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| **Examination in Public – Additional Session 18th July**  **Future Locations for Growth** |  |

It has been clear for some time that east Bedfordshire is facing huge growth, this through the National Infrastructure Commission’s report on the Oxford/Cambridge Arc and the proposals for the Expressway and East/West Rail. It has already been decided that the crossing point for North/South and East/West for both road and rail will be in east Bedfordshire.

Biggleswade is defined as a Major Service Centre in the Local Plan and the Town Council’s policy is to take a pro-active role in responding to the coming growth by encouraging sustainable development with the necessary local infrastructure also in place. The Council is in process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan to support this policy and will want to include housing to the east of the town rather than the north.

From the first iteration of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, the consultation published in July 2017, CBC has begun to frame our future by outlining a vision for a new market town at Tempsford of 10,000 homes and new villages to the east of Biggleswade, 3,000 homes minimum. This concentrated Biggleswade’s mind on what is likely to happen and what will be needed to maintain the quality of life of existing residents.

The Town Council was somewhat surprised when only one village of 1,500 homes to the east was allocated but that 416 homes were allocated to the north, HAS06, in a far less sustainable location, particularly with regard to transport.

We are pleased that the village to the east now has outline planning approval and that there has been a successful Garden Community bid to Government for funding to ensure better design and planning for the village.

The Town Council therefore cannot understand why CBC have asked for Appendix 7 to be withdrawn. CBC refer to a ‘potential for confusion’ but we would suggest that any confusion will have started in July 2017 when the first draft of the Plan was published. Under Spatial Strategy Approach, the Plan stated that it “seeks to: Identify and deliver spatial options and strategic opportunities that could provide for **longer term economic and housing growth** at Tempsford, Biggleswade and in the Marston Vale’ (P.63, CBC emboldening). It went on to indicate that a high-level sustainability appraisal supported the potential for both Tempsford and East Biggleswade. The Plan then went on to give further detail about ‘provisional capacity’ – 3-6,600 homes for Biggleswade (p.93) and 10,000 for Tempsford.

It has also been clear that detailed planning for the A1 corridor depends on decisions made on national infrastructure. However, CBC’s statement in support of withdrawal of Appendix 7 talks of ‘the potential future but as yet unknown role of Central Bedfordshire in relation to the Oxford/Cambridge Arc’. That is somewhat disingenuous.

* 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 A1 Black Cat roundabout is currently being held. 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.
* 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, 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.

This means, however, that all three of these hugely important infrastructure schemes are due to be completed within the Local Plan period leading to much more demand for housing and economic development sites in East Bedfordshire.

Apart from these infrastructure projects, it is highly like that Central Government will want to impose higher housing targets on Central Bedfordshire, particularly if the Housing Infrastructure Fund bid is successful, allowing the proposed improvements to electricity supply which will give capacity for much more development in the A1 corridor.

Another issue which we need more certainty on is planning for education, not only for sufficient school places for the potential growth but also because CBC are quite rightly encouraging the move to two-tier education, instead of lower, middle and upper. This means that there are issues about how we use existing school facilities, not just how many schools we need.

All this is why the sites for future growth in Appendix 7 are so important for Biggleswade. It is very important to us that the Local Plan is in place to prevent speculative development but also that it indicates where it is likely future development might be. We recognise that full assessment of the sites is not yet possible but Appendix 7 will help to ensure a faster response to what will be national demands for housing.

Given the timescale for the national infrastructure projects the Town Council feels that there is a strong case for a Partial Review within six months. It is understood that the review would have to have regard to the Government’s higher housing requirement and that any review would cover sites other than just the Future Growth Areas. For Biggleswade, it is likely that further housing to the east of the town will be found to be much more sustainable than elsewhere and that the higher provisional figure of 6,600 will come forward.

Biggleswade Town Council wants to play its part in supporting the delivery of this growth and wants to be able to plan effectively for the eventual scale and siting of development likely for our town.

We are therefore strongly in favour of the retention of Appendix 7 in the Local Plan.

Thank you.