

Local Plan
Central Bedfordshire Council
Priory House
Monks Walk
Chicksands
SG17 5TQ

10 August 2020

Dear Sirs,

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN - CONSULTATION ON ADDITIONAL
EVIDENCE (JUNE 2020)
LETTER OF OBJECTION**

I welcome this opportunity to comment on the additional evidence Central Bedfordshire Council (“the Council”) has submitted to the Planning Inspectors, in response to their letter of 30 September 2019 (Exam 69) on the examination of the emerging local plan (“the Plan”).

The Council’s retrospective evidencing of the soundness of the Plan’s policies has unnecessarily prolonged the period of uncertainty for those living in the shadows of its allocations, blighting the lives and homes of the communities it serves, with consequential effects on their mental health.

However, before I set out my objections on the additional evidence, in view of the extensive evidence that has been submitted since the examination began (including several schedules of proposed modifications and changes agreed in statements of common ground), I ask if the Council would produce a track-change version of the submitted Plan (NSIP developers regularly supply updated versions of their DCOs during examination).

Please note that where this letter contains quotations, the use of bold font is my emphasis.

My objections relate to policy SA2 - Marston Vale new villages.

1. Summary of objections

The *SA Supplementary Report* (Exam 115) fails to acknowledge that: the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway has been paused; the Forest of Marston Vale has been designated part of the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy; and Milton Keynes Council has published a *Milton Keynes Draft Strategy for 2050*, which includes the sites of the Aspley Guise and Marston Vale SAs (Objection 1).

Furthermore, the Council's misconduct in safeguarding the Aspley Guise SA for any future Expressway, demonstrates its lack of willingness to work with Highways England to consider how the SA could be delivered without undermining the Expressway (objection 2). This, and its failure to make provision for direct access into the Aspley Guise SA as part of its current A421 upgrade - dualling the carriageway from the Eagle Farm roundabout down to M1 J13 (objection 5) evidences how quickly the Council closed its mind to Aspley Guise as a reasonable alternative to Marston Vale (objections 13 and 14). It is also illogical that the largest housing allocation in the Plan is in close proximity to M1 J13, one of the most congested hotspots in Central Bedfordshire (objection 6).

The Council has also failed to consider how the potentially negative effects of policy SA2, on the predominantly rural Marston Vale landscape, might be mitigated by differing scales of development - all five growth scenarios include potential new settlements at Marston Vale of 5000 dwellings (objection 7).

The *SA Supplementary Report Appendices* (Exam 115B) also contains a number of discrepancies in the assessments of the Marston Vale (policy SA2) and Aspley Guise SAs (objections 8 through to 12). Until these are addressed, it is difficult to determine whether policy SA2 is indeed, the most effective strategy for meeting the housing need in Area C (East-West Corridor).

Policy SA2 also needs strengthening to ensure future planning applications comply with the forest plan (Exam 14), which is a material consideration in planning decisions, by delivering at least 30% new woodland creation (not counting street trees and those in residential gardens). Indeed, I contend that this landscape led development must be ambitious in beginning to address the current underachievement of the overall 30% target for the Marston Vale community forest. This would also deliver on the strategy in the forest plan that the Brickfields should secure a higher level of new planting than elsewhere in the community forest (objections 3 and 4).

Although not raised as an objection (as it is outside the scope of this consultation) the Council has relied on unpublished evidence (ie not included in the examination documents) to assure the inspectors (at the examination hearing last year) it can achieve its two commitments of providing both separation and screening between the existing villages in the Marston Vale and any new development. This contravenes the principles of an open, fair and transparent examination.

Also out of scope and therefore, not raised as an objection, is the inspector's decision at the examination hearing into policy SA2, to refuse the Council's modification to designate three heritage buffers within the Marston Vale SA (Exam 7J, 7M and 7M Annex 1). In effect, to modify the boundary of policy SA2 shown on the proposed allocation map to exclude these areas from the policy. I would respectfully correct the Council when it said (at the hearing) that this was as a result of its [unpublished] masterplanning; it was in fact the outcome of the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) the Council carried out in response to the former inspector's (Mike Hayden) request for it to "clarify the historic environment evidence on which the CBLP has been based and how this has informed the plan's strategy and choice of site allocations" (Exam 2) and to show that policy SA2 is "justified and consistent with national policy in respect of its heritage impacts" (Exam 6). Accordingly, Exam 7M concludes that, to be consistent with national policy, the settings of several heritage assets must be safeguarded (the three heritage buffers). Therefore, it seems entirely reasonable that the conclusion of the HIA would be incorporated as a

modification to the Plan, otherwise what purpose did it serve in answering the former inspector's concerns?

The discrepancies in the Council's assessments, coupled with its failure to consider differing scales of development at Marston Vale, and its mis-conduct in prematurely safeguarding the Aspley Guise SA for the (now paused) Expressway, demonstrate that it has not properly considered the reasonable alternatives to policy SA2. Without such proper consideration, policy SA2 is not sound. The Aspley Guise SA was first promoted in the *Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy* (MKSM SRS) and so, I contend it is the natural and logical choice for meeting the housing need for Area C (East West Corridor); not Marston Vale.

2. Matters arising from Sustainability Appraisal of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Supplementary Report (Exam 115)

Objection 1: In respect of the Marston Vale SA, the SA Supplementary Report (Exam 115) fails to acknowledge that:

- A. The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway ('the Expressway') has been "paused" (*Department for Transport Road Investment Strategy 2: 2020–2025* (RIS2)). Indeed, the *SA Supplementary Report Appendices* (Exam 115B) still references implementing the Expressway¹.
- B. The Forest of Marston Vale has been designated part of the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, a network of forest conservation initiatives throughout the 53 nations of the Commonwealth². It is one of just five sites currently designated in the United Kingdom.
- C. Milton Keynes Council has published a *Milton Keynes Draft Strategy for 2050*³ that proposes a Metropolitan Milton Keynes area that if adopted, would include the Marston Vale. Indeed, the Marston Vale new villages are referenced throughout the draft strategy.

These have potential consequences for the assessment of the strategic allocations in Area C (East-West Corridor), which the Council has not considered in its SA.

¹ "A further improvement has also been identified as part of the commitment to growth in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, to **implement a new route known as the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway**, linking the M40 and the M1 to create a fast and direct connection." (page A-7)

"A428 Oxford to Cambridge Expressway – The case for a strategic link to connect the cities of 'the Brain Belt' together has been set out following the identification that east-west links in England could benefit from improvement. The Stage 3 Report involved the assessment of the three short listed Expressway options and **benefits identified were promising enough to take them forward to the next stage of assessment**. A Strategic Outline Business Case was set out for the project **which concluded that the Expressway** along with other transport interventions, including improved east-west rail connectivity, are **critical to overcoming existing local, regional and national infrastructure deficits**". (page B-4)

² <https://queenscommonwealthcanopy.org>

³ <https://www.mkfutures2050.com>

2A. The Expressway

RIS2 states:

“We are now **pausing further development of the scheme** [the Expressway] while we undertake further work on **other potential road projects that could support the Government’s ambition for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc...**”

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps had previously said the "benefits" of the Expressway were "finely balanced against its costs, both financial and environmental". He also said the scheme would only "proceed" if it has "local support".⁴

Whilst, if I have understood the *Transport Technical Paper* (Exam 114) correctly, policy SA2 is not dependant on the Expressway (or a similar scheme that substantially meets the same needs/objectives), the pausing of the Expressway further weakens the Council’s already flawed argument that it prevents the Aspley Guise SA from being progressed as a strategic allocation (ie as a reasonable alternative to policy SA2). In this regard, Exam 115 and 115B state:

“Aspley Guise

This site was **prevented** from being allocated due to it being within the **potential alignment for the Expressway**. The Council was aware the route would connect at J13, meaning allocation of **this site could have prejudiced its delivery**. This site could **only be considered** once strategic decisions around infrastructure in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc were further down the line.” (page 58, Exam 115)

“Not progressed as a Strategic Allocation **to allow time for identification of the proposed Expressway** and associated road and junction improvements” (Table C.5 Growth Locations for Strategic Growth – Housing, Aspley Guise, Exam 115B).

One of the key benefits of the Expressway was to unlock opportunities for economic growth along the OxCam arc, so it’s something of an anomaly that it’s having the opposite effect at the Aspley Guise SA.

The Council should have worked more closely with Highways England to ensure that opportunities for growth at Aspley Guise were maximised, similar to the approach taken by the North Essex Authorities⁵ for the local plan Garden Community at Marks Tey, which considered how A12 Chelmsford to A120 Widening (Junctions 23 to 25) improvements could be delivered without undermining the proposed housing growth.

The A12 proposals had progressed further than those for the Expressway, but the parties signed a statement of common ground that:

“Given that **a key function of the Strategic Road Network is to facilitate economic growth**, Highways England has worked closely with the relevant local authorities to consider how the A12 could be delivered without undermining the proposed housing growth proposals for the Garden Community at Marks Tey. This has resulted in a **further**

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50489564>

⁵ Braintree District Council, Colchester Borough Council, and Tendring District Council

non-statutory consultation to gather public feedback on **four alternative routes running between junctions 23 and 25 that could be used if the proposed garden community does go ahead**. The consultation closed on 1 December 2019.”⁶

Objection 2: The Council has not worked with Highways England to consider how the Aspley Guise SA could be delivered without undermining any future (but now paused) Expressway.

The Council’s actions in safeguarding the Aspley Guise SA for any future Expressway are not commendable. It is under no obligation (legal or otherwise) to safeguard land until the highway authority has served written notice (a “notification of development”) of its intention to build, alter or improve a highway⁷. Even then, a notification of development cannot guarantee to safeguard land for a proposed highway, it is only its aim. Can the public now understand that (if the Expressway is progressed) notwithstanding that a consultation into possible route options has yet to be undertaken, a route through the Aspley Guise SA has been pre-selected?

2B. Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy

At a ceremony performed by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal at the Marston Vale Forest Centre on 30 July 2019, the Marston Vale Community Forest received the prestigious honour of being designated part of the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy. It is currently one of only five designated sites in the United Kingdom.

I realise that a Community Forest is about creating both sustainable communities and woodland landscapes. The two must sit in harmony, complementing each other, in order to truly realise this concept. However, the Marston Vale Community Forest now sits along some of the most prestigious, inspiring and important forests in the world.

Following the hearings last year, the *Forest of Marston Vale: Forest Plan (2000)* (“the Forest Plan”) (Exam 14) was added to the examination documents. It confirms that the 30% tree cover in policy SA2 is to realise the aim of providing “woodland cover”, “woodland planting” or “woodland creation” (pages 12, 17 and 22).

The Forest Plan also states that:

- A. It is “a material consideration used to inform the preparation of statutory development plans” (page 8).
- B. The Brickfields (policy SA2 is completely within the Brickfields, see map on page 15) needs to “secure **a higher level of new planting than elsewhere in the Community Forest**” (page 16), with “**the core Brickfields and urban fringe zones being targeted for the highest proportion of tree planting**” (page 21).

⁶ Braintree, Colchester and Tendring Local Plans: Section One, Examination Document SCG.017A ECC & Highways England - December 2019

⁷ Town and Country Planning (Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. A notification of development is not issued before the preferred route of a new highway is announced

- C. “expanding settlements... **require substantial planting** to offer landscape, wildlife, recreation and amenity benefits” and “**the landscape value of larger woods will be significant when the Vale is viewed from the ridges**” (page 16).

In addition, *Breathing Space Creating Green Infrastructure in the Marston Vale*⁸, which also refers to achieving “30% **woodland cover**” (pages 1 and 7), states:

“Existing water bodies, housing, industry and hard infrastructure mean that to achieve 30% **woodland cover** across the 61 square miles, **39% of the remaining land must become available for woodland creation.**” (page 7)

It is clear from these two documents that:

- A. The 30% tree cover is to be “woodland”;
- B. The 30% woodland cover must be of the total area of the community Forest (the areas of existing water bodies, etc. are included in that calculation);
- C. The highest proportion of tree planting should be in the “Brickfields [where policy SA2 is located] and urban fringe zones”;
- D. The core aim of the Forest Plan will fail if 39% of the remaining land (which includes policy SA2) does not become available for “woodland” creation.

However, evidence submitted to the examination by the developer⁹ conflicts with this. It’s 30% calculation includes “street trees and planting within private gardens” and it calculates the site area “excluding water bodies”. It also proposes to create 69 ha of woodland “outside the development area” (had the Council intended that additional land could be utilised in achieving the overall 30% tree cover, it would have made provision for this in policy SA2).

Policy ENV1 *East of England Plan*¹⁰ defines the Forest of Marston Vale as “an area of **landscape, ecological and recreational importance**” and (along with the Milton Keynes to Bedford Waterway Park and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) as “assets of **regional significance** for the **retention, provision and enhancement of green infrastructure**” through Local Development Documents. That was before it was designated part of the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy, which must now elevate it to a landscape asset of national (if not international) “significance”.

In contrast, Aspley Guise does not form part of the Marston Vale Community Forest (or the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy).

Objection 3: Policy SA2 should acknowledge that as the site forms part of “the Brickfields” it needs “to secure a higher level of new planting than elsewhere [in the community forest]”. Given this is a “landscape led” development and policy SA2 provides

⁸ http://www.communityforest.org.uk/resources/Forest_of_Marston_Vale_Breathing_Spaces.pdf

⁹ para 4.4 and Table 4.1 - Local Plan Examination Matter 6, Issues 1, 2, 6 & 7 Statement on behalf of O&H Properties Ltd Appendix A: (i) Marston Valley OPA Development Specification

¹⁰ https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pscd07_-_east_of_england_plan.pdf

commitments that the new villages will be both “separated” and “screened” from existing settlements¹¹, it should set ambitious targets. It should require that significantly in excess of 30% of (not a total of) the land become available for woodland creation.

Objection 4: Whilst further clarification should not be necessary, given the differing views of the parties, it would be helpful if policy SA2 clarified what is expected by “woodland cover” so that everyone understands this requirement. Strengthening this policy now will support the Council in standing resolute in achieving it. Otherwise, it risks forever destroying this asset of regional significance and of landscape, ecological and recreational importance.

2C. Milton Keynes Draft Strategy for 2050

The *Milton Keynes Draft Strategy for 2050*¹² (MK 2050) proposes a Metropolitan Milton Keynes area that if adopted, would include the Marston Vale and Aspley Guise SAs. In particular:

Figure 4: Green infrastructure potential growth framework, shows how two new settlements could be provided in the Marston Vale¹³, with substantial belts of green infrastructure around existing villages and along the A421 corridor, in compliance with the Forest Plan.

Figure 6: Possible Mass Rapid Transit Network Routes, extends into the Marston Vale, to provide sustainable public transport, mitigating: (i) congestion at M1 J13 and A421 into Milton Keynes; and (ii) access coalescence with existing villages.

Whilst, policy SA2 will “deliver viable and efficient public transport routes through the development that link with key destinations...” (principle 12) the Council has yet to consult on proposals.

Figure 13: Recommended Spatial Strategy, shows the recommended strategy in this proposal.

Notwithstanding the draft status of *MK 2050*, or that (until I see more detailed proposals for how this development might proceed) I have concerns about the sustainability and adverse environmental effects of building 5,000 dwellings in the Marston Vale, I support its broad vision.

¹¹ The Council’s assurance to the inspector at the examination hearing into policy **SA2** on 13 June 2019 (<https://cranfieldandmarstonvale.co.uk/marston-moretaine/marston-valley-discussed-at-hearing/>) that it was confident that separation between the villages could be achieved is unsubstantiated. The Council relied upon its “comprehensive and quite extensive masterplanning work” that is not an examination document; nor is it in the public domain. As such this aspect of policy SA2 has not been properly tested through examination. The reliance on unpublished documents contravenes the principles of an open, fair and transparent examination.

¹² https://ddd3d78e-749e-4b55-9eee-73303fdcb896.filesusr.com/ugd/02d3f7_6179d2c547974a38ad86344e338fabdf.pdf

¹³ This accords with the Council’s earlier proposal to provide for “two distinct villages separated from existing settlements of Marston Moretaine & Lidlington by blue/green infrastructure” (para 8.93 Exam C31).

In these simple figures, *MK 2050* has illustrated a far clearer vision for policy SA2, than the Council has been able to convey to local communities in the three years since its Reg 18 consultation.

With the detail held back for the masterplanning, many residents still have little idea what this development could look like. Until then, those who (like me) accept we need to build significantly more homes, would feel like ‘turkeys voting for Christmas’ if we supported policy SA2. Without clarity, we are expected to act in good faith (potentially to our detriment) on our own interpretation and limited understanding of the Plan. As I have demonstrated, the lack of clarity has already led to conflicting interpretations by the parties regarding the 30% woodland creation¹⁴ (objection 3). A constraints map, for example, would be an invaluable start in aiding understanding.

Housing Trajectory 31 January 2020 (Exam 90) shows development commencing in 2021/2022, suggesting the Council’s proposals are in fact, far more detailed than it is currently willing to communicate to the local communities it is supposed to serve.

3. Highways - access and congestion hotspots

The Council’s current A421 upgrade - dualling the carriageway from the Eagle Farm roundabout down to M1 J13 could have easily incorporated an at-grade roundabout (this stretch of the A421 into Milton Keynes already contains two such roundabouts) to provide direct access into the Aspley Guise SA. It is not known why the Council did not take this opportunity.

Authorisation to make the Central Bedfordshire Council (A421 widening and improvement) Compulsory Purchase Order 2017 was sought in April 2017¹⁵, evidencing that by then (ie before its Reg 18 consultation in the Summer of 2017) the Council had firmly closed its mind to the Aspley Guise SA.

In comparison, for the Marston Vale SA, access onto A421 is only possible through the existing villages of Marston Moretaine and Brogborough (in conflict with the prevention of coalescence - policy SP5). Direct access onto A421 would require a new grade separated junction.

Objection 5: The Council has intentionally missed key opportunities with its A421 upgrade to bring forward the Aspley Guise SA in accordance with MKSM SRS.

Nevertheless, it is noted that “Junction 13 M1 improvement works which took place in 2007/08 were future proofed to take account of an urban extension for Milton Keynes which would include the capacity of this [the Aspley Guise SA] site, as promoted in MKSM SRS.”¹⁶.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 Transport Modelling Stage 1C & 1D (Exam C26) identifies M1 J13 as one of the most congested hotspots within Central Bedfordshire, scoring 9 out of 10 for

¹⁴ There are other conflicts between policy SA2 and the developer’s outline planning application that the Council will need to address, but it not appropriate to discuss these here

¹⁵ <https://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s71627/A421%20Dualling%20M1J13%20-%20Milton%20Keynes%20Magna%20Park%20-%20CPO%202017.pdf>

¹⁶ NLP463 Q.8 (critical infrastructure requirements)

congestion in the reference case 2025 (increasing to 10 out of 10 in the 2035 reference case).

It is also unclear whether the forecasting methods for determining the future operation of M1 J13 in the 2025 and 2035 forecast years (para 2.2.5 Exam 114) have factored the increase in traffic from the developments currently being built at Marston Moretaine and Wavendon, together with the approved Milton Keynes eastern expansion (*Budget 2020* awarded Milton Keynes a Housing Infrastructure Fund package to support building 5,000 new homes east of the M1, as set out in *Plan:MK*), the former Stewartby Brickworks (*Bedford Borough Adopted Local Plan*), and the Rookery Pit incinerator, which when it comes online, is expected to significantly increase HGV movements in the area. All of these developments will impact on movements at this junction.

Objection 6: It is illogical to situate the Plan's largest housing allocation (policy SA2) and the employment allocation at Marston Gate (policy SE2) within a couple of miles of this congestion hotspot.

4. Consideration of reasonable alternatives to the Marston Vale SA

4A. Growth scenarios for Area C (East West Corridor)

In respect of the growth scenarios for Area C (East West Corridor), the SA states:

"All five scenarios include a potential new settlement at Marston Vale in Area C (5000 homes)"¹⁷

The inspectors raised concerns (Exam 69) that the *January 2018 Suitability Appraisal* (Exam C31) which tested 5 Growth Scenarios for each Area, allocated 4,000 dwellings for North of Luton in all the growth scenarios for Area A (except the 'No Development' scenario). Therefore, the inspectors concluded that they failed to see how the SA had adequately considered reasonable alternatives for Area A.

Why in requiring the Council to consider the reasonable alternatives for Area A, have the inspectors not similarly required it to consider the reasonable alternatives for Area C? Given that policy SA2 is the largest housing allocation in the Plan, one would similarly expect it to be fundamental that the SA thoroughly considers the reasonable alternatives to it in Area C, before concluding which is the most appropriate strategy for meeting the housing need. Until it does so, I contend the case for policy SA2 is unsound.

At no point does the Council seek to vary the scale of the proposed development at the Marston Vale SA, despite Exam C31 also noting:

"The effect of the growth on settlements will depend on the scale and design of the development proposed.

"Potential for **negative effects on the predominantly rural landscape**. These could be cumulative and **residual effects will depend on the scale** and scope of the development and how the potential impacts are mitigated.

¹⁷ Section 5, para 5.48 and Table 5.3 (Exam C31), as referred to in Table C.5 Growth Locations for Strategic Growth – Housing of (Exam 115B)

“The effect of the growth on settlements will depend on the scale and design of the development proposed.” (para 5.106)

The Council has now produced three options (with different scales of development) for each of the Arlesey, Luton North and Luton West SAs to assess, compare and contrast how scale affects the SA objectives. Why has it not completed similar assessments for the Marston Vale SA? If nothing else, I would suggest that reducing the number of homes to say 4,000 (which would be sufficient to met the housing need in Area C over the Plan period¹⁸) may potentially improve the assessment of the SA objectives (and therefore, scores), whilst further meeting the aims of woodland creation in the Forest Plan.

Objection 7: The SA fails to test how “scale” might effect “the growth on settlements” and its “residual effects”. In doing so, it fails to consider how options for smaller scale development at Marston Vale, might mitigate the “potential negative effects on the predominantly rural [vale] landscape”. Again, without this evidence, the Council’s case that the scale of policy SA2 (5,000 dwellings) is the most appropriate strategy for meeting the housing need in Area C, is unsound.

4B. The Aspley Guise SA

With the Aspley Guise SA being promoted in MKSM SRS and the Council being under no obligation whatsoever to safeguard it for any future (now paused) Expressway, the assessment/ scores for this and the Marston Vale SA will be fundamental in determining which offers the best solution for meeting the housing need for Area C.

There are a number of discrepancies in the assessments/ scores of the SA objectives for these SAs (Exam 115B Appendix F) that need to be explained or resolved, as follows:

(a) **SA objective 1: housing** - it is unclear why the Council has used a capacity of only 3,000 dwellings for the Aspley Guise SA (the assessment states “The delivery of up to 3,000 new homes...”). This conflicts with the 5,000 dwellings put forward by the site promoters in response to the Council’s call for sites and the Council’s own assessment methodology, which arrived at a figure of 4,677¹⁹. Perhaps the capacity has been reduced to take account of any future Expressway through the site, although this is unclear.

Objection 8: The Council has not justified how (or indeed why) its assessment has scaled back the Aspley Guise SA to 3,000 dwellings, being just under the 3,700 proposed to be delivered by policy SA2 in the Plan period²⁰.

(b) **SA objective 3: Services and facilities:** The significance criteria for this objective (table 3.3: Sites SA Framework, Exam 115) states:

“The nature and significance of the effects against this SA Objective will relate to the distance of the site from **existing** services/ facilities.

¹⁸ Housing Trajectory 31 January 2020 (Exam 90) provides for 3,700 homes over the plan period

¹⁹ NLP463 Q.1 provisional site capacity

²⁰ Housing Trajectory 31 January 2020 (Exam 90)

“The Council considers key facilities/services to include schools (primary and secondary), GP surgery/medical centre & retail provision (Town Centre/ Local Centre).

“The SA assumes that larger strategic development options have greater potential for enhancements to existing provisions. However, **this will not have an impact on the nature and significance of the effect against this SA Objective**. This will be a consideration through the Council’s wider site assessment process.”

The assessment for Marston Vale states “These significant provisions [the new local facilities proposed in policy SA2] will support improved accessibility in this area and **address existing accessibility issues**, with the potential for a significant long term positive effect against SA Objective 3.”

Policy SA2 scores ++ which means the site is located within reasonable walking distance (within 800m) of all existing services and facilities (Table 3.3: Sites SA Framework, Exam 115).

Objection 9: Why does policy SA2 score ++ for services/ facilities, if it has “existing accessibility issues” (noting that the potential for the SA to enhance existing facilities does not impact on the significance of effect against this objective)?

(c) **SA objective 4: Employment opportunities** - The Aspley Guise SA scored 0 for employment support on the basis that “If no employment is being proposed as part of development, as it is a housing site option, then it is considered to have a neutral effect against this SA Objective” (Table 3.3: Sites SA Framework, Exam 115).

Interestingly, it then scored + for a town centre, which will of course provide employment opportunities. Indeed, I understand that local shops, primary and secondary schools, and a GP surgery or medical centre were offered as part of this development²¹, offering a number of employment opportunities.

Objection 10: In assessing a strategic allocation for housing, it is questionable to score it less favourably simply because it does not also include employment opportunities. It is unnecessarily dogmatic to require those employment opportunities to be specifically located within the SA. That approach conflicts with the assessment methodology for other SA objectives, for example the approach to highways naturally considers the effects beyond the SA boundary (where the Marston Vale SA references the future expressway improvements, which would finish at M1 J13 and East-West Rail, which whilst passing through the SA does not actually stop there). Indeed, I thought the strategic vision for the OxCam arc was to create homes and employment across the arc, rather than considering each allocation in isolation.

The Aspley Guise SA is particularly well situated to Milton Keynes²² and the approach taken by the developer is no different from the housing development that would

²¹ Site Assessment NLP463

²² The M1 lies to the north of the SA and the Bedford to Bletchley rail line to the south, forming man made boundaries to Milton Keynes at this location, putting the SA firmly in Milton Keynes, which lies to the west and forms the third side of this triangular site

practically adjoin it, currently being constructed at Wavendon²³. In considering employment opportunities beyond the SA, Aspley Guise will benefit from the extensive opportunities in Milton Keynes - Magna Park, Kingston (retail and distribution), Brinklow (distribution) and the Open University, are all within three miles of this SA. These are far greater and varied than the up to 30ha of employment land being proposed in policy SA2.

One might argue that employment opportunities outside of the SA increases local traffic. However, transport is assessed separately and to reflect on the impact of local traffic movements under “employment” would be double counting. Nevertheless, in relying on employment opportunities at Milton Keynes, the Aspley Guise SA would not impact on traffic movements at M1 J13.

Home working also appears to be increasingly popular for office based staff (not just as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic).

(d) **SA objective 11: soil (previously developed land)** - The Marston Vale SA scores + for previously developed land, which in accordance with Table 3.3: Sites SA Framework, (Exam 115) means that “The majority of the site is brownfield land and will not result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land”.

However, the assessment for the SA objective states that “Development in this site will **predominantly result in the loss of greenfield land** with the potential for long-term negative effects” and that “The site **does not contain any previously developed land**”.

Objection 11: If the Marston Vale SA does not contain any previously developed land and is predominantly greenfield, with “the potential for long-term negative effects”, why does it score + for the objective of using previously developed land?

(e) **SA objective 12: Biodiversity and geodiversity** - the SA assessment of the Aspley Guise SA contains conflicting information. It states:

“There are **opportunities for enhancement of the biodiversity network** in the local area.

“**Enhancing connections between the two CWSs and Priority Habitats** with the NIA through new ecological corridors and biodiversity network improvements would **result in benefits for both areas**. The creation of new habitat sites in and around the site option would also **help improve the local biodiversity network**.”

However, it concludes: “... the potential for **habitat fragmentation at the CWSs and Priority Habitats** means an **overall minor negative effect is expected**” and scores -?.

²³ “Development of 2,900 homes within the Parish of Wavendon with supporting infrastructure including new access roads; a secondary school, two new primary schools; playing fields and strategic open space and a landscape buffer to protect the setting of the village of Wavendon” (Milton Keynes *Strategic Land Allocation Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)*, Adopted November 2013 - <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/strategic-land-allocation-development-framework-supplementary-planning-document-spd-adopted-november-2013>)

Objection 12: How does “enhancing connections between the two CWSs and priority habitats” resulting in “benefits for both areas”, lead to the conclusion that “habitat fragmentation at the CWSs and priority habitats means an overall minor negative effect is expected”?

(f) **Minerals and waste** - approximately half the Marston Vale SA is in a Mineral Safeguarding Area for Oxford Clay²⁴ and is subject to Mineral Strategic Policies MSP11 and MSP12²⁵, which require “development proposals” to be accompanied by a Mineral Resource Assessment (MRA). In this regard, the Council’s assessment notes:

“At this stage, it is not considered that there are any significant sustainability issues within Central Bedfordshire in relation to Minerals and Waste. While **development proposed** through the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan will affect this topic, it is considered that these effects **are unlikely to be of significance.**” (Exam 115, Table 3.3: Sites SA Framework).

I was unaware that a MRA had been undertaken for the Marston Vale SA to inform that conclusion.

Objection 13: Until these discrepancies are resolved, the Council is unable to demonstrate that the Marston Vale SA is the most effective strategy for addressing the housing need in Area C and therefore, that policy SA2 is sound.

4C. Consideration of a combination of the Aspley Guise and Marston Vale SAs

The Council could also have considered dividing the housing allocation across the two SAs. This might have:

- provided greater flexibility in the masterplanning;
- enhanced opportunities for separation and screening between new and existing villages, improving settlement identities and their relationship to their surroundings;
- enabled significantly more woodland creation at Marston Vale in support of the aims of the Forest Plan;
- redistributed traffic movements at M1 J13 (access from the Aspley Guise SA into Milton Keynes would not use this junction). However, the movement of residents across the two SAs would need to be understood (eg shared employment opportunities and facilities); and
- provided opportunities to progress both sections of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway.

Objection 14: This option has not been tested through the Council’s SA to properly understand these opportunities. As discussed in objection 7, the one constant throughout

²⁴ Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Strategic Sites and Policies adopted January 2014 - https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/migrated_images/policies-map-location_tcm3-2131.pdf

²⁵ https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/migrated_images/minerals-waste_tcm3-2120.pdf

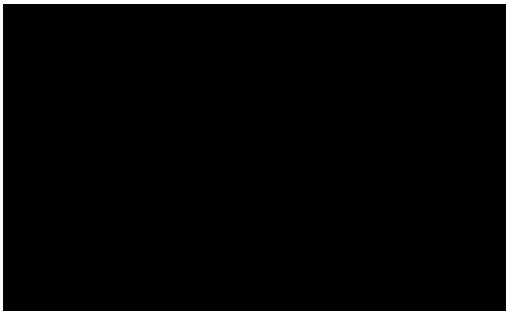
the development of the Plan, from the initial site assessments and throughout the various iterations of the SA, was that Marston Vale was always going to provide 5,000 new homes (regardless of the proposed village structure). The Council has never considered the reasonable alternatives to development scale at the Marston Vale SA.

Conclusions

- A. The Council's latest SA (Exam 115) fails to even acknowledge a number of key developments potentially affecting the strategic allocations in Area C (East-West Corridor), let alone consider their impact.
- B. The Council has been premature in safeguarding the Aspley Guise SA for the Expressway and therefore, in dismissing it as a reasonable alternative for meeting the housing need in Area C (East-West Corridor).
- C. The Council has not considered how differing scales of development in policy SA2 might affect the SA objectives and, therefore, what scale best meets its objectives.
- D. The Council's latest SA (Exam 115B) contains a number of discrepancies that need to be explained/ resolved.
- E. Policy SA2 also needs strengthening to ensure future planning applications comply with the forest plan (Exam 14), by delivering at least 30% new woodland creation.
- F. Until matters A to E are resolved, the Council is unable to demonstrate that policy SA2 is the most effective strategy for addressing the housing need in Area C and therefore, that the policy is sound.

Accordingly, I contend that the Aspley Guise SA is the natural and logical choice for meeting the housing needs of Area C. If the Council has justification for scaling back its assessment of the Aspley Guise SA to 3,000 dwellings (objection 8), the Marston Vale SA could then provide the remainder of the housing allocation (around 700 dwellings²⁶) at the end of the plan period, with the Marston Vale continuing to be built out in the next plan period. For reasons unbeknown to me, the Council: (i) disagrees with the conclusions of the MKSM SRS; and (ii) missed the opportunity to provide direct access into Aspley Guise as part of its A421 upgrade.

Kindly acknowledge safe receipt of this letter and confirm that it has been passed onto the inspectors.



²⁶ Housing Trajectory 31 January 2020 (Exam 90) shows 3,700 homes at the Marston Vale SA over the Plan's period. With 3,000 at the Aspley Guise SA that leaves a shortfall of 700.