

Land at Cotton End Road, Wilstead

Call For Sites

Date September 2020

Introduction

This note has been prepared in connection with land at Cotton End Road, Wilstead ('the Site'), shown edged red in the image below:



It accompanies a response to the "Call for Sites" carried out as part of wider consultation on the Issues & Options version of the emerging Bedford Local Plan. Whilst it is noted that the deadline for submissions in response to the Call for Sites was 14th August 2020, it is clear that submission of suitable and available sites for development forms an integral part of wider consultation on the Issues & Options version of the emerging Local Plan. The deadline for those responses is 4th September and as such we consider it is entirely reasonable that the deadline for submission of sites is extended appropriately.

As set out on the accompanying pro-forma, it is considered that the site is capable of accommodating circa 100 dwellings at an assumed average density of approximately 30 dwellings per hectare across the developable parts of the Site.

The Site

The Site comprises approximately 7 hectares of land on the southern side of Cotton End Road, outside of but immediately adjacent to the existing settlement boundary. It is bound by existing residential properties to the west whilst its southern boundary is formed by an existing hedgerow. To the east is a ribbon of existing residential development also accessed from Cotton End Road.

Wilstead is designated as a "Key Service Centre" in the adopted Local Plan and as such it is identified by the Council as a sustainable location for development. Facilities in the village are located to the west of the Site but within easy walking distance. These include, but are not limited to, Wilstead Lower School, Wilstead Branch Surgery (Medical Centre), Wilshamstead Village Hall, Wilstead Pharmacy and a limited number of shops and pubs. It is therefore an inherently sustainable location for additional housing growth.

The front part of the Site closest to Cotton End Road is identified as a 'Village Open Space / View'. No. 58 Cotton End Road, which is immediately to the east of the Site, is a Grade II listed building. The whole of Wilstead, and its surroundings, is within the Forest of Marston Vale where adopted policy requires 30% tree cover across the site. However, these constraints can be responded to with appropriate masterplanning and do not prevent the development of the Site as put forward.

Planning History

Planning permission was granted in June 2017 (planning application ref. 17/02424/AOC) for a natural burial ground comprising 10,500 plots with a chapel and parking. As such, the principle of developing this Site, including the loss of agricultural land, has already been accepted.

Whilst the approved scheme has not yet been implemented, it is noted that the Business and Planning Act 2020 temporarily modifies the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to extend permissions that expired between 23rd March 2020 and 31st December 2020, subject to an Additional Environmental Approval, to be extended until 1st April 2021. As such this permission remains extant.

Technical Considerations

The previous approval referred to above, the suite of technical reports that accompanied the application and the subsequent Committee Report, have made it clear that the Site is developable as a matter of principle. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that development would not be precluded in the following key technical areas:

Transport

Vehicular access to the site would come from Cotton End Road as previously approved. In terms of vehicular movements, it is noted that in connection with the previous scheme, the Highways Development Control Officer concluded that there was capacity on the surrounding highway network to accommodate movements from the proposed development even if the numbers were “*far higher*” than predicted. As such, they raised no objection to the proposal.

That situation would still apply today and it is not considered that the proposal would have a severe impact on the highway network.

Flooding and Drainage

The Site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at the lowest risk of flooding.

More detailed issues of drainage were considered at length under the previous application. Any subsequent planning application would be accompanied by a report dealing with surface water run-off but there is no reason to assume that this matter could not be satisfactorily dealt with.

Arboriculture

None of the trees on site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. A number of trees at the entrance to the site required removal under the previous scheme to facilitate access and this was found to be acceptable. That same situation would apply in this case.

As before, a landscaping scheme including substantial replacement planting, particularly to site boundaries, would be provided.

Ecology

A Mitigation, Enhancement and Management Plan submitted with the previous application found that the site in its current form is not ecologically diverse, albeit it provided habitat for a number of species including nesting birds.

Measures were outlined to provide net gains in biodiversity including additional tree planting and improvement of existing habitats. Similar measures to secure net gains in biodiversity can be provided in this case.

Heritage

The Council's Conservation Officer commented that the previous scheme employed sympathetic materials and was mitigated through the retention of vegetation cover.

A relatively low density scheme which leaves a significant proportion of the site closest to Cotton End Road and the adjacent listed building undeveloped would be advanced in this instance. A significant quantity of existing vegetation would be retained and supplemented as appropriate. As such, it is equally considered that an adverse impact in heritage terms would be avoided.

In terms of archaeology, a Written Scheme of Investigation was previously submitted and there was no objection from the Council's Archaeological Officer subject to further trial trenching. The same would apply in this case.

Conclusion

It has been shown previously that the Site can be developed without undue harm in a range of technical areas. The Site is now promoted for an alternative form of development, namely a residential scheme comprising circa 100 dwellings, but it is considered that subject to appropriate design and layout, those same conclusions would apply.

Wilstead is a Key Service Centre and is therefore acknowledged as being one of the more sustainable settlements within the borough for housing growth. The Site would benefit from suitable access to facilities within that settlement. In accordance with our representations to the Issues & Options version of the emerging Local Plan, we consider that development within Bedford should be dispersed across the most sustainable settlements within the borough including Wilstead. Within that context the Site in this case is demonstrably one of the most appropriate locations for growth and should accordingly be allocated for housing.