Greater Cambridge Local Plan – Proposed Submission (Regulation 19)

Representations on behalf of Ascendal Cambridge BMCO Limited and Whippet Coaches Limited

Site: 2 Rowles Way, Buckingway Business Park, Swavesey, Cambridge CB24 4UG

Date: 25 September 2026

Contact: Ed Cameron, Managing Director, Whippet Coaches Limited, [redacted]

1. Introduction

1.1 These representations are made by Ascendal Cambridge BMCO Limited, the freehold owner of 2 Rowles Way, Buckingway Business Park, Swavesey (Land Registry title CB204521), and Whippet Coaches Limited, which operates its bus and coach depot from the site.

1.2 Whippet is a long-established Cambridgeshire bus operator, founded in 1919, which has operated from Swavesey since 2009. It runs local bus services across Cambridgeshire, including the Universal service for the University of Cambridge. The Swavesey depot is its sole operating base, employing approximately 90 staff and housing a fleet of about 40 vehicles.

1.3 We support the Plan's aim of focusing growth where it can be served by high-quality public transport. We seek two targeted changes so that the Plan also provides for the operational land that bus services need. Each is set out below.

2. Representation 1 – Policy J/NE (paragraph 8.10) and the Policies Map

Part of the Plan: Policy J/NE, parts 5 and 6; supporting paragraph 8.10(d); Policies Map (Buckingway Business Park Established Employment Area).

Legally compliant: Yes.

Sound: No – not effective.

Reasons

2.1 We support the continued identification of Buckingway Business Park as an Established Employment Area in the countryside (Policy J/NE part 6(i)), where employment development of an appropriate scale and character will be permitted.

2.2 However, paragraph 8.10 defines employment uses as Classes E(g), B2 and B8, plus sui generis uses that share a significant number of their characteristics, naming only medical research institutes. Bus and coach depots are sui generis. They combine the storage of vehicles (akin to Class B8) with vehicle maintenance and repair (akin to Class B2), and provide skilled local jobs for drivers, engineers and control staff. Because the definition is silent on depots, it is unclear whether Policy J/NE part 5 supports the expansion of an existing depot within an Established Employment Area. That uncertainty makes the policy less effective and could frustrate the provision of operational land on which the Plan's transport strategy depends (see Representation 2).

2.3 We have checked the Established Employment Area boundary shown on the Proposed Submission Policies Map. It includes the whole of 2 Rowles Way as registered under title

CB204521, including the land to the north west of the depot fence line. We support that boundary and ask that it be retained without amendment. We note that the site boundary used for the 2009 change of use application stopped at an internal fence line and covered less land than the registered title. That historic application boundary should not be treated as limiting the extent of the Established Employment Area.

Changes sought

(a) Amend paragraph 8.10(d) to read:

> *"Any sui generis uses that share a significant number of characteristics with the uses above, in particular sui generis medical research institute uses and public transport operational facilities such as bus and coach depots (including vehicle parking, maintenance and charging infrastructure)."*

(b) Retain the Buckingway Business Park Established Employment Area boundary as drawn. If the boundary as finally adopted does not include the whole of 2 Rowles Way, the Policies Map should be amended so that it does, as shown on the enclosed title plan.

3. Representation 2 – Policy I/ST: Sustainable transport and connectivity

Part of the Plan: Policy I/ST and supporting paragraphs 10.7–10.14.

Legally compliant: Yes.

Sound: No – not positively prepared, not effective and not consistent with national policy.

Reasons

3.1 The development strategy relies heavily on public transport. Policy I/ST expects major development to provide access to high-quality public transport within 400 metres of a bus stop, anticipates a vehicular "trip budget" for strategic sites, and asks proposals to have regard to the Combined Authority's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and Bus Strategy.

3.2 Buses need land to be parked, maintained, cleaned and, increasingly, charged. The Plan contains no policy supporting the retention, expansion or provision of bus depots. Without one, operators and the Combined Authority face uncertainty over the operational capacity needed to deliver the service levels the Plan assumes.

3.3 This is a live and immediate issue. The Combined Authority's bus franchising consultation material of September 2026 sets out its proposed depot strategy. It proposes to build and own a new depot in Peterborough for the North West Area, and to provide depot facilities in the Cambridge area for the East Area. For the Central Area, which is built around the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, it states that operators bidding for the contract will be required to provide their own depot facilities, on the basis that suitable existing depot facilities are considered to be available in the market. The same requirement applies to every smaller contract across all three areas.

3.4 That assumption depends directly on the planning system. Private depot capacity on the Busway corridor can only be available if planning policy allows existing depots to be retained and expanded. The Plan is silent on the point, so it does not support the delivery of the very transport network it relies upon. Depot capacity close to the routes it serves also reduces empty running between depot and route, cutting operating cost, congestion and emissions.

3.5 Electrification makes this a land use issue, not only a transport one. The Plan's climate change policies and its transport policies both assume a shift to zero-emission vehicles. In

practice, converting a bus depot to electric operation consumes depot land. Charging equipment, cable runs, substation and switchgear, and the clear access required around each charging bay all occupy space previously used for parking, and during the transition a depot must accommodate a mixed fleet. At the Swavesey depot, installing eight charging bays in 2023 required the loss of two parking bays in order to maintain the clearance of 750 millimetres required between parked vehicles. Each further stage of electrification will reduce parking capacity again. More land is therefore needed to operate the same number of vehicles.

3.6 We make this point from direct operating experience. Whippet operates the Universal service in Cambridge under contract to the University of Cambridge, which the University describes as the only privately operated and funded fully electric bus service in the United Kingdom. That fleet is charged at the Swavesey depot. A Plan that expects the bus fleet to decarbonise, while containing no policy enabling depots to expand to accommodate the land take that decarbonisation requires, is not effective and is not positively prepared.

3.7 National policy on promoting sustainable transport (NPPF chapter 9) expects planning policies to identify and protect, where there is robust evidence, sites which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choice. The Plan does not do this for bus operational land.

Changes sought

(a) Add a new part 5 to Policy I/ST:

> *"5. Proposals for the expansion or intensification of an existing bus or coach depot, including additional vehicle parking, maintenance facilities and zero-emission charging infrastructure, will be supported on land within, adjoining or in the immediate vicinity of that depot, subject to the other policies of this Plan."*

(b) Add supporting text after paragraph 10.14:

> *"Delivering the public transport improvements on which this Plan relies, including the Combined Authority's bus franchising scheme, requires sufficient depot capacity at existing operating bases. Depots close to the routes they serve reduce empty running, operating costs and emissions. The transition to zero-emission fleets increases the land required for each vehicle at a depot, through charging equipment, electrical infrastructure and the access needed around it. The Councils will work with the Combined Authority and operators to support the provision of this operational land."*

4. Participation in the examination

4.1 We wish to take part in the hearing sessions on both representations if the Inspector considers it helpful, to explain the operational needs of bus services and the implications of bus franchising for land use planning.

Enclosure: Title plan, HM Land Registry title CB204521.