Land West of London Road, Fowlmere (HELAA site 40116)

 The northern parcel was also assessed individually within the HELAA, under the reference Site 40252.

Policy S/RRA sets out the proposed policy for new site allocations in the rest of the rural area. The First Proposals document states that policy S/RRA will allocate sites for homes or employment that support the overall development strategy within the rural area. There are a total of just four new housing sites proposed to be allocated to the rest of the rural area, excluding the rural southern cluster, demonstrating the restrictions of the proposed development strategy to development in the rural area.

Fowlmere is located only 3.2 miles from Melbourn, which is recognised as a well-functioning place for residents and employment. Paragraph 8.68 of Greater Cambridge Employment Land and Economic Development Evidence Study (2020) states:

“…the villages are able to play an ongoing role in ensuring viable and available industrial floorspace to meet the needs of the city and the wider Greater Cambridge area. Industrial demand for those locations with good connectivity and / or proximity to Cambridge is anticipated to remain moderately strong in the medium term.”

As set out within the accompanying Vision Document, Land West of London Road is located within 20 minutes of a range of local services and facilities to support daily needs. Fowlmere village centre is located less than a five minute walk away, with the facilities, education and employment opportunities of Foxton, Melbourn and Cambridge all easily reachable by bike or public transport. As demonstrated in the accompanying Vision Document, the proposed development would also provide electric vehicle charging points with each dwelling, promoting the use of electric vehicles.

Land West Side of London Road, Fowlmere - Introduction
Wates Developments Ltd. are promoting Land West of London Road, Fowlmere. This Site was submitted to the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP) as a component of their Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment in February 2020.

The GCSP assessed the site against a range of criteria and allocated an overall amber rating in terms of suitability and a green rating in terms of availability and achievability.

We disagree with this amber rating and we have reassessed the Site on receipt of site specific technical evidence, which reassessed the site as having an overall green rating.

Wates are promoting two parcels of land which combine to form the full site, with the Manor Farm access providing the division. The full site is being promoted for approximately 145 dwellings.

Site Description
The land that is being promoted, is approximately 10.33ha in size and is bound to the north by the Manor Farm Business Park, to the east and south by the B1368 and to the west by agricultural land. The site is of a Greenfield nature.

As noted, the site has been identified through the Greater Cambridge Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment as a potential site for development and allocated the reference 40116.

The site’s location within Fowlmere provides a location with access to key amenities such as a Primary School and Bus Services, whilst nearby towns and villages such as Shepreth, Melbourn and Royston provide a full range of required jobs, services, leisure and cultural facilities.

The site is proposed to include considerable provision of public open space to enhance the quality of the site for new and existing Fowlmere residents. This is considered to be a key benefit to the future scheme and also meets the Councils’ aspirations to delivery high quality open space to new and existing residents of Greater Cambridge.

Landscape and Design
A Preliminary Landscape Review of the Site has been undertaken by SLR Consulting Ltd.
The Review confirms that the topography of the site is broadly flat, ranging in elevation between approximately 20m and 25m AOD. The Site is surrounded by areas of built development, including derelict land and disused buildings and Butts residential area and employment site to the south, residential development properties along London Road to the east and London Road to the south along with further residential properties and caravan park. The western boundary of the site is defined by a tree belt which creates a defined physical barrier between the Site and the open agricultural land further to the west. The Site represents a logical location for accommodating development.

The adopted Local Plan identifies land at the eastern edge of the Site, along London Road, as “Important Countryside Frontage”. As demonstrated in the accompanying Vision Document, Land West of London Road and the proposed development responds positively to the Important Countryside Frontage designated along London Road. The development of the Site provides an opportunity to create a gateway into the settlement, providing a transition between the wider settlement and the village. The delivery of a village park will reinstate the countryside frontage, framing the edge of the settlement and aligns with the principle of the designation. The mature tree boundary along the Site’s eastern edge also provides a clear segregation between the settlement and the wider countryside.

The preliminary landscape review concluded that the landscape of the site is of low value to the north of the Manor Farm access. Furthermore, the visual appraisal concluded that the site is visually enclosed but that there is the potential for sensitive views from residents and walkers to the east and south.

The concept masterplan as shown in the accompanying Vision Document has been landscape-led. As recommended by the Landscape Review, the masterplan proposes large swathes of the Site to provide publically accessible open space in the form of a village park and provide a gateway to Fowlmere.

Highways/Access
The Site and proposed development is also supported by an Initial Transport Appraisal, undertaken by i-Transport LLP.

The Site has a long frontage onto London Road (that becomes High Street at its northern end), which is subject to a 30mph speed limit. The Appraisal demonstrates that access to both the northern and southern parcels is readily achievable in highway design terms from High Street and London Road respectively.

With regards to traffic impacts, a development of 145 dwellings is likely to generate approximately 70 two-way vehicle movements in the network peak hours. This will likely be split between travel southbound on London Road towards Royston and northbound via Cambridge Road to Cambridge. This level of traffic generation should not have a noticeable impact and should be well below a level that could reasonably be considered severe.
The proposed development is therefore considered to be acceptable in highways terms.

Flooding and Drainage
The Site sits entirety within Flood Zone 1, demonstrating that it has a less than 0.1% chance of flooding in any year. The flood risk from surface water on the site is predominantly very low.

The Concept Masterplan proposes areas of sustainable drainage systems, which will be multifunctional, providing both biodiversity and amenity benefits as supported by the Draft Local Plan and supporting evidence base.

Ecology
There is a considerable buffer of over 1km between the Site and Fowlmere Watercress Beds SSSI, whilst the village of Fowlmere separates the Site and the Hummocky Fields SSSI to the west.

The presence of Priority Grassland, Wetland and Woodland Habitats are recorded in the wider area surrounding Fowlmere, however no Priority Habitats are located on or in close proximity to the Site.

It is not anticipated that residential development would have a detrimental impact on any designated site or those within regional or local protection.

Heritage
Whilst it is acknowledged that there are a number of heritage assets within Fowlmere, some of which are in proximity to the Site, being in proximity to the setting of a heritage asset does not necessarily cause harm to it.
The Site and proposed development is supported by a Heritage Briefing Note, prepared by Orion Heritage Ltd.
The Note acknowledges the proximity of the Site to the aforementioned Conservation Area, however states that, through the potential loss of the rural frontage to the London Road, is likely to be impacted.

The United Reformed Church, located opposite the Site, is also acknowledged, although as set out in the accompanying Heritage Note, its significance as a landmark building is reduced by the fabric concerned being a later addition, with significance from setting deriving principally from neighbouring buildings rather than its rural interface.

Orion Heritage conclude that in respect of all heritage assets, the development of the Site would result in a less than substantial range as a worst case scenario, which could be further mitigated through sensitive design and layout.

Arboriculture
The Site and proposed development is supported by an Arboricultural Technical Note, produced by SJA Trees.
The Technical Note acknowledges that there are some existing Tree Protection Orders (TPO) on the Site. These TPOs are shown to date back to 1975 and focus on Elm and Horse Chestnut trees. It should be noted that these orders were enacted prior to death of many Elm trees from Dutch Elm Disease, therefore no Elm trees remain on the Site. The remaining Horse Chestnut trees are suffering from lead miner infestations and are of reduced quality and value.

The non-protected mature trees on the site are Ash and Sycamores, although these trees are considered individually unremarkable and of moderate quality at best.

The Technical Note concludes that few protected trees remain and “those that do are generally of limited value or quality”. Development of this site is considered acceptable in arboricultural terms.

Mitigating the effects of Climate Change
Land West of London Road, Fowlmere will positively contribute to carbon offsetting in a number of ways. As demonstrated through the accompanying Vision Document, the proposed development will deliver an attractive open space in the form of a village park, which will provide existing and future residents of Fowlmere with a destination for amenity and leisure. The residential elements of the scheme will deliver low carbon housing and benefit from electric charging points, promoting the use of electric vehicles. In accordance with the aspirations of the Greater Cambridge emerging Local Plan, low water consumption will also be promoted to reduce water usage and positively contribute to water recycling where possible.

Evolving Masterplan
Following the design suggestions offered through the technical assessments, a preliminary masterplan has been produced. This masterplan seeks to maintain and enhance the existing green frontage alongside the London Road and proposes generous swathes of the southern parcel as accessible public open space.

As the design criteria suggests, the majority of the northern parcel will see provisions for residential development, whilst felicitous residential development is proposed on the southern parcel. A range of popular community features are outlined such as allotments, orchard planting, a children’s play area and a village park. These features will complement the aforementioned generous allocation of public open space.

The masterplan proposes two options for development of the Site, both of which are underlined by the principles of a healthy and sustainable community and promote the concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood.

Summary
This site is considered to be suitable, deliverable and achievable, and there are no known significant constraints that should prevent the development of the site.

With appropriate master-planning and design, the site is capable of delivering a sensitively designed but comprehensive and well-connected sustainable development that could contribute to the local development needs of the emerging Greater Cambridge Shared Planning area.

Housing Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) 2021

The Site (which collectively includes both the northern and southern parcels) has been assessed through the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) process (identified as 40116). The northern parcel was also assessed individually within the HELAA, under the reference Site 40252.

The assessments differed in their ratings attached to Landscape & Townscape and Transport & Roads. Regarding the former, the two parcels in unison were afforded an Amber rating, whilst the single parcel was granted a Green rating. With regards to Landscape & Townscape, the collective site was allocated an Amber rating whilst the northern parcel assessed solely was given a Red rating. This Red rating resulted in the overall suitability for development of the individual parcel to also be deemed Red.

We raise concerns with regards to both of these assessments and ratings, which we consider to be inaccurate.
Despite the Site’s positive assessment, it is noted that the Site has not been subject to any further independent assessment as it was “not considered to represent a reasonable option as it would not provide a sustainable location to allocate development”, this is because, according to the Councils, Fowlmere as a whole is not considered suitable for accommodating development. As a result of adopting such an approach that applies a blanket inflexible principle, the Council are at risk of not identifying appropriate sites for development.
This argument originates back to Greater Cambridge assessing Fowlmere as not being located either on an existing or proposed public transport route or in close enough proximity to allow active transport to Cambridge or a market town outside the district to warrant a further assessment.

We disagree with this conclusion and strongly recommend the Councils to reassess Fowlmere in terms of its sustainable location and proximity to good public transport links, therefore re-categorising Fowlmere as a Group Village that benefits from good public transport links, warranting those sites that were assessed positively to be reassessed independently through the Sustainability Appraisal.