



**PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT LITTLE BARFORD
PROPOSED ALLOCATION - POLICY HOU19
BEDFORD BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2040
LITTLE BARFORD NEW SETTLEMENT**

EDUCATION REVIEW

**PREPARED ON BEHALF OF
THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE NIGEL ALINGTON**

by

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Little Barford New Settlement

Education Review

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1 Introduction and context

- 1.1 This report is provided in support of proposed development at Little Barford. It considers the potential implications of the proposal on education provision, including the availability of places in existing schools and the schools proposed as part of the proposal.
- 1.2 The proposal to establish Little Barford New Settlement is contained in the emerging local plan for the area, as the subject of Policy HOU19. The proposed development does not extend beyond the Bedford Borough boundary. However, Little Barford lies at the eastern extremity of Bedford Borough and the allocation area abuts two local authority boundaries - with Central Bedfordshire at its southern boundary, and Huntingdonshire District at its northern boundary.
- 1.3 Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and Central Bedfordshire (CBC) are both unitary authorities, and each is both local planning authority and local education authority for its area. The local education authority for Huntingdonshire is Cambridgeshire County Council, as this is a 'two tier' authority area.
- 1.4 Before the local government reorganisation that established Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, on 1 April 2009, Bedfordshire County Council was the local education authority for the area. The historic secondary education linkage for Little Barford to Sandy Secondary School remains in place, as confirmed by BBC's 'School catchment areas' webpage¹.
- 1.5 Despite the relatively close proximity of St Neots to Little Barford, there does not appear to be much 'cross border' education linkage at present. This could change in the future with the development of new schools and the possible improvement of the A428 – which would re-align the road through the HOU19 allocation site.

2 Expected education demand from Little Barford New Settlement

- 2.1 The emerging local plan (Local Plan 2040, Plan for Submission, April 2022) presents Little Barford New Settlement as making a key contribution to the delivery of new homes with 3,800 of the 4,000 dwellings allocated being estimated for delivery within the plan period. Development of this scale will undoubtedly require new and additional schools.

¹ <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/schools-education-and-childcare/schools-and-colleges/school-admissions/school-catchment-areas-from-september-2021/>

Policy HOU19

2.2 Proposed Policy HOU19 identifies the need for a phasing strategy and an infrastructure delivery plan to demonstrate timely delivery of infrastructure.

2.3 The policy goes on to identify, under 'PLACEMAKING',

*"xi. The provision of serviced sites for secondary and primary schools including early years facilitates at the heart of the local neighbourhoods to serve the new development, (2 x 5.5ha 4FE primary and 1 x 10.1ha 8FE secondary schools); Due to the lack of capacity in existing schools, additional capacity will be required to be open prior to the occupation of the first dwelling."*²

Supporting documents and pupil yield

2.4 Supporting documents to the submission version of the local plan, include an 'Education Implications Topic Paper (2030) + Addendum (2040)' (EITP&A), and 'Bedford Infrastructure Delivery Plan, 12 May 2022 – Final Report' (IDP).

2.5 In Section 1.5, the IDP identifies additional primary school provision being needed to support housing growth beyond 2030, together with three new secondary (11-16) schools - including one at Little Barford. Sections 6.1 and 6.2 deal with education in greater detail.

2.6 For primary education, the EITP&A assumption of one form of entry (1FE) for every 500 dwellings is used - this equates to 42 pupils per 100 dwellings. This assumption is considered further below. For 4,000 dwellings at Little Barford it is proposed that there should be two, 4FE primary schools at a cost of £26m (paragraphs 6.1.22 and 6.1.25 and Table 6.3).

2.7 For secondary education, the assumption of 21 secondary school age children per 100 dwellings contained in BBC's 2013 Planning Obligations SPD is used. This produces an expectation of 840 (equivalent to 5.6FE) secondary age children from 4,000 dwellings, and the figure of 798 (stated in Table 6.4) for Little Barford ("New settlement A421") is based on 3,800 dwellings up to 2040 (in contrast to the primary schools requirement, which is for the whole allocation). The IDP explains that the new scale of development at Little Barford justifies a new school (paragraph 6.2.15). BBC estimates the indicative cost of an 8FE secondary school, with sixth form, as £25m.

2.8 The IDP suggests that education costs will be covered by developer contributions. It is assumed that this will be achieved through the CIL charge or through contributions secured in s106 planning obligations.

2.9 The EITP&A mirrors the requirements in the IDP and specifies the site areas required for the schools - 2 x 5.5ha for primary schools and 10.1ha for the secondary school. It is also

² One form of entry is 30 pupils per year groups. A four form entry (4FE) school would provide 4 x 30 x 7 (the number of year groups) = 840 pupil places. For secondary schools there are five year groups and if a sixth form is included a 50% 'stay on' over two years effectively adds another year group, such that an 8FE secondary school would provide 1,440 (8 x 30 x 6) pupil places – of which 1,200 would cater for the secondary age group.

stated that BBC prefers to commission school buildings rather than having them delivered directly by developers (paragraph 6 of the Addendum).

- 2.10 The EITP&A also explains, at paragraph 2.1, why a higher pupil yield than stated in BBC’s 2013 SPD has been used for primary pupil yield. It appears that there is some evidence to support the higher figures now being used, and a number of examples of recent large scale developments are provided at paragraph 2.4. Full details of BBC’s calculations have not been published, and are required to understand the implications.
- 2.11 I consider the point made at paragraph 2.2, about new developments being popular with families with young children, is a fair one. 2011 Census information shows that migrant households (those that moved in the year prior to the Census) include more ‘young families’ and have more young children, in comparison to average households. Whilst the Census information is not confined to new dwellings, it seems reasonable that the ‘young family’ demographic would apply people moving into new and existing dwellings alike - bearing in mind that one of the key drivers for families to move is likely to be that their existing accommodation is not large enough to accommodate a growing family.
- 2.12 However, new housing does not create new children, it simply provides an alternative place for people to live, and not all families who move will be new to an area. In existing towns, the effects of development are offset by wider demographic changes. Where new settlements are being created, such changes will be more remote and the impact will be more apparent. This should be recognised in school place planning, as it is important that families have reasonable access to education.
- 2.13 However, it must be the case that the ‘young family’ demographic characteristics seen in new dwellings gradually change as families age, and those dwellings will in due course have demographic characteristics similar to other existing housing stock. Existing housing stock has an average pupil yield of around 1FE per 1,000 dwellings, or 21 pupils per 100 dwellings.
- 2.14 Table 1 below shows child yields for Bedford Borough, calculated from the 2021 Census information published on 28 June 2022. Child yield is not quite the same as pupil yield and households (with more than one usual resident) is not quite the same as dwellings. However, the comparison is a reasonable one to make. The published information shows Bedford Borough contained 74,900 households with at least one usual resident.

| | Aged 4 years and under | Aged 5 to 9 years | Aged 10 to 14 years | Aged 15 to 19 years | Average |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Persons | 11,200 | 11,700 | 12,000 | 10,300 | 11300 |
| Child yield | 2.99 | 3.12 | 3.20 | 2.75 | 3.02 |

*Table 1 2021 Census data – Child Yield calculations per year group per 100 households
Source for population and household figures: ONS Census 2021*

- 2.15 The figures by age group show some variation, but are around 3 children per year group per 100 households. This can be compared to BBC's figures of 6 and 4.2 pupils per year group per 100 dwellings for primary and secondary respectively.

Observations

- 2.16 While there is evidence of higher than average primary child/pupil numbers being resident in new housing, the assumed primary and secondary pupil numbers are well above the wider area average and will not be sustained in the long term. This needs to be taken into account when planning provision.
- 2.17 At the planning application stage, detailed considerations may also affect expected pupil yield. Dwelling numbers, dwelling mix, the inclusion of specialist dwellings types (such as dwellings specifically for older people) could all affect expected pupil yield.
- 2.18 The longer the timescale for the completion of the development, the more likely it is that the initial peak in demand for primary places from the first phases of development will be waning and able to offset the peak from later phases of development.
- 2.19 It would be helpful to explore the information available from the developments referenced by BCC to understand how the pupil yield from these developments have changed (and are changing), to inform provision required for Little Barford.

3 Existing primary and secondary school provision

- 3.1 There is no doubt that Little Barford New Settlement justifies new and additional school provision. New primary schools on site are certainly a reasonable requirement, and a new secondary school appears to be appropriate in view of the lack of existing secondary education provision in this part of Bedford Borough, as explained below. However, it is important that final decisions take into account all relevant circumstances, including whether Little Barford New Settlement is the best location.

Existing schools, capacities and pupil numbers on roll

- 3.2 St Neots is a substantial town, served by a number of primary schools and two secondary schools. The proximity of these schools means that they could potentially provide some capacity to accommodate demand from Little Barford, probably on a temporary basis only, subject to other demands and admission rules. This could affect the timing and amount of provision needed on site at Little Barford.
- 3.3 Informal contact with Cambridgeshire County Council Education officers indicates that there is little cross border movement in the area at present, although this may not have been studied in detail. In any event the demand from existing housing will be relatively low compared to the demand from St Neots itself. St Neots is an area of housing growth in its own right, and opportunities may be limited as places are increasingly filled from development in and adjacent to the town.

3.4 A further consideration is that a new secondary school is being considered in the St Neots area. The school trust Advantage Schools currently runs Bedford Free School, and has proposed a new free school in the area. The project was originally approved by the Department for Education (DfE) in April 2017. It was subsequently put on hold, but “resurrected” in April 2021. It is understood that no firm decisions have yet been made.

3.5 At this stage, it is not being suggested that there are opportunities available to utilise capacity in schools in other authority areas that should be relied upon. However, it is suggested that the policy wording should encourage, not preclude, imaginative options for providing capacity being fully explored. This could particularly affect timing of provision.

| Local Authority | School Name | Approximate distance | Age range from | Age range to | Sixth form? | Capacity | Number on Roll | Surplus places |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|----------|----------------|----------------|
| Cambridgeshire | Ernulf Academy | 1.3 | 11 | 18 | Yes | 1274 | 623 | 651 |
| Cambridgeshire | Longsands Academy | 2.6 | 11 | 18 | Yes | 1838 | 1775 | 63 |
| Central Bedfordshire | Sandy Secondary School | 4.1 | 11 | 18 | yes | 1009 | 1007 | 2 |
| Bedford | Mark Rutherford School | 7.2 | 11 | 18 | Yes | 1243 | 1285 | -42 |
| Central Bedfordshire | Stratton Upper School | 7.7 | 13 | 18 | Yes | 1320 | 869 | 451 |

*Table 2 Secondary schools within 8 miles, ordered by distance - capacity, NOR and spare capacity
Source: DfE. Information as of January 2021. Distances based on PE19 6YE (New Manor House)*

3.6 Table 2 above shows secondary schools within eight miles – this distance was chosen so that the table would include the relevant Bedford Borough catchment school, Mark Rutherford School. Mark Rutherford School is full, as well as being a considerable distance away. Sandy Secondary School, with which there is an established relationship also shows as being full. However, the nearest school, Enulf Academy, is only about half full. It would clearly be a very poor use of resources to create additional places if there is available capacity that be utilised. Capacities and pupil numbers include sixth forms.

| Local Authority | School Name | Approximate distance, mls | Age range from | Age range to | Nursery class(es)? | Capacity | Number on Roll | Surplus places |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|----------------|----------------|
| Cambridgeshire | Middlefield Primary Academy | 1.3 | 5 | 11 | No | 210 | 207 | 3 |
| Cambridgeshire | Bushmead Primary School | 1.8 | 4 | 11 | No | 364 | 346 | 18 |
| Cambridgeshire | Winhills Primary Academy | 1.8 | 3 | 11 | Yes | 367 | 260 | 107 |
| Cambridgeshire | Eynesbury CofE C Primary School | 1.9 | 4 | 11 | No | 210 | 190 | 20 |
| Cambridgeshire | St Mary's CofE Primary School St Neots | 2.09 | 3 | 11 | Yes | 210 | 113 | 97 |
| Bedford | Roxton CofE Academy | 2.12 | 3 | 11 | Yes | 90 | 76 | 14 |
| Cambridgeshire | Crosshall Infant School Academy | 2.47 | 3 | 7 | Yes | 438 | 388 | 50 |
| Cambridgeshire | Crosshall Junior School | 2.47 | 7 | 11 | No | 480 | 447 | 33 |
| Cambridgeshire | Priory Park Infant School & Playgroup | 2.48 | 4 | 7 | Yes | 270 | 249 | 21 |
| Cambridgeshire | Priory Junior School | 2.64 | 7 | 11 | No | 360 | 341 | 19 |
| Cambridgeshire | The Round House Primary Academy | 2.75 | 4 | 11 | No | 420 | 385 | 35 |
| Cambridgeshire | Wintringham Primary Academy | 2.76 | 2 | 11 | Yes | 630 | 24 | 606 |

*Table 3 Primary schools within 3 miles, ordered by distance - capacity, NOR and spare capacity
Source: DfE. Information as of January 2021. Distances based on PE19 6YE (New Manor House)*

3.7 Table 3 above shows primary schools, within three miles – this distance being chosen to include the Bedford Borough catchment primary school, Roxton CofE. A number of Cambridgeshire schools with surplus capacity are closer than Roxton CofE, and would benefit from additional demand. Capacities and pupils may include nursery classes. The information about Wintringham Primary School in Table 3 appears to be incorrect and/or misleading (due to the number of surplus places indicated), and should be disregarded.

Existing schools and pupil forecasts

3.8 Local authorities normally plan school places based on planning areas rather than individual schools, so forecasts for individual schools are not generally available. Forecasts, are provided annually by local authorities to DfE which publishes them some months later. Currently published information is based on forecasts that were undertaken in Summer 2021.

3.9 The forecast information for Mark Rutherford School, which is the only school in the East Bedford Secondary planning area shows continued pressure on places with forecast pupil numbers above capacity.

3.10 The forecast information for Sandy Secondary School shows substantial and steadily increasing demand over the forecast period to 2027/28, with intake forecast to exceed the schools published admission number of 269 in all but one forecast year. It may be noted that this admission number is inconsistent with the capacity stated in Table 2 above. However, since it appears little surplus capacity will be available, this is inconsequential.

3.11 The forecast information for the two Cambridgeshire secondary schools in St Neots shows steadily increasing demand over the forecast period to 2027/28, as shown in Table 4 below. Notwithstanding the expected increase in demand, substantial numbers of surplus places are forecast through to the end of the forecast period.

| Year / Year group | 2020/21 actual | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Year 07 | 450 | 438 | 453 | 482 | 456 | 445 | 476 | 470 |
| Year 08 | 452 | 446 | 435 | 451 | 481 | 454 | 443 | 474 |
| Year 09 | 391 | 446 | 441 | 431 | 448 | 477 | 450 | 439 |
| Year 10 | 344 | 389 | 445 | 441 | 432 | 448 | 477 | 450 |
| Year 11 | 400 | 344 | 390 | 447 | 444 | 434 | 450 | 479 |
| Year 12 | 176 | 179 | 172 | 179 | 185 | 190 | 197 | 210 |
| Year 13 | 185 | 170 | 146 | 142 | 149 | 153 | 158 | 164 |
| Secondary total | 2398 | 2412 | 2482 | 2573 | 2595 | 2601 | 2651 | 2686 |
| Surplus capacity | 714 | 700 | 630 | 539 | 517 | 511 | 461 | 426 |
| Surplus % | 22.9% | 22.5% | 20.2% | 17.3% | 16.6% | 16.4% | 14.8% | 13.7% |
| Years 7-11 | 2037 | 2063 | 2164 | 2252 | 2261 | 2258 | 2296 | 2312 |
| Surplus capacity Y7-11 | 573 | 547 | 446 | 358 | 349 | 352 | 314 | 298 |
| Surplus Y7-11 % | 22.0% | 21.0% | 17.1% | 13.7% | 13.4% | 13.5% | 12.0% | 11.4% |

Table 4 Secondary Schools in St Neots Secondary Planning Area

- Forecasts of pupils on roll (actual for 2020/21) Source: DfE.

Note: Total capacity is 3112, and 2610 excluding sixth forms – based on total admission number to Year 7 being 522. Source: Cambridgeshire CC.

- 3.12 The colour shading in Table 4 above and Table 5 below indicates whether the schools are close to capacity margins, with green shading being 10% or more surplus and progressive amber to red shading between 10% surplus and no surplus. The individual year figures in Table 4 show a maximum of 482, which represents 40 surplus places, or 7.7%. Similarly, the maximum individual year figures of 428 in Table 5 is a surplus places of 29 places, or 6.3%.
- 3.13 The forecast information for Bedford Borough primary schools is of very limited value in this instance, since there are six primary schools in the primary planning area and it is therefore impossible to draw any reliable conclusions about the likely circumstances in Roxton CofE Academy. In addition, Roxton CofE is a very small school and not easily accessible from Little Barford. Any contribution it might make towards accommodating demand from the new community will be marginal, and can be disregarded.
- 3.14 The Cambridgeshire schools shown in Table 3 comprise a complete primary planning area, and a summary of the forecast information is shown in Table 5 below. The demand for Reception places is forecast to decline slightly, before starting to increase again - although remaining below intake capacity (admission number).

| Year / Year group | 2020/21 actual | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 |
|-------------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reception | 413 | 377 | 377 | 391 | 421 | 428 |
| Year 01 | 418 | 403 | 371 | 373 | 389 | 419 |
| Year 02 | 406 | 410 | 398 | 367 | 371 | 387 |
| Year 03 | 397 | 395 | 402 | 391 | 362 | 366 |
| Year 04 | 422 | 390 | 391 | 399 | 390 | 361 |
| Year 05 | 393 | 417 | 388 | 390 | 400 | 391 |
| Year 06 | 385 | 388 | 415 | 387 | 391 | 401 |
| Primary total | 2834 | 2780 | 2742 | 2698 | 2724 | 2753 |
| Surplus capacity | 365 | 419 | 457 | 501 | 475 | 446 |
| Surplus % | 11.4% | 13.1% | 14.3% | 15.7% | 14.8% | 13.9% |

Table 5 Primary Schools in St Neots Town 1 Primary Primary Planning Area

- Forecasts of pupils on roll (actual for 2020/21) Source: DfE.

Note: Total capacity is 3199, total admission number is 457. Source Cambridgeshire CC.

Observations

- 3.15 The pupil forecasts for secondary schools, in both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, indicate increasing pressure, supporting the need to establish a new secondary school as part of the Little Barford New Settlement. The lack of a nearby school in Bedford Borough also means that such provision would benefit existing communities in this part of the borough.

- 3.16 The only Bedford Borough primary school in the area is very small and poorly located to serve the proposed development. New primary schools will be needed as part of the Little Barford New Settlement.
- 3.17 However, the pupil forecasts for both primary and secondary schools in St Neots show surplus capacity throughout the forecast periods. Whilst the information may well present an incomplete position, due to future housing in St Neots itself, the figures suggest that some options may be available for utilising some primary and secondary school capacity in St Neots – most likely on a short term basis. It is therefore suggested that the policy wording should encourage not preclude the possibility of more imaginative options being fully explored.

4 Timing and amount of additional education provision

- 4.1 As noted at paragraph 2.3, above, the proposed local plan policy includes a requirement for a certain amount of provision to be made, and for additional provision to be open prior to the occupation of the first dwelling (Placemaking xi.). The proposed policy is not specific about the nature (primary or secondary, permanent or temporary, extension to existing school or new school) or quantity of this initial provision. However, it could be interpreted that this is a reference to a new school, or schools, on site. As such, very significant sums of money could be involved with considerable cash flow implications for construction (and also operation) of that provision. The cash flow implications might be mitigated if a grant is available to advance fund infrastructure. However, such grants ‘come and go’ and no reliance can be placed on their availability in this case.
- 4.2 In addition, there are practical issues to consider including servicing, and developing on, a site that may well be remote from access points and early phases of housing.
- 4.3 This element of the proposed policy contradicts and pre-judges the principle of developing an infrastructure delivery plan within an SPD, as set out in the third paragraph of the proposed policy.
- 4.4 It is understood from informal conversation with BBC Education that early delivery is driven not only by lack of capacity (in Bedford Brough schools) but also by transport costs. This is understandable in view of the distance to existing schools in the borough. However, it is not clear that any serious consideration has been given to alternative approaches to these issues, including the potential to utilise surplus capacity in St Neots schools.
- 4.5 It is not being suggested that discussions about cross-border opportunities should take place now, at least not in any detail. It is suggested that the policy wording should encourage rather than preclude such discussions.
- 4.6 As to the amount of education provision stated in the proposed policy, it is clear that the 8FE primary provision relates to the expected demand based on BBC’s latest pupil yield. Earlier sections of this report have identified factors that may mitigate the high pupil yields

currently being expected by BBC, and also explained why BBC's pupil yield figures represent a peak rather than a long term demand.

- 4.7 Some further research into the timing and length of peak demand is needed.
- 4.8 For secondary the provision proposed is 8FE, which is 46% above BBC's anticipated yield from Little Barford New Settlement of 5.6FE. Clearly, there are other settlements in the Bedford Borough area that could benefit, but it is not clear what the basis for a 8FE requirement is. It would be helpful for BBC to explain where the rest of the demand for the new secondary school is expected to come from, to help understand whether it is reasonable for a site of 10.1ha to be provided and what compensation the site owner might receive for the over-provision.
- 4.9 BBC's calculation of both primary and secondary site areas need to be confirmed. On initial inspection, the primary site areas appear to exceed DfE guidance in BB103 considerably; and the secondary area is at the top of the range, so could be reasonably be reduced if a suitable site can be found.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The scale of the proposed Little Barford New Settlement strongly suggests new schools will be required on site. This is reinforced, from a Bedford Borough perspective by a lack of accessible primary and secondary schools within its area.
- 5.2 The pupil yields now being used by BBC indicate demand for school places well above the long term average for the council area – double in the case of primary. BBC has some evidence to support its figures, which are broadly consistent with an expectation of households that move including above average numbers of young children. These high child/pupil numbers will not be sustained in the long term and, on a large development such as this, overall demand may be lower. Further work is needed to inform place planning for Little Barford New Settlement.
- 5.3 Whilst Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire schools are relatively inaccessible and lack capacity to accommodate children from the proposed development, there are schools with surplus capacity in St Neots that may be able to accommodate some of the demand from the early stages of the proposed development. This could make good use of existing resources and investigation, at the appropriate time, should be encouraged rather precluded by rigid policy wording.
- 5.4 Clarification is required from BBC about site area requirements, the justification for an 8FE secondary school, and the choice of Little Barford New Settlement as the location.
- 5.5 This report identifies a number of areas of uncertainty at present, which strongly suggests a flexible approach to policy about education provision is needed. The proposed HOU19 policy wording at Placemaking xi. is unduly prescriptive. The need for an infrastructure

delivery plan is already identified in paragraph 3, and Placemaking xi. should be amended to read as follows:

“xi. The provision of serviced sites for secondary and primary schools including early years facilitates at the heart of the local neighbourhoods to serve the need generated by the new development., ~~(2 x 5.5ha 4FE primary and 1 x 10.1ha 8FE secondary schools); Due to the lack of capacity in existing schools, additional capacity will be required to be open prior to the occupation of the first dwelling. Financial contribution towards secondary school provision~~ In the first instance this will be sought onsite but a detailed strategy will be produced within the site/development specific IDP that will consider the most appropriate approach to the phasing of this provision as the development comes forward;”