

## **Potton Town Council comment on CBC Draft Local Plan**

### **Introduction**

Potton Town Council (PTC) is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) under the guidance of a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee. The Draft NP is now in the final stages of preparation having completed the consultation Questionnaire to confirm the Draft Policies.

The Questionnaire was produced in hard copy and around 2200 individual copies were distributed to households in Potton. Additionally, an online version was made available for completion. We received 727 responses to the Questionnaire, a return rate of around 33%. This is a substantial response rate and these comments on the CBC Draft Local Plan reflect the views of the population of the Parish of Potton as illustrated in the Questionnaire results.

### **Development 2017 – 2035**

The overriding concern of the majority of respondents regarding housing developments in Potton was the size, scale and rate of developments. Respondents were asked how many additional houses they felt would be an acceptable number in Potton up to 2035. While there is a general acceptance that growth is inevitable, 74% of respondents felt that no more than 250 additional houses would be acceptable. Only 4% were of the view that more than 500 houses would be acceptable. These results confirm the Neighbourhood Plan Vision of 'Medium Scale Growth' throughout the period of the plan. Medium scale is defined as 'up to 500 houses'.

As a result of this, Potton Neighbourhood Plan policy H01 states that housing developments will not be supported which will result in the total number of dwellings exceeding 2735. This policy is supported by the questionnaire results.

Since 2235 households is the baseline for future development within the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan (and Local Plan), the following planning approvals must be included is the accepted medium scale development in Potton up to the year 2035:

- 151 households on Biggleswade Road (part of old Local Plan)
- Planning approval for 90 households south of Sutton Mill Road (part of old Local Plan)
- Planning approval for 90 households on Sandy Road (South)
- Planning approval for 62 households on Mill Lane

Therefore, this means that a maximum of 107 additional households will be supported within the lifetime of the Local Plan.

The questionnaire results also clearly showed a strong concern about the rate of development as well as the scale of development. 85% of respondents supported the policy that the maximum number of 500 houses should be delivered evenly throughout the period of the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore

also the Local Plan. There is currently planning permission granted for the development of 393 households in Potton, which represents 78.6% of the medium scale development supported for the Local Plan. Since this is likely to be accomplished within the next 5 years, the Neighbourhood Plan will only support the development of the additional 107 households within the final 5 years of the Local Plan i.e. between 2027 and 2035. This support would also only be given provided the necessary infrastructure had been upgraded.

### **Call for Sites**

It is noted from the Draft Local Plan that Site Assessments have been carried out on the many sites identified around the town by the 'Call for Sites' issued by CBC. Four sites have been put forward for further consideration in the Local Plan, all of which are outside the current settlement envelope. Although no proposals have yet been submitted, based on the site areas, these four sites represent the potential for a further 189 houses. In order to respect the views of the respondents to the Questionnaire, we have already stated that a maximum of an additional 107 households can be considered through the Call for sites process. We would like to comment on and object to two of these sites with details as follows.

### **Site ALP465.**

- This site is adjacent to and is very similar in shape to site ALP199. Site ALP199 has been excluded from the Local Plan process for a range of excellent reasons involving Ecological, Green Infrastructure and Landscape mitigation reasons which we believe apply equally to site ALP465 which should also be excluded from further consideration.
- We would support Policy H3 in the CBC Draft Local Plan regarding support for older people. Sites ALP199 and ALP465 are both on steeply sloping land which is unsuitable for older people with mobility issues. Access to the town centre and other facilities would require a circuitous route of approximately 1500 metres (done on OS 1:2500 map) including steep slopes which would need to be negotiated.
- This land is currently an open green space which readily absorbs precipitation. If it were to be developed, rainfall would be channelled downhill into the existing Sheepwalk Close development with associated flooding issues. Additionally, any run-off would contain contaminants from roads/gardens which would affect the water quality in the brook.
- Stage 1A Assessment, sections 4 and 5. We believe that these sections should be answered 'Yes'. The site is on Greensands Ridge Nature Improvement Area is it?.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 18. It is inaccurate to state that there has been no public consultation. There has been community consultation on this site which was proposed in planning application CB/17/01096/OUT. This consultation resulted in 50 objections and over 1200 signatures on a petition opposing the proposed development of the site. The planning application was rejected by CBC.

- We support Stage 2 Assessment section 23 with the view that the site would have a negative impact on the character of the settlement and would result in the loss of aesthetic value for the area.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 24. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the site is a former Land Settlement Area and is designated as Grade 1 Agricultural Land according to the Eastern Region Agricultural Land Classification map published by Natural England.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 27. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the bus stop referred to does not have at least an hourly service at any time of the day.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 32. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the Water and Waste Water infrastructure is currently under stress as identified in the Water Cycle Study (April 2017). Improvements to the infrastructure will only be in place towards the end of the Local Plan Period and the Stage 2 Water Cycle Study has not yet been prepared.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 36. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since it has already been concluded in section 23 that development of this site would have a negative impact on the landscape.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 37. We believe that the Heritage assessment should be R (Red) since this site is a former Land Settlement Area.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 39. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since development of this site would contravene Aspiration 20 of the Potton Green Infrastructure Plan regarding expansion of Pegnut Wood in a northerly direction.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 41. As already advised under section 18, this site does have a planning history with an application CB/17/01096/OUT which was rejected by CBC.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 45. As previously stated, 85% of the respondents to the questionnaire supported an even rate of growth over the plan period and therefore this site could not be developed for 11-15 years.

**Site ALP217.**

- Stage 1A Assessment, sections 4 and 5. We believe that these sections should be answered 'Yes'. The site is on Greensands Ridge Nature Improvement Area. Additionally, the site is a Significant Wildlife Area according to the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in terms of species per km<sup>2</sup>.
- Stage 1B Assessment section 6. We would suggest that this site is NOT a logical extension to the settlement but should be considered an outlying development. The site is separated from the existing development by a hornbeam hedgerow which should be retained as an existing settlement

edge. Either removal or obscuring this hedge would have a negative effect as it would urbanise the approach to Potton and obscure the view of the established boundary hedge which defines the Western edge of Potton.

- Stage 2 Assessment section 18. It is inaccurate to state that there has been no public consultation. There has been community consultation on this site which formed part of a proposed site in planning application CB/17/00296/OUT.
- The site is not supported by the questionnaire results with 82% of respondents objecting to development of this site.
- Stage 2 Assessment, section 23. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the site does not complement the existing settlement because of the separation caused by the significant hedgerow.
- Stage 2 Assessment, section 24. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the land is designated as Grade 2 Agricultural Land according to the Eastern Region Agricultural Land Classification map published by Natural England.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 27. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the bus stop referred to does not have at least an hourly service at any time of the day.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 29. Access to the site would only be possible off the already busy Sandy Road and we believe that any development of this site would increase traffic flow on this road and add to the dangerous nature of the road.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 32. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since the Water and Waste Water infrastructure is currently under stress as identified in the Water Cycle Study (April 2017). Improvements to the infrastructure will only be in place towards the end of the Local Plan Period and the Stage 2 Water Cycle Study has not yet been prepared.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 36. We believe that this should be designated R (Red) since development of the site would have a significant harmful impact on the landscape. The site is on Greensands Ridge Nature Improvement Area and additionally, the site is a Significant Wildlife Area according to the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in terms of species per km<sup>2</sup>.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 38. There was a recent development proposal reference CB/17/00296/OUT which went for public consultation. There were a large number of objections to the proposal regarding the Ecological assets of this site.
- Stage 2 Assessment section 41. As previously stated, this site formed part of a proposed site in planning application CB/17/00296/OUT. The application was withdrawn. We understand that this was when it became

apparent that the application would be refused by CBC.

- Stage 2 Assessment section 45. As previously stated, 85% of the respondents to the questionnaire supported an even rate of growth over the plan period and therefore this site could not be developed for 11-15 years.

Within the constraints already highlighted early in this response to your draft Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan would support development on sites NLP170 and NLP347.

## **Housing**

We are fully supportive of the proposed Housing policies in the Draft Local Plan.

We would particularly support the Draft Local Plan policy H4 regarding affordable housing. The questionnaire confirmed the findings of the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) Housing Needs Survey for Potton which identifies a shortage of affordable housing in the parish. All developments proposed in Potton will need to have a minimum of 30% affordable housing. (Site Assessment indicates 35%)

In addition to this, there is an identified need in the BRCC Housing Needs Survey which is supported both anecdotally (do you mean during the consultation period) and by the questionnaire results, for a Rural Exception Site of up to 30 dwellings. Therefore, we also support the CBC Draft Local Plan Policy H5 regarding Rural Exception Sites. The Neighbourhood Plan will support the inclusion of Rural Exception Sites within any future developments or sites that are to be included in the Local Plan process. Thus, NLP170 and NLP347, should include this provision for the inclusion of a Rural Exception Site.

## **Employment and Economy**

We are fully supportive of the proposed Employment and Economy policies.

The Neighbourhood Plan survey showed that 66% of residents were supportive of the identification of land for a business centre in Potton. This is further supported by the fact that 144 respondents either run a business or work from home in Potton. In the Local Plan (2011) an employment area was identified in MA5 and we would wish to see this as a priority in the future development of Potton. Furthermore, site NLP042 was proposed for industrial use in the 2011 Call for Sites and the Neighbourhood Plan would also support this in order to relocate an existing haulage business which is currently in the centre of the town.

## **Transport**

We are fully supportive of the proposed Transport policies.

The Neighbourhood Plan survey identified an issue with bus services within Potton. As mentioned earlier in this response, bus services do not meet the Site Assessment criteria of a minimum of an hourly service in peak times. The main issue is the connectivity of buses to trains running from Biggleswade or Sandy.

90% of respondents were dissatisfied with bus services in Pottton and the majority of complaints were related to links with trains. The Neighbourhood Plan will therefore support the introduction of a bus – train link service at peak times. This will become even more important with the 22% increase in households over the lifetime of the Local Plan – and probable increase of 17% over the next 5 years.

The Neighbourhood Plan steering group is concerned about the possible closure of Sandy station if the new East – West link railway results in a replacement station being built in the new Tempsford Town. This would result in Pottton residents having to drive through the small hamlet of Everton. This would inevitably result in an increased usage of Biggleswade station.

### **Environmental Enhancement**

We are fully supportive of the proposed Environmental Enhancement policies.

Policy EE1 - As part of the Neighbourhood Plan a revised Green Infrastructure Plan has been developed by BRCC. Creation of footpaths and cycle ways were particularly supported, with 61% of respondents requesting that all new developments provide traffic-free walkways and cycle ways with access to town facilities. A Pottton Green Wheel is also being planned in association with BRCC and we would look to section 106 monies to finance this as well as any planning applications facilitating routes where required. The Neighbourhood Plan is also supportive of developing cycle links to Biggleswade, Gamlingay and Wrestlingworth in addition to the existing link to Sandy which is being developed.

Overall, we welcome the policies within the draft Local Plan and will expect close adherence when planning applications and site layouts are considered. The Pottton Neighbourhood Plan is close to completion and will detail the wishes of the residents for the development of Pottton 2017 – 2035 and also supporting the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.