**Examination in Public – Day 9**

**A1 Corridor Sites**

Thank you, Sir/Madam

East Bedfordshire is facing huge growth through the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor, East/West Rail and improvements to the A1.

* The A1 – The strategic study carried out under the Road Infrastructure Strategy 2 should have culminated in a report published in November 2017. A report has never been published. However, there has since been talk of a study to look at a realignment to the east and the importance of resolving issues on the A1 corridor has been identified as a regional priority by England’s Economic Heartland, the sub-national transport body for the region. There is as yet no preferred solution so it is likely that funding will not come forward until RIS3, 2025 – 2030.
* East/West Rail – An announcement on the preferred route option for the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire section of East/West Rail is expected this autumn. The Secretary of State has identified the need for this section to be delivered at the earliest opportunity and the current working assumption is that this will be 2027 – 2028.
* A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbett – This will complete the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway between the M1 Junction 13, effectively Milton Keynes, and Cambridge. A consultation on the preferred route and design for the Black Cat roundabout is currently being held, finishing 0n 28th July. This is the first part of the process to obtain a Development Consent Order and it is anticipated that construction will take place between 2021 and 2025.

All three of these hugely important infrastructure schemes are due to be completed within the Local Plan period. This will lead to much more demand for housing and economic development sites in East Bedfordshire.

This is why the sites for future growth in Appendix 7 are so important and why Biggleswade Town Council is anxious to ensure that development is properly planned, with the necessary local infrastructure provided.

Since the Pre-Submission Consultation, the Council’s position has been to acknowledge development to the east of the town but to oppose development to the north. This position will be reinforced if the preferred route of East/West Rail is the one between Biggleswade Common and Sandy. The Common is the largest open green space within the parish and very important to residents.

The Local Plan allocates site HAS06, which is a disappointment to the Council. We would prefer no further development to the north other than that already with planning permission. We know that the promoter of HAS06 also wants some further 800 homes over and above those allocated in the Plan. We do, therefore, welcome the inclusion of the Important Countryside Gap proposed between Biggleswade and Sandy to prevent any further development to the north and avoid coalescence with Sandy.

The prime concern of the Town Council about development to the north of the town is the impact on the road infrastructure. To get to the A1 at the A1N roundabout, further housing would have to use the existing roads in one of the older parts of the town, roads which are already taking levels of traffic well beyond what they can cope with. The roads are narrow and still struggle even though a one-way system has been introduced and the road surface on the bridge over the East Coast Mainline is in poor condition.

When traffic from the north of the town reaches Shortmead Street (the old Great North Road), it has the right of way at the roundabout over traffic leaving the town centre towards A1N. At peak times, this causes a long tailback towards the town centre.

When the recently built housing to the north was planned it was thought that traffic would use Baden Powell Way and go to the A1S roundabout. In fact, traffic to the A1N is very much increased.

The proposed Integrated Health Hub on the former Biggleswade Hospital site will put a further load on the roads in the northern part of the town.

The Great North Road – the former A1 – which forms London Road, the High Street and Shortmead Street – is the Highways England diversion if there is an incident on the Biggleswade A1 Bypass. This with much more development to the north could cause total gridlock in the town centre.

The Town Council believes that development to the east is more sustainable in that traffic is much more likely to use the A1S roundabout to access the A1 and all the employment sites, both existing (Stratton Business Park) and proposed (Holme Farm), are to the south either side of the A1.

There is also the question of access to the town centre to consider. The outline planning consent for the 1,500 houses on Land East has the requirement for a traffic impact study on the town centre to be carried out and work on this has already started, with the involvement of the Biggleswade Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. Central Bedfordshire will then need to take this forward by adding the impact of any new housing to the north of the town.

Work is already going on to look at walking and cycling routes to the town centre and possible public transport. There is a public transport interchange at the station proposed as part of the Housing Infrastructure Fund bid. An emerging concern is the difficulties faced by mobility scooters, wheelchairs and buggies given the very narrow and uneven pavements in some older parts of the town.

The Neighbourhoold Plan group is taking advice on how to support the Local Plan by the possible inclusion of that part of Land East outside of the current outline planning but which is within our parish boundary, as housing land. We also want to support the concept of the Important Countryside Gap to prevent coalescence with Sandy and also to protect the Common.

Finally, we re-iterate that the Town Council wants to work with Central Bedfordshire Council, the developers and other appropriate partners to plan for the growth which we know is going to come. We want good housing, the necessary infrastructure and services and to keep a focus on our community by maintaining the quality of life of our existing residents and protecting the remaining green spaces in the parish.

Thank you.