need to reconsider their approach to bringing land forward and the assumptions which they make. For example, by considering developers' past performance on delivery; reducing the length of time a permission is valid; <u>re-prioritising reserve sites which are 'ready</u> <u>to go</u>; delivering development directly or through arms' length organisations; or sub-dividing major sites where appropriate, and where it can be demonstrated that this would not be detrimental to the quality or deliverability of a scheme."

The identification of reserve sites is therefore recognised as an appropriate part of the plan-making process. Identifying reserve sites would provide the Council with an insurance against a fall in housing supply and will give the Council more time to undertake a Local Plan review in the late 2020s should East-West Rail and the improvements to the A421 be delayed. Without adequate insurance through further allocations or the identification of strategic reserve sites, policy DS3(S) – Amount of housing and timing of housing growth, has not been adequately justified by the evidence base and will note be effective in meeting the Borough's housing needs. The stepped change in delivery is a high-risk strategy and inadequate mitigation is provided should that strategy fail to deliver due to delays in the delivery of strategic infrastructure. On this basis the adoption of this policy is considered to render the plan **UNSOUND**.

6. The modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant and sound, in respect of any legal compliance or soundness matters you have identified at 5 above.

In parallel with our recommendations for modifications to Policy DS2(S) and DS5(S), the policy should be amended to include a release mechanism within the policy, should monitoring indicate that the target delivery rates within the policy table are not being achieved.

Suggested modification:

Remove the line of the end of paragraph *"When undertaking the five-year supply calculation, should any shortfall arise, it will be distributed across the remaining years of the plan period.*

Add additional line:

"Should the minimum dwellings per annum, identified in the table above, not be achieved, or there is clear evidence of a delay in the delivery of supporting infrastructure on which this stepped delivery is reliant, planning permission will be granted for the development of strategic reserve sites identified under Policy DS2(S) [as proposed for modification], subject to their compliance with the policies of the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040, when read as a whole."

Sites can be identified within the plan at policy DS5(S), and additional housing policies where necessary.

7. If your representation is seeking a modification to the plan, do you consider it necessary to participate in examination hearing session(s)?

No , I do not wish	\checkmark	Yes,	I	wish	to
to participate in		partic	ipat	te	in
hearing session(s)		hearing session(s)		(s)	

8. If you wish to participate in the hearing session(s), please outline why you consider this to be necessary:

Our objection to the soundness of the plan is based upon objections to the fundamental housing strategy being proposed by the Borough Council in the Local Plan. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to speak at the examination to debate the grounds of objection, to expand on our reasoning and our supporting evidence base; and to advocate the merits of our client's land, and how the proposed modification would make the plan sound.

2.2 Policy DS5(S) – Distribution of Growth

7. To which part of the Local Plan does the representation relate?						
Paragraph	Policy	DS5(S)	Policies	Мар		
8. Do you consider the Lo	ocal Plan is:					
4 (1) Legally Compliant		Yes	N	lo		
4 (2) Sound		Yes	N	lo	\checkmark	
4 (3) Complies with the operate	Duty to co-	Yes	N	lo		
5. Details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate:						
Please refer to our representations in respect of proposed policies DS2(S) and						

DS3(S) of the Local Plan 2040 – Plan for Submission. We raise objection to the

soundness of the plan due to a reliance on stepped housing trajectory, reliant on strategic settlement delivery in 2030, underpinned by the need to have significant infrastructure in place before 2030. This is a high risk strategy and our representations are that additional housing should be identified in the search area, consistent with the spatial strategy, that will offer additional capacity; could be delivered in phases in the late 2020s, or are held as strategic reserve sites to be released for development should it become clear that delays in the delivery of strategic infrastructure in the form of east-west Rail and improvements to the A421 will delay or reduce the delivery of the identified new settlements on Land South of Bedford and Little Barford.

On the basis of the above representations, Policy DS5(S) does not identify sufficient allocations to mitigate for this scenario, nor does it take the opportunity to identify strategic reserve sites that could be brought forward if and when necessary to meet the shortfall in delivery rates.

Without adequate insurance through further allocations or identification of strategic reserve sites, policy DS5(S) – Distribution of growth has not been adequately justified by the evidence base and will not be effective in meeting the Borough's housing needs. The stepped change in delivery is a high-risk strategy and inadequate mitigation is provided should that strategy fail to deliver due to delays in the delivery of strategic infrastructure. On this basis the adoption of this policy is considered to render the plan **UNSOUND**.

6. The modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant and sound, in respect of any legal compliance or soundness matters you have identified at 5 above.

The policy should include for other allocations or strategic reserve sites that will come forward in the event of delays in supporting infrastructure, such as our clients' land at Great Barford. The details of these sites will need to form part of the plan's wider strategy and requires modification to other strategic policies including identification through additional housing policies.

Under this altered policy we would advocate the identification of the balance of land at Great Barford West, allocated under policy H1 of the Neighbourhood Plan (January 2022). We would highlight the planning merits of this site, which offers additional capacity over and above the current allocation for 500 dwellings (and associated infrastructure). The site has already been subject to examination and technical review. This site has capacity to accommodate additional development, and while it is not yet clear the level of additional housing that could be accommodated, based on initial work undertaken in support of the Great Barford West Development Brief, this could range from 200 to 400 additional dwellings. Our client therefore reserves the right to make further comments on the site's capacity once the Development Brief has been agreed.

We would advocate that the cap on the existing allocation is lifted, allowing the capacity of the identified site to be fully explored. This could be done as a second phase, following the delivery of the 500 dwellings.

If the cap is not lifted, then under policy DS5(S), the remainder of the site could be specifically allocated for additional development (the quantum of which can be confirmed).

It is further highlighted that additional development here is not reliant upon the proposed strategic infrastructure improvements but can be accommodated within the existing the highways network. The 500-dwelling scheme will also deliver improvements to local infrastructure, including utilities and this in turn means that the site can be delivered in phased manner following the development of the initial 500 dwellings, therefore making it available to deliver additional numbers in the late 2020s.

Regarding social infrastructure, Bedford Borough have previously confirmed that

the existing school complex has the capacity to expand to accommodate primary educational needs arising from additional development above the currently proposed 500 dwellings, therefore, further highlighting the sustainability of the settlement and its capacity to accommodate future growth.

The additional development could be brought forward in line with the policy objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan, with input from the Parish Council, and adopt the objectives of the Development Brief (currently being prepared). The allocation could also come through a Neighbourhood Plan Review. In paragraph 4.31 of the Local Plan 2040, it states (emphasis added):

"Policy DS5(S) sets out where growth will be located. It takes into account existing commitments together with the additional growth required to meet needs to 2040. There will continue to be growth in villages as a result of policies in the Local Plan 2030 which allocate growth to some Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres. No new allocations are made in these villages in the Local Plan 2040, <u>although some Parish Councils may choose to allocate further sites for</u> <u>development in their neighbourhood plans to meet particular local needs.</u>"

The potential for deliverable sites to address any short fall in the medium term, would mitigate the need and delay caused by a Local Plan review, or at least, reduce the urgency for the review to be reconsidered in the light of such delays.

If the Council remains of the view, that it does not wish to allocate the land for residential development now, then we would strongly encourage the Council to identify the balance of the Great Barford West allocation as a strategic reserve site, and adopt a policy enabling strategic reserve sites to be brought forward if the stepped trajectory fails.

We would also highlight the availability of the additional land to the west of Great Barford, that represents a deliverable strategic alternative to the two new settlement proposals. We would encourage the Council to give greater consideration to the merits of the site "Land west of the village of Great Barford south of the A421". This land (or a part of it) could also be identified as a strategic reserve site and would offer significant mitigation against the potential for delays in delivery from the identified strategic allocations.

7. If your representation is seeking a modification to the plan, do you consider it necessary to participate in examination hearing session(s)?

No , l do not wish	\checkmark	Yes, I wish	to
to participate in		participate	in
hearing session(s)		hearing session	(s)

8. If you wish to participate in the hearing session(s), please outline why you consider this to be necessary:

Our objection to the soundness of the plan is based upon objections to the fundamental housing strategy being proposed by the Borough Council in the Local Plan. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to speak at the examination to debate the grounds of objection, to expand on our reasoning and our supporting evidence base; and to advocate the merits of our client's land, and how the proposed modification would make the plan sound.

3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 This representation provides specific responses on behalf of Countryside Partnerships Plc to the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040 – Plan for Submission (Regulation 19 Publication Stage) consultation.
- 3.2 The representations made intend to constructively contribute towards to the plan making process.
- 3.3 The main thrust of our client's objection is that the proposed residential development trajectory is not realistic or deliverable, and that our client's site offers capacity to deliver additional housing that could either be delivered after the initial phase of 500 dwellings (as allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan), or it could be identified as a strategic reserve site to be brought forward during the plan period in the event that housing supply falls short of the Council's projections.
- 3.4 The land at Great Barford West has been allocated for development of up to 500 dwellings in the Great Barford Neighbourhood Plan, however the extent of the allocation can accommodate more than the Neighbourhood Plan allocation. Given the planning merits of this site have already been established, and tested through examination, this represents a deliverable opportunity site that could be allocated or reserved to meet future needs in the near or medium term. In addition, our client has an interest in land beyond the western boundary of this allocation which offers strategic potential Land west of the village of Great Barford south of the A421 site ID878. The identification of this land as a strategic reserve site (or part of it) would offer mitigation against the potential for the delay in the delivery of the strategic allocations at South of Bedford and Little Barford.
- 3.5 We trust our representations will be given due consideration in the process and welcome the opportunity to discuss these points with the Inspector.

Appendix A – Broadway Malyan – Site Location and Ownership Plan CS103



Contractors and consultants are not to scale dimensions from this drawing

Extent of Neighbourhood Plan allocation

Extent of Davison ownership

Extent of Thompson ownership





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Revision
Date
Description

- YY-MM-DD
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Client Countryside Project Land to the West of Great Barford Description Existing Extent of Site

Status

For InformationScaleDrawn By1:5000@A1MJJob NumberDrawing Number33574CS103

Date Jul 22 Revision



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