

Sustainable Communities

Site Assessment Technical Document

Version 2 – April 2010

Technical Report

Draft Submission

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1 Purpose of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)

- 1.1 The primary purpose of the Site Allocations DPD is to identify sites for housing and employment purposes in order to deliver the spatial visions, objectives and policies outlined in the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD.
- 1.2 As part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process for Central Bedfordshire (North), at least 17,950 new homes and 17,000 new jobs must be provided between 2001 and 2026, in line with requirements contained in the East of England Plan and the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy.
- 1.3 The sites being allocated in this DPD will account for the remaining shortfall in housing and employment land required in Central Bedfordshire (North). This shortfall amounts to almost 5,000 homes and 77 ha of employment land which need to be built by 2026.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Central Bedfordshire (North) Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD was adopted in November 2009 and covers the period up to 2026. The Spatial Vision for Central Bedfordshire (North Area) states:

'The majority of new development will be planned for at the Major and Minor Service Centres, which will see their role enhanced and their range of services and facilities broadened. This will include the provision of new and varied local employment reducing the need for people to travel out of the district to work'

'The countryside and open spaces will be enhanced by green infrastructure and the historic context of both landscape and buildings will be retained and enhanced. Overall, the district will have kept its rural character for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations'

- 2.2 To help inform where new development should take place, the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD set out a hierarchy of settlements. The Settlement Hierarchy identified four distinct tiers of distributing new developments. Arlesey and Silsoe were identified as having potential for sustainable growth beyond their position in the Settlement Hierarchy. Therefore, these settlements have been specifically identified to receive more significant levels of development than might be expected.
- 2.3 Setting aside these two locations, the remaining requirements for new development are broadly apportioned by the ratio 60/30/10 – 60% of

development going to the Major Service Centres, 30% to the Minor Service Centres and 10% to the Large and Small Villages.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 This document sets out the assessment methodology and the process undertaken to select the most suitable and sustainable sites. To determine the most suitable housing, mixed-use and employment sites for development, the Council developed a set of assessment criteria. The criteria have been developed based upon the requirements in the Core Strategy, local conditions and circumstances, in addition to a series of sustainability factors. Following two calls in 2007 and 2008 for potential development sites, a total of 443 proposals were submitted for consideration by landowners and developers. Each proposal submitted has been assessed using a standard approach in order that all sites could be compared. The completed site summary profile sheets show how each sites scored against the various criteria as well as providing a reasoned justification for allocating or indeed rejecting a site. Completed proformas are contained in Appendix 1 for those sites in the Major and Minor Settlements and Appendix 2 for those sites within the Rural Areas.

The first sections of the summary sheets contain some background information about the sites submitted, including site area, location, a short description about the proposal and summary of responses coming out from the 'Issues and Options' stage of the Plan's preparation.

The criteria for housing sites were developed separately from the criteria for employment sites to take account of the different planning considerations and issues for these different land uses. The assessment of housing sites is set out below. Section 5 further explains the method used to assess employment proposals. Any proposal for a mixed use development has involved compiling the findings of both the housing and employment assessments to create a hybrid proforma.

Assessment of Housing Sites

- 3.2 Due to the high number of sites submitted for housing allocation, the assessment criteria were prepared in three linked stages. The first exclusion stage was to identify wholly unsuitable sites. This stage was heavily informed by national policy and specific requirements identified in the Core Strategy.
- 3.3 The second stage was to identify the most sustainable sites. This stage identified the proximity to key services, relationship to the settlement and existing land uses etc.

- 3.4 The final stage was to test sites against any identified constraints where mitigation to make the site suitable for development may be too expensive or not possible. The information used in this stage was provided by statutory consultees, Council Members, residents, and local groups.

Assessment Stage 1

- 3.5 There were seven criteria against which sites were assessed at Stage 1 (refer to Appendix 3). Sites which run contrary to the criteria were discounted outright. The criteria include:
- 3.6 Sites within the Green Belt;
- The Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD indicates that no Green Belt land will be allocated through this LDF during the plan period.
- 3.7 Small sites with less than 4 dwellings, is considered not to be able to viably provide at least one affordable home and therefore not considered as an allocation site;
- In order to comply with Core Strategy Policy CS7: Affordable Housing, new housing development for 4 or more dwellings should provide an element of affordable housing. Sites of 4 dwellings should include one affordable dwelling. On all other qualifying sites, 35% or more units should be affordable.
- 3.8 Identified sites in other local plans and emerging DPD's such as the Minerals and Waste Local Plan;
- 3.9 Sites which are wholly in Flood Zone 2 and 3. The remaining part of a site not within zones 2 and 3 will be assessed accordingly;
- In order to comply with PPS25: Development and Flood Risk, which states that the sequential approach be applied for assessing sites within flood risk area. Due to the abundance in availability of sites, any area within Flood Zones 2 and 3 was eliminated.
- 3.10 Sites likely to have significant negative effect on a site of international or national biological or geological importance;
- In order to comply with Core Strategy Policy DM15: Biodiversity
- 3.11 Sites likely to have a significant negative effect on a national archaeological site or monument or a nationally or internationally important historic site;
- In order to comply with Core Strategy Policy CS15: Heritage, which aims to protect areas of historical importance; and
- 3.12 Sites which are wholly in Important Countryside Gaps.
- In order to comply with the Saved Local Plan Policy CS21: Important Countryside Gap

Assessment Stage 2

3.13 Sites that progressed from Stage 1 were assessed under four main categories at Stage 2 (refer to Appendix 3). The categories are:

- The use of land,
- The provision of facilities and services,
- Transport and movement; and
- Employment opportunities.

3.14 There were twelve factors considered under these four categories. The factors were accorded score points to help determine the most suitable and sustainable sites. The scores were 0 - 5 depending on how close and accessible the facility/service being considered is from a site, with 5 being the best and 0, the worst. This range was chosen as it could be applied to all the data collected.

3.15 Due to the rural nature of the area, it was decided that the proximity of certain facilities/services should not be assessed area-wide and therefore not distort the outcome of the assessment. For example, the consideration of a Leisure Centre as an important facility/service was not applied because of its limited provision and the population threshold required for its provision. It was also considered that some data should be assessed by public transport data rather than walking data.

3.16 Proximity data was scored using six minute bands. Where a site was further than thirty minutes, the site scored the lowest (0). Unless otherwise stated, the six minute bands relate from zero to thirty minutes. The bands are set as below:

- 0 to 5.9mins = 5;
- between 6 to 11.9mins = 4;
- between 12 to 17.9mins = 3;
- between 18 to 23.9mins = 2;
- between 24 to 30mins = 1;
- over 30mins = 0.

3.17 The factors considered at Stage 2 are described below:

3.18 GP/Health centre

- Walking data. Data has been used for all settlements.

3.19 Lower School

- Walking data. Data has been used for all settlements.

3.20 Middle School

- Walking data. Data has been used for all settlements.

3.21 Upper School

- Walking data. Data has been used for settlements with an upper school.

3.22 Retail Centre

- Walking data. Data only used for settlements having a designated retail centre. These include Ampthill, Biggleswade, Shefford, Flitwick, Potton and Sandy.

3.23 Employment Centre

- Public transport data. Data used for all settlements. Data for employment centre was only available for centres with 500 jobs and over.

3.24 Settlement Centre

- Public transport data. The settlement centres have been defined as the Major and Minor Service Centres, and centres outside Central Bedfordshire (North) such as Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis, Toddington, Barton-le-Clay and Woburn Sands. Data has been used for all settlements.

3.25 Leisure Centre

- Public transport data. Data was used only for settlements having a leisure centre.

3.26 Railway Station

- Public transport data. Data was used only for settlements having a railway station.

3.27 Bus stop

- Walking data. Data has been used within all settlements. Proximity data was scored using six minute bands, from zero to five minutes. Where a site was further than five minutes, the site scored the lowest (0). The bands are set out below:
 - 0 to 0.9 mins = 5;
 - between 1 to 1.9mins = 4;
 - between 2 to 2.9mins = 3;
 - between 3 to 3.9mins = 2;
 - between 4 to 5 mins = 1;
 - over 5 mins = 0.

3.28 Settlement Relationship

- This data identified the proximity of a site to the existing settlement envelope. This data has been scored using the following calculation:
 - Site with a major physical barrier (eg. Rail line, road, river) = 0;
 - Site outside settlement envelope = 1;
 - Site bordered on only one side by settlement envelope = 2;
 - Site bordered on 2 sides by settlement envelope = 3;
 - Site bothered on 3 sides by settlement envelope = 4;
 - Site within settlement envelope = 5.

3.29 Previously Developed Land

- Previously Developed Land (or 'brownfield' land) has been identified

using the definition in Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing. The data has been scored using the following percentages and scores. The percentages refer to how much land has been previously developed on the site being considered:

- 80-100% = 5
- 60-80% = 4
- 40-60% = 3
- 20-40% = 2
- 1-20% = 1
- Greenfield = 0

3.30 To identify site specific data for proximities to facilities and services, 'Accession' data was used. This 'Accession' data gives the time taken to get from each origin site to the nearest key destination/facility/service (e.g. from the site to the particular nearest education establishment; healthcare facility). The data takes into account constraints such as time spent waiting for public transport. A separate explanatory note on the Accession model is set out in Appendix 4.

3.31 Furthermore, rather than scoring each factor equally, it was clear that certain factors were of greater importance than others when considering new housing locations. In order to determine these, a Site Allocations Criteria public consultation was undertaken in September 2009. The public consultation was conducted via the Council's website and required 11 factors to be placed in order of priority. Residents, agents and statutory consultees were informed of by letter. The results of the consultation showed that previously developed land was considered the most important, followed by relationship to the settlement envelope etc., while proximity to a leisure centre was the least important. The results of this consultation are in Appendix 45. A weighting system was subsequently developed to take into account the outcome of the Site Allocations Criteria consultation. The weighted scores were then applied to the scores of each factor as shown in the table below to enable the assessment exercise to identify the most suitable and most sustainable sites.

Table 1: Weighted Scoring at Assessment Stage 2

	Stage 2 Scores					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Previously Developed Land	-10	0	10	20	30	40
Settlement Relationship	-9	0	9	18	27	36
Lower School	-8	0	8	16	24	32
Middle School	-8	0	8	16	24	32
Upper School	-8	0	8	16	24	32
Retail Centre	-7	0	7	14	21	28
Bus Stop	-6	0	6	12	18	24
Employment	-5	0	5	10	15	20
GP/Health Centre	-4	0	4	8	12	16
Settlement Centre	-3	0	3	6	9	12
Railway Station	-2	0	2	4	6	8
Leisure Centre	-1	0	1	2	3	4

Assessment Stage 3

- 3.32 Stage 3 involved a more specialist assessment and a professional judgement to be made. Input has been provided by statutory consultees such as the Highways Agency, Environment Agency and Anglian Water Services as well as and—other specialist organisationsorganizations and departments within the Council to help identify sites that are likely to have major barriers to development and whether such barriers can be overcome by some forms of mitigation and remediation (refer to Appendix 3). A list of those organizations that were consulted is contained in Appendix 6. Relevant ecomments received have been included in the summary results sheet for each site.

The assessment carried out at this stage was considered under three categories below:

- Protecting the environment (impact on heritage; impact on biodiversity; and impact on landscape)
 - Physical limitations (access infrastructure; utilities provision such as water, sewerage, electricity, etc; land condition such as contamination; the presence of pylons, sewers, electricity sub-stations; telephone masts, etc)
 - Environmental factors and conflict with neighbouring uses (heavy and hazardous industry; sewage treatment works; pollution, dust, odour and noise emitting installations, etc)
- 3.33 Furthermore, ~~this stage throughout the process of assessing the sites, included~~ discussions with the promoters, owners and developers of ~~all~~ the sites ~~took place when required that reached Stage 3~~ to ascertain site availability and deliverability. Issues such as ownership, identified development constraints and timely deliverability were discussed. In some cases, changes have also been made to the original proposals submitted, such as grouping sites in close proximity to one another, in order to be able to deliver a viable or more appropriate scale of development. The summary sheets detail any amendments made.
- 3.34 During the assessment process the list of sites were considered at a series of Council meetings including the Development Strategy Task Force; Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee; Executive and finally Central Bedfordshire Full Council on 7th January 2010 when the document was approved for Submission to the Secretary of State. Copies of the Agendas and Minutes of these meetings are available to view on the Council's website: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/ldf/ldf-north-area/north-ldf-site-allocations-document.aspx>
- 3.35 The final list of sites was decided upon after these 3 stage assessments of sites. The rigorous process applied in assessing the sites ensures that the Council met both its statutory obligation and that sites chosen for allocation are those considered to be most suitable and most sustainable.

4 Assessment Results

- 4.1 The findings of the assessment exercise are contained within the appendices. ~~The site specific assessments for housing and mixed use sites are included in Appendix 1.~~ Appendix ~~5-7~~ contains the stage 1 assessments for all sites. Appendix ~~6-8~~ contains the stage 2 assessments for the sites that progressed beyond stage 1.
- 4.2 A summary sheet has been produced for all proposals submitted for the Major and Minor Service Centres (Housing, Mixed Use and Employment Sites) setting out the Council's reasons for accepting or rejecting sites – refer to Appendix 1. Site assessments for the Rural Areas (Housing, Mixed Use and Employment Sites) may be found in Appendix 2, along with an overall summary setting out the Council's

reasons for accepting or rejecting sites.

5 Assessment of Employment sites

- 5.1 As stated in Section 3.1 the assessment of employment sites was separately to those being considered for housing. The Council appointed Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to carry out the assessment of sites submitted for employment uses. Details of the assessment process and the conclusions are contained within the 'Employment Land Review Stage 3' (January 2010) document, which has been published as a supporting document accompanying the Site Allocations DPD. Individual employment site assessments have been produced from this document and are included in Appendices 1 and 2 ~~Appendix 2.~~