

Bedford Borough Council
Planning Policy Team
Borough Hall,
Cauldwell Street,
Bedford, MK42 9AP

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Review of the Bedford Local Plan 2030 – Call for Sites Submission for Land adjacent to Highfield Road, Oakley

On behalf of client, Bedfordia Developments Ltd, we are pleased to submit details of the above site for consideration as part of the Review of the Bedford Local Plan 2030 – Call for Sites submissions.

In commencing an immediate Review in accordance with Policy 1 of the adopted Plan the Council is, as required, seeking to ensure that future needs for growth are provided for in-line with government policy i.e. local housing need calculated using the standard method. This will entail meeting a significant (up to c.35%) increase in the minimum annual requirement for development for at least the period 2020-2040 upon adoption of the Review, expected in 2023.

The Review of the Local Plan is an important opportunity to address issues regarding flexibility and choice in a variety of locations for growth, as well as ensuring a balanced allocation of land for development sufficient to meet future needs.

The scope for the Review has been enhanced as a consequence of the foreshortened plan period of the current Plan, and its strategy of apportioning specific (albeit minimum) values for the distribution of housing across the settlement hierarchy and the deferral of site allocations to Neighbourhood Plans. Equally, the challenges of housing delivery must also reflect realistic timescales to 'unlock' developable sites in the Urban Area, as well as ensuring necessary supporting infrastructure in other locations.

Furthermore, as part of the Plan's overall strategy and requirement to provide for sustainable development, there is an inherent need for economic development and providing support to a prosperous rural economy and a post-Covid recovery, which this site could aid in delivering.

The Borough Council has acknowledged this through consideration of a diverse range of spatial options to inform the Local Plan Review. As stipulated by national policy this is an opportunity to ensure that Plans are positively prepared in terms of seeking opportunities for sustainable development.

Our client's site at Land adjacent to Highfield Road, Oakley should be considered in this context. The details submitted illustrate the opportunity for a sustainable contribution towards an appropriate spatial strategy that would satisfy key elements of the proposed Sustainability objectives and requirements for development.

As part of the details submitted for our client's site at Land adjacent to Highfield Road, Oakley we confirm that this location is free from overriding constraints to availability or suitability and that access



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can be provided.

The site is considered suitable for a high calibre employment site (across the B1/B2/B8 Use Classes at a scale appropriate to the local area). The site offers an opportunity for the consolidation of the existing employment development on Highfield Road, which was purpose built and offers arrange of 'mid-size' units for a range of 'B' type uses. Policy BE1 of the Oakley Neighbourhood Plan provides support for a range of B1/B2/B8 uses within the existing Highfield Park.

The site is contained by existing development comprising the Midland Main Railway Line, existing housing, employment uses and the A6 Clapham Bypass. This contained setting would result in development appearing as a logical extension to Oakley and can also benefit from appropriate landscaping to mitigate impacts upon rural character and separation with Clapham to the south and east. The site has the capacity to accommodate approximately 3ha of employment development and offers also an opportunity for innovative design and job creation.

To ensure sufficient employment land is available to support housing growth, we would emphasise that when evaluating potential options for allocation and existing land use designations, consideration should be given to potential sites that could provide optimize opportunities for economic development in rural areas as well as potential infrastructure that would improve the delivery of employment sites.

We would invite the Council's Planning Policy Team to consider the previous site assessment findings for this location when assessing the submitted details. The Council's 2018 SHELAA records the site (under ref: 529) as having the potential for employment as its primary use and would be suitable, available, and achievable for development. In the 2018 Sustainability Appraisal of sites the Council identified scope for a positive contribution towards several plan-making objectives, including economic development in an accessible location. These conclusions remain entirely valid in the context of Oakley's role as a Rural Service Centre and specific planning considerations regarding our client's land to accommodate the Borough's growth, including sufficient land for employment purposes.

We look forward to future updates regarding preparation of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review. We would be happy to answer any questions or requirements for clarification as part of the Council's assessment of the site within the next version of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment and ahead of future stages of consultation regarding the Local Plan Review.

Yours Sincerely

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