



Flitwick Town Council

Report to Town Council 21st June 2022: Land between Brogborough, Lidlington, and Marston Moretaine

Implications of recommendations

Corporate Strategy: There are no direct implications from this report

Finance: There are no direct financial implications from this report.

Equality: No equalities implications have been identified from what is discussed in this report.

Environment: There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

That that Council consider the matters relating to the Land between Brogborough, Lidlington, and Marstone Moretaine raised in this report. The Planning Improvement Group advises that should the Council consider objecting to the application, that it be done on grounds of impacts on health services and insufficient measures being taken to mitigate the impacts of the development on the A507.

Regardless of the Town Council's position, it is recommended that the following conditions be requested should the planning application be permitted:

- A sufficient financial contribution is made to improving the capacity of local health services, in line with contribution recommended by the NHS and CCG, though prioritised on improving the capacity of healthcare facilities in the West Central Beds area;
- The targets for use of non-car modes of transport in the Travel Plan be explicitly included as a planning condition, to mitigate the impact of the development on the A507;
- That a financial contribution be made to junction improvements at the One-o-One roundabout; to mitigate the impact of the development on the A507;
- That a Construction Traffic Management Plan be agreed between Central Beds and the developer, with the involvement of town and parish councils, that actively encourages the use of the M1 and A421 by construction traffic, to mitigate the impact of the development on the A507.

Background

The Planning Improvement Group has been tasked with the consideration of, and making recommendations to, Town Council concerning major planning applications. As well as such planning applications within Flitwick, this also considers major applications that are likely to have an impact on the town.

The planned development of the 'Marston Valley' – formally known as Land between Brogborough, Lidlington, and Marston Moretaine – has been in consideration for a number of years. This is a significant development that will impact upon Flitwick. Consequently, the Planning Improvement Group has reviewed this application in line with the adopted Planning Guide.

Councillors can view the application documents online on the [Central Beds Planning Portal](#), citing planning application reference CB/18/01969/OUT.

The proposals

The planned development is for a significant-sized new community between Brogborough, Lidlington, and Marston Moretaine, of a scale comparable in size to Flitwick currently. This proposal constitutes the following in a series of 4 'villages' across the area:

- Up to 5000 new homes
- Up to 30 hectares of employment land
- Other land uses such as retail, community, leisure and sport uses, and hotels
- 4 lower schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 upper school
- Woodland planting, waterways, ecological areas, and landscaping works
- Supporting infrastructure, vehicle access, walking and cycling routes, and public transport routes

An overall plan of the development is shown below.

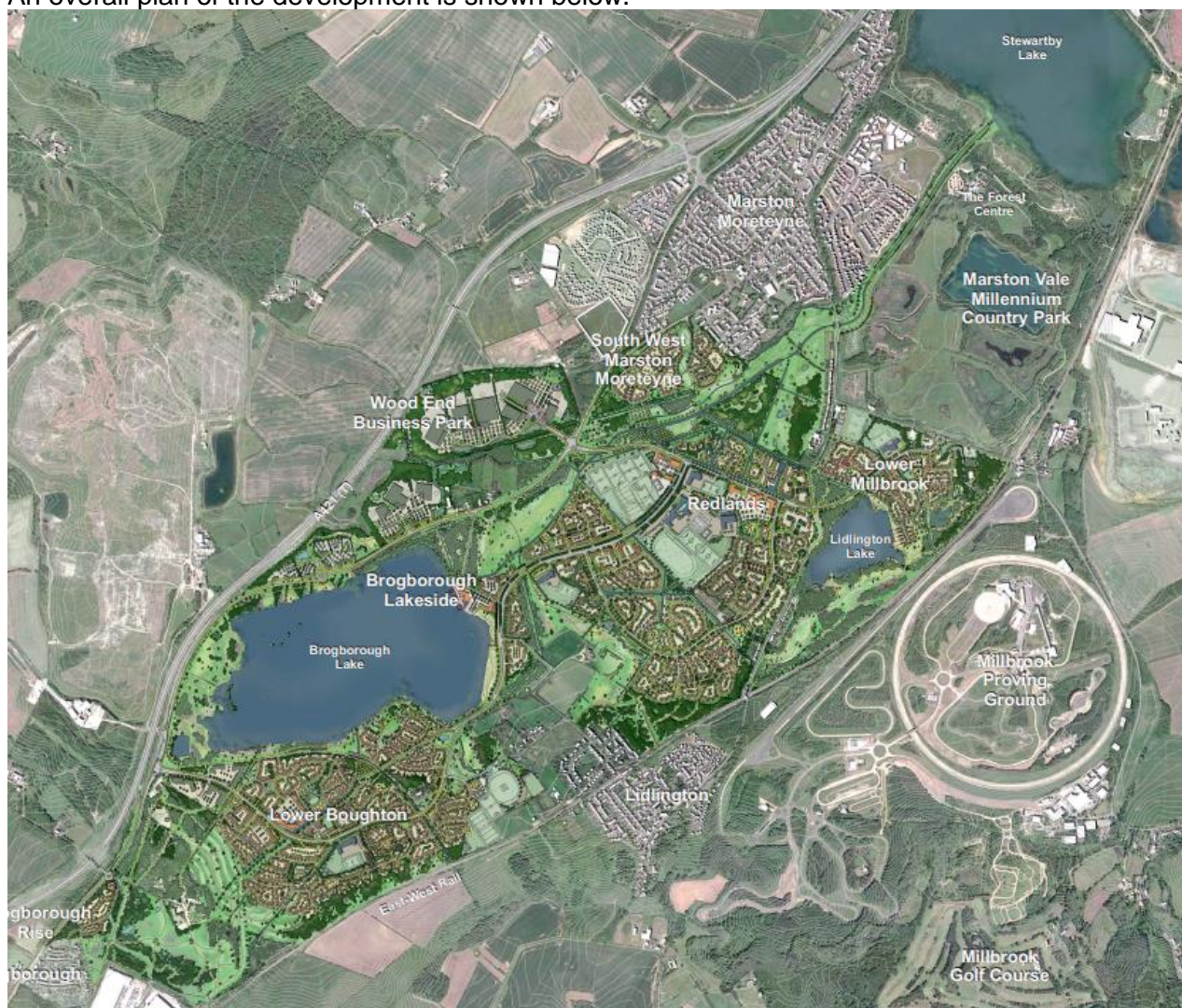


Figure 1 - Overview map

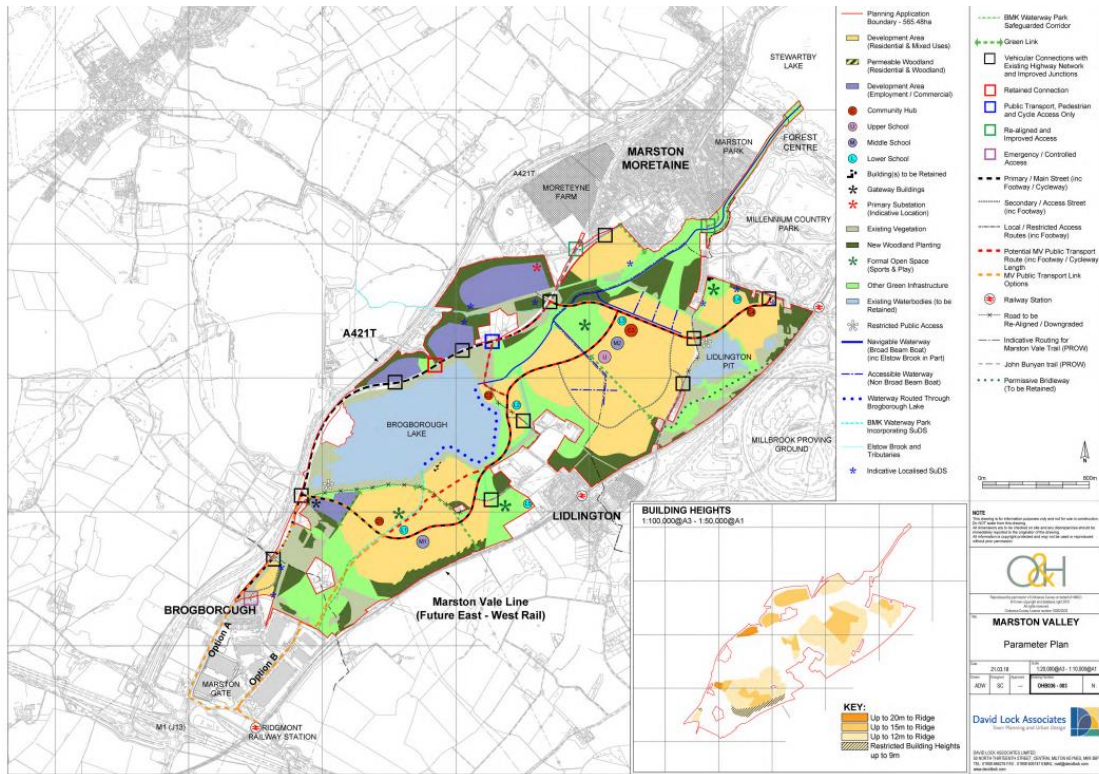


Figure 2 - Parameters Plan for the Marston Vale Development

This planning application has been live since 2018. However, [following the adoption of a Development Brief for the site](#), the original application has been updated, with changes made to a number of key documents. This includes the Environmental Statement, the Transport Assessment, the Design and Access Statement, the Planning Statement, and Landscape and Visual Statement.

Matters for consideration

This is a significant development that is likely to have a major impact on all surrounding areas. In our consideration of the application, the Planning Improvement Group largely focussed our discussions on the impact of the development on infrastructure and services in a manner that will directly affect Flitwick. But we have also considered the principle of the development in our discussions.

Principle of development

The principle of the development is established in both [the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan](#) and [the adopted Development Brief for the site](#). A number of policies in the Local Plan are relevant to the development, with the most significant being Policy SP1 – Growth Strategy, which states that:

“New homes and jobs will be delivered via a combination of strategic and small - medium scale allocations throughout Central Bedfordshire. Strategic allocations will be made at the following locations:

- *Marston Valley (New Villages) – 5,000 homes and 30ha employment land...*”

Policy SA2 of the Local Plan deals specifically with the new growth planned in the Marston Vale, setting out a number of development principles that the site should accord to. The relevant parts of the policy for the Town Council are set out below

The land for Marston Vale New Villages, as identified in the Policies Map, is allocated for a mixed-use development comprising of approximately 5,000 dwellings and approximately 30 hectares of employment land. The employment land is allocated for new non-strategic E(g) and

B2 uses, intended specifically for employment relating to research and development, office, services and tourism to contribute towards meeting local employment needs.

Development proposals will be permitted where the principles set out below are met. These principles will be defined in more detail through the preparation of a Development Brief which will include a concept plan and an indicative phasing plan. Planning permission will only be granted for development following the Council's endorsement of this Development Brief. A site wide Design Code(s) will also be required, followed by area specific Design Codes for each phase, to be prepared by the developer and approved by the Council. In order to ensure the development will be supported by the local and strategic infrastructure needed to ensure sustainable development, the Council will refuse any piecemeal planning permission that would undermine the Council's ability to deliver such infrastructure...

...The development shall provide dedicated and safe pedestrian and cycle links between the new and existing villages, connecting new local centres, employment opportunities, schools, shops, public transport nodes and community facilities with existing pedestrian and cycle networks in the wider Marston Vale...

...the development will provide supporting transport infrastructure to mitigate the impact of traffic associated with the development, including a deliverable scheme of improvements at J13 of the M1 and improvements to the strategic and the local highway network as necessary, to mitigate the impacts of development. The development shall deliver viable and efficient public transport routes and segregated cycling routes through the development that enable links with key destinations including the nominated East West Rail stopping station and employment areas...

...The development shall provide commensurate contributions towards the provision of appropriate off-site infrastructure improvements including towards public transport interchange facilities relating to the enhancement of the nominated stopping station for East West Rail..."

The development brief takes these and other principles outlined in the policies, and develops them in more detail. For example, by identifying site access arrangements and the locations of planned housing and employment facilities. This brief was adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council at its Development Management Committee on 16th March 2022.

The Planning Improvement Group advises that the principle of development in this area is well established in Local Plan policy. And therefore it would not be possible for the Council to object to the application on the basis of the principle of development.

Impacts on healthcare

The Planning Improvement Group has noted that the new development itself will provide up to 1750m² D1 floorspace, which will be split between health facilities (up to 1200m²) and Learning and non-residential institution (up to 550m²). The number of patients that this is expected to serve is uncertain, however the application notes that there are two nearby GP surgeries at Marston Moretaine (that is at capacity) and Cranfield.

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has noted the capacity issues at local surgeries, and has requested a "contribution of £2,445 per dwelling...towards the proposed new primary care centre in Marston Valley, West Mid Beds Integrated Health and Care Hub and improvement of capacity at Bedford Hospital and Milton Keynes Hospital."

There is uncertainty as to how this development will be phased. However, there are known capacity issues at nearby NHS facilities, including Flitwick Surgery. It is uncertain as to whether this contribution will mitigate the impact of the development on local healthcare facilities sufficiently. This is matter not clarified either by the application documents or the CCG's response. This in itself may be a material consideration on which to object to the application.

This matter could potentially be overcome by requesting a planning condition that specifies the planning contribution requested by the CCG, but prioritises such funding towards improving local healthcare facilities (a new facility in the Marston Vale and the West Mid Beds Integrated Health and Care Hub). Furthermore, a condition could be requested where the provision of funding towards additional healthcare facilities be provided at an early stage of the development, so that the worst impacts of the development could be mitigated.

Should such a contribution be sought, the choices of the NHS of the location of the West Mid Beds Integrated Health and Care Hub is only a planning matter relevant to the application in that it is likely to be spent in a location 'relevant' to the development – i.e. within close proximity. Therefore, the Town Council will need to engage with the CCG at a later time on the location of this Hub.

Impacts on local schools

The Planning Improvement Group reviewed the application for its impacts on local schools. The assessment of the capacity of the local schools in the immediate vicinity of the development highlights that several schools in Marston Moretaine and Cranfield have issues in terms of insufficient capacity for new pupils. However, the Group is concerned that one of the closest Upper Schools to the site at Redbourne has not been assessed in terms of the impact on capacity. There are no comments from the Education department at Central Beds Council on the application either.

This impact is primarily mitigated by the scale of the school construction on the development site – 4 lower schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 upper school. Whilst no numbers are given for the planned schools, the Planning Improvement Group considers that this is likely to be a substantial increase in capacity that will cater for the planned development. The delivery timescales for these are slightly uncertain.

Whilst ultimately the impact of the development on local school capacity will be mitigated, the plans do not consider the impact of the development on that capacity as it is delivered. This could be mitigated by requesting a planning condition that provides a plan for the delivery of this additional capacity.

Impacts on transport and roads

The plans of the development place a significant emphasis prioritising sustainable modes of transport, namely walking and cycling for local trips, and public transport for longer distance trips. This includes providing segregated walking and cycling infrastructure throughout the development, and providing new bus links.

For longer distance trips, the Transport Assessment notes that it is likely that the majority of such trips are likely to be to and from Bedford and Milton Keynes, and as such will use the A421 and M1. The Planning Improvement Group considers that this is a reasonable assumption, although there will be impacts on the A507 and Flitwick.

It should be noted that the planned East-West Rail link has been factored into the development. The application anticipates that the link will use the existing Marston Vale Line between Bedford and Bletchley, and has also taken account of planned closures and diversions to existing level crossings planned as part of the link. Also, the application assumes that the Wixams station between Bedford and Flitwick will open as planned in 2024/25.

The proposals also put forward a new bus service running between Flitwick and Cranfield, via the new development. No route details are set out, but it is reasonable to assume that this bus will run at least as far as the new interchange at Flitwick Station. For Flitwick, this could result in a new, frequent bus service operating down Steppingley Road, and providing for new public transport journeys towards the Marston Vale and Cranfield.

Traffic modelling as part of the Transport Assessment forecasts that, assuming nothing is done, the development will result in traffic congestion issues on the A507. Most notably for us, the Transport Assessment notes:

- At the Millbrook roundabout, traffic will be queuing on the approach to the roundabout coming from Millbrook. Traffic levels will also grow on all other approaches, but not to a significant degree;
- At the One-o-One roundabout, traffic will be queuing on all approaches to the roundabout as the development is constructed

For the Millbrook roundabout, the developer proposes to mitigate the issues by encouraging residents of the new development to use the planned new bus service. The sites Travel Plan proposes non-binding targets to encourage a shift to using public transport, and a series of actions to do this. For the One-o-One roundabout, the developer has indicated that it will provide a contribution to an unspecified junction upgrade being planned by Central Bedfordshire Council.

The Planning Improvement Group is concerned that, should the development go ahead, these will be insufficient in mitigating the impact of the development. Targets for encouraging the use of buses to and from Flitwick (and the use of non-car modes of transport generally) need to be binding on the developer, and secured by planning condition. For the bus service itself, this also needs to be delivered from an early stage of the development, and financially supported by the developer. It also needs to be frequent, and timed to meet commuter trains from Flitwick from early in the morning until late in the evening. There is also no evidence given of the impact of the planned improvements to the One-o-One roundabout.

The plans do not include any details on how construction traffic will be managed as part of the development. It is standard practice that a Construction Traffic Management Plan is agreed prior to the development commencing, and it is essential that this is done here through a planning condition. As part of this Traffic Management Plan, construction traffic should be encouraged to not travel through Flitwick, owing to the availability of alternative routes (the M1 if heading south) and the impact on communities. We also recommend urging the developer and Central Beds Council to consider strong enforcement measures should construction traffic contravene this plan,

Finally, the Planning Improvement Group commented that as part of the development, providing a safe cycle route as far as the Millbrook roundabout would be useful. This would enable residents of the development cycling to Flitwick, and even visitors to the country park at the Forest Centre from Flitwick to cycle there safely.

Other matters commented upon

The Planning Improvement Group also observed a number of aspects of the development that were considered to be of interest, although were either not material to Flitwick or were insufficient in scale to warrant further consideration. These included:

- A commitment by the development to have a 'net benefit' impact in terms of biodiversity;
- The development planning to have a 'woodland contribution' to the Marston Vale of at least 32% of the surface area of the development;
- The development providing a dedicated alignment for the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway