

Introduction

This document is produced for SmithsonHill Ltd (SmithsonHill). The contents of this document form SmithsonHill's response to the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP) which was published for consultation by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) on 1 December 2025 and closes on 30 January 2026. SmithsonHill's interests relate to Land at Hinxton, hereafter 'the Site' (Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) Site ID 200765).

The Site is located to the immediate north of the Wellcome Genome Campus expansion site, which has outline planning permission for a mixed-use development (LPA ref S/4329/18/OL). The Site extends to the A505 roundabout at its northwestern corner, with a parcel of land on the northwestern side of the roundabout close to Whittlesford Parkway Station also forming part of the Site – this is known locally as "Ricketts Field". The Site Location Plan can be found in the accompanying document 'Hinxton Masterplan Diagrams to support Repls 23 January 2026' produced by PTE.

Russell Smith Farms and The Hill Group jointly own the Site as SmithsonHill Ltd. SmithsonHill also holds an option over the Hinxton Grange land currently owned by the Derham family. The Hill Group is one of the largest housebuilders in the UK and is very active in the Cambridge market through its respective investment partnerships with Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

It is anticipated that the SmithsonHill response to this consultation will be made via the Local Plan's digital consultation system, and therefore each of the sections of the report will be added as a comment to a specific local plan policy. The relevant policy is indicated at the top of each section. With regards to the work and technical reports which rebut the HELAA conclusions for the Site, a dedicated 'Sites Form' will be completed. The content of Section 5 will be transferred into the relevant format.

The Site is not an emerging allocation in the GCLP, but its development would fit with the spatial strategy being pursued by the GCSP. Save for Ricketts Field, the Site is not in the Green Belt. It is a location which is highly sustainable for development, and it has the potential to create significant betterment for the sustainable and active travel potential of the Rural Southern Cluster more broadly.

NPPF Consultation and Policy S5

This section responds to Policy S/AMC/WHD: Whittlesford Parkway Station Policy Area.

Our response is supported by the accompanying Transport Summary document for the Site produced by Rappor (January 2026).

On 16 December 2025, the Government released its "Next Phase" of Planning Reform which, among other things, proposed a re-structured NPPF ('proposed NPPF') containing national development management policies ('NDMPs'). Central to these proposed NDMPs is a "*permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development*" which makes "*clear what forms of development are acceptable in principle in different locations as part of creating a more rules-based approach to development*". A key component of this presumption is establishing a "default yes" "*for suitable proposals that develop land around rail stations within existing settlements, and around 'well-connected' train stations outside settlements*" (see <http://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-12-16/hcws1187>).

Draft Policy S5 (1)(h) of the proposed NPPF looks to achieve this goal most directly, stating that residential and mixed-use development outside settlements should be approved (unless harms substantially outweigh benefits) where they are:

“within reasonable walking distance of a railway station which provides a high level of connectivity to jobs and services; physically well-related to a railway station or a settlement within which the station is located; is of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure; and where the development would not prejudice any proposals for long term comprehensive development in the same location.”

Footnote 25 proposes to define well-connected rail stations as follows:

“those in a top 60 Travel to Work Area located partially or fully within England by Gross Value Added (GVA) and which, in the normal weekday timetable, are served (or have a reasonable prospect of being served due to planned upgrades or through agreement with the rail operator) throughout the daytime by four trains or trams per hour overall, or two trains or trams per hour in any one direction.”

Proposed Policy GB7 (h) allows for these principles to be applied to development proposals within the Green Belt, provided they comply with proposed policy GB8 (Golden Rules) including affordable housing.

The proposed NPPF is currently undergoing consultation and therefore the specifics of the proposed policy may change. However, given this Government’s long trailed support to use planning policy to deliver housing development around commuter hubs, the core components of this policy are considered unlikely to materially shift (see HMT Press Release on the Chancellor’s speech on “*bold reforms to the planning system*” dated 26th January 2025 and the further announcement on 18th November). Therefore, from a decision-making perspective, it is inevitable that the Councils will have to consider this policy in the near future. This is regardless of whether sites in such locations appear as allocations in this emerging local plan.

However, there is time and now an opportunity for the Plan to allocate land in line with the government’s ambitions whilst applying a strategic lens, thus maximising its potential benefits for Greater Cambridge. If the Councils do not do this, speculative applications on land around well-connected railway stations will still be subject to a permanent presumption for decision-making purposes. In other words, reasonable proposals near stations are likely to be approved, whether allocated or not.

In the context of SmithsonHill’s interests promoting the development of the Site, this section explores how Greater Cambridge should apply the principle of support for residential and mixed-use development around rail stations (in this case, Whittlesford Parkway Station) to it.

Land at Hinxton in the context of proposed draft Policy S5

The Site as identified at HELAA ref. 200765 includes a c.13ha parcel of land to the north of the A505, currently located within the Green Belt and referred to locally as ‘Ricketts Field’. This part of the Site is currently less than 15-minutes walk of Whittlesford Parkway rail station, which offers regular services into Cambridge City and London. If access corridors were provided through development at the Site, walking distances to the station could be reduced to as little as 5-10 minutes. Therefore, regarding proposed NDMP policy GB7 (h), this northern parcel of the Site is certainly within a reasonable walking

distance of Whittlesford Parkway Station. With regard to footnote 56 of the proposed NPPF, the station would meet the definition of a well-connected railway station because it is:

- 1 Within a top 60 Travel to Work Area located partially or fully within England by Gross Value Added (GVA); and
- 2 in the normal weekday timetable, is served throughout the daytime by more than four trains per hour overall.

On this northern part of the Site, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that once the revised NPPF is adopted a high-density development for around 650 homes¹ would be considered acceptable in line with policy GP7 (h) (subject to compliance with other NDMPs including the Golden Rules). This would be the case whether or not the wider land is allocated within the plan, however it is not in line with the Councils' current intentions for Whittlesford Parkway Station.

The remainder of the Site, located to the south of the A505, is **outside of the Green Belt**. It has already been identified as having potential to deliver 2,500 to 3,500 new homes supported by a range of community infrastructure, as part of an integrated mixed-use development with a wide range of benefits. SmithsonHill considers that residential development on this parcel possibly alongside Sustainable Transport Gateway which brings all sustainable routes together, offers the most opportunity to create benefits for Greater Cambridge. Our reasoning is set out in more detail below.

Realising the Vision for Whittlesford Parkway

Whittlesford Parkway station currently contains 348 car parking spaces and 48 cycle storage spaces². It is served, to a limited extent, by public bus services, primarily running southwards (including to the Wellcome Genome Campus). There is currently very limited pedestrian and cycle infrastructure leading to/from the station.

The station is c. three miles from the Wellcome Genome Campus, however there is no active travel infrastructure linking the two. Users of the station wishing to access Granta Park and/or the Babraham Research campus by public transport are currently required to take the train into the centre of Cambridge before taking a bus back out. This encourages car use over sustainable forms of transport. We note that the draft GCLP contains a number of references to improving connectivity to the station, particularly in the Rural Southern Cluster. Such references are made in Policy S/GF (Land adjacent to A11 and A1307 at Grange Farm, 6,000 homes) and Policy S/WGC (Wellcome Genome Campus, Hinxton, 1,500 homes + significant expansion of the Campus).

Policy S/AMC/WHD states its intention to “*create a multimodal travel hub, employment and housing in a highly accessible location*”. Notably, the policy states its intention to achieve a comprehensive approach to the area that will involve improving, amongst other things, nearby highways and station facilities which currently limit the use of the station. Further, through the comprehensive approach, the policy anticipates an “*integrated approach of land use planning, different modes of travel and service providers*”. However, the full area has not been submitted through the local plan process for consideration for development, therefore, the aspirations the councils have for this existing developed area (which includes existing employment, homes and a highways depot) cannot be fulfilled at present.

¹ Based on the proposed minimum density requirement of 50dph proposed for developments of this kind (see proposed policy L3).

² <https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/travel-information/station-information/wlf>

Whittlesford was initially identified as a potential site for a pilot Rural Travel Hub in the Feasibility Study report published in January 2018 and we have reviewed the Greater Cambridge Partnership's Whittlesford Masterplanning Exercise.

However, without the participation of willing landowners, and the funding necessary to deliver these changes (including through developer contributions) the ambitious plans for this masterplan will not be achieved. It is noted that the Whittlesford Parkway Station Transport Masterplan Stage Two Report: Plans and Proposals (December 2018) specifically identified that developer contributions could be sought from all development within the catchment area of the station, including the proposed Garden Village at Great Chesterford. However, things have moved on significantly, the Uttlesford Local Plan is currently at examination and no strategic development is proposed at Great Chesterford owing to the need to consider larger scale growth in the context of planning for the longer-term, larger scale infrastructure (beyond the scope of this Plan period) and to be more effectively aligned with planning for Cambridge.

While there may be a long-term solution, the Site offers land now for a range of relevant uses to help maximise the potential of this station.

Using the site to deliver the vision

SmithsonHill considers that by unlocking residential-led development on the southern part of the Site, there is potential to deliver a cohesive development opportunity across both parcels. This opportunity envisions the northern parcel being used as a sustainable travel hub with some mixed-use development including residential serving the whole of the Rural Southern Cluster, whilst the southern parcel would host a mixed-use, housing-led scheme.

A Sustainable Transport Gateway in this location could create a true gateway to the Rural Southern Cluster; a potential place where people arrive by rail, then the gateway travel hub facilitates onwards travel with buses or shuttles to CSET, safe onward pedestrian connections and bike hire to the Wellcome Campus, the Hinxton development, Granta Park, Babraham Research Campus all via sustainable travel options. There is also potential for it to accommodate an expanded route for the CSET that takes in Wellcome Genome Campus and Whittlesford Parkway Station, among other places. More detail is included in the accompanying Transport Summary document for the Site produced by Rappor and the Connectivity Plan for the Site included in the PTE produced Plans to support Repls document.

The approach set out above would encourage development in line with central government's ambitions to unlock growth around key commuter hubs, as well as meet the Councils' vision to unlock sustainable growth within the Rural Southern Cluster, as well as realise the potential of Whittlesford Parkway by building on the aims of Policy S/AMC/WHD. As research campuses grow, demand for nearby housing will go hand in hand with well established, integrated sustainable transport infrastructure that serves both residents and key employment areas.

Summary: NPPF Consultation and Policy S5

Policy S/AMC/WHD states its intention to "create a multimodal travel hub, employment and housing in a highly accessible location". However, the full area has not been submitted through the local plan process for consideration for development, therefore, the aspirations the councils have for this existing developed area cannot be fulfilled at present. The Site offers land now for a range of relevant uses to help maximise the potential of this station.

Furthermore, Draft Policy S5(1)(h) of the proposed NPPF states that residential and mixed-use development outside settlements should be approved (unless harms substantially outweigh benefits) where they are within reasonable walking distance of a railway station which provides a high level of connectivity to jobs and services and is physically well-related to a railway station. Proposed Policy GB7 (h) allows for these principles to be applied to development proposals within the Green Belt. In all likelihood, this new NPPF will be adopted and in use immediately for decision making purposes before the GCLP is even at examination. From a decision-making perspective, it is inevitable that the GCSP will have to consider this policy on speculative proposals regardless of whether sites in such locations appear as allocations in this emerging local plan.

However, there is time and now an opportunity for the Plan to allocate land in line with the government's ambitions whilst applying a strategic lens, thus maximising its potential benefits for Greater Cambridge. Allocation of the Site offers the ideal opportunity for this.