



Mr G Sansom
CPRE Bedfordshire
5 Grove Place
Bedford
MK40 3JJ

Your ref:
Our ref: AD/Is/99
Date: 24 July 2017

Dear Mr Sansom,

Planning application CB/12/03613 Houghton Regis North Site 1

Thank you for your recent letter to Cllr James Jamieson which he has asked me to respond to.

You ask a range of questions which I have sought to address below.

As you will be aware the National planning policy requires that all local planning authorities “identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years’ worth of housing against their housing requirements”.

The NPPF goes on to say in footnote 11 that “To be considered deliverable, sites should 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 in particular that development of the site is viable”.

The decision to remove Houghton Regis North site 1 (HRN1) from the five-year supply followed a number of planning appeal inquiries during which the planning inspectors removed the site from the 5-year supply due to insufficient evidence that it could begin to deliver within five years.

There were discussions regarding the quantum of planning work which needed to be done, land ownership and associated infrastructure. Moving the site from the five years does not mean that it cannot begin to deliver within that time, just that at the current time there is not sufficient evidence available to demonstrate a “realistic prospect” that it will. It is important that the Council presents a housing trajectory which is robust and can withstand scrutiny so that our five-year supply can be defended.

Following the conclusions of the inspectors, it is the Council’s opinion that to include HRN1 at the current time would undermine the robustness and integrity of the housing trajectory.

When we are presented with information which provides a firm and realistic prospect that the site can deliver within the five-year supply period then it will be moved back in. As work on the planning applications is now progressing, this may be the case in the foreseeable future.

The decision to remove the site from the five-year supply trajectory was not a matter discussed at any Council meeting as it was a decision that responded to conclusions that came out of a series of appeal decisions. This was an evidence based decision needed to maintain the robustness of the trajectory.

The Houghton Regis North Site 1 application was subject to the usual tests to ensure it was viable given all the infrastructure costs that were associated with the scheme and there were no planning reasons why the site could not be delivered. The decision of a landowner/s not to bring sites forward are not always linked to planning reasons. As you may recall this application was referred to the Secretary of State before it was issued and was the subject of subsequent legal proceedings. I am satisfied that we undertook due diligence on the application and I would draw support for this conclusion that given the level of scrutiny to which it was subjected this area of concern would have been identified.

Issues of deliverability are a problem for local planning authorities as we currently have little control over when sites are brought forward. We continue to push government on the need for wider powers to ensure sites are delivered but see little appetite from government to legislate for any additional powers.

At this time, there has been no variation or removal of conditions from the original planning permission but we are shortly expecting to receive the first submissions to start to deal with the conditions. Turning to your question about withdrawing the planning permission, it can't be withdrawn. There is a process for revoking a planning permission but this includes compensation for the developer and the Council is not intending to explore this option. In any event it would be counterproductive to revoke the planning permission as while it is not currently contributing to the 5 year supply it will do and if we revoked the permission we would have to find a compensatory 5150 homes somewhere else in Central Bedfordshire.

Although outside of the five-year supply period, HRN1 still remains an important strategic component of Central Bedfordshire's housing land supply over the Plan period and the Council is committed to its delivery.

I trust this responds to your enquiry.

Yours sincerely



Jason Longhurst
Director – Regeneration & Business