

Subject: Bedford Borough Local Plan 2035 update

Good afternoon

Local Plan 2035

Parish Councillors will recall the recent Local Plan 2035 consultation. By way of a brief summary, the Borough Council invited comments during January, February and March 2018 on the plan's legal compliance and soundness. This stage precedes the decision to submit the plan for formal examination. Around 3,200 representations were received from 1,800 respondents. These representations are now available to view on the Council's web site www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035

Colworth Garden Village was a key allocation in the published plan. The proposed scheme would deliver 4,500 dwellings (2,500 before 2035) and new high quality employment land along with a parkway rail station and community facilities. The station would serve the local existing and new community, the extended Colworth Business Park as well as intercept traffic on the A6 heading for Bedford Midland Station. However the scheme relied on joint working between Wrenbridge (the site promoter) and the operator of Santa Pod Raceway to resolve concerns about noise. Despite ongoing negotiations it has not been possible to reach agreement about noise mitigation works on the Santa Pod site and without these a satisfactory noise environment is unlikely to be achievable. The operator of Santa Pod Raceway has objected to the plan on that basis and there is no sign that an agreement will be forthcoming in the foreseeable future.

For that reason the plan as it stands is not ready to be examined. The Council must believe the plan to be 'sound' when it is submitted for examination and, as the garden village proposal is unlikely to be deliverable, this is not the case at the present time. This will be explained in a report to be considered by the Council's Executive on May 16th. The purpose of the report is to explain that other options for meeting the required number of dwellings now need to be considered, the plan amended and a further period of consultation held before the process can move forward. The meeting on May 16th will not agree how the plan should be changed; more work is needed before that decision can be made. The papers can be viewed on [the Council and Democracy](#) part of the Council's web site.

In terms of the timetable, the Government is planning to update the National Planning Policy Framework which will bring with it a new way to calculate housing numbers for inclusion in local plans. For Bedford these numbers will be higher than they are at present. However, transitional arrangements will be put in place so that authorities such as Bedford who have made significant progress with their evidence base and their plans can carry on with the current numbers to get their plans in place. Indications are that plans submitted for examination before the end of 2018 (rather than the end of March 2018 as we had previously been told) will benefit from the transitional arrangements, so the timetable in the Local Development Scheme will be updated to reflect this. Executive on May 16th will be asked to agree the updated timetable. What this means in practical terms is that a further consultation will take place in the autumn to invite representations on a changed local plan before it is submitted to the Secretary of State.

Whilst repeating the consultation is not ideal, the planning system is set up to respond to this eventuality. We are not the first to be in this position and it is better that the plan is changed to make it robust otherwise there is a very real risk that it would be found 'unsound' by the examining Inspector. It is important that residents and others with an interest in the plan and its policies are able to comment on the revisions before submission takes place. Legal advice is that the Council cannot restrict the second consultation to only those parts of the plan that have changed. However, we will make it very clear that all submissions made during the consultation in January-March 2018 will be sent to the examining Inspector, so where things have stayed the same there will be no need to resubmit responses.