Local Plan Consultation  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Priory House, Monks Way  
Chicksands  
Shefford  
Bedfordshire  
SG17 5TQ

Dear Sir/Madam

Re Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035; Draft Plan Consultation July 2017  
Land to the south-east of Leighton Road Toddington Ref: NLP 152 and NLP 153

I write regarding the consultation invited following the publication of the Draft CBC Local Plan dated July 2017, with particular reference to the proposals for Toddington.

Growth Strategy

I am broadly supportive of the growth strategy set out in the Plan which focusses increased development to sustainable locations such as Toddington. The Spatial Strategy sets out a sensible approach to deliver up to 30,000 new homes through moderate extensions to existing towns and villages, along with entirely new settlements. However, the Council should be careful to ensure a balanced delivery strategy for these developments. An over-reliance upon a few large developers developing substantial housing numbers in new villages and urban extensions carries with it the potential for missing targets if there are delays for reasons outside the control of the Council. A balanced approach involving the allocation of a number of smaller sites along with the larger schemes, will encourage small/medium sized developers to become involved in the delivery of housing units, thereby spreading the ‘delivery risks’.

Whilst the Council recognises the need to phase developments, some of the issues raised in Section 8 of the Draft Plan [Implementation], with the stated intention to boost supply, may lead at best to confusion and at worst to a reduction in housing supply. The Council should look again at the statements made at para 8.3, in particular the wording at 8.3.2, which could well have the effect of choking off supply rather than enhancing it as the Council envisages.

Toddington Strategy

Toddington is identified in the draft Local Plan under the Settlement Hierarchy as a Minor Service Centre. Unfortunately, apart from two mentions here, Toddington rates only one other mention in
the body of the Plan, that being a passing reference to the Toddington Services on the M1. This demonstrates the lack of granularity in the Local Plan. Residents of Toddington will be interested above all in their immediate residential areas – indeed the strap line on the front cover of the Plan highlights: ‘Shaping where you live 2035’. In fact, the Plan has little to say about where people live today or the detail of what the Council has in store for the next eighteen years to 2035. How can there be meaningful consultation by residents when there is no detail on which to comment?

The Council seeks to fill the gap by publishing under the same ‘Shaping where you live 2035’ strapline, a number of documents entitled Community Plans, Toddington along with other neighbouring villages being included in Community Area 14**. This ‘Plan’ appears to be a report on a number of community gatherings at which attendees were asked to comment on Transport, Jobs and Businesses, Environment, Homes, Growth and Infrastructure in their areas. The Community Plan document concludes with Event Findings but there is no pathway set out in the Community Plan or the Local Plan to translate the issues raised by residents into strategy principles in the Local Plan.

This results in an unfortunate dis-connection between these Community Plans and the broad-brush approach of the Local Plan. The missing connectivity then extends to an absence of linkage between the Local Plan, the Community Plan and the comments made about the variety of sites brought forward in the Call for Sites requests over the past two years. The resident-driven Community Plan findings call for job creation in Toddington, a greater range of homes for all ages, affordable housing, leisure facilities, improved healthcare and a wider range of services and shops in the High Street. These increased facilities require a larger local and catchment population, which means more residential development in Toddington and surrounding villages. Why then are so many sites brought forward for development around Toddington rejected?

Toddington has suffered from its positioning in the centre of an area of Green Belt designation with insufficient relationship to, or linkage with, its immediate environs. Compare the situation in Toddington with the improved services seen in Flitwick, where residential development has driven the local economy and increased service provision for the growing population. A comparatively low level of population expansion in Toddington has resulted in a stagnation of village services. The Council is urged to apply the principles set out at 2.4. of the Local Plan to encourage the growth of an increased range of services in Toddington, facilitated by an increase in village population.

Toddington has found it difficult to maintain services because of an inadequate economic stimulus. The Council should be explicit about the economic imperative in the Local Plan: it is a key factor to the growth of Toddington as a sustainable community and service centre and is the only way to deliver the wishes of residents outlined in the Findings to the Community Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan must also reflect these imperatives. A continuum of limited growth, caused by Green Belt constriction around Toddington and a presumption against development, must change if the decline in services on the High Street and in the village is to be arrested and reversed.

**Toddington: Sites for Development**

Given the need to generate economic growth in Toddington, sites must be allocated for development, both for residential and commercial uses to create local jobs and provide improved local services. Residential expansion is best provided through a number of smaller schemes around the periphery which are likely to be delivered in a short and reliable timeframe with a minimal effect on the village environment.
This will require the release of some edge of village sites from the Green Belt but the intrusion can be designed to have little effect on the local environment and some new development can be focused on previously used land. Failure to release more land for population growth will mean that the preferences of residents as set down in the Community Plan will not be met.

With these principles in mind, the Council is urged to look again at the sites around Toddington. In particular, the sites at NLP152 and NLP 153 – land to the south east of Leighton Road as shown edged red on the attached plan - would provide a small sustainable development with a variety of housing types, family homes and accommodation for the elderly as well as affordable houses as called for in the Community Plan. The sites are already well screened to the south west and additional screening can be provided along the south-east boundary. The sites are adjacent to existing residential development and form a natural extension to the village envelope. Approximately half of NLP153 has been garden land and used as a small holding for many years until recently – in fact the plan shows farm buildings still existing. The development is easily connected to the High Street through an extension of the present footpath network. Indeed, these sites are better connected to Toddington than the identified site to the north west of Leighton Road.

I therefore suggest that the land to the south-east of Leighton Toad Toddington [NLP 152 and NLP 153] should be identified and allocated as eminently suitable for residential development in the next iteration of the Local Plan and in the Toddington Neighbourhood Plan.

I submit these comments as a contribution to the consultation process for the Local Plan. I look forward to receiving confirmation of receipt.

Yours faithfully

Alan D White BSc FRICS

**Note: Council Officers may wish to know that the report on Community Area 14 does not fully download. The Maps within the report do not appear to download.**
Land to the SE of Leighton Road Toddington NLP 152 & 153 – shown edged red