

Statement on behalf of Maggie Campbell

By Kevin Coleman of Phase 2 Planning & Development Ltd

Introduction

This statement is submitted by Phase 2 Planning & Development Ltd on behalf of Maggie Campbell, who is the owner of the land known as Duckhall Farm, Bovingdon.

14.1 Is the policy for growth and change in this area appropriate and justified, including in relation to national guidance and local needs, and in terms of economic, social and environmental impact?

As per the respondent's previous submissions, the broad policy approach for Bovingdon is supported, subject to the comments below in respect of questions 14.2 and 14.3.

14.2 Is the Chesham Road allocation (LA6) sound when assessed against reasonable alternatives?

It is our submission that the proposed allocation LA6 is not sound because it is not the most appropriate, when assessed against the reasonable alternatives, specifically the Duckhall Farm site, which is Option 1 of the 5 sites that the Council assessment for Bovingdon.

We would preface our comments below by saying that the Core Strategy is not here considering a specific form of development, such as a set layout or design, but rather it is considering the most appropriate site. Although individual landowners may put forward indicative schemes for consideration, ultimately the role of the Core Strategy is to identify and allocate the site that is most suitable for development (assessed against the reasonable alternatives).

The Council's own conclusions on the various sites are set out on Page 190 of the June 2012 Land Allocations and Strategic Sites report. The report concludes:

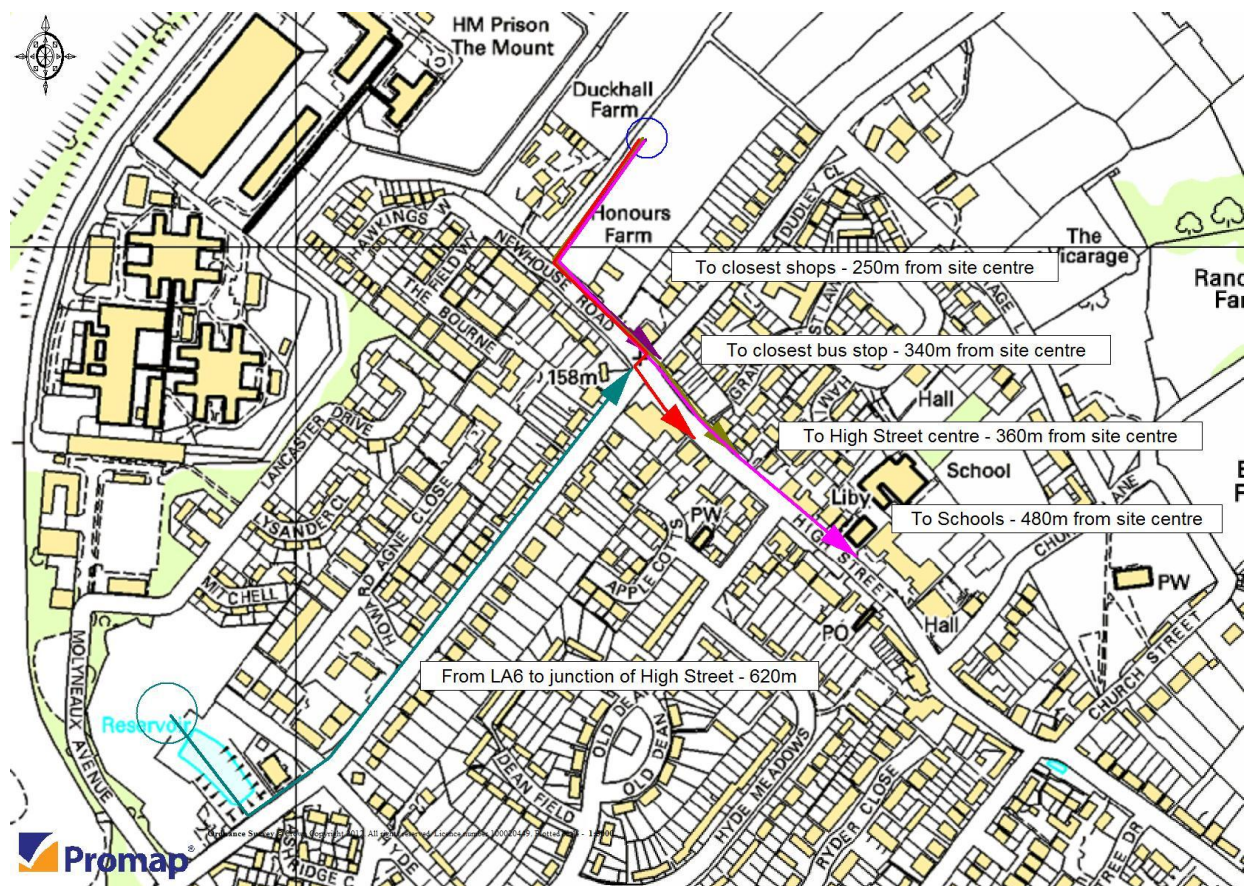
"Options 1-4 are all considered suitable for development and there are advantages and disadvantages of each. On balance, it is recommended that the eastern section of Option 4 be the preferred local allocation."

This passage confirms two key matters: Firstly that the Council accepts that each and all of Options 1 to 4 are reasonable alternatives in this instance; and secondly that the selection of Option 4 was not clear cut, but was made 'on balance', accepting that Option 4 has disadvantages.

The Sustainability Appraisal suggests at 6.1 (page 43) that “there is little differentiation between the four development options.”

Map 5 on Page 210 of the June 2012 report shows the facilities within the village, and the relative position of the various sites. There can be no doubt that the heart of the village is the High Street, which extends essentially from the edge of the Duckhall Farm site (on the corner of Newhouse Road/Hempstead Road/Chesham Road/High Street) to the south-east.

Essentially all of the facilities within the High Street, including the infant and primary schools, are within 500m of the centre of the Duckhall site, and of course the vast majority of facilities (and public transport connections) are considerably closer (the Inspector should note that the distances provided on page 147 of the Assessment report are wrong – please see extract below).



In terms of sustainability, the Duckhall Farm site is far and away the single option that is most closely related to the heart of the village and local services and facilities. It scores positively against criteria 13 in the Council’s assessment, which is “sustainable location”.

Conversely, the centre of the preferred site is around twice the distance to the far end of the High Street, and around 600m to even reach the High Street/Chesham Road junction. The Assessment report on page 163 shows the much longer distances from key facilities associated with LA6 site, all of which are outside normally accepted walking distances. Moreover, the route to the High Street along Chesham Road is along a busy road, with many crossings, making it relatively inhospitable for walking and cycling. This site scores negatively against the “sustainable location” criteria.

Inherently, then, based on proximity to facilities and the opportunities for sustainable travel modes, the Duckhall Farm site is clearly preferable. It is also worth noting at this point that a key means of tackling problems of congestion in Bovingdon is identified in the Core Strategy at paragraph 24.5 as being “... encouraging a higher level of trips by non-car modes”. It is difficult to see how the allocation of the LA6 site is compatible with this aspiration.

If the inherent locational advantages of the Duckhall Farm site are to be set to one side in favour of an alternative, then clearly the advantages of the alternative would have to be significant. It will be apparent, however, from our opening comments above that the Council considered the Duckhall Farm site to be suitable, and that the decision to allocate the LA6 site was only taken ‘on balance’, and with the SA showing “little differentiation”.

In actual fact, the assessment for the LA6 site as set out on pages 163 to 167 identifies little in the way of unique or unusual positive attributes (the argument that the site utilises previously developed land is marginal, since this comprises in the main a limited area of hardstanding). The main text of the assessment does identify the significant negative aspects of the location of the site relative to the rest of the village, but curiously the officer summary ignores that part of the analysis.

In respect of the Duckhall Farm site, the only material differences relate to the fact that the land is currently in an agricultural use, and that there are two adjoining listed buildings. Comments made in respect of infrastructure delivery, the existence of a wildlife corridor and proximity to the prison, for example, apply with equal if not greater force to the LA6 site. Although there are some references in the Duckhall Farm appraisal to crossing of a busy road, the Inspector will note that the same comments are made in respect of the LA6 site, but moreover the comments ignore the fact that there is a pedestrian refuge immediately outside the Halfway House pub adjacent to the Duckhall Farm site, a nearby pedestrian crossing, and of course the option of providing enhanced crossing facilities as part of any development.

The land owners have already made it clear that the removal of the land from agricultural use will not prejudice agricultural viability on the remainder of the holdings, while the impact on adjoining listed buildings is essentially a matter for any future site specific design (we return to the point that the issue for the Core Strategy is to identify the most appropriate site, not to approve a specific layout or form of development).

Overall, it will be apparent from the Council's own assessments, and in particular the wording of the SA report, that there is little to choose between the various options. However, fundamentally, Option 1 (Duckhall Farm) is assessed as being in a "sustainable location" and Option 4 (Proposal LA6) is assessed as being in an unsustainable location.

Given the substantial locational advantages of the Duckhall Farm site, and the lack of any substantive argument in favour of the LA6 site to overcome its inherent disadvantages in sustainability terms, we have to conclude that Proposal LA6 is not sound because it is not the most appropriate allocation having regard to the reasonable alternatives.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the Council's evidence base identifies possible concerns regarding the deliverability of the LA6 site, given the fact that it contains a substantial reservoir in its middle. If there is any doubt at all about the deliverability of the site, then either (a) it should be discounted, or (b) a reserve site should be identified (at Duckhall Farm) in the event of a failure to deliver the LA6 site, release of which would be triggered if development has not occurred at the LA6 site within 5 years of the adoption of the Core Strategy.

14.3 Should there be a specific policy for the village as a whole in order to ensure that the Council's vision will be delivered?

It is evident from the stated objectives and text at paragraphs 24.2 to 24.5 that the vision for the village is more than just the provision of a new housing site for 60 units. A number of themes can be identified over and above the delivery of Proposal LA6, being:

- The delivery of 130 units overall by 2031;
- The delivery of a residential care home for the elderly;
- The delivery of allotments;
- New development to maintain the distinctive character of the village, and respect the conservation area and key views;
- Retention of Bovingdon Green and existing outdoor leisure space;
- Existing shops, services and employment premises to be maintained;
- Investigation of possible measures to reduce congestion.

In our view, all of the above could usefully be combined in to a Bovingdon Policy, to ensure that there is a policy basis for delivery of all aspects of the village, over and above the delivery of proposal LA6.

However, we would draw particular attention to the second and third bullet points above. There is a clear statement of intent in the supporting text to support a new residential care home and new allotments, but no site specific allocation is included in the Plan.

The best way to ensure delivery of these additional land uses would be to identify a specific site, and our clients land at Duckhall Farm has been promoted as being suitable for the provision of a care home and allotments (Duckhall Farm is one of the sites identified on page 190 of the June 2012 Site Assessments report as being potentially suitable for such uses).

In the absence of a site specific allocation, a policy to support the delivery of a residential care home at the village would offer more certainty and more prospect of successful delivery than the rather vague phrase currently contained in the Core Strategy which refers only to “consideration” being given to such development.

A '*positively prepared*' plan should be giving policy support to a residential care home and allotments being delivered at Bovingdon.