

14 August 2020
CAPL4619/A3/PR



Bedford Borough Council



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Dear Sir

Bedford Borough Local Plan Call for Sites 2020

On behalf of our client, The Southill Estate, we are pleased to engage with your Council in this early stage of plan preparation for Bedford. The Southill Estate is a significant landowner to the south of Bedford and its land ownership extends from sites within the urban area to the southern part of the Borough and beyond into Central Bedfordshire UA area. We were grateful to be able to have a general discussion with your officers at our recent meeting, regarding the range of opportunities that may exist for development of land within the ownership of the Estate. In light of that meeting the Estate has concluded that it should respond positively and with ambition to the Call for Sites. We hope that the opportunities we present below are of interest to the Council and we will be pleased to provide further information or enter into discussions as needed.

Policy AD43 Urban Open Space

We have one general matter to comment on in regard to this process. A number of the sites we are putting forward are currently designated as Urban Open Space, dating back to earlier appraisals of the green infrastructure of the urban area in plan-making over the last 20 years or so. We are putting these sites forward again now because we are aware the Council, in deciding on its spatial strategy, will be weighing the relative merits of protecting a range of urban spaces on the one hand, against the impacts from loss of countryside or coalescence of settlements beyond the urban area, should more development be forced beyond the urban boundary. This presents the opportunity to consider the effectiveness and value of protecting the current urban open space designations on these and other urban sites. The rationale for designation of urban open spaces has evolved over time and we suggest it will be important in reviewing the benefits or harm of any new spatial strategy or specific proposals, that there is a clear understanding of the nature and relevance of the modern status of each currently designated Urban Open Space, especially if the current designation is to weigh significantly against any proposed opportunity site put forward for allocation for development. We would therefore urge the Council to undertake an appropriate review of the status and evidence for the current designations to be continued into the future. Well designed new development can have a greater positive impact in some circumstances and comprise the best use of available land.

The Sites

The Estate is committed to the delivery of sustainable development in the Borough and to that end has instructed Savills to put forward a number of sites for possible allocation in the new local plan. Individual forms have been completed in relation to each site but for convenience this letter sets some background and context for each of them in one place -

- Land at 174 High Street, Elstow (residential)

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- Abbey Field, Land West of Elstow (residential)
- Bedford River Valley Park (Rowing lake and enabling development)
- Exeter Wood Farm (employment and residential)
- Medbury Farm (residential)
- Village Farm (residential)

Land adjacent and rear of 174 High Street, Elstow

This site comprises approximately 0.73 hectares of land with vehicular access from High Street Elstow, between nos. 174 and Bunyan's Mead, both of which are listed buildings. The land to the rear comprises former horticultural holding with the remains of a greenhouse in the southwest corner. Whilst the proposed access is unlikely to meet the full requirements of your adopted highway standards our consultants have previously concluded that given the historic use of the access and the highway conditions in Elstow High Street, the existing access could serve up to 15 dwellings here. Part of the land is currently designated under Policy AD43 as Urban Open Space. We understand the original intention of this designation was to maintain a distinct separation between development in the historic village of Elstow and development of the adjoining Cauldwell urban ward. In reality the character of the village in this area would not be harmed by development of the site in terms of coalescence and a low density development can maintain the concept of a green corridor running north-south between Elstow and Cauldwell/ Harrowden. Your published range of spatial development options includes opportunities for the more efficient use of land within the urban area.

Abbey Field, Land West of Elstow.

This site has been reviewed in great detail on previous occasions and much is known and understood of its constraints in terms of heritage, ecology and flood risk. It remains however a substantial area of underused land in the urban area which we consider to be capable of contributing to the needs of the town for more housing. It is currently designated Urban Open Space. The vision document we have produced illustrates one way of accommodating development whilst respecting the constraints and offering enhanced access to the amenities of the site for Bedford residents. The fact that the site has historically been ruled out for inclusion in previous plans should not rule it out of consideration again, particularly in view of the changed options and demands the Council has identified that will frame decisions for the new local plan.

Bedford River Valley Park.

The Estate recognises the substantial community benefit that could be realised by this development, that relies on a number of landowners cooperating and generating sufficient enabling funds to deliver the infrastructure. The Estate remains, in principle, a supporter of the project and will make its land available if the shared vision is deliverable.

Exeter Wood Farm

The Estate has identified this area, extending to approximately 15 hectares as a potential mixed-use extension to the settlement of Cotton End, taking access from the A600. The extent of residential development reflects the position of the junction with Wilstead Road and the built development on the northwest quadrant of that junction that currently creates the approach to Cotton End when travelling north on the A600.

The land and farm buildings at Exeter Wood Farm, now coming to the end of their useful life as modern-day grain storage facilities offer the opportunity for small scale Class E (non-food, retail etc), B2 or B8 uses and open storage. We understand that some discussion about this opportunity has taken place informally and we will be pleased to continue those discussions if helpful at this stage.

Medbury Farm

Although this site has a current employment allocation the Estate is keen to consider alternative possibilities. Much of the land has potential for the extraction of gravel and the Estate has been approached to allow extraction to take place in the short term. It also has a view that residential development of the land could be a suitable future alternative to the currently envisaged business development once mineral extraction has taken place. An imaginative scheme of residential development incorporating leisure facilities open water lakes etc would be possible. We anticipate that housing could be delivered within the next ten years, with access off Wilstead Road, Elstow.

Village Farm

This site, like the land at High Street, referred to earlier, is within the Urban Area but currently subject of a designation under Policy AD43, as part of the remaining gap between the historic built areas of Elstow and Harrowden. The Estate consider that the visual separation between Elstow village and the adjoining Harrowden development is of little real benefit in maintaining the distinct character of either place. Development on the Village Farm site would be primarily seen and 'read' from the High Street side and designed and laid out to reflect and enhance that area. Suitable landscaping to the eastern edge would create an appropriate distinction, if it is still considered beneficial, when viewed from the Harrowden area to the east, and could form part of a green corridor running north-south down the eastern edge of Elstow.

Yours sincerely

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Director