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Greater Cambridge Planning Service – Local Plan Team

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## **SUBMITTED ONLINE**

Dear Sir / Madam

**Cambridge Bar Hill Hotel Golf Course, Bar Hill, Cambridge, CB23 8EU**

### **Call for Sites Submission**

We understand that the Greater Cambridge Planning Service is undertaking a 'Call for Sites' as part of its Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA). Whilst no new sites are being assessed at present, we have been advised that a submission can still be made and that it will be considered during the next round of the planning process, following consultation on the First Proposals later this year.

We are instructed by R. Cambridge Propco Limited, the owners of the Cambridge Bar Hill Hotel, to formally submit this 'Call for Sites' form, in relation to the golf course at Bar Hill. We believe that this site has strong potential to provide a sustainable urban extension at Bar Hill (delivering around 300 homes, with complementary facilities). It should be noted that this site is available for the use proposed, and could be suitable for a strategic development to support housing delivery within the Greater Cambridge area in a sustainable location. Indeed, the site owner is already progressing a pre-application enquiry with the Council in relation to the prospects for the site (and this request has been given reference: **BDKDFGWJ**, although no advice has been received to-date).

To support our submission, we have enclosed the following documents:

1. Site Location Plan;
2. Illustrative Proposed Site Masterplan;
3. Initial Ecological Appraisal;
4. Highways Note; and
5. Design and Access Statement.

### **The Site and Its Surroundings**

Our client owns the Cambridge Bar Hill Hotel (BW Signature Collection), which includes an indoor swimming pool, gym and an 18-hole golf course. The hotel would be retained, and only the golf course land is to be considered as part of the 'call for sites' submission.

The golf course plot incorporates an 18-hole course, with its associated fairways, roughs and bunkers, alongside two ornamental lakes. There are also three storage barns located in the north of the site, which would be removed as part of any development.

The site lies directly adjacent to the established settlement of Bar Hill (a minor rural centre) and has good potential to form a natural sustainable urban extension to the settlement. Indeed, the urban



area of Bar Hill already extends in the direction of the golf course, and we note that both Thruffle Way and The Fairway form pockets of development to the east of Crafts Way, interconnected with the golf course land. Additional new residential development has also recently been permitted to the north of Crafts Way, in the vicinity of the hotel, with permission granted on appeal in 2017 for 40 residential dwellings across two plots (comprising 13 houses and 27 apartments) (reference: **S/0851/16/FL**). The settlement of Bar Hill thus appears to be organically growing northwards / eastwards in the direction of the hotel and golf course. The site is also bounded by the A14, which has recently been upgraded through junction improvements, and this also forms an urbanised edge to the site, on its northern boundary.

It is relevant that Bar Hill is well-served by a range of shops, services and community facilities, including a Tesco Extra store, public house, Post Office, primary school and village hall. The local centre, anchored by Tesco, is located off Saxon Way, within easy walking distance of the hotel and golf course. A new residential development on the land would thus be sustainably and accessibly located with regards to the main facilities of the settlement. It is also notable that there are two bus stops on Crafts Way (known as 'Hollytrees' and 'Acorn Avenue'), which are both adjacent to - and within easy walking distance of - the golf course land, and which provide access to bus services to Cambridge, Swavesey and the centre of Bar Hill. The site would therefore be well-served by public transport.

It is recognised that the entire extent of the golf course lies within the designated Green Belt, and this is a policy issue which we discuss in detail below (albeit it is recognised that the emerging Local Plan may include a review of the extent of the Green Belt). As greenfield land, the site inevitably supports a range of natural features, including ponds, a stream and belts of mature trees. These natural features are recognised and would be retained, where possible, within any future development scheme, as described below.

We are aware that the site could also support some ecological habitats, and so an initial Ecological Study has been undertaken to identify the main ecological constraints and opportunities of the land (please see enclosed report). The report explains that the site can be subdivided into greens, fairways, roughs and peripheral areas, all of which exhibit different characteristics.

The majority of space within the site is occupied by modified grassland. The areas of grassland which form the golf course's teeing boxes, greens and fairways are highly manicured, being subject to intense management in the form of mowing and the application of fertilizer and herbicide. These areas are extremely species poor. Located intermittently throughout the golf course are less frequently mown areas of grassland that form 'roughs', as well as unutilised corners. These areas contain a greater diversity of herbs. There are trees and shrubs throughout the site, which are primarily semi-mature specimens planted approximately 50-60 years ago, when the golf course was created. The trees and shrubs do not form a woodland habitat. There are two ornamental lakes to the north of the site, both of which measure between 2,000 and 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The lakes contain clear, standing water, with aquatic plants. The lakes are not of high ecological quality and are considered highly unlikely to support key biotic groups. There are mixed hedgerows along the boundaries of the site. Whilst these boundary features are not considered to meet the criteria of 'important' hedgerows, they do qualify as habitats of principal importance, and are of ecological value at the local level.

Thus, with the exception of the boundary hedgerows and tree lines, none of the habitats present are of ecological value beyond the site level, and thus ecology is certainly not a constraint to development on this site.



The site is subject to few other physical, heritage or environmental constraints. The site is not located within a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings within the vicinity of the site. As noted above, a stream does bisect the site along its northern extent (close to the lakes), and the land along its banks does fall within Flood Zone 2 / 3. The land within the higher flood risk areas could remain clear of residential development. The majority of the golf course, however, lies within Flood Zone 1 and is thus within the lowest area of risk of flooding from coastal and fluvial sources.

### **Vision for the Site**

A vision for the site has evolved through careful consideration of the existing constraints on the site. It can be seen from the plans that there are two lakes on the site, and a stream which bisects the land, as well as various areas of dense tree planting. The aim of any development on the land would be to retain, protect and enhance these natural features, wherever possible.

It is envisaged that the north-west section of the golf course (to the north of Crafts Way and The Fairway) could be developed to provide a new neighbourhood within Bar Hill, which would function as a sustainable urban extension to the settlement.

Meanwhile, the future of the southern and eastern sections of the golf course, the “retained land” edged blue on the attached plans, could be agreed as part of any development package as the plans are advanced. The retained area would have the potential to act as a strategic reserve for future housing allocations or might be converted to form a new country park / area of public open space / allotments / recreation or sporting use, with possible focus on planting and habitat creation which would deliver substantial biodiversity net gain over the existing use of the land as a manicured golf course. As such, whilst both the red and blue-edged land forms part of the ‘call for sites’ submission, it is envisaged that the usage of the land will be different and / or follow different timescales. Certainly, any development on this land, has the potential benefit of opening up the southern / eastern areas of the land for public access, delivering significant new areas of public open space for the Bar Hill / north Cambridge communities on either a temporary or permanent basis.

With regards to the red-edged area of the site, the vision is to create a sustainable new neighbourhood, which will be laid out around the existing landscape features on the site. The existing lakes and stream would be retained in situ, and would provide a focal point for an area of public open space to the north of the development. The new neighbourhood would also incorporate a dense woodland strip, to provide an appropriate buffer to the A14, and this could also include landscape bunding. There would also be a third core area of public open space to the south-east of the plot, which would provide a transition area between the new community and the open land / new country park to the south. The areas of open space would incorporate a LAP and a LEAP, to local authority standards.

The new residential development would include a mix of housing styles, sizes and types, and could include apartments as well as detached and semi-detached dwellings, to cater for the full range of local housing needs. There would also be scope to provide some self / custom-build plots, and the scheme would of course include affordable housing provision.

Whilst the new homes are shown only schematically at this stage, the Masterplan has been formulated to ensure appropriate dwelling sizes, garden sizes, and separation distances between homes. The density of the scheme (30 dph) would replicate the density of other residential streets in Bar Hill and at this stage it is considered that there is scope to provide around 300 homes on the land.



The Masterplan also shows that there is scope to provide some form of community building / local shop, to service the local community's needs, and – subject to further market testing – additional complementary uses could be added. There is scope to provide these uses along the main spine through the development, or around the proposed new village square.

It is worth clarifying, in summary, that although the proposal would represent a major strategic development, the scheme would also ensure the retention of a substantial quantum of open space, which would be improved and enhanced to deliver greater local community benefit as well as biodiversity net gain. Indeed, the site as a whole is just over 50 ha in size, and only one fifth of this land is proposed for development (10 ha), as shown in **Table I** below.

**Table I – Summary of Proposed Land Uses**

LAND USE	AREA (IN HA)
<b>EXISTING USE</b>	
Golf Course	50.5
<b>PROPOSED USE</b>	
Residential Development	10.0
Main area of Public Open Space (at south of development plot)	2.5
Area of open land around the lakes / stream	3.5
Buffer zones (around A14 / Crafts Way / The Fairway)	3.0
Ancillary green spaces within the residential development area (eg. around the Village Square)	1.0
Retained open space / Country Park (blue edged on Plan)	30.5

## The Planning Issues

### Principle of the Development

#### Green Belt

We are aware that the site currently lies entirely within the designated Green Belt.

Paragraph 149 of the NPPF (2021) states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate within the Green Belt (subject to certain exceptions). Paragraph 147 notes that: “*Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances*”.

We understand that a strategic development of the scale proposed would represent a departure from the currently adopted Local Plan. However, there is scope as part of the emerging Local Plan process to review the Green Belt boundaries, and we consider that there is a strong case to remove this area of land from the Green Belt, as part of any Local Plan allocation.

In this regard, we note that paragraph 138 of the NPPF lists five purposes of the Green Belt, which are as follows:

- a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;



- d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

With regards to the golf course site at Bar Hill, this forms a very small proportion of the Green Belt land that encircles Cambridge City Centre. If the parcel of land was to be developed for residential use with a potential country park or other open space facilities (as proposed), it would not have any implications in terms of urban sprawl between Bar Hill and Cambridge. The A1307 and Oakington Road both form a clear boundary that would prevent any 'urban sprawl' towards Cambridge, and the retained land on the eastern side of the site could provide a natural transition area between the new neighbourhood and the Green Belt to the south / east. The proposal would thus allow a limited sustainable extension to the settlement, but without causing any coalescence between settlements or opening the doors for unrestricted urban sprawl.

Furthermore, the proposal would not result in encroachment into the open countryside, as the site is currently in formal use as a private golf course. This stretch of Green Belt, which abuts Bar Hill, does not serve to preserve the setting and special character of a historic town, as Bar Hill is a purpose-built village dating from the 1950s. Moreover, development in this location would not adversely impact on urban regeneration, as there are no brownfield sites available for development within this planned settlement.

The Green Belt in this location is seemingly designated to preserve the historic City of Cambridge and to protect it from encroachment. However, it is our view that the development of a sustainable new neighbourhood within Bar Hill, which lies around 5km from the outskirts of Cambridge (and on the opposite side of the A428 / A14) is not going to compromise the primary purpose of the Green Belt in this location. Conversely, the redevelopment of the site will allow the development of much-needed new homes, whilst bolstering the Green Belt boundary with Cambridge.

Thus, the site's current location within the designated Green Belt should not rule it out as a serious option for housing development. It is clear that the emerging Local Plan is currently carefully assessing the future housing needs of the area, and that there is likely to be a need to identify new strategic locations for housing growth in the near future. Indeed, the Development Options is clear that this is likely to require the removal of some land from the Green Belt, in order to support growth and development.

The site at Bar Hill is a suitable site that could accommodate a new neighbourhood in a sustainable location on the edge of Bar Hill. Moreover, development in this location will deliver a range of benefits in terms of potentially improving local access to open space and achieving biodiversity net gain on an underused site.

### **Village Location**

We have sought to show that a scheme on the Bar Hill golf course site can add to the availability of village facilities, through the provision of a new shop / community buildings; new public open space and play facilities; and potentially new sports facilities. Appropriate contributions would also be made to support health and education infrastructure in the village, ensuring that the new neighbourhood can be accommodated and supported as a natural extension of the settlement.



## **Loss of Existing Use**

Finally, with regards to the existing use of the site as a golf course, we can find no specific policy in the existing adopted Local Plan that would seek to protect and preserve this use.

Moreover, it is relevant that the golf course is not the only 18-hole golf facility within the local area, and there are comparable facilities available at the Kingsway Golf Centre in Royston; Cambridge Lakes Golf Course; Girton Golf Club (which is very close by); Cambridge Country Club; Cambridge Meridian Golf Club; and the Gog Magog Golf Club. Thus, the loss of the golf course should not be a determinative issue in considering the merits of this site.

Furthermore, the retained land provides the potential opportunity for a variety of possible future uses including provision for replacement outdoor recreation facilities, including both formal and informal areas of open space, and this could also include some form of sports facility, depending on local demand. As such, whilst a scheme on this site will necessarily entail the loss of a golf course, there are suitable alternative facilities available nearby and the proposal could provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation, which will be more openly accessible and offer new value to the local community of Bar Hill.

## **Conclusion on Principle of Development on the Golf Course Site**

In summary, it is considered that the submitted site has the potential to deliver substantial benefits in terms of providing a sustainable, deliverable housing site that can meet some of the housing needs in the Greater Cambridge area; with the potential to deliver new community recreational facilities and access to open space; and achieving a biodiversity net gain across a major greenfield site. These are important and valuable benefits.

## **Other Planning Issues**

A strategic housing development on this site is likely to raise a range of other planning issues, and we summarise the position in relation to each below.

- **Highways** – It is proposed to provide two access junctions into the site, from Crafts Way. Car parking spaces would be provided for each dwelling in line with adopted car parking standards. At this stage, our initial assessment shows that there will be no access / capacity / highways safety issues as a result of the development, which benefits from its location close to the recently enhanced A14 roundabout (see enclosed Transport Note).
- **Residential Amenity** – Whilst the layout of the new neighbourhood is only shown indicatively on the masterplan, regard has been had to the existing required separation distances between properties (i.e. 15m between windows and property boundaries). A planting buffer could be provided along the south of the site, to protect the amenity of existing residents on The Fairway. Provision would also be made for a buffer zone (which could include a landscape bund), to protect the amenity of future residents from the noise of traffic on the A14.
- **Ecology** – the existing ecological interests on the site are summarised above. We have identified limited species / habitats of note on the site.



- **Trees** – It is recognised that there are several mature trees and notable tree belts across the site, and there is scope to factor these into the future site layout as much as possible.
- **Design** – the vision is to create a high quality, beautiful sustainable extension to the settlement of Bar Hill, and close regard would be paid to the local vernacular and South Cambridgeshire DC's Design Guide DPD (or any subsequent local design code) in working up detailed proposals for the site. Further information is provided in the enclosed draft Design and Access Statement.

## Conclusion

We hope that this submission provides sufficient information for you to include this strategic site within the 'call for sites' exercise, and assess it as part of the HELAA / new local plan-making process.

We believe that the site offers good potential to provide a sustainable urban extension to Bar Hill to meet some of Greater Cambridge's future housing needs. The site can be available for this use (within a short time frame), it is viable for this option, and it is a suitable and sustainable location on the edge of an existing settlement. There is scope as part of the Local Plan process to remove this site from the Green Belt and take it forward as a deliverable housing allocation in the next stage of the Local Plan process.

If you require any further information to assist the consideration of this site, please get in touch, and we are happy to provide additional details.

Yours faithfully,



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