

James Jamieson  
Leader  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Priory House  
Monks Walk  
Chicksands  
Shefford  
SG17 5TQ

12 July 2018

Dear Mr Jamieson

**Re: Planning application CB/12/03613 Houghton Regis North Site 1  
for 5,150 new homes. Decision Date: 02/06/2014  
Land Banking?**

I am writing to you to express CPRE Bedfordshire's very serious concerns regarding the decision of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to remove the above site from your Housing Trajectory used to calculate the Councils "5 year Forward Land Supply".

This site, one of the largest and most important sites for new homes in Central Bedfordshire, was provided with planning permission by CBC on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014 and so far, more than 4 years later, not a brick has been laid and not one new home built.

Quietly and without the support of any detailed reasoning, your Council has stated in the Housing Trajectory dated 31/03/2018 which accompanies the latest 5 Year Forward Land Supply that:

*"..... However, due to the outstanding pre-commencement condition requirements on the outline consent this site has been removed from the five year supply (i.e. it has been discounted on an individual basis).*

*Potential Barriers: Site has been removed from the 5 year supply until further progress has been made."*

The Trajectory now indicates that CBC believe that building on the site will not now commence before 2023/2024. Up to 10 years after the date of the decision notice!

As you are well aware, the absence of a 5 Year Land Supply has plagued the residents of Central Bedfordshire for several years until very recently. Allowing developers to

gain planning permissions on sites which were unacceptable to local people and destroying the countryside through Appeals which CBC were unable or unwilling to defend.

This was mainly due to the lack of activity on the Houghton Regis North Site 1.

CBC's Local Plan 2035 recently submitted for examination defines the Houghton Regis North site as being of "Strategic" importance.

**5,150 homes is equivalent to a new town +30% larger than the town of Ampthill (4,000 homes).**

We would therefore have expected that the decision that building on the site will be significantly delayed, would have been the subject of very detailed discussion within your Council at both Executive and Full Council level, in order that residents of Central Bedfordshire are fully informed of the reasons.

We would also expect that the decision making process would have been accompanied by detailed analysis and publication of the precise reasons for the delays to building the **"desperately needed new homes"** - the words used by your council when agreeing planning permission for this site.

There has been considerable comment recently in the National Media about **"land banking"** and the very serious delays this causes to house building at the expense of the housing needs of local people and the loss of local countryside - land banking results in additional land having to be made available for development. The only beneficiaries are the profits of developers.

This would appear to be one of the worst cases of land banking that we have ever seen in Bedfordshire.

CPRE Bedfordshire is therefore asking if you would please provide the following information as soon as possible:

1. Full and complete details of the reasons why CBC have accepted further very substantial delays to development of the Houghton Regis North Site?
2. Who at CBC took the decision to remove this site from the 5 Year Forward Land Supply and when was the decision taken?
3. Was the decision discussed or made at a CBC Executive Meeting and/or a CBC Full Council Meeting? - if so please provide details of meeting date(s) and Agenda item numbers together with details of background papers made available to Executive Members and/or full Council Members.
4. What due diligence did the Council undertake over deliverability of the development before removing this site from the Green Belt and granting planning permission? What assurances were sought from the landowners, prior to the grant of planning permission, over deliverability such as ensuring a landowners agreement was in place?
5. What specific factors have changed since the grant of planning permission which are now causing the delay to development?
6. The Planning permission granted by Central Bedfordshire Council was subject to a large number of "conditions" as at the Decision Notice date of 2 June 2014. Can you please advise which of the "conditions" have been met to date and which are still outstanding?

Can you please advise if any of the original “conditions” have been varied or removed since the Decision Date or if new “conditions” have been added?  
If so, what have been the changes made to the “conditions”.

5. Why has planning permission not been withdrawn for the development of this site if Developers are unable or unwilling to move forward with it?

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Chief Executive of CBC.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

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Gerry Sansom  
CPRE Bedfordshire