Land at Hinxton Grange

Smithson Hill representations to the Greater Cambridge Regulation 19 Local Plan

Smithson Hill

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4.0 Policy S/AMC/WHD: Whittlesford Parkway Station Policy Area

4.1 This section responds to draft Policy S/AMC/WHD: Whittlesford Parkway Station Policy Area. SmithsonHill's Reg 18 representations commented on this policy, identifying that in many ways, the opportunities presented by the development of the Site are similar to the emerging allocation at Grange Farm. However, the key differentiating feature is the access to an existing railway station (Whittlesford Parkway Station) which is operational today; it is not awaiting a funding inquiry and years away from being operational like CSET.

4.2 It is considered that the policy identifies the right opportunity but lacks an effective delivery mechanism.

4.3 This policy aspires to achieve a comprehensive, masterplan led redevelopment of the Whittlesford Parkway Station Policy Area to bring forward a multi-modal mobility hub. While the aspirations of the policy are positive, they are just that, aspirations. Full land assembly is needed to deliver this proposal which has not been secured or tested through the Plan. In this case, the area identified by Policy S/AMC/WHD is largely in active use for employment uses, and the policy itself admits that it serves only to provide a context for future proposals if the scheme is developed further as part of a future mixed use, transport interchange, with further engagement with residents, local businesses and other stakeholders necessary before development can be achieved.

4.4 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 which sits within Uttlesford District Council, over the county border in Essex. However, things have moved on significantly, the Uttlesford Local Plan has been adopted and no strategic development is currently 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.

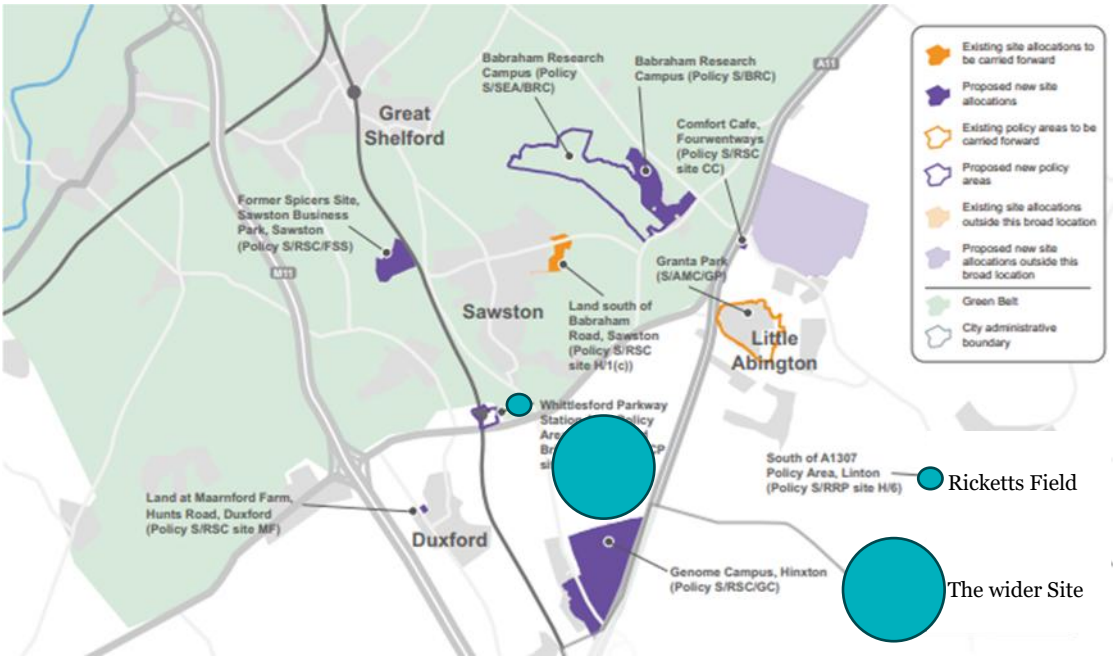
4.5 For these reasons, the policy is unlikely to be effective for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 36(c), because the principal land within the policy area remains in active use and there is no clear mechanism for its comprehensive redevelopment.

Proposed Modification

4.6 As mentioned in response to policy S/DS, the land parcel to the north-east of the McDonald's roundabout known as "Ricketts Field" is also in the control of SmithsonHill and sits in the Green Belt (unlike the rest of the Site). Figure 4.1 below shows Ricketts Field (the small blue circle) relative to the wider Site (the large blue circle). It forms part of the Site as assessed in the HELAA (HELAA Site ID 200765). Although it does not apply directly to plan making for this Local Plan, the new NPPF (2026) proposes that development (including residential) within a reasonable walking distance of a well-connected train

station has a strong presumption in favour of development, regardless of the site's Green Belt location. For decision making, the application of a permanent presumption in favour of development around train stations is directly relevant to this portion of the Site. Subject to meeting the necessary tests, it is likely that were the Site not to be allocated, the 2026 NPPF would indicate that permission should be granted for residential development around Whittlesford Parkway Station in any event. SmithsonHill considers that by allocating the Site, a more comprehensive development could be achieved that aligns more closely with the thrust of Policy S/AMC/WHD and the Council's ambitions, whilst meeting housing needs in an area where there is demand.

Figure 4.1 Rural Southern Cluster



Source: Draft GCLP

Policy S5 and GB7(1)(h)

4.7 In August 2026, the new NPPF was published containing national decision-making policies ('NDMPs'). A key component of its new presumption is establishing a "*default yes*" for *"suitable proposals that development land around rail stations within existing settlements, on green belt land defined as Grey Belt, and around 'well-connected' train stations outside settlements*".

4.8 Policy S5(5) of the NPPF, applies a presumption in favour of not inappropriate development as defined within policy GB7. Of relevance to the land surrounding Whittlesford Parkway station, particularly the eastern undeveloped parcel, is policy GB7(1)(h), which supports development on land that is within a reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations. It is important to note that the presumption concerned applies regardless of whether there is unmet need for the type of development proposed, and/or the status of the local plan.

4.9 GB7(1)(h) states residential or mixed-use development should not be considered inappropriate in the green belt where it meets the criteria set out below:

1 Is within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected railway station (applying the definitions in the glossary at Annex B);

2 Is physically well-related to the railway station or the settlement within which the station is located;

3 Is of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure;

4 Would not prejudice any proposals for long-term comprehensive development in the same location; and

5 In the case of proposals for major development, complies with policy GB8 (Golden Rules).

4.10 We briefly set out how a proposal on the land parcel of the Site situated to the north-east of the McDonald's roundabout could benefit from this policy, before setting out SmithsonHill's view on how a carefully master planned, more strategic approach to development on this parcel could generate increased benefits for Greater Cambridge.

Is the north-eastern parcel within a reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station?

4.11 This test comprises two parts:

1 Whether the station is within a reasonable walking distance; and

2 Whether the station is well connected.

Reasonable walking distance

4.12 NPPF26 Annex B defines reasonable walking distance as "*around 800 metres, or around 10 minutes' walk time if topography, route availability and quality or physical barriers would prevent or discourage walking from up to 800 metres away*". Figure 4.2 shows the Site boundary in the context of an 800 metre radius from Whittlesford Parkway station.

Figure 4.2 North East Parcel shown in the context of an 800 metre radius from Whittlesford Parkway station



Source: Lichfields

4.13 Based on this initial analysis the north-eastern parcel of the Site is likely to fall within this definition, satisfying limb one of GB7(1)(h)(i). Its proximity to the station, together with the availability of established connections through to the site, indicates that the station is capable of being reached within a reasonable walking distance.

Whittlesford Parkway as a well-connected station

4.14 Annex B of NPPF26 defines a "*well connected railway stati*on" as one which is:

1 in a top 80 Travel to Work Area located partially or fully within England by Gross Value Added (GVA); and

2 offers at least four trains an hour or two in one direction across the daytime.

4.15 Lichfields' analysis identifies Cambridge TTWA is a top 80 Travel to Work Area, sitting at number 10 on the scale.

4.16 In respect of train frequencies, departure and arrival data[14] demonstrates there are between six and seven departures an hour from Whittlesford Parkway Station between 06:00 hrs and 22:00 hrs. At no time throughout the day does the station go below four services an hour. On that basis, Whittlesford Parkway Station meets the Annex B definition of a well-connected railway station.

[14] https://www.brtimes.com/!board?stn=WLF

Is the north eastern parcel physically well-related to the railway station or the settlement within which the station is located?

4.17 The site is likely to satisfy GB7(1)(h)(ii). The north-eastern parcel is physically well-related to Whittlesford Parkway Station, including through established pedestrian connections, and a well-designed scheme could be brought forward sensitively

Density considerations

4.18 Where the site falls within the relevant walking distance of a qualifying station, the Councils will need to apply the density requirement in Policy L3 of the NPPF 2026 when determining the Site's capacity. Policy L3(2)(c) of the NPPF establishes a clear national expectation that residential and mixed-use development within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station should make efficient use of land, achieving a minimum density of 35 dwellings per hectare within the net developable area. It is recognised that NPPF 2026 policy L3(2)(c) is in line with the thrust of Policy GP/HD: Housing Density.

Is the north eastern parcel of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure?

4.19 With regard to GB7(1)(h)(iii), this would require further examination, however there is existing infrastructure in the area to support residents, and any scheme proposed would be of a scale which could be accommodated through a combination of existing infrastructure and infrastructure proposed/enhanced in connection with that scheme. Allocation would allow the infrastructure position to be managed comprehensively.

Would development on the north eastern parcel prejudice any proposals for long-term comprehensive development in the same location?

4.20 Given that the Site has not been allocated in the emerging draft GCLP, there are no proposals for long-term comprehensive development in the same location and the north eastern parcel could comply with GB7(1)(h)(iv). As is discussed in more detail below, the Councils' failure to allocate the site and encourage a strategic, masterplanned approach to its development means that they are opening up the prospect of a planning application on the site which is not allocated in the plan and is potentially less aligned with its strategic priorities. A plan-led allocation would better secure comprehensive development than relying on a later application outside the allocation framework.

Is the north-eastern parcel capable of complying with the Golden Rules at GB8 of the NPPF 2026?

4.21 With regard to GB7(1)(h)(v), SmithsonHill has identified no reason why the north-eastern parcel at Ricketts Field would not be capable of complying with the Golden Rules at GB8 of the NPPF 2026 subject to detailed scheme design and legal obligations.

4.22 On the basis of the above, the north-eastern parcel appears capable of satisfying the relevant decision-making criteria. However, the better planning outcome in our view is to

allocate the Site through the GCLP to allow for a comprehensive station-led strategy on Ricketts Field alongside development of the remainder of the Site.

Realising the Vision for Whittlesford Parkway

4.23 Whittlesford Parkway station currently contains 348 car parking spaces and 48 cycle storage spaces[15]. It is served by public bus services, primarily running southwards (including to the Wellcome Genome Campus). There is currently limited pedestrian and cycle infrastructure leading to/from the station. The station is c. three miles from the Wellcome Genome Campus, but with 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 must take the train into the centre of Cambridge before taking a bus back out.

4.24 We note that the draft GCLP contains a number of references to improving connectivity to the station. 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

4.25 SmithsonHill considers that allocating the southern part of the Site would enable a comprehensive approach across both parcels, with the northern parcel supporting a sustainable travel hub and the southern parcel delivering housing-led mixed-use development

4.26 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.

4.27 The approach set out above would encourage development in line with central government's ambitions to unlock growth around key commuter hubs, alongside meeting the Councils' vision to unlock sustainable growth within the Rural Southern Cluster. A Sustainable Transport Gateway could provide a point of arrival by rail and onward distribution by shuttle, bus, cycle and walking routes to Wellcome, Hinxton, Granta Park and Babraham.

4.28 Absent an allocation, the Councils are likely to face proposals relying on the 2026 NPPF decision-making framework. A plan-led allocation would allow those benefits to be captured strategically and on the Councils' terms.

[15] https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/travel-information/station-information/wlf

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