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Bedford Borough Council

Black Cat Roundabout
Commercial
Development

14th August 2020



THE MAJOR JUNCTION IMPROVEMENTS AT THE BLACK CAT ROUNDABOUT WHERE THE UPGRADED A428 MEETS THE A1, WILL CREATE A STRATEGIC HIGHWAY INTERSECTION WHICH IS IDEALLY LOCATED TO SUPPORT A RANGE OF NEW COMMERCIAL FACILITIES INCLUDING MOTORWAY SERVICE AREA, ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING, HOTEL, LORRY PARK AND DISTRIBUTION AND ASSOCIATED RETAIL AND LEISURE FACILITIES

Carter Jonas

Scope Of Services: Black Cat Roundabout, Commercial Development

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1 Introduction

This Vision Document has been prepared by Carter Jonas on behalf of Bedford Borough Council to illustrate the development potential of a parcel of land to the east of the Black Cat Roundabout, Bedford (“the Site”), which is submitted in response to Bedford Borough Council’s ‘Call for Sites’ in August 2020.

The aim of the document is to start the process of sharing the landowner’s vision for a sympathetic roadside services and employment-led development; and provide Bedford Council, as the local planning authority, with the information required to properly consider the Site through the SHELAA and Local Plan site selection and allocation processes.

The Council has already started work on the Local Plan Review and intends to submit the finished plan for examination in late 2023. The Council is currently consulting on the Issues and Options stage which it will use to inform the site selection process for the new Local Plan 2040.

The new Local Plan will allocate sites for development in order to address existing development needs and to accommodate projected growth over the plan period, taking into account new ONS growth figures and the emerging spatial strategy for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

This document seeks to outline the possibilities for the allocation of the site, and its development in a way to capitalise on its strategic location within the Region.

Fig 1: Red line plan of the Site area (Opposite)



ST NEOTS

A1

A421

BEDFORD

Bedford Road

River Great Ouse

SANDY

2 Planning Position

Current Local Plan

Bedford's Local Plan 2030 was adopted in full on 15th January 2020.

The adopted Policies Map shows that the site is currently located outside of any settlement boundary and is not allocated for any purpose. It is partly within Flood Zone 3a and is part of a "Green Infrastructure Network Opportunity Zone".

Policy 3S on the Borough's Spatial Strategy states that to deliver sustainable development and growth that enhances the vitality of the borough's urban and rural communities, all new development will be required to contribute towards achieving the stated objectives and policies of the plan. This includes point iii): "Building on and expanding the town's employment base with a focus on strategic locations related to the primary road network in the context of increasing east-west connectivity through road and rail improvements".

Policy 69S sets out an ambition to provide a minimum of 6,900 additional jobs in the Borough up to 2030. The policy states that new employment should be provided mainly be within the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston, and within allocated employment sites. However, Policy 72S does allow for non-allocated B-class development on sites over 5ha, if (amongst other criteria):

- There is no availability on allocated sites;
- There is a demonstrable demand and need at the proposed location;
- The development is adjacent to the strategic transportation network by road or rail, and is well located for borough residents.

Policy 76 also allows for new visitor-related development beyond defined settlements if it can be reasonably demonstrated that it needs to be in this location. There are no policies in the existing Local Plan that deal specifically with roadside uses.

New Local Plan

Due to changes to national planning policy, in particular the need for the borough to plan for higher housing numbers beyond this local plan, the Council has committed to undertake an early review of the Local Plan.

Policy 1 of the 2030 Local Plan states:

"The Council will undertake a review of the Local Plan 2030, which will commence no later than one year after the adoption of the plan.

The plan review will secure levels of growth that accord with government policy and any growth deals that have been agreed. The planning and delivery of strategic growth will be aligned with the delivery of planned infrastructure schemes including the A421 expressway, Black Cat junction, East West Rail link and potentially the A1 realignment."

Growth along the A421 corridor is defined as one of the six options for future growth in the District. The advantages cited in the Consultation Paper include proximity to existing employment areas; good strategic road connections; a reduction in the need for growth in rural areas; and proximity and reduced travel time to the high-value Cambridge market. Disadvantages could include encouraging car use, poor connections to town centres, and the potential for urban sprawl.

The National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 82 of the NPPF (2019) states that "Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; and for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations."

Paragraph 104 states that planning policies should, amongst other things, "provide for any large scale transport facilities that need to be located in the area, and the infrastructure and wider development required to support their operation, expansion and contribution to the wider economy. In doing so they should take into account whether such development is likely to be a nationally significant infrastructure project and any relevant national policy statements".

The National Planning Policy Framework outlines at footnote 42 that policies for large scale facilities should be developed through collaboration between strategic policy-making authorities and other relevant bodies. Examples of such facilities include roadside services. The primary function of roadside services should be to support the safety and welfare of the road user.

The Importance of Roadside Users

The Department for Transport, Brake and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents have published documentation speaking to the risk of driver fatigue and importance of taking breaks and over-night stops in preventing accidents.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RSPA)

The RSPA Policy Statement on driver fatigue (2011) states:

many thousands of road accidents each year. It is not possible to calculate the exact number of sleep related accidents but research shows that driver fatigue may be a contributory factor in up to 20% of road accidents, and up to one quarter of fatal and serious accidents.

Crashes caused by tired drivers are most likely to happen:

- on long journeys on monotonous roads, such as motorways
- between 2am and 6am

Relevant recommendations in the Policy Statement include:

- Plan your journey to take sufficient breaks. A minimum break of at least 15 minutes after every two hours of driving is recommended
- If you feel sleepy, stop in a safe place. Do not stop on the hard shoulder of a motorway
- The most effective ways to counter sleepiness are to drink, for example, two cups of caffeinated coffee and to take a short nap (up to 15 minutes).
- If necessary, plan an overnight stop

Brake

Brake is the road safety charity. Its web-site echoes the recommendations of the RSPA, adding the following relevant advice:

Drinking a caffeinated drink such as coffee or an energy drink is effective in reducing driver tiredness over short periods, and has been found to reduce crash risk among long-distance truck drivers by 63% [38]. Energy drinks are a more reliable source of caffeine, as levels in coffee vary. Drinking caffeine before taking a 15 minute nap, giving the caffeine time to kick in while you rest, can therefore be helpful in addressing tiredness temporarily. However this is only a short-term solution, and cannot replace regular breaks and sufficient sleep. Therefore drivers who still feel tired or still have a long way to go should stay put and, if possible, check into a hotel to get some proper rest.

Department for Transport (DfT)

Government policy is contained in DfT Circular 02/2013 'The strategic road network and the delivery of sustainable development' (10th September 2013), specifically Annexe B: 'Roadside facilities for road users on motorways and all-purpose trunk roads in England'. This states:

Motorway service areas and other roadside facilities perform an important road safety function by providing opportunities for the travelling public to stop and take a break in the course of their journey. Government advice is that motorists should stop and take a break of at least 15 minutes every two hours. Drivers of many commercial and public service vehicles are subject to a regime of statutory breaks and other working time restrictions and these facilities assist in compliance with such requirements.

The DfT policy on roadside services states:

The primary function of roadside facilities which is to support the safety and welfare of the road user.

3 Site Context

The Site is located to the east of the Black Cat roundabout, and borders the A1/A421 to the west and River Great Ouse to the east.

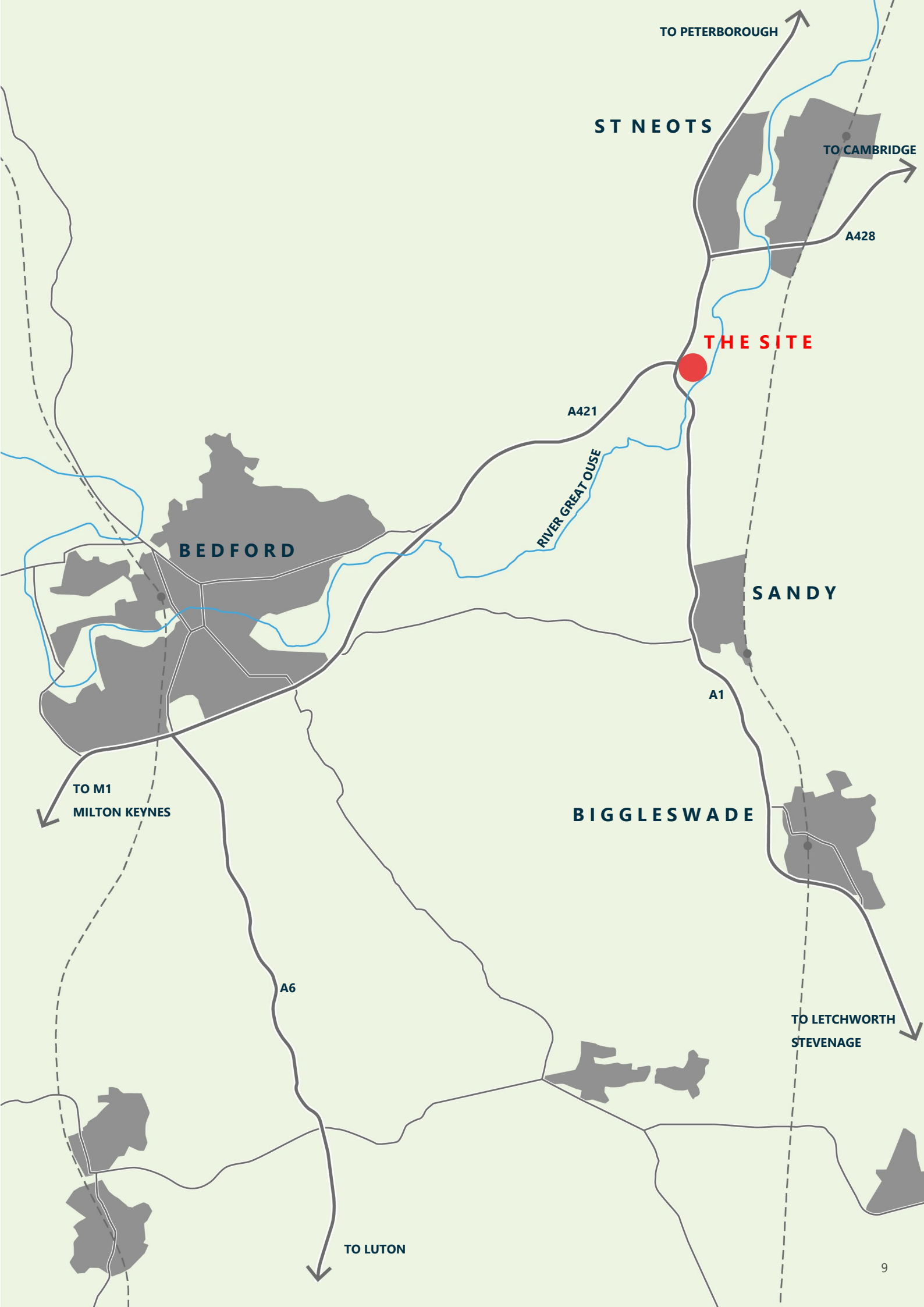
The site is currently in use as an aggregates pit by Breedon Black Cat Quarry and comprises a number of pits, lakes, spoil heaps and buildings. Access is provided directly off the Black Cat roundabout. The site is strategically located 2.7km south of Colmworth Business Park, St Neots; 8.09km north east of Elm Farm Industrial Estate, Bedford; and 4.6km north of Sandy.

The site currently has access to both the A421 (linking Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes) and the A1 (linking Peterborough, London and the North East). As such it is strategically located on major east-west and north-south routes linking East Anglia with the rest of the country.

The Site currently lies outside any settlement boundary and is not designated for any purpose in the current Bedford Borough Local Plan.

This part of the Borough is characterised by a mix of roadside, employment and agricultural uses. A motor sports circuit and garden nurseries are located to the north; a service area and Travelodge to the north west (which is to be demolished as part of the Black Cat improvement scheme); Roxton Garden Centre to the south west; and Kelpie Marine Boat Yard to the south.

Fig 2: Site Context Plan (Opposite)



TO PETERBOROUGH

ST NEOTS

TO CAMBRIDGE

A428

THE SITE

A421

RIVER GREAT OUSE

BEDFORD

SANDY

A1

TO M1
MILTON KEYNES

BIGGLESWADE

TO LETCHWORTH
STEVENAGE

A6

TO LUTON

4 Access Strategy

Existing Access Arrangements

The site has an existing access off the Black Cat at-grade roundabout junction, serving the existing use of the site as a quarry. This junction was improved as part of the Government's "pinch point" programme in 2014/15, enabling journey time savings and road safety improvements. However, the existing site access arm was designed only to accommodate largely infrequent vehicular movements associated with the quarry. Furthermore, the existing at-grade junction continues to experience significant congestion during peak hours.

Highways England's Proposed A428 Black Cat – Caxton Gibbet Improvements

Highways England are proposing a significant upgrade to the A1 Black Cat junction as part of its scheme for the A428 Black Cat – Caxton Gibbet

scheme. This scheme will provide a continuous dual carriageway 'Expressway' route between Cambridge and Bedford as indicated in Figure 3.

The upgrade to the Black Cat junction will provide a new three tier junction which will allow traffic to flow freely on the A1 by travelling under the junction and on the new dual carriageway over the junction. The proposed layout is shown in Figure 4.

The proposed Black Cat grade separated junction will significantly improve strategic traffic movements north – south on the A1 and east – west on the A428 / A421. It will improve safety, create quicker and more reliable journeys, help grow the local and regional economies and discourage rat running through local villages.



Fig 3: Highways England 'Express Way' route map

Proposed Access Arrangements

Highways England's Black Cat proposals will result in an upgrade of the site access arrangements for the site, with the creation of a dedicated entry and exit into the site at the south-east corner of the roundabout junction (indicated by a black star on Figure 4).

This dedicated access will be in accordance with highways design standards for this strategic category of road, and will mean the site will have easy access to the strategic road network from all directions, including the A1 to the north and south, and the A428 / A421 east and west.

The proposed roadside uses will primarily attract vehicular trips that are already on the strategic road network and already passing on the A1 and / or A428 / A421, and therefore the development would not in itself generate new trips to the junction, albeit some staff trips would be new

trips. The capacity of the proposed junction would need to be tested for the proposed uses, but this is considered to show that the junction would operate within capacity as many trips will be using the junction anyway. Potentially some minor changes to the site access itself may be required as a result of this testing, such as the widening of the exit from the site onto the roundabout, but this would be deliverable within the land available.

The site will therefore benefit from a high quality vehicular access to the strategic road network, and so in highways terms it is considered that it would offer an excellent location for new roadside and logistics uses to be allocated in the emerging Bedford Borough Local Plan.

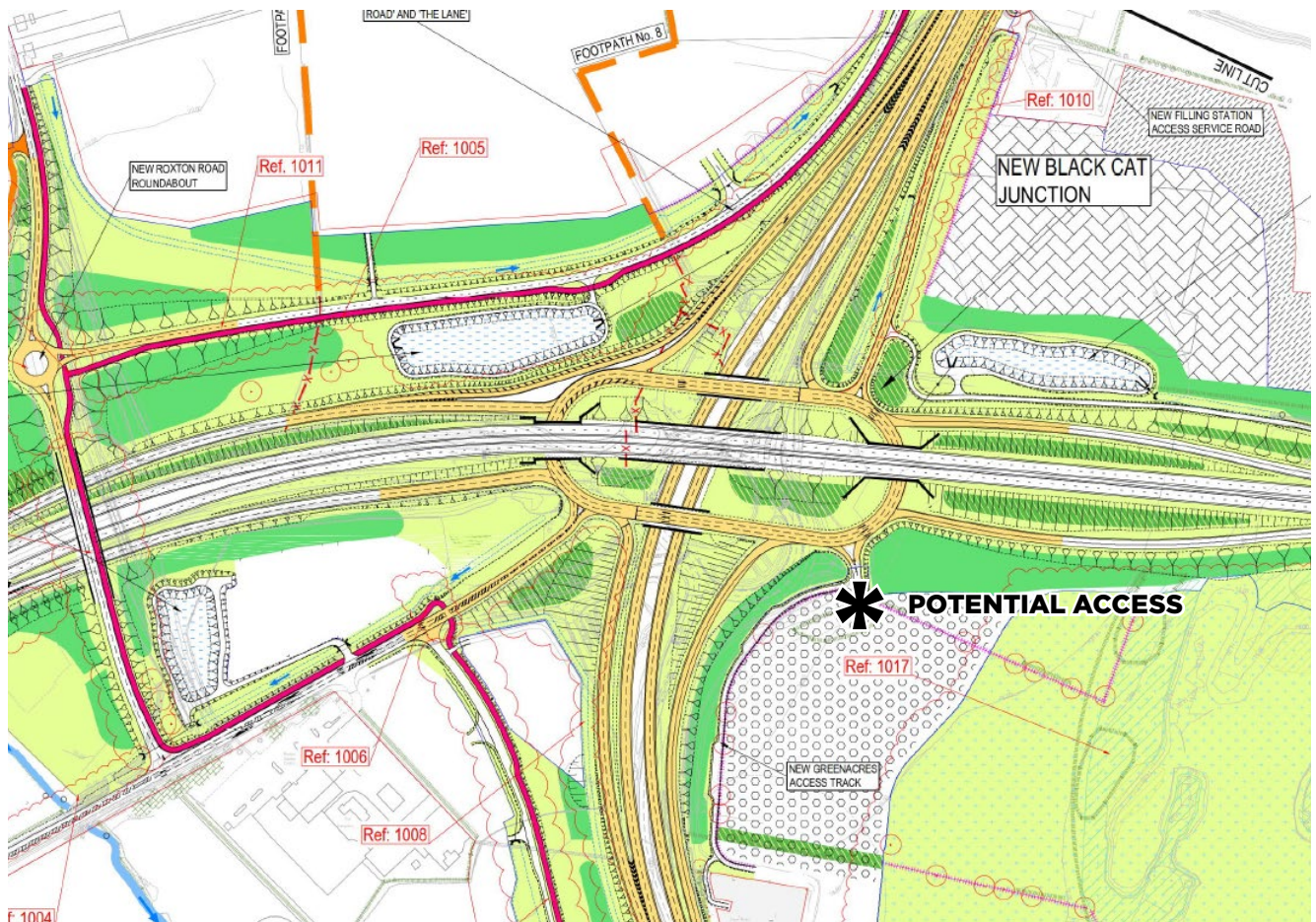








Fig 4: Highways England proposals for the Black Cat Roundabout, showing potential site access

5 Considerations - Opps & Cons

The plan opposite shows the key considerations related to the potential development of the site.

LEGEND

-  Red line site area
-  Embankment to A428/A1
-  Flood Zone 2
-  Flood Zone 3
-  Proposed highway
-  Watercourse

- ① Access from redesigned Black Cat roundabout
- ② Alignment of A428
- ③ Extent of flood zone 2
- ④ Extent of flood zone 3
- ⑤ Existing residential property
- ⑥ Open boundary to the south

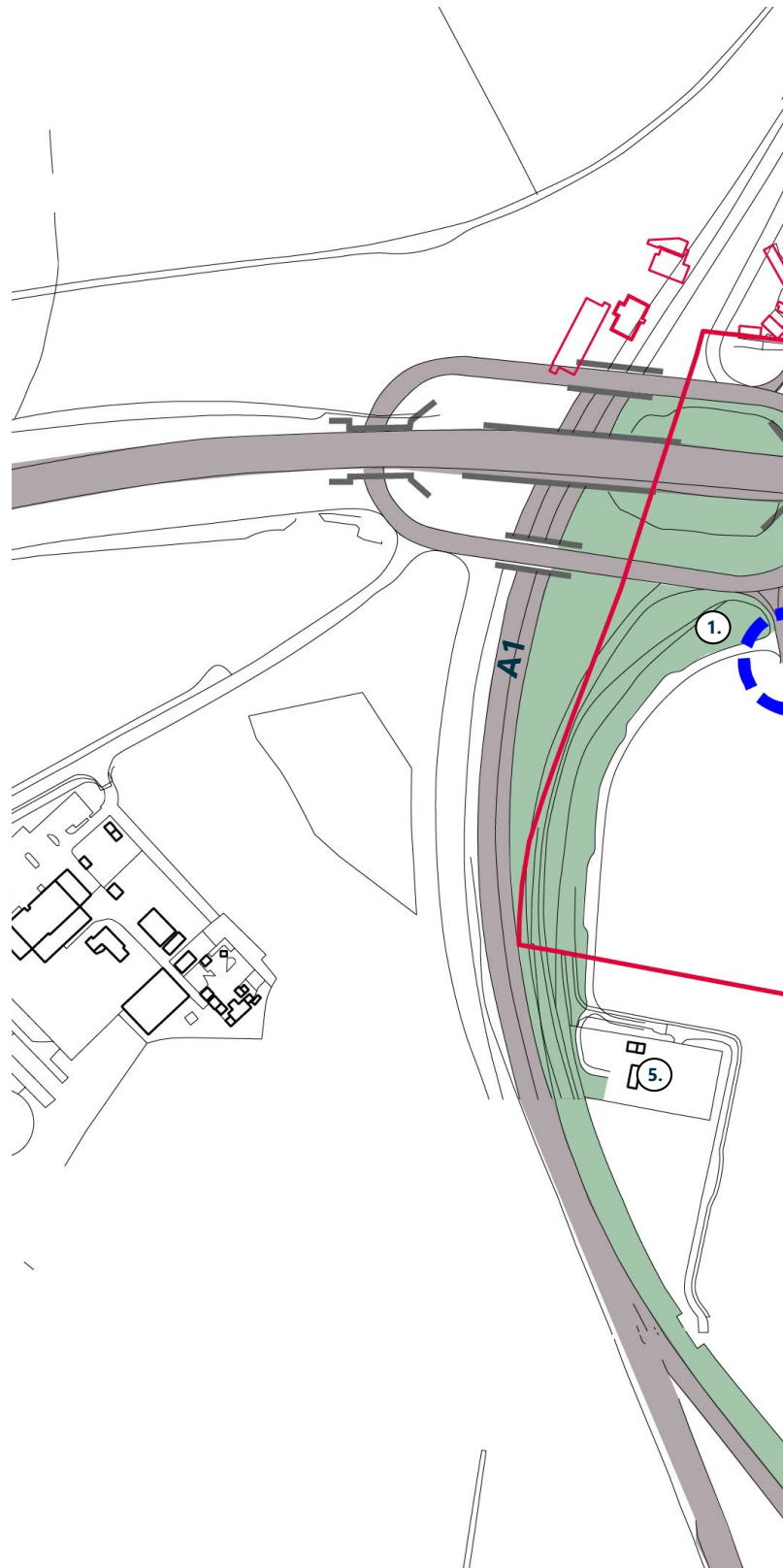
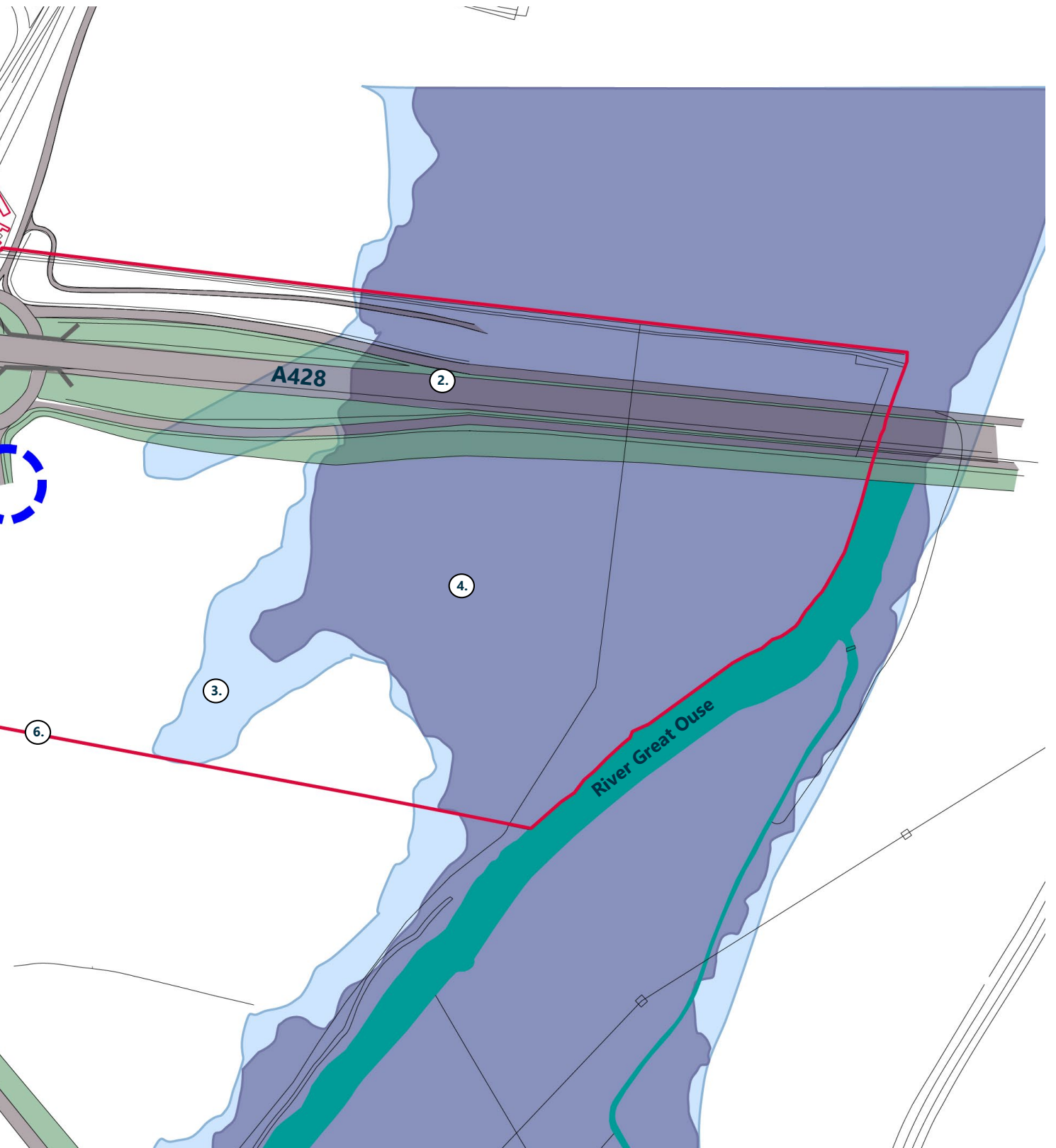


Fig 5: Considerations Plan showing the opportunities and constraints of the Site



6 Concept/ Capacity Plan

The plan opposite shows indicative concept proposals for land to the east of the A1/A428 junction.

The total area of developable land, as indicated on the Highways England plans for the junction measures 3.50 hectares, however we believe there is scope to expand the development zone subject to further detailed flood risk analysis.

LEGEND













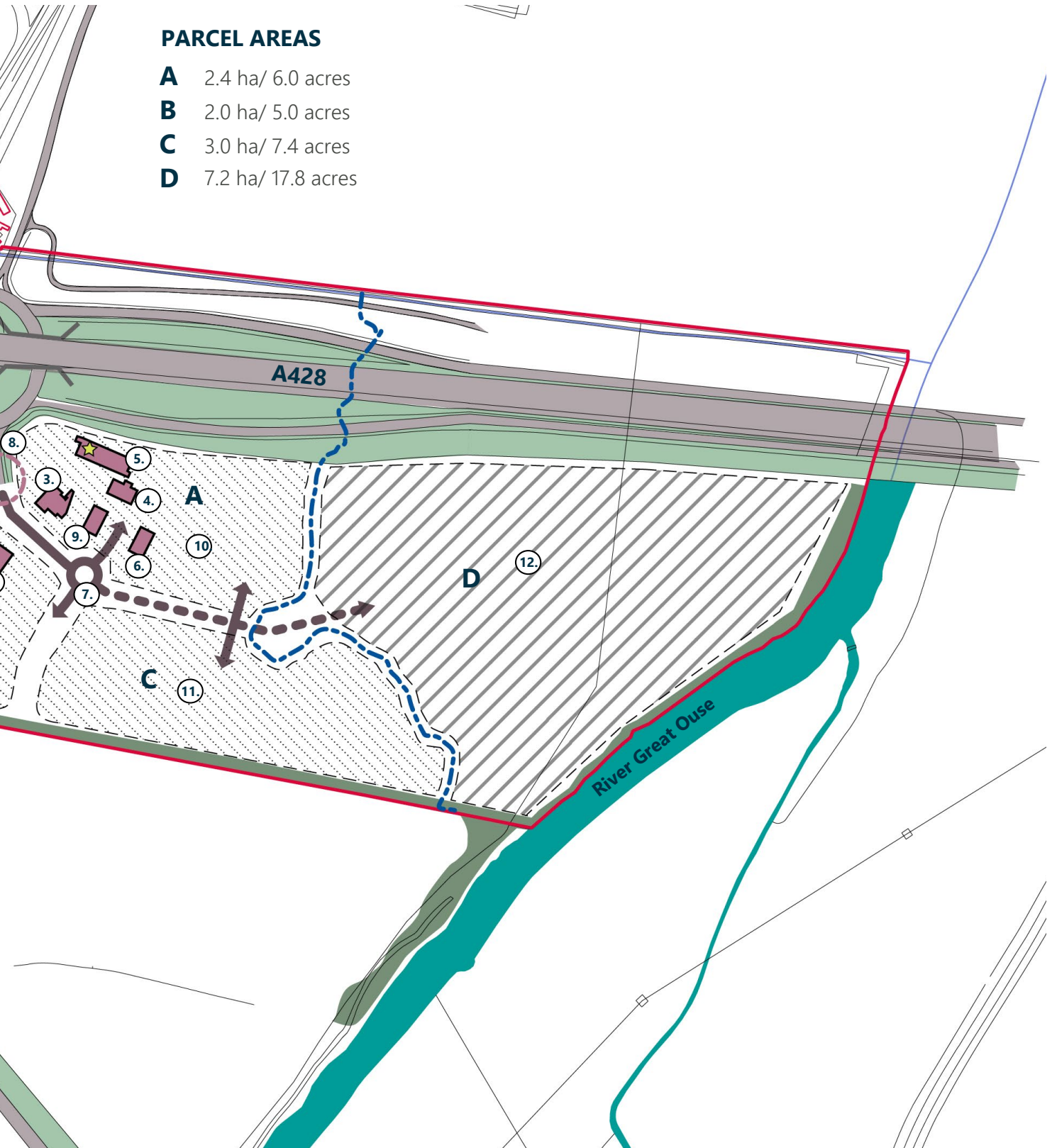
-  Red line site area
 -  Feature building
 -  Indicative building location
 -  Proposed development zone
 -  Potential further development zone
 -  Open space, biodiversity, drainage
 -  Proposed highway
 -  Buffer planting
 -  Watercourse
 -  Extent of EA Flood Zone 3
 -  Embankment to A428/A1
 -  Existing commercial buildings
-
- ①. Landmark service station building/ food court
 - ②. Service Station (inc. parking)
 - ③. Filling station
 - ④. Drive thru takeaway/ eat-in restaurant
 - ⑤. Hotel
 - ⑥. Family pub
 - ⑦. Access roundabout / turning head
 - ⑧. Spur/ access from A14/A1 junction
 - ⑨. Electric vehicle charging
 - ⑩. Further roadside / retail uses
 - ⑪. Further commercial uses
 - ⑫. Industrial / logistics uses



Fig 6: Concept/ Capacity Plan

PARCEL AREAS

- A** 2.4 ha/ 6.0 acres
- B** 2.0 ha/ 5.0 acres
- C** 3.0 ha/ 7.4 acres
- D** 7.2 ha/ 17.8 acres



7 Commercial Opportunity

The key features of the site are its prominent roadside position and the proposed spur access off the Black Cat Roundabout. These, combined with the current high-volume traffic flow numbers, and those that will undoubtedly increase post the expansion of the roundabout and new link road to Caxton Gibbet, will generate an exceptionally strong commercial opportunity. The concept/capacity masterplan shows a mixed commercial use scheme with roadside fuel/retail hotel (60 – 80 bedroom), family pub and associated uses along with industrial warehousing/logistics/lorry park uses.

Roadside fuel/retail will typically be positioned within parcels of land A&B, with additional complimentary commercial uses on parcel C and industrial/logistics and associated uses on parcel D.

Roadside Uses

The roundabout was reconstructed in 2005/6. This was done as part of the Great Barford bypass works to allow access to the new dual carriageway bypass. Further reconstruction work took place in 2014-15 which made the roundabout bigger and added traffic lights. Now in 2020, Highways England have deemed that this roundabout should be substantially upgraded once again in order to increase capacity to support the continued rise in traffic volumes. Additionally, the new roundabout will have to support the increased traffic flows from the new Caxton Gibbet link road.

A major roundabout junction such as this will require the necessary roadside services and associated uses.

Typically, the roadside fuel/retail will comprise a service station and food court with parking, petrol filling station, drive thru restaurants, electric vehicle (EV) charging and hotel.

The two nearest competing roadside services will be significantly affected following the completion of the proposed Black Cat Roundabout works. The Shell petrol filling station and Travelodge Hotel will be extinguished and the BP, located 0.7 miles to the north of the roundabout, will suffer, and most likely close, due to a realignment of access to and from the site under new Highways England (HE) proposals. The operator confirmed

to Carter Jonas that they consider the HE proposals as too restrictive and will result in traffic numbers being heavily reduced, making the site not viable.

The proposed 'Expressway' route between Cambridge and Bedford aims to bypass traffic east-west on the A428/A421 and in doing so, the existing service stations to the north of the A428 are likely to be nullified as traffic flows from the south are reduced. The subject site has the opportunity to capture traffic from all directions and as such a major roadside offer will be required in this location.

EV Charging

It is forecast that end of 2020 there will be a million EVs, rising to 10 million by 2035. This site is ideal to incorporate EV charging with the fuel operator or by way of a standalone EV provider.

Industrial Market Overview

Industrial take-up has been buoyant in recent years as retailers and their third-party logistics partners adapt to growing online demand. The convergence of traditional supply distribution chains and the rise of e-commerce continues to fuel demand for both large distribution warehouses and smaller urban units for last-mile delivery. Overall, it has been hugely challenging to satisfy occupier demand, creating strong upward pressure on values.

Across the UK, lorry storage is in short supply, and with demand likely to increase, trailer parking could potentially become a distinct subsector.

Local Industrial Overview

Market analysis reveals strong demand for industrial space in the Bedford area. In terms of take-up, approximately 485,500 sq ft of industrial space transacted over the past 18 months across 33 deals. Over the past 5 years, the strength of the market has been echoed by fall in the availability rate from 8.3% in Q1 2015 to 4.0% in Q3 2020.

An assessment of the site characteristics, local service provisions, traffic numbers and national and local market indicates that this site would be a strong industrial / logistics location. A high level study has shown approximately 500,000 sq ft of commercial floorspace could be proposed on parcels C and D.



Fig 7: Precedent images

8 Summary & Conclusions

Conclusion

This Vision Document has demonstrated that allocation of the land at the Black Cat Roundabout for the delivery of up to 14.6 hectares of roadside services and employment is both deliverable and desirable.

Following the completion of the realignment of the A421 and the A1, the site will occupy an unrivalled strategic position on the regional road network, situated centrally between Peterborough, London, Cambridge and Oxford. The site is unlikely to be suitable for a return to agricultural use and will therefore be vacant, available and suitable for development.

Replacement roadside services on the Black Cat Roundabout would provide the following significant benefits:

- A safe place away from the carriageway for drivers to park and take a break.
- Sale of food and drink including caffeinated drinks.
- Budget over-night stays for road users.

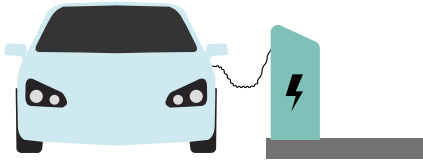
The A428 improvements would result in significantly increased traffic volumes on the east / west route. If the existing services are extinguished, there would be an approximately 18 mile gap between services and over-night stays on this route. The intensification of traffic on the east/west route would therefore be associated with a reduction in the provision of roadside services and roadside hotel facilities in a key location, which would be potentially detrimental to the safety and welfare of road users.

There are other services and a hotel on the A1 in this area for north and south bound travellers, however these do not offer such comprehensive provision of hotel, fuel and hot food options, and in some cases are only accessible from one side of the carriageway. Further future realignment of the A1 may lead to these becoming extinguished.

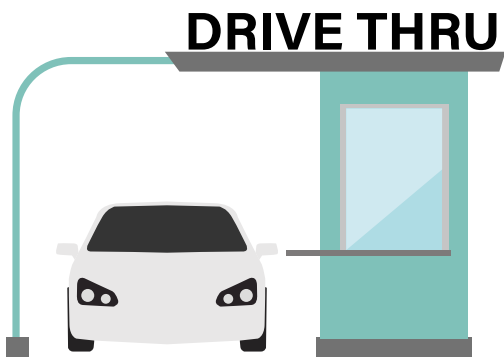
This risk underlines the importance of retaining a comprehensive service offering at the Black Cat roundabout. This is a strategic location that will provide services to both the A1 and improved A428/A421 route more efficiently, maximising the benefit to road users and with less impact on land use than smaller roadside provisions scattered along both routes.

Allocation in the Bedford Borough's Local Plan would meet the objectives of the current Local Plan to expand the Borough's employment base, particularly at strategic locations, and provide employment and visitor-related facilities in areas where demand can be demonstrated. Allocation would meet the objectives of the emerging Local Plan, in securing growth along strategic corridors. Allocation would also meet the objectives of the NPPF in addressing the locational requirements of different sectors, and the ensuring the provision of roadside services and transport facilities.

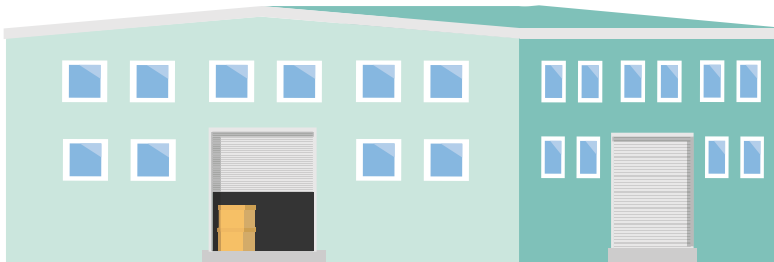
The site is therefore a logical, suitable, sustainable, available and achievable location for development.



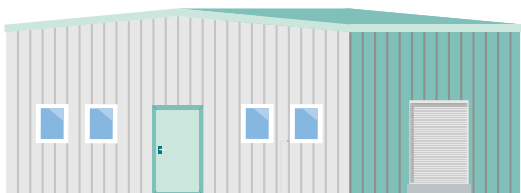
Electric Vehicle Charging Points



Roadside Services



Logistics Uses



Industrial Uses

Fig 8: Potential scheme benefits

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Fig 4: Highways England proposals for the Black Cat Roundabout, showing potential site access

Fig 5: Considerations Plan showing the opportunities and constraints of the Site

Fig 6: Concept/ Capacity Plan

Fig 7: Precedent images

Fig 8: Potential scheme benefits

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