

Gonville and Caius College

Call for Sites 2025

Sites Reference 54906

Land at Rectory Farm, to the North-West of Milton

March 2025

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This submission to Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP) Call for Sites (CfS) 2025 has been prepared by Graeme Tulley Planning Consultant and Allies and Morrison master planners on behalf of Gonville & Caius College, University of Cambridge (“Caius”). This representation sets out material up-dates to the existing CfS Site Reference 54906 which comprises **Land at Rectory Farm, to the North-West of Milton**.
- 1.2 The site covers a total area of approximately 95 hectares. The site is located on land to the north-west of the village of Milton. It is adjacent to the A10 along the south-eastern boundary. Butt Lane, Milton Park & Ride and Milton Recycling Centre abut its southern boundary. Landbeach Road adjoins the east boundary of the site. Rectory Farm currently consists of agricultural land.
- 1.3 On behalf of Caius, Strutt and Parker responded to the Call for Sites (CfS) in 2020 proposing up to 1,500 dwellings and approximately 30,000 square metres of commercial floor space.
- 1.4 In response, the Greater Cambridge Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) 2021 summary of Site Assessment was:

Criteria	Outcome
Suitable	Red
Available	Green
Achievable	Green

- 1.5 The **GREEN** assessment for “availability” reflects the fact Caius was - and remains - the sole land owner with the land in annual agricultural cropping use.
- 1.6 The **GREEN** assessment for “achievable” reflected Strutt and Parkers assessments of the commercial attraction and likely viability of the site for residential and employment uses given the highly sustainable location and its proximity to the north of Cambridge.
- 1.7 The **RED** for “suitable” was given against HELAA assessments a) Landscape and townscape and b) Strategic highways impact.

- 1.8 We do not comment on the HELAA assessments below as the comments set out in Caius's response to the GCLP First Proposal 2021 by Strutt and Parker remain valid. However, we do address below the two RED assessments in the context of material updates to the site and its context.

2 INCREASED NEED FOR JOBS AND HOMES IN CAMBRIDGE

- 2.1 In January 2023 GCSP published an update of its development strategy for the emerging GCLP. This noted that following further work on employment and homes needs over the plan period (2020-2041), these had increased from 58,500 (as set out in the GCLP "First Proposals") to 66,600 jobs and homes from 44,000 to 51,723. The report goes on to note that ...*"Reflecting national planning policy as outlined above, in principle we consider that we should plan positively to provide new land for the identified undersupply in particular types of employment, unless evidence identifies an insurmountable problem with achieving that in a sustainable way"*.
- 2.2 Caius support the planning authority's objective of meeting all needs in a sustainable way and as set out below consider the Rectory Farm proposals will help deliver on the employment and homes needs in a meaningful and sustainable way.
- 2.3 It should also be noted that there is an existing Cambridge Water main running southwest to northeast across Rectory Farm and there are also plans for a new water main from Grafham Water to run across the northern boundary of the property, as shown on the concept plan, and providing a landscaped boundary to the north.

3 CAMBRIDGE TO WATERBEACH BUSWAY ROUTE

- 3.1 When considering the impact of the site in landscaping terms, it also does not appear that the HELAA assessed the impact that the delivery of the Waterbeach to Cambridge busway would have in this location in landscape terms.
- 3.2 The proposed scheme would deliver a dedicated busway alongside a new walking and cycling route to provide fast, frequent and reliable and sustainable journeys between Waterbeach New Town and north Cambridge via Landbeach village to make it easier for people to get to work and school.
- 3.3 In this regard, significant progress has been since the last CfS (2020) on the busway.

- 3.4 In October 2024, the Greater Cambridge Partnership held consultation on a new proposed alignment. The proposed route will start at the existing busway next to Cambridge Regional College. It will then connect with Milton Park & Ride and Landbeach via farmland including Caius land at Rectory Farm, before linking with a new travel hub in Waterbeach.
- 3.5 In February 2025 Cambridgeshire County Council (as the statutory body) agreed to submit a Transport for Works Act (TWA) Order for the project to go ahead. The Greater Cambridge Partnership, which will deliver the project, has said the TWA order will be made later this year (2025) with a public inquiry in 2026.
- 3.6 This has the following implications for the land at Rectory Farm.

Alignment and land acquisition for busway

- 3.7 In discussion with the GCP, Caius has positively engaged in agreeing the new busway alignment as it traverses Rectory Farm.
- 3.8 Moreover, Caius has agreed with GCP that the required land acquisition to facilitate the busway will be subject of a private treaty agreement between Caius and GCP/CCC, thus ensuring that there will be no need for a contested or lengthy compulsory purchase order (CPO) in respect of the Rectory Farm land, thus quickening the land acquisition process for the busway.
- 3.9 The private treaty agreement between Caius and the GCP will also contain provision for Caius to build crossing points over the busway to provide access to the land to the north west of the busway for development at a future date.

Updated masterplan

- 3.10 Through its masterplanning team – Allies and Morrison – Caius has updated the Rectory Farm plan to take account of the new alignment, location of busway crossing points and site accesses into the Rectory Farm land. A copy of the indicative concept plan is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.11 This review has shown that the capacity of the site for residential remains circa 1,500 new homes but potentially significantly more employment space than in the CfS 2020 could be accommodated, i.e. circa 50,000 (Min) – 100,000 (Max) sqm of commercial/employment floor space with substantial public open space. The employment space typologies have yet to be agreed but may consist of mid technology uses potentially with a medical focus.

Development timings/phasing

- 3.12 The timing of the busway does have an impact on the build out, phasing and delivery timescales for the Rectory Farm proposals.
- 3.13 In this regard, Caius envisage a first phase (Phase 1) of development to the east of the busway alignment and up to the A10, could go ahead before the busway works are complete, gaining site access from existing junctions with the A10 and Landbeach Road.
- 3.14 This first phase would be expected to consist of 1,000 residential units and 40,000 sqm of commercial floorspace facing the Butt Lane frontage, plus a local centre consisting of local retail, recreational and leisure facilities. Caius consider this first phase is available, achievable and deliverable for development to be built out over years 6 -15.
- 3.15 In respect of Phase 2 development this would need to wait for busway works to be complete, including new (south western) site access from Butt Lane and installation of a number busway cross over points from Phase 1 to Phase 2.
- 3.16 Phase 2 would likely consist of another 500 dwellings and a further 40,000 sqm commercial space fronting Butt Lane. In terms of timings, it is expected this could be available and developed out over the 11-16 years +.

4 IMPACTS ON LANDSCAPE

- 4.1 The landscape and townscape assessment were given a **RED** issue in the HELAA 2021 on the grounds that “harm would still be adverse, unacceptable and incongruous with the rural landscape”. The HELAA continues, identifying how development in this location would adversely impact local views present due to a lack of intervening vegetation and built form.
- 4.2 In representation to the GCLP First Proposal, Strutt and Parker noted that *...“views on this area of land are not considered to be of such significance to prevent logical and sustainable development. The entire site is relatively flat, and thereby the land is not considered overly sensitive in landscape terms, and it is not situated within a protected area.”*
- 4.3 We consider the **RED** assessment should be downgraded to **AMBER** for the following reasons:
- the existing site landscape is not overly sensitive due to the flat nature of the agricultural land.

- the agreed alignment of the busway effectively dissects Rectory Farm in two parts. This provides a clear and logical defined boundary on the eastern side of the busway for in-fill development up to the A10.
- the agreed busway route – which is raised - across Rectory Farm results in a significant new feature within the landscape, which would act to significantly reduce the landscape sensitivity of all the site when viewed from east to west.
- the new busway route has a significant impact on the contribution the site makes to the Green Belt. The Green Belt Assessment, prepared by LUC for South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council and published in 2021, considers the parcel of land M11 to make a moderate contribution to the Green Belt. The harm resulting from the release of land parcel M11 from the Green Belt, as an expansion of Milton, is further assessed as ‘very high.’ However, this assessment is based on the assumption that its release would significantly weaken the strong boundary distinction due to breaching the A10 transport corridor. However, the proposed busway will significantly alter the character of this land parcel and reduce its contribution to the Green Belt. The busway will shift the transport corridor further west, meaning that the A10 will no longer serve as an urban containment edge.
- Caius College would be happy to commit to the provision of extensive landscape planting towards the west and north boundaries, thus also increasing BNG of the site, in order to minimise the impact of development on the landscape.

4.4 Whilst it is acknowledged that any development of this scale would have some landscape impact, this needs to be considered holistically against the benefits that a development in this location could offer.

4.5 Considering the above, it is considered that the issue to landscape and townscape should be re-categorised as **AMBER** with the flat landscaping and introduction of the busway limiting existing views with the result that it constitutes a less sensitive landscape.

Potential Grey Belt site

4.6 As noted above, the Rectory Farm site is located within the Green Belt with the last green belt review undertaken in 2021. Where required in plan making - most notably to meet identified housing and employment needs - and in decision making, the NPPF (2024) defines grey belt land within the green belt. The Green Belt PPG (2025) details how authorities should assess their green belt where required to identify grey belt for release.

4.7 The GCSP latest update(2025) taking on board the government's new targets and methodology, notes that the councils cannot currently demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, and the councils latest evidence base on employment and housing needs(2023) shows significantly increased targets to plan for in the GCLP. At this Call for Sites stage, it is unclear how the GCLP will seek to meet these greater needs, but a review of grey belt land is one option.

4.8 The PPG details the three "grey belt" contributions assessments as required in the NPPF Para 143 a), b), d). We consider these are helpful in considering the contribution to green belt that Rectory Farm makes and in turn its visual and landscape value:

Purpose A - to check unrestricted sprawl:

The development of the busway will provide a strong physical, linear and regular new feature in the landscape in "reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development" and which would mean there is no "incongruous pattern of development" so we consider there is moderate, weak or no contribution to limiting sprawl from the A10 and the built-up area of Milton.

Purpose B - to prevent neighbouring towns merging:

The site forms only a small part of a strategic gap and could be developed without the loss of visual separation due to the presence of the new busway and A10, limited natural landscape elements and low-lying topography that would all preserve visual separation. The site therefore makes a "moderate, weak or no contribution" to this green belt objective.

Purpose D – to preserve the setting of historic towns:

The site is not within, adjacent to, or of any significant visual importance to historic Cambridge. By virtue of the A10 and future busway, it does not have any "visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the City". In this regard we consider the site would have "moderate, weak or no contribution" to this purpose.

4.9 In respect of grey belt land, the NPPF and PPG also requires the exclusion of other protected sites designations as set out at NPPF Footnote 7 (other than green belt). In this context Rectory Farm does not include any Footnote 7 designations.

- 4.10 The site is also strategically and sustainably located next to the Milton Park and Ride, the A10 and the new busway and would help meet the council's housing and employment needs.
- 4.11 Thus, taking these aspects together , i.e. there is currently no 5 year housing land supply, the Rectory Farm land does not strongly contribute to green belt purposes (NPPF Para 143 a), b), d)); Footnote 7 policies are not engaged; that all other aspects of NPPF Para 155 would need to be met (including the "golden rules"); then in decision making terms, the presumption would shift from "inappropriate development" in green belt to a presumption in favour of sustainable development as per NPPF para 11 d(ii).
- 4.1 Given the green/grey belt assessment tests as set out in the PPG, which suggest the site makes “moderate, weak or no contribution” to the green belt, thus in turn the site has limited visual and landscape value, the site benefits from a strategic and sustainable location and the site would help meet housing and employment needs, we respectfully request that Rectory Farm should be allocated in the GCLP.

5 STRATEGIC HIGHWAYS IMPACT

- 5.1 The assessment identifies issues of highways impact as **RED**, due to apparent impact on the A14, with sites having to demonstrate “no net increase in vehicle trips on the strategic road network”.
- 5.2 The HELAA response in this regard, appears inconsistent with the assessment of the site on “Transport and Road” section of the HELAA for Rectory Farm, which also references the nil policy position, but acknowledges that the delivery of the site could provide reasonable mitigation.
- 5.3 North East Cambridge through the AAP and GCLP is proposing to regenerate a 182-hectare area immediately adjacent to the south of the A14. The land within this proposal has been considered to be suitable having regard to its impact upon the A14.
- 5.4 By contrast the development proposals at Rectory Farm, whilst of a significant scale, are substantially smaller than the proposed development within the Cambridge North-East Area Action Plan. Therefore, without detailed transport impact work by GCSP, it is surprising that land at Rectory Farm is assessed as unsuitable having regard to the impact upon traffic along the A14.
- 5.5 National policy NPPF (2024) Para 110 notes...” *Significant development should be focused on locations which **are or can be made sustainable**, through*

limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making” (our bold italics).

- 5.6 In this regard the busway (with walking and cycling routes) proposal will further enhance the location for sustainable development with public transport connections into Cambridge city centre and Waterbeach new town.
- 5.7 It is also useful to note NPPF (2024) Para 116, which whilst dealing with decision making clearly states...*“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an **unacceptable impact on highway safety**, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, **would be severe**, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios” (our bold italics).* In this regard the NPPF test is not “nil increase” but whether any impact would have an unacceptable impact on highways safety and be severe.
- 5.8 Caius has no objection to the provision of appropriate infrastructure funding from the development on Rectory Farm site, to assist with the delivery of any required major transport infrastructure improvements along this corridor.
- 5.9 Considering the above, the site at Rectory Farm should be reassessed as **AMBER**.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This representation has been prepared to update the proposed allocation of a mixed use site, comprising 50,000 – 100,000 sqm of employment space, and up to 1,500 dwellings (existing CfS Site Reference 54906) which comprises Land at Rectory Farm, to the North-West of Milton. It is intended that development at Rectory Farm, Milton will be phased.
- 6.2 The site has a number of favourable attributes that would demonstrate it is a sound allocation for housing and employment growth, within the emerging GCLP:
- It is located in a sustainable location, adjacent to the A10. It is situated within a sustainable growth corridor, with Cambridge North-East Area Action Plan to the South and Waterbeach New Settlement to the north. The provision for substantial growth at Milton would fully align with the objectives of achieving a cluster of growth along the Cambridge North- East- Waterbeach Corridor.

- The site is in a very sustainable location adjacent to Milton Park & Ride and also benefits from very good cycle access to Cambridge City, which are being further improved as part of Waterbeach Cambridge Busway and Greenway project. It benefits from very good ease of access to Cambridge North-East and the existing Science Parks within this area.
- The new green/grey belt assessment tests as set out in the PPG, mean the site makes limited or no contribution to the green belt.
- Cambridge County Council (as statutory provider) and GCP (delivery body) has agreed to make a Traffic Works Act Order later in 2025. GCP and Caius have agreed the alignment of the busway through Rectory Farm (where Caius is the sole landowner) and to enter a private treaty land acquisition to facilitate the busway, thus avoiding a lengthy, contested and expensive compulsory purchase process in respect of the Rectory Farm land.
- The HELAA Assessment for the site will need to be re-assessed to account for the impact that the Waterbeach to Cambridge busway will have in providing a clear and defined landscape buffer for the development at Rectory Farm. The number of major transport projects along this corridor would provide mitigation to the development of this site. In this regard, the impact of development at Rectory Farm appears to be inconsistently assessed in terms of strategic highways having regard to the NPPF tests, recent green belt PPG advice and the Cambridge North-East Area Action Plan proposals directly south of the A14.

6.3 In light of the above, it is therefore considered that land at Rectory Farm, Milton, provides an excellent location for development and would be a sound basis for allocation as part of the emerging Local Plan.

APPENDIX A

CONCEPT PLAN

