



Phase 2

Greater Cambridge Local Plan – First Proposals

Preferred Options 2021 Consultation

Representations in response to:

Regulation 18 stage of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

Land to the East of Station Road, Meldreth, SG8 6ND (GCLP Site Ref: 40089)

On Behalf of

The landowners

December 2021

Our Ref: C20010

Phase 2 PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

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Quality Assurance

Site Name: Land to the East of Station Road, Meldreth, SG8 6ND (Council Ref: 40089)

Client name: The Landowners

Type of Report: Local Plan Representations

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Signed

Date: December 2021

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Signed

Date: December 2021



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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 These representations have been prepared on behalf of the five landowners, (the “owners”) detailed below:

- Sally McGeachie,
- Mark Burlton,
- Michael Burlton,
- Andrew Dummett, and
- Suzie Abrey,

1.2 The representations relate to Land to the East of Station Road, Meldreth, SG8 6ND. This site was put forward for consideration to the Call for Sites in March 2019 as a potential housing allocation with some employment use.

1.3 The land, which is part of an area promoted for development at an earlier stage of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP), process, was assigned the reference: 40089. Our clients have two land holdings that have been submitted to the Council as part of the call for sites in March 2019. Representations were also made in response to the publication of the Issues and Options Consultation in January and February of 2020. The site subject to this report is referred to as Land to the East of Station Road (Land to the West of Station Road, ref: 40088, is subject to a separate representation).

1.4 This Report provides our clients response to the Regulation 18 stage of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, Preferred Options of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This was published for consultation between 1st November to 13th December 2021. We provide responses to the matters of principal interest to our client’s interest.

2. The Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.1 These representations relate to a reduced area of the site previously identified and promoted as an opportunity for development at the Issues and Options stage of the GCLP process.
- 2.2 The extent of the Site which is the subject of these representations is clearly shown edged red in the map extract below. Other areas of land in the vicinity of the site which are also within the client's ownership are shown in blue. This includes an area of approximately 10 hectares to the west of the A10 which was previously the subject of representations promoting the site as a suitable location for development at the Issues and Options stage.

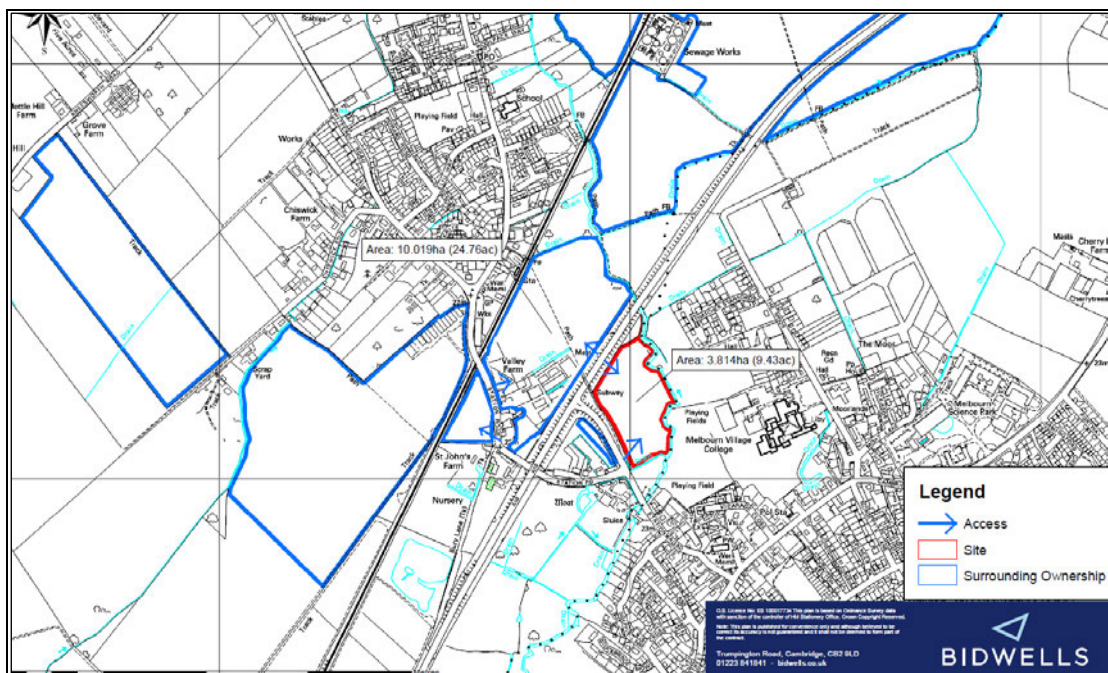


Figure 1: Map showing the extent of the Site (edged red), alongside other land in the vicinity within the same ownership.

- 2.3 The site which is now being promoted (and which is the subject of these representations), covers an area of 3.814 hectares. The Site is located to the east of Station Road and to the A10. It adjoins the course of the River Mel which defines the eastern boundary of the site. The site is currently undeveloped and is arable land, comprising of a single, large field, with more mature vegetation around the margins of the site.
- 2.4 In planning terms, the site lies outside of the 'Development Framework Boundary' which marks the extent of the settlement of Melbourn. The site is less than 100 metres to the north-west of the Development Framework Boundary. The position of the site relative to this boundary is shown in the map extract from the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (SCLP), Policies Map included at Figure 2 below.

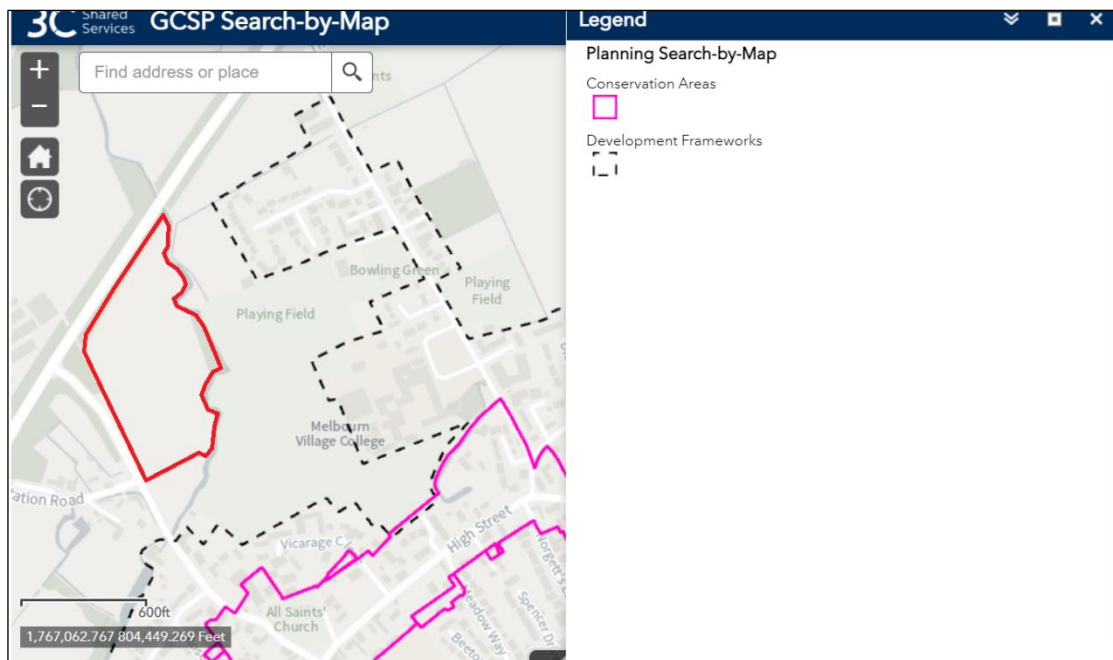


Figure 2: Extract from SCLP Policies Map

- 2.5 As is evident in Figure 1 above, the site is particularly close to Meldreth Railway Station which is approximately 350 metres to the north-west of the site. While the station is to west of the A10 and the site itself is to the east, there is a direct link between these for pedestrians and cyclists via an existing underpass which significantly reduces the distance that would otherwise have to be travelled in order to access rail services from the station.
- 2.6 It is estimated that the 3.8 hectare site could accommodate approximately 70 dwellings on the basis that the density of development would be in the region of 30 dwellings per hectare. This allows for the provision of open space, landscaping and vehicle circulation and maintaining green corridors along the western bank of the River Mel (which marks the eastern boundary of the site).
- 2.7 The development of this site would improve access to the riverside area, as well as having potential to improve the linkages between Meldreth and Melbourn. The site could be used to create new links between Meldreth and the northern and eastern areas of Melbourn for pedestrians and cyclists. This would significantly reduce the length of journeys between the railway station in Meldreth to the west, and the employment areas and secondary school to the east, thus improving the attractiveness of walking and cycling as a mode of travel. The improved link between the existing employment areas at Melbourn Science Park and Meldreth Station would greatly enhance the prospects of its future expansion and the benefits to the local and regional economy that would result from the presence of additional jobs in the high-technology sector.
- 2.8 As well as Meldreth Railway Station, and Melbourn Science Park, the site is located in close proximity to a range of facilities and amenities in both villages. The site is particularly close to the amenities provided in Melbourn which include a doctor's surgery, a primary and secondary school, local supermarket, butcher, village store, 2 pubs, 2 restaurants, 1 take-away, 2 petrol

stations, café, dentist, pharmacy and building society. In terms of sports and social facilities, the village offers a wide range of sports and social clubs including bowls, football, judo, tennis, swimming and squash. There is a large village recreation ground with a cricket pitch, allotments association, three active churches and a community hall.

Previous Assessment of the Site

2.9 The site assessment records in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), relating to the land to the East of Station Road provide a brief summary of the constraints (or otherwise), to the development of the site. A 'traffic light' system has been used for assessing the suitability of sites for development. This has identified 'Landscape and Townscape' and 'Access' as two key factors which could limit or prevent development of this site from being realised. Both have been assessed as 'Red' in terms of how these influence the suitability or otherwise of the site for residential development.

2.10 In the assessment of landscape impact, the wider site is described as being highly prominent in wide and local views due to the topography and the lack of intervening vegetation. Reference is made to views of the site from Station Road where it rises to cross the railway line.

2.11 However, the assessment of the landscape impact refers to and is clearly heavily influenced by the prospect of development across the entire site. The conclusions in relation to the impact of this on landscape state that:

"If developed in its entirety the site would significantly impact the existing separation between Meldreth and Melbourn eradicating the narrow area of open farmland between the two and amalgamating the villages and irreversibly affecting the character of the individual villages."

2.12 It is acknowledged that the land between the railway line and the A10 currently maintains a gap between the two settlements and as a result the focus of these representations is on the land to the east of the A10. Unlike the wider area of land extending further to the west, this 3.8 hectare site is clearly well-contained and would not result in landscape harm to the extent identified in the site assessment. Indeed, the extent of any visual impact resulting from the development of this site would be limited to a narrow range of vantage points due to the presence of embankments on the southern and western boundaries which are also flanked by linear belts of mature vegetation providing a visual buffer between the site and the highway areas beyond. The southern and eastern boundaries are also defined by the presence of mature trees. The latter, which adjoin and follow the course of the River Mel, limit the extent of views across the site from the east currently mark the extent of the playing fields and areas of informal open space beyond.

2.13 Therefore, despite the conclusions drawn in relation to the impact of development extending across the wider site, it is maintained that the site now promoted for development lends itself particularly well to residential development. This would not result in significant harm to the

landscape and would be viewed against the adjoining land within Melbourn to the east and the A10 to the west.

- 2.14 In terms of access, the reduced scale of the proposed allocation would reduce the extent to which concerns about the vehicular access to the site would be applicable. The existing access from Station Road which is currently used to provide access for agricultural vehicles, is capable of enhancement and is capable of serving as a means of accessing a new residential area.
- 2.15 The conclusion in the site assessment that the access between the site and the public highway would not be suitable to serve the number of units proposed is no longer applicable given the more limited scale of development now being promoted in the area to the east of the A10. Unlike the wider area of land which was the subject of previous representations, providing vehicular access to this site does not represent a constraint to the site being developed for housing.
- 2.16 It is therefore maintained that the findings of the HELAA assessment which considered the suitability of this site for development in relation to the potential landscape impact and the issues raised in relation to access do not represent constraints to realising the development potential of this particular area of land to the east of Station Road.
- 2.17 As well as not being subject to any physical constraints that would prevent it coming forward for development, the allocation of this site for development would result in benefits in the form of new housing provision in a sustainable location, while the improved pedestrian and cycle links that would result from the site being opened up to public access would significantly improve the connection between the northern and eastern areas of Melbourn and Meldreth. As outlined above, this would result in a significant reduction in the length of journeys taken by those walking or cycling between the railway station and the employment areas, as well as improving access between Meldreth and the secondary school site at Melbourn Village College. These improvements in connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists would be a significant public benefit which would greatly improve the relationship between the two areas.
- 2.18 This area of land also has the potential for enhancements in its value for wildlife. Given that it is currently in use as an arable field, there is significant scope for the provision of measures to deliver a substantial uplift in biodiversity as required by the Environment Act.
- 2.19 The site also benefits from close proximity to the western edge of Melbourn, and with it being largely level, and benefitting from a point of access onto the public highway at Station Road, there would be no requirement for extensive works to provide enabling infrastructure or connections to utilities. As such, the land could be brought forward for development within five years and would represent a deliverable site for the provision of new housing in a sustainable location.

3. Planning Policy

- 3.1 The South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) was adopted in September 2018. The Plan included a policy that made a commitment to an early review of the Local Plan. This forms part of the commitment to the City Deal agreement with the Government established in 2013.

Existing Planning Policy - South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (SCDCLP)

- 3.2 The adopted Local Plan acknowledges that South Cambridgeshire is a mainly rural district but is significantly influenced by the city itself. Sustainable development and a comprehensive approach to encouraging the use of more sustainable modes of travel are seen as critical for the future.
- 3.3 Within the Local Plan, the strategy for the rural area classifies the villages into 4 groupings that aims to direct housing to the most sustainable locations. The villages were classified following a review of the services and facilities, education, public transport and employment available at each settlement.
- 3.4 In relation to the site the subject of these representations, Meldreth is currently classified as a 'Group Village' under Policy S/10 where there are some services and facilities allowing only some of the basic day-to-day requirements of their residents to be met without the need to travel outside the village. The policy currently allows proposals providing up to 8 dwellings, and exceptionally up to 15 dwellings where these relate to brownfield sites within the Development Framework for the village.
- 3.5 Other key policies from the adopted Local Plan that are relevant to the site are as follows:
- 3.6 Policy S/6 sets out the development strategy to 2031 in relation to the need for jobs and homes with the following order of preference for development:
- a. On the edge of Cambridge;
 - b. At new settlements;
 - c. In the rural area at Rural Centres and Minor Rural Centres.
- 3.7 Point 4 of the policy states:

“Development in the rural area will be limited, with allocations for jobs and housing focused on Rural Centres and Minor Rural Centres, and rural settlement policies providing for windfall development for different categories of village consistent with the level of local service provision and quality of public transport access to Cambridge or a market town.”

- 3.8 Policy TI/2 refers to Planning for Sustainable Travel. Development must be located and designed to reduce the need to travel, particularly by car, and promote sustainable travel appropriate to its location. Reference to walking and cycling between home and nearby centres of attraction, and to bus stops or railway stations, to provide real travel choice for some or all of the journey, in accordance with Policy HQ/1.

Environmental Matters

- 3.9 In late 2018, SCDC declared a 'Climate Emergency' and backed a motion of support for a transition to zero carbon by 2050 in the next Local Plan. However, the need to reduce carbon and address climate change is generally growing in public awareness. Whilst the policies for implementing zero carbon by 2050 are not yet fully detailed, it is clear that the Council is moving forward on its commitment to be a leader in the transition to zero carbon.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.10 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first published in March 2012, and subsequently updated in 2018, 2019. The current iteration of the Framework was issued in July 2021. The NPPF stresses the main purpose of the planning system is to help achieve sustainable development and sets out three dimensions to sustainable development: an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective.
- 3.11 There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and local authorities are expected to positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and local plans are expected to meet objectively assessed needs with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change. Paragraph 81 of the NPPF confirms that:

“significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.”

- 3.12 The NPPF sets out the required approach to Plan-making in paragraphs 15 – 37. Each Planning Authority should set out the strategic policies for the area in the Local Plan including the homes and jobs needed in the area. Crucially, Local Plans should:
- *be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;*
 - *be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable.*
 - *be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees;*

- *contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals;*
- *be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentation; and*
- *serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant).*

3.13 Paragraph 31 seeks to ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up to date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area.

Soundness of the Plan

3.14 Paragraph 35 of the NPPF states that during a Local Plan examination, an independent inspector will determine the soundness of that Plan in accordance with the four tests listed below:

- Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

3.15 In preparing these representations we have had full regard to the National Planning Policy Framework’s (NPPF) policies on the soundness of emerging Local Plans. Our representations on the specific policies are made with reference to these tests.

Other Relevant areas of the Framework

3.16 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF relates to support for a prosperous rural economy. While it states that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites may have to be found in areas beyond existing settlements, it is noted that the Paragraph also goes on to state that:

“In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.”

- 3.17 The proposed allocation of land at Meldreth for residential use would be consistent with the relevant areas of this Paragraph. The Site would be well-contained and would relate well to its surroundings, while allocating it for development would enable substantial improvements to the local highway network both to ensure that access is provided to the site in a suitable and safe manner, and also to deliver improvements to road safety more generally at what is a key gateway location, particularly for vehicles approaching Meldreth from the south.
- 3.18 It is also notable that development of this site would achieve the objective of making the location more sustainable, by ensuring that prospective residents of any dwellings constructed in this area have safe and convenient access to public transport links. Development at the southern edge of Meldreth also limits the distance that pedestrians or cyclists would have to travel to access retail and other amenities, as well as employment opportunities, both in Meldreth and in Melbourn. As Paragraph 85 states, development of these sites should be encouraged. It is considered that this represents such an opportunity for a sustainable addition to the existing settlement.

4. Response to the Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP) - First Proposals

4.1 We have reviewed the GCLP: First Proposals draft and have identified a number of areas where there is significant scope for the Plan to better reflect the objectives of the NPPF and achieve a more sustainable form of development, particularly in relation to the role of Meldreth and Melbourn and how residential development here would deliver new homes with convenient access to rail links to Cambridge, London and a range of other destinations.

4.2 Our comments on the specific areas of the Plan set out in the consultation documents are set out below.

Vision and Development Strategy

4.3 While the general principles associated with the growth of the Greater Cambridge area are supported, it is considered that there are aspects of the strategy which fail to recognise the potential of areas in the south of this area for accommodating sustainable growth, particularly where this utilises existing infrastructure and access to rail links to London and Cambridge.

4.4 Policy S/DS: Development strategy sets the principles and general policy direction of the GCLP in order to meet the vision of the Local Plan. The proposed policy direction seeks to direct development where it has the least climate impact and where alternative means of transport to private cars are the 'natural choice'.

4.5 While the general principles are supported, it is arguable whether the development strategy makes the most of the opportunities that exist to utilise the proximity to existing public transport nodes in the rural areas beyond the Rural Southern Cluster. It is considered that the strategy currently relies too heavily on the strategic sites and large-scale developments towards the north of the Greater Cambridge area. A more balanced approach would be to recognise the potential of areas where existing public transport links, including Meldreth Station, can be realised in order to deliver sustainable extensions to existing settlements.

4.6 The policy direction currently seeks to provide "a very limited amount of development" in the rural areas. This would be achieved through the provision of:

- *Small new sites for housing and employment at villages that have very good public transport access, to help our rural communities thrive;*
- *New employment sites in the countryside meeting specific business needs; and*
- *Windfall development - an allowance for homes on unallocated land, which would need to be consistent with policy requirements in the Plan, including Policy SS/SH: Settlement Hierarchy, which sets out scales of development in different categories of village.*

- 4.7 The approach to meeting development needs, and providing for growth has generally been to allocate land for the provision of large scale developments. However, this does not allow existing areas to improve or account for the fact that there is a need for new homes to be provided across the GCLP area.
- 4.8 The opportunity to support development within existing communities that would improve the impact on climate change should be considered within the Local Plan. The current focus on larger-scale development, including new settlements, does not necessarily result in the benefits of new housing being distributed among existing communities, and the fact that new development also addresses issues and brings with it other benefits, including environmental enhancements, and the contribution that new development makes towards sustaining and enhancing local services. It is therefore considered that there is a need to balance the growth strategy to ensure that the needs of existing settlements are met, alongside the larger strategic elements in Cambridge and in the main growth areas.
- 4.9 As far as the Settlement Hierarchy is concerned, the identification of Melbourn as a Minor Rural Service Centre is supported, although this does not fully recognise its potential for sustainable growth.
- 4.10 The definition of Meldreth as a Group Village is regarded as a significant missed opportunity to provide for growth in a sustainable location with good access to rail services. There is considerable potential for both Melbourn and Meldreth to contribute towards the sustainable growth of the area, both in the form of new housing and through the provision of new employment opportunities, building on the success of the cluster of high-technology employers at Melbourn Science Park.
- 4.11 It is proposed that the potential of these two settlements should be recognised and that these should both be afforded greater prominence and appear higher in the Settlement Hierarchy so as not to limit the scale of what would be regarded as the maximum scheme size for development in these areas.
- 4.12 More generally, the limits on the size of scheme that will be considered acceptable in settlements of a particular size are not considered necessary or appropriate. While it is acknowledged that these policies reflect the approach in the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan which was adopted in 2018, placing specific limitations on the scale of development that would be acceptable does not provide flexibility or recognise that circumstances may change during the Plan Period. This approach may also result in development being promoted which fails to make efficient use of land (contrary to Paragraphs 124 and 125 of the NPPF), and which may result in artificially low levels of development in sites which would otherwise have the potential to accommodate development in a sustainable manner and form.
- 4.13 It is proposed that the policy approach is amended to recognise that some smaller settlements which benefit from public transport links have the potential for growth and are able to accommodate levels of development that would not be consistent with the settlement hierarchy.

Site Allocations: Rest of the Rural Area

- 4.14 Policy S/RRA allocates sites for homes or employment that support the overall development strategy within the rural area beyond that identified as the rural southern cluster. This includes allocation of 8 sites including two in Melbourn, including (site ref) S/RRA/ML: The Moor, Moor Lane, and S/RRA/CR: Land to the west of Cambridge Road, Melbourn, which would provide 20 and 120 dwellings respectively. It is also envisaged that the latter (i.e.S/RRA/CR), would provide 2.5ha of land for employment use.
- 4.15 It is considered that there is considerable scope in both Melbourn and Meldreth to provide for additional growth which takes into account the access that residents (existing and prospective), have to a range of facilities and amenities, as well as its excellent public transport accessibility. There is clearly potential to better-utilise the land in close proximity to Meldreth Station and make effective use of this area. Unlike outlying areas of these settlements land in such close proximity to the station will ensure that public transport represents the most convenient means of accessing employment and for journeys to Cambridge, Royston and London (as well as other destinations served by the railway network). Outlying areas of the villages beyond 800 metres from the Station may result in commuting by private cars which would add to pressure on the existing station car park.
- 4.16 While it is noted that while two sites in Melbourn are proposed for development, these areas would not necessarily provide convenient access to Meldreth Station. Indeed, these may result in additional journeys being undertaken via private transport and would be more likely to increase pressure on the station car park rather than providing for new housing where there is fast and convenient access to public transport. The relative merits of the sites where residential development is proposed in Melbourn and the land to the east and west of Station Road are examined in greater detail below.
- 4.17 The two sites where development is currently proposed at The Moor (ref: 40215), and the larger site to the West of Cambridge Road (ref: 40490), are a significantly greater distance from Meldreth Station. Residents of these areas requiring those wishing to access rail services on foot or by cycling, having to travel a minimum of 2km.
- 4.18 Furthermore, development in Meldreth would also provide significant opportunities for enhancements to the existing access to the railway station from Melbourn. The land owner of the Site promoted for development to the east of Station Road is able to make provision for enhancements to the existing east-west linkages between Meldreth and Melbourn for pedestrians and cyclists. Development on the land in close proximity to the station provides an opportunity to deliver significant enhancements to these pedestrian and cycle links between Melbourn and Meldreth. While a direct pedestrian link from the eastern edge of the station is currently provided to Melbourn, this is only possible via an underpass beneath the A10 which does represent an inviting or attractive route for pedestrians or cyclists. There is significant scope for the enhancement of this key link (across land owned by our client), between the two villages which would increase the ease of access to rail services for residents of Melbourn and thus make this form of travel more convenient and attractive.

- 4.19 Moreover, the proposed allocation of land to the West of Cambridge Road would result in the provision of housing within an otherwise contiguous area of well-established commercial premises. This has the potential to limit the extent of land that would otherwise provide an opportunity for the expansion of Melbourn Science Park. While it is noted that this site is currently proposed for allocation as ‘mixed-use’ providing 2.5 hectares of employment land alongside housing, this would effectively represent the limit of the Science Park and prevent further growth of the high-technology sector which is an important part of the local economy. The risk in allocating part of this land for residential development would be that future investment in related businesses and/or research and development facilities may not be realised, or it may be the case that the presence of housing limits the range and extent of investment in the Science Park.
- 4.20 It is also unclear why the assessment of the two sites proposed for allocation in Melbourn has led to greatly different conclusions being drawn in terms of the impact of development on the landscape. In the assessment of Landscape and Townscape in the HELAA the Councils have concluded that *“Residential development with open space is seen to be appropriate here when considering the immediate surroundings of existing residential and commercial properties.”*
- 4.21 It is unclear how the assessment of landscape impact has resulted in greatly different conclusions being drawn in relation to the potential landscape impact resulting from the allocation of land to the West of Cambridge Road, and at The Moor, where similar findings have been reported about the extent of any impact on the landscape. It is also notable that the HELAA assessment of both of these sites at the north-eastern edge of Melbourn suggests that both would require landscape mitigation and strengthening of the boundaries between the sites and the wider countryside as part of any development. It is unclear how or why the assessment of development on these sites is vastly different to that of the site which is the subject of these representations when these all share similar characteristics and are within the same broad classification of landscape typologies.

Climate Change

- 4.22 The Local Plan is one of many elements in the overall development process that is required to work effectively to help achieve net zero carbon by 2050. The Local Plan influences the location and scale new development but it can also ensure that development that would improve the sustainability of existing settlements is considered in a more favourable light.
- 4.23 As previously noted, we agree with the approach that in order to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 it is essential to reduce energy usage, promote renewable forms for energy and encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport to reduce the reliance on the use of the private car. We support the pro-active approach of promoting the planting of trees and the use technology such as carbon capture and storage. Proposals that are able to bring land into a more efficient and effective use that capture these elements should be considered favourably in the Local Plan.

- 4.24 In light of the overarching objective of preventing or reducing carbon emissions, and mitigating against the impact of climate change, it is clear that development which clearly promotes, and effectively encourages, the use of public transport, particularly where there is direct access to rail services in particular should be supported. The current development strategy delivers new development in the north of the Greater Cambridge Area but fails to maximise the opportunities for sustainable development in the southern areas where the areas in close proximity to public transport links are not allocated for growth.

Biodiversity and Green Spaces

- 4.25 The policy approach to biodiversity and green spaces is supported. There is significant potential to enhance the biodiversity of the areas proposed for development in Meldreth and Melbourn. The creation of new residential areas would replace existing areas of agricultural land which currently have low levels of biodiversity. It is therefore anticipated that there is significant potential for enhancements to biodiversity and opportunities for net gain of 10% or greater to be achieved as part of development proposals.

Wellbeing and Inclusion

- 4.26 The GCLP promotes a cohesive society and healthy communities. This is supported. A key factor in achieving this is a thriving economy, including a supply of market and affordable housing in a range of areas and where this benefits residents of all areas of the CLP area. At present, the absence of any proposed allocations in Meldreth does not promote or support the objective of delivering wellbeing and inclusion by ensuring that there is access to housing, and that new residential areas are provided where prospective residents have access to public transport. The allocation of land at Meldreth would contribute towards achieving these objectives and would be consistent with this overarching policy.

Great Places Policies

- 4.27 The Great Places Policies in the GCLP are generally supported. The proposed policy approach towards the enhancement of landscape character is supported, although it is important to recognise that there are variations within broadly defined landscape character areas. Many areas, particularly those on the edge of existing settlements, or which are well-contained by existing physical features, will have a much more limited visual impact than areas which are also subject to the same broad landscape designation. Provided these policies enable the site-specific circumstances are taken into account when assessing the visual impact of any particular location, these policies would represent an important aspect of maintaining high quality environments in the GCLP area.

Jobs Policies

- 4.28 As highlighted above, the proposals to promote mixed use development, including residential uses on land towards the east of Melbourn would potentially reduce the prospect of further

growth or expansion of the successful employment areas where high-technology, research and development and related facilities are now well-established.

- 4.29 Unlike more conventional employment premises, the research and development sector is one where there is significant potential for growth and one where growth would support and fund additional development.
- 4.30 It is evident that the proposed allocation of the land adjacent to the existing Science Park for mixed use development (with only 2.5 hectares of the total site area of 6.5 hectares identified for employment use), would potentially restrict the future growth and expansion of this key sector. The proposed allocation represents a unique source of land for the expansion of the Science Park while it is not necessarily the most suitable site for residential development in Melbourn or Meldreth.

Homes Policies

- 4.31 The general approach to the provision of housing is supported. It is recognised that affordable housing is an important component of major development schemes, and that the rate of affordable housing proposed is appropriate in the context of the GCLP area where affordability is a key issue.
- 4.32 The inclusion of a specific policy relating to rural exception sites is supported. This should recognise that where there is evidence of need, schemes which provide new homes to meet this address this issue should be supported even where these may be contrary to other policy objectives. Any policy approach should ensure that particular weight is given to the provision of housing which addresses a specific need for housing, particularly where it is possible to demonstrate that this represents sustainable development and access is provided to a range of facilities and transport links.

Infrastructure Policies

- 4.33 It is noted that the most significant investment in infrastructure will be associated with the larger-scale development areas towards the north of the GCLP area. It is acknowledged that with the scale of growth there is a need for investment in the infrastructure to support this and that this will inevitably be the focus of development and infrastructure provision during the Plan Period.
- 4.34 It is noted that the provision of infrastructure to facilitate new development and to ensure that this can be accommodated in the target locations (primarily in the large-scale growth areas and new settlements to the north of Cambridge, at Northstow and at Cambourne). However, it is not considered that sufficient attention has been given to the role of existing infrastructure and how locations in the GCLP area which are currently well-served by public transport links can contribute to sustainable growth.

4.35 The role of Meldreth Station and other public transport nodes, particularly those which provide access to rail services, is not given sufficient prominence. As highlighted above, the fact that settlements benefitting from convenient access to the rail network do not have greater prominence as a focus for sustainable development represents a significant missed opportunity. There is an opportunity to address this by recognising the potential of existing infrastructure to accommodate growth which is proportionate to the scale of the settlement.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The councils have acknowledged that greenfield land will need to be developed to meet the housing and employment needs for the plan period. The focus of development remains areas on the edge of Cambridge and large-scale new settlements, predominantly to the north of the city. This has led to a restrictive approach to development with the rural areas irrespective of the level of sustainability of settlements. In respect of the land the subject of these representations, the villages of Meldreth and Melbourn are clearly in sustainable locations and this has been recognised in the assessments undertaken by the councils.
- 5.2 Furthermore, the relevant guidance provided by the NPPF does not necessary limit growth of an appropriate scale in rural areas, but instead seeks to enable these to prosper and for growth to be promoted where it will maintain or enhance the viability of the settlement and/or areas within it as a source of both homes and jobs. The GCLP does not achieve this objective in its current form, and it is maintained that a greater balance needs to be achieved between promoting development in the key target locations, whilst also recognising the growth potential of sustainable locations with good access to public transport links and employment opportunities.
- 5.3 More specifically, it is considered that the Land to the East of Station Road represents a suitable site for the provision of new housing and that its development would deliver new homes in close proximity to a key public transport node in the form of Meldreth Station. The proximity of the site to Melbourn would also mean that the range of services and facilities in the larger settlement are easily accessible by pedestrians and cyclists. The site itself is largely unconstrained, and represents a deliverable site where, because of its scale, development could be realised within five years.
- 5.4 While it is acknowledged that it would not necessarily be appropriate for the entire area currently identified as site: 40089 to be allocated for development, the area of 3.8 hectares to the east of the A10 and to the west of Melbourn, would represent an appropriate, proportionate and highly-sustainable addition to the existing village. The development of this site would also result in additional public benefits in the form of improved access across the land (potentially involving a new river crossing and the provision of a more direct link between north and east Melbourn and Meldreth Station), and enhancements to the existing pedestrian and cycle links across land owned by the promoter of this site to improve the attractiveness of making journeys across this land to or from the station.
- 5.5 There are significant public benefits arising from the development of the site to the East of Station Road which include, but are not necessarily limited to:
- The provision of housing in a genuinely sustainable location where there would be convenient access to Meldreth Station and a range of facilities and services in Melbourn;

- Improvements to the accessibility of the existing footpath linking Melbourn and Meldreth Station (the existing link may be upgraded in order to improve the condition and lighting of the existing pedestrian and cycle link);
- Provision of access to the western bank of the River Mel which is not currently accessible to the general public;
- Provision of new pedestrian and/or cycle links across the site to enable the creation of direct links between the northern and eastern areas of Melbourn and Meldreth Station (subject to the provision of a new crossing over the River Mel and continued onward access across third party land).

5.6 In addition, it is notable that the development of this particular site would be preferable to the use of land on the north-eastern edge of Melbourn for mixed-use (including housing), when it would be better for this to be allocated specifically for the expansion of Melbourn Science Park. The proposed allocation of land to the north-east of Melbourn would not necessarily represent the most suitable or appropriate location for new housing, particularly since this would be over 2km from Meldreth Station. Prospective residents of new housing in this part of the village would therefore be more likely to use private cars for commuting, whereas residential development on the Site that is the subject of these representations would promote the use of public transport, walking and cycling, ultimately resulting in a more sustainable form of development. The close proximity of housing to both the railway station to the west and the amenities within Melbourn to the east would make it more attractive to travel on foot or by bicycle to gain access to these facilities.

5.7 As well as being well-located to public transport links, retail outlets and other associated facilities, it is notable that this site is also within easy walking distance of schools with Meldreth Primary School only 500 metres to the north. The Secondary School at Melbourn Village College is also within walking distance of the site. The distance of 1km between the site and the Secondary School (which it may subsequently be possible to reduce significantly if the access improvements outlined above are achieved), would make the school within easy walking distance for children of secondary school age. Should the improvements in access across the site also be realised, this would significantly improve access and reduce the distance and time taken to travel by foot or by bicycle between Meldreth and the secondary school which would further reduce the prospect of the need for journeys between the two areas by private cars.

5.8 It is notable that there are commitments to improve public transport to the village as noted in Figure 22 of the GCLP and provide new and improved walking and cycle routes. Development of the land subject to this representation would lead to further improvements in sustainability and support new housing and employment in a sustainable location. This connectivity represents a key advantage and an opportunity to generate significant environmental and connectivity improvements for the two settlements. This will increase the wellbeing and social inclusion and spread the benefits of growth, helping to create healthy and inclusive communities.

- 5.9 On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that the 3.8 hectare site to the East of Station Road (and in particular the area to the east of the A10), is largely unconstrained, and should be considered suitable for development. Accordingly, it should be allocated for residential development which would maximise the opportunity that exists to provide new housing in a sustainable location which would enhance the viability of local services in Meldreth and Melbourn.
- 5.10 The land subject to these representations is also readily deliverable with no known technical or physical constraints that would prevent the site from being developed within the first five years of the Plan period. There is firm interest from a residential developer which is a further indication that the potential of this site, while the size of the site means that it could be developed without the need for significant additional infrastructure. The benefits arising from the development would therefore be realised within the first five years of the plan period.



Phase 2

PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
LIMITED