

Clare College Sports Ground, Cambridge
Supporting Statement

Greater Cambridge Local Plan Regulation 18
Issues and Options Consultation – Call for Sites

February 2020

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Client

Clare College

Our reference

CLAC3008

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been produced on behalf of Clare College in response to the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Regulation 18: Issues and Options Consultation 2020 (the Consultation). Question 2 of the Consultation document invites the submission of sites for housing and employment. As such Clare College would like to take the opportunity to put forward the Clare College Sports Ground, Bentley Road, Cambridge. Specifically, this statement seeks to promote the Clare College Sports Ground for residential use.
- 1.2 The Consultation document, in Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 invites opinions on whether the urban area should be 'densified' and sites released from the Green Belt. It is in that context that this site is being promoted as although it is in a very sustainable location for access to services and public transport facilities, it is currently designated as Green Belt.
- 1.3 The purpose of the invitation for site submissions, is to identify potential sites that can be assessed for their suitability, availability and achievability for housing and economic development to meet identified needs in South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge.
- 1.4 This report sets out information to demonstrate that the site should be considered suitable, available and achievable for residential development within the plan period.

2. Site Description and Context

- 2.1 Clare College Sports Ground is located towards the south of Cambridge, and is accessed from Bentley Road, just off Trumpington Road. A Location Plan is included in Appendix 1 of this representation.
- 2.2 The site covers an area of around 5.5ha and is almost square in shape, though it widens slightly at its northern end. The majority of the site is mown grass, housing soccer and rugby pitches in winter and cricket in summer, though the mown area is considerably larger than the pitches. There are also a grass and hard-surfaced tennis courts (the former to the north of the site and the latter adjacent to the car park) along with a pavilion containing changing facilities, social spaces and two flats, which was built in 1938. In addition, the site contains two portacabins, owned and used by Cambridge United Football Club and there are a range of store sheds, some in dilapidated condition. The drive along the west side of the pitches towards the pavilion provides car parking and accommodates around 70 vehicles.
- 2.3 Despite being large and open, the playing field is surrounded by mature trees on all its boundaries, with a denser rectangular plantation on its north east corner adjacent to the Cambridge Assessment (formerly CUP) site.
- 2.4 The access to the site runs from the east end of Bentley Road, crossing Vicar's Brook and an adjacent open field (also owned by the College) before entering the sports ground in its north east corner. Currently this is single track but with wide grass verges beside it.
- 2.5 The facilities are for the benefit of the College students but are significantly underused as they are some distance from the College itself (more than 2.5km) and the rather isolated site is not popular with students. The tennis courts were at one stage provided free to local groups, but since the levy of a modest charge, such membership has dwindled. The portacabins are owned by Cambridge United Football Club and are for their exclusive use as gym / treatment room. They are expected to vacate the site within the next four years.
- 2.6 To the west of the sports ground is the established housing area containing Bentley Road and Barrow Road which is a conservation area. The houses, which largely date from the 1920s and '30s are large and set in generous plots. To the south is an open agricultural field north of Long Road. To the east is the Guided Busway and cycle track, with the railway line and Homerton College beyond. To the north is the former CUP site which is now Cambridge Assessment. From the north east corner of the site, along the cycle way, Cambridge railway station is within 900m. The area around the station contains a mix of high density residential uses, commercial, hotel and retail uses.
- 2.7 The site is currently designated as Green Belt in the 2018 Local Plan. The 2015 LDA Cambridge Inner Green Belt Study identified this site as part of sector 9.2. The text setting out the justification for preventing further release of this green belt land for development largely concentrates on the area to the south closer to Great Shelford and the desire to prevent the village coalescing into wider Cambridge. Whilst there are specific mentions of the Hobson's Brook Corridor, this is outside the site to the west.

Whilst views from the railway are mentioned, again this is largely in the context of the surroundings of Great Shelford.

- 2.8 The sports ground is also designated as Protected Open Space. Clearly it fulfils the purpose of a playing field, albeit largely for the benefit of the College. With the exception of the surrounding tree belts, the ecological value is considered to be low. Similarly in visual amenity terms, most of the attraction stems from the surroundings rather than the playing field itself.
- 2.9 The northern part of the playing field is considered of moderate risk from surface water flooding, with a further pocket liable to flood on the site of the hard tennis courts. The flood risk is considered to stem largely from the current use and capable of being mitigated if the courts were removed.
- 2.10 The corridor along Hobson's / Vicar's Brook is a wildlife corridor but is outside the site to the west.

3. Proposed Development

- 3.1 The proposed use for the site is for residential development. This could be in the form of market housing, affordable housing, older persons housing, a residential care home or self-build housing. The development of the site could also comprise a combination of these residential uses. Owing to the very sustainable location of the site, it is considered that a wide variety of residential uses are appropriate.
- 3.2 Furthermore, the site could also accommodate public open space. The form of this could either be amenity green space, or alternatively an element of recreational / sports facilities could be retained in part of the site. It is considered that the boundary trees on the site could be retained, to provide an attractive landscaped setting to the development.
- 3.3 Access to the site would be taken via Bentley Road, with the potential need for some improvements to the most easterly part of the road (within College ownership). Pedestrian and cycle access could be provided to the east of the site, connecting to the Guided Busway.
- 3.4 The landowners are therefore flexible in the potential use of the site, and would like to take the opportunity to assure the Council that the site is available for development.

4. Assessment

- 4.1 In order to demonstrate that the site should be allocated for development an assessment has been undertaken which reviews the site constraints, weighing these against the benefits of developing the site.

The Need for Housing

- 4.2 The NPPF sets out the Government's objective of 'significantly boosting the supply of homes' and stresses the importance of providing 'a sufficient amount and variety of land... where it is needed' (paragraph 59). In response to Question 31 of the Consultation document, the Local Plan should therefore meet housing needs by providing the necessary supply of housing. In doing so the Councils must allocate a sufficient number and scale of sites to provide realistically deliverable developments, which will come forward at the time that they are needed.
- 4.3 The Issues and Options document sets out that the next Local Plan period will be 2017-2040. The currently allocated sites and planning permissions are likely to provide 36,400 homes, and a further 9,660 may be built after 2040. A number of sites are already planned which will contribute to future housing need for the next Local Plan. However, the current calculations using Standard Method indicate a need for 1,800 homes per year or 40,900 for plan period 2017-2040.
- 4.4 In addition, job growth has been faster than expected and is likely to continue to grow meaning demand for housing has been exceptionally high and housebuilding has not kept up with the demand. In the Issues and Options document it is set out that if job growth is achieved then 2,900 homes a year would need to be built, equating to 66,700 homes between 2017 and 2040. There is therefore likely to be an additional need beyond the local housing need derived from the standard method of an additional 30,000 homes.
- 4.5 Continued economic growth within the Greater Cambridge area is a key priority. The resulting implication of this is the demand for more housing to meet the needs of those employed in the area. In this regard the Councils clearly acknowledge this in their Issues and Options by providing the above higher end figures. In answer to Question 32 of the Consultation document, it is therefore considered that the need for housing and the ambition for economic growth are inherently linked, and in order to double the total economic output of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough over the next 25 years, additional housing will be required.
- 4.6 There is therefore significant pressure in the Greater Cambridge Area for housing sites. Clare College Sports Ground provides a suitable site in a sustainable location for housing development as part of the next Local Plan period, and should therefore be considered as an appropriate option for contributing to the supply of housing in the Greater Cambridge area.

Green Belt Designation

- 4.7 Question 39 of the Consultation document asks whether land should be removed from the Green Belt if evidence shows it provides a more sustainable development option by reducing travel distances, helping us reduce our climate impacts.
- 4.8 The most sustainable location for development will inevitably be adjacent to existing development, and in particular, adjacent to Cambridge itself. This is where the majority of services and facilities are, along with public transport opportunities, employment and housing. In order to meet the target for net zero carbon by 2050, the most realistic option is for development to be delivered in locations that offer the most sustainable transport options. Given that the Green Belt closely wraps around the extent of Cambridge, in order to deliver sustainable development some Green Belt release will be necessary.
- 4.9 Implicit in the allocation of development sites in the Green Belt is therefore the need to review and amend the Green Belt boundary. The NPPF is clear that any alterations to Green Belt boundaries should be fully evidenced and justified through the preparation of a Local Plan (paragraph 136). When reviewing Green Belt boundaries the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account (paragraph 138).
- 4.10 Over the past 20 years there have been numerous reviews of the Green Belt, and the value of certain parts of it. It is however considered that where sites are in sustainable locations, these should be those first considered for release and subsequent development. Clare College Sports Ground is such an area.
- 4.11 The site is effectively the northernmost part of a 'green finger' of Green Belt which largely follows the railway line northwards from the direction of Great Shelford; a narrow tendril continues north and west along the brook to link with Sheep's Green and the river. All of this is within the Green Belt, though the encircling Green Belt proper forms an outer ring around the city and contains the 'necklace' villages.
- 4.12 The Inner Green Belt Boundary Study Review (Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils 2012) includes Plan 4: Areas of Significance of Development on Green Belt. This identifies the site as being within Sector 9 an area considered of very high significance. Despite this the Sector is described to be of low importance to setting and that important views are restricted by vegetation. It is considered that the site does not contribute to the wider Green Belt as whole, given that it is bordered to 3 sides by existing development. In any case, vegetation would be retained to the site boundaries, minimising the impact on any long views and therefore having very limited harm on the openness of the Green Belt as a whole.
- 4.13 It is also important to note that Sector 9 covers a large area that continues further south towards the city extents. This has the effect of ascribing characteristics and value of the wider area, which do not necessarily apply specifically to the proposed allocation site.
- 4.14 Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework defines five purposes which green belts serve:

(a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

- 4.15 The loss of all or part of the playing field would have little effect on this. The area has developed since the 1920s and in recent years there has been significant high-density development to the north and urban expansions to the south.

(b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

- 4.16 Given the location of the site, it would not result in any merging between towns. The site forms an area already encompassed by the built form of Cambridge.

(c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

- 4.17 Similarly, although Hobsons Brook retains a rural feel, this site is very much part of the urban area already. The countryside to the south will still be protected by the land south of Long Road.

(d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;

- 4.18 It is accepted that the way in which green spaces run into the urban area of the City is a specific Cambridge characteristic and these spaces allow key views of historic buildings and help define the setting of the town. However, this playing field, which is surrounded by trees and by built form separating it from the historic core does not perform this purpose.

(e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 4.19 Cambridge historically lacked the industrial base of many towns and therefore there is very little 'brownfield' land within the city which remains undeveloped. Such land would go nowhere close to providing the housing numbers needed. The whole basis of the Consultation is that to meet housing needs there needs to be a step change and tough decisions about where housing should be built precisely because the central area will be unable to meet the defined need.
- 4.20 As such it is considered that the site does not contribute to the purposes of including the land within the Green Belt. The harm to the Green Belt arising from the development of the site would be very limited, and would be outweighed by the benefits of providing housing in a very sustainable location in order to meet local needs and help achieve net zero carbon by 2050. This clearly demonstrates that it would be appropriate for the land to be released for development.

Protected Open Space

- 4.21 The site is currently designated as Protected Open Space (POS) by virtue of policy 67 of the 2018 Cambridge Local Plan. Such spaces are designated due to their environmental and recreational value. The spaces around Hobson's / Vicar's Brook are also POS which are additionally identified as a wildlife site. In contrast the open field to the south of the playing field (between it and Long Road) is just identified as Green Belt.

- 4.22 The Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011) identifies the POS as site SPO 11. It states that the site is of both environmental and recreational importance, with a quality value of 68%. The POS designation of the playing field is classed as 'Outdoor Sports Facilities' in the document, therefore its designation is in relation to its recreational use.
- 4.23 As has been noted previously, as an area of predominantly mown grass, it has little environmental or ecological value. The exception would be the tree-lines on the site boundaries and plantation to the north east which could all be retained whilst allowing significant space for development.
- 4.24 The present playing field is, for the most part, a private facility used by the students of the College. It has been in such use since the 1930s and is used for football, rugby, cricket and tennis. Its use is therefore predominantly for the college teams' formal games. The facilities are significantly underused by students as they are some distance from the College itself (more than 2.5km) and the rather isolated site is not popular with students.
- 4.25 Outside of the College use, the facilities are little used, other than by Cambridge United Football Club. The tennis courts were offered free to local groups but since a moderate charge has been levied, there has been little use over the past few years. The courts are little used by students due to the distance from College and perception of the remote setting.
- 4.26 Cambridge United Football Club own two portacabins on the site which are used, solely by them for fitness work and treatment. They are intending to vacate the site in the next four years.
- 4.27 The area occupied by the existing cricket field, tennis courts and pavilion etc covers only a proportion of the site and it would be possible to retain (or relocate them) and still allow the rest of the site to be developed.
- 4.28 Alternatively, most Colleges today share sports facilities, particularly cricket grounds. The College are in discussion with other Colleges to discuss the potential for this which would allow the entire grounds to be developed without detriment to the well-being of its students.

Flood Risk

- 4.29 According to the Gov.uk website, the majority of the site is located in Flood Zone 1. A very small section of the site adjacent to its western boundary is within Flood Zone 3, owing to the nearby Vicar's Brook. Small parts of the site to the north and western boundaries are also at low to high risk of surface water flooding. These are the parts of the site that are currently covered by tennis courts and tree plantations. The small area of higher risk of surface water flooding is in the location of the current hard-surface tennis courts.
- 4.30 Flood risk is not considered to be an issue which would prevent the development on the site. Indeed a sensitive development which incorporated SUDS would have the potential to improve the drainage issues on the site. In addition, the site is of sufficient size to

allow a significant amount of open space to be retained – either retaining space to allow the existing recreational uses to be retained or even in a more comprehensive redevelopment to allow a built form which reflected the form of adjacent developments. As such a scheme could be designed to avoid any dwellings within the areas of risk.

Other considerations

4.31 There are no other site constraints that would prevent the development of the site, and the relevant planning considerations are summarised below:

- **HERITAGE** - the established housing area to the west of the site contains the Barrow Road conservation area. However the site is separated from this area by Vicar's Brook and a tree belt and the access to the site is via Bentley Road which is outside the Conservation Area. Any impact on the conservation area is therefore considered to be negligible.
- **HIGHWAYS AND ACCESS** – the proposed development would retain the existing access from Bentley Road, and would only require possible improvements on land owned by the College. It is considered that the level of development on the site could in any case be designed to minimise impact on the local highway network. Car and cycle parking can easily be provided within the site to meet the relevant Council standards and there will be the opportunity to link to the cycleway beside the guided bus route.
- **ECOLOGY** – the vast majority of the site is mown grass for sports pitches, and as such is likely to be of low ecological value. The planted boundaries are likely to be of most ecological value, and would therefore be retained. The proposed development would also offer the opportunity for ecological enhancements.
- **TREES** – the trees within the site, and to the site boundaries would be retained to provide an attractive landscape setting to the site. Should any removal be required to widen the access to the site from Bentley Road or facilitate access to the Guided Busway, then this would be very minimal, and could be mitigated by re-provision within the site.
- **CONTAMINATION** – the site is not known to have any potential for significant contamination, with the site having been used for recreational purposes and historic maps suggesting that prior to this the site has long been an area of open space. Residential development is therefore considered to be a suitable use for the site.

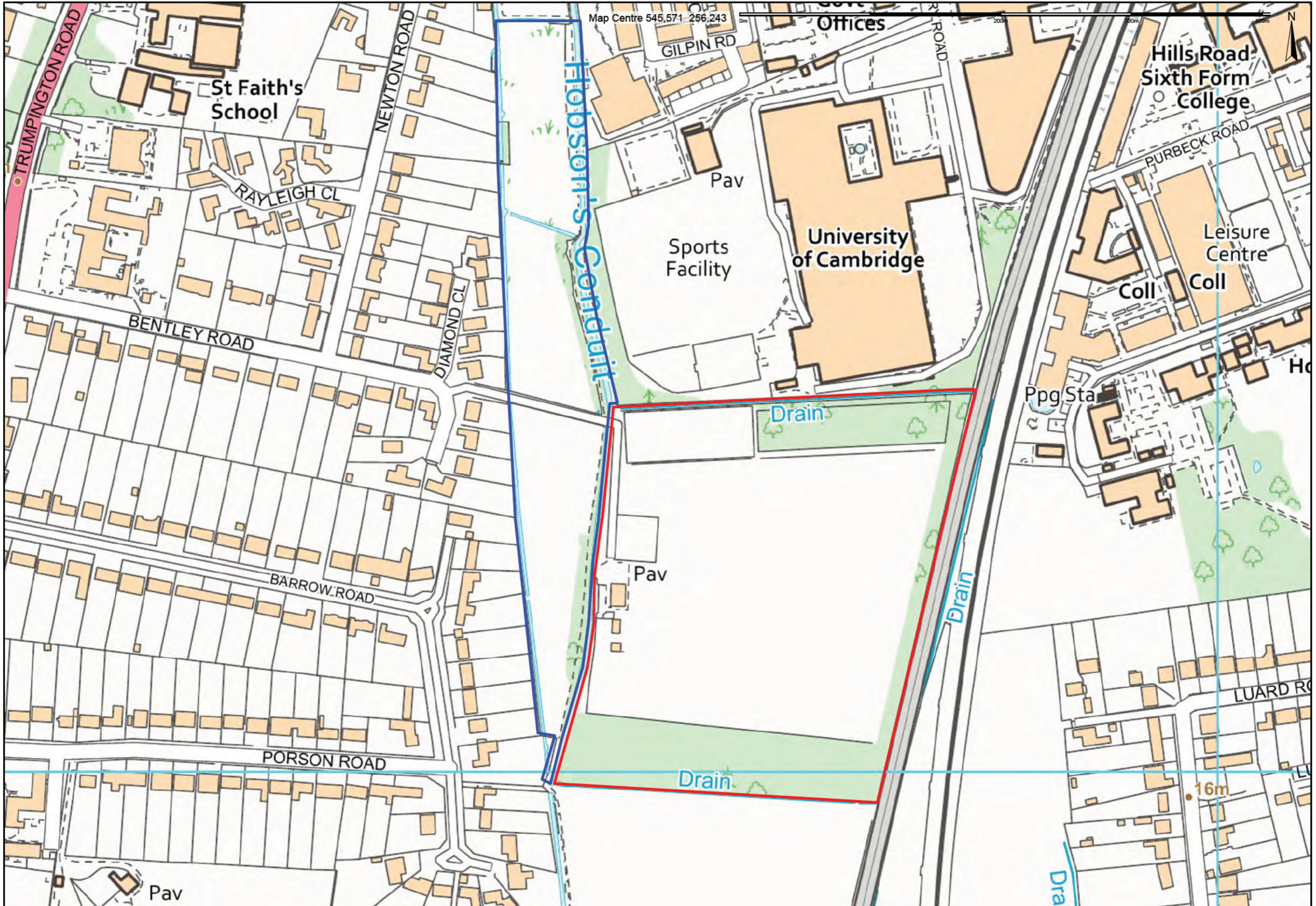
5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The site offers the opportunity to be able to provide new homes, on land within the ownership of Clare College.
- 5.2 Although the site is currently located within the Green Belt, it is adjacent to established housing and forms effectively the northernmost part of a 'green finger' of Green Belt. Its position forms a logical location for development within the city, in a highly sustainable location, and is considered to be of limited value to the Cambridge Green Belt as a whole.
- 5.3 The following benefits would result from the development of the site, and are considered to outweigh any minimal harm:
- Contributes to the supply of homes in Cambridge, including affordable homes;
 - Provides development in a very sustainable location within the city, in close proximity to services and public transport facilities;
 - Could provide a pedestrian/cycle link through the site to enable existing residents to the west to connect to the Guided Busway / cycleway;
 - Would provide open space available for enjoyment by the public;
 - Provides opportunities for biodiversity enhancements.
- 5.4 It is therefore concluded that the site forms an appropriate location for residential development to help meet housing need, and that the site should be released from the Green Belt in order to facilitate the allocation.

Deliverability and developability

- 5.5 The site would meet the tests set out in the NPPF for assessing whether housing sites can be delivered and developable:
- To be considered deliverable the NPPF requires sites for housing to be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years; and
 - To be considered developable the NPPF requires sites to be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.
- 5.6 This statement has demonstrated that the site meets the tests of deliverability and developability. Therefore in summary, it is considered that the land should be allocated for residential development.

Appendix 1: Location Plan



Map Centre 545,571 256,243

Offices

St Faith's School

Hills Road Sixth Form College

Sports Facility

University of Cambridge

Leisure Centre

Coll Coll

Ppg Sta

Drain

Drain

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