



Central Bedfordshire Council

HOUGHTON REGIS NORTH FRAMEWORK PLAN

The Strategic Urban Extension of
Houghton Regis

The Houghton Regis North Project Team
October 2012

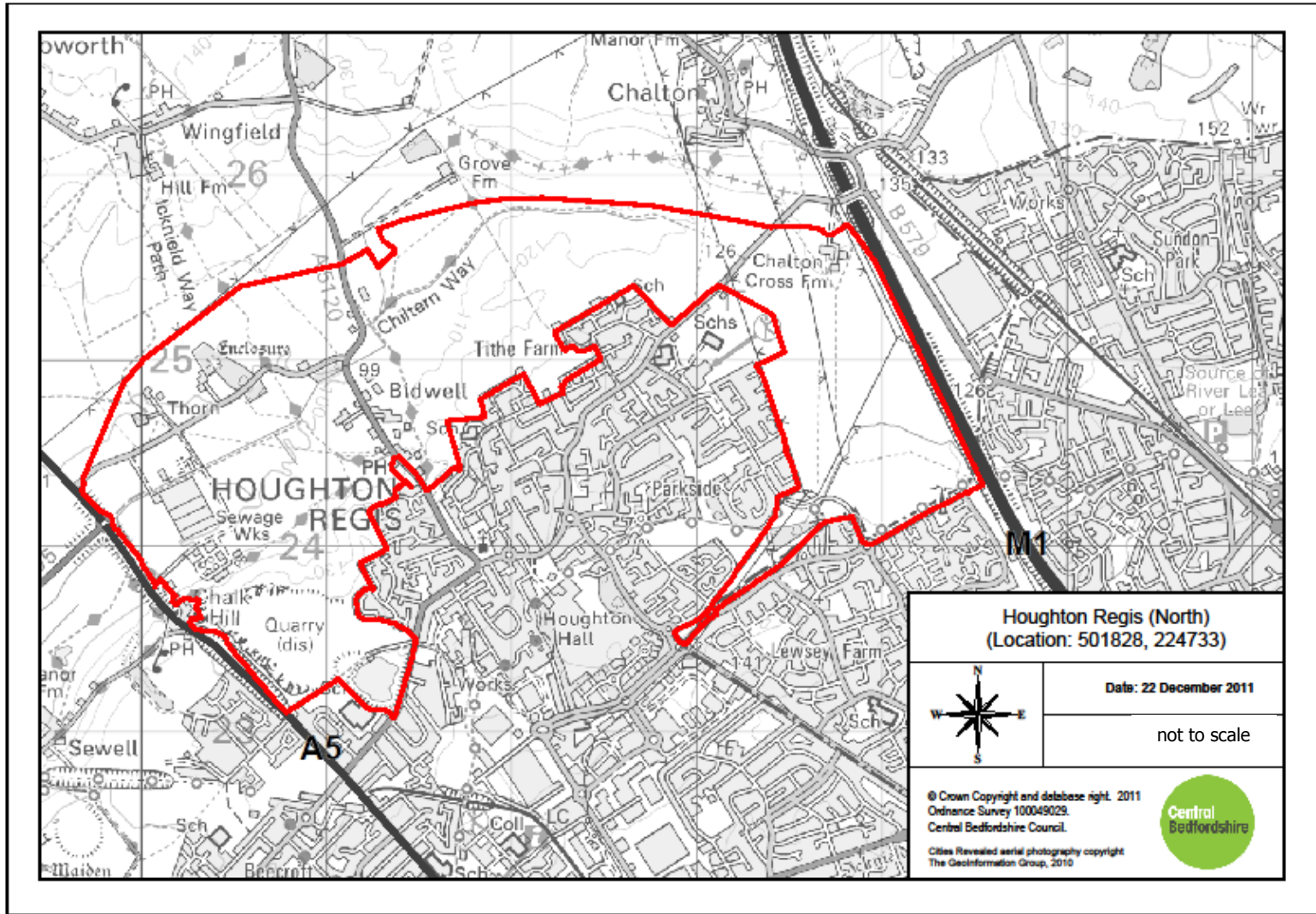
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) has been planning for the provision of good quality housing within well constructed environments. The purpose is to achieve sustainable development to meet rising population pressure. After assessing alternatives through the *Development Planning*¹ process, CBC considers that the best way to achieve a sustainable expansion of growth within the southern part of its administrative area is to pursue the extension of Houghton Regis northwards. This will be a residential led, mixed use scheme of about 7,000 dwellings and 40 hectares of employment land together with its supporting infrastructure. This is known as Houghton Regis North. The area is shown on the next page.

¹ The Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy endorsed by CBC July 2011; The Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy



- 1.2 This document together with the accompanying Framework Plan diagram² sets out a *Vision*³ for the development of the extension to Houghton Regis and CBC's expectations for any planning applications that may be submitted.
- 1.3 CBC recognises that the process of preparing a new Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire will lag behind the consideration of some of the planning applications within the Houghton Regis North area that will be submitted over the coming months and years. Nevertheless, the Council does not wish to discourage appropriate planning applications from being submitted and for development to proceed, provided that:
- The *critical infrastructure*⁴ that is necessary for the area (such as the A5 – M1 Link Road and the Woodside Connection at Houghton Regis) is confirmed to be available;
 - Where it can be demonstrated by means of a transport assessment for any planning application that critical infrastructure is not required for a particular quantum of development there will be the potential for early releases in different locations within the strategic allocation;
 - The planning applications are consistent with the overall vision for expansion set out in the emerging Development Strategy and this Framework Plan; and
 - That planning applications incorporate agreed measures of mitigation for the impacts caused cumulatively as a result of development.

² Note, no measurements should be taken from the diagram: any references to measurements in the text over-rides the diagram

³ A *Vision* is a broad statement about how the area should develop and the qualities it should have over the long term.

⁴ *Critical infrastructure* is defined as that which is required to be in place before significant development can be commenced.

- 1.4 Until the new Development Strategy is adopted, CBC will consider the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy as it was drafted in July 2011⁵ as an important material consideration, along with the *National Planning Policy Framework*⁶, this Framework Plan, and other material considerations⁷ in determining planning applications.

2.0 VISION

- 2.1 The *Vision*, presents a picture of the type of place that CBC wishes to create through the northern expansion of Houghton Regis. Planning applications will be expected to show how they comply with this Vision.
- 2.2 The northern expansion of Houghton Regis will be a sustainable urban extension, building upon the existing strong sense of local community, and will help form a distinctive place, whilst ensuring that it appropriately integrates and connects with the existing urban form of Houghton Regis. It will complement the wider regeneration efforts taking place in Central Bedfordshire and will help to encourage inward investment and strengthen the local economy. The urban extension will:

⁵ See www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk for details.

⁶ The NPPF is a recent Government document that sets planning policy for the Country as a whole.

⁷ These material considerations will include the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs).

CONNECT WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS ...

... by being a place with easy access to the places people will want to visit as part of their everyday lives. This will include good public transport and safe and convenient walking and cycling .

HELP FORM NEW COMMUNITIES ...

... by being a place where people can experience a good quality of life and where neighbourhoods will have an attractive mix of housing, a wide range of local employment opportunities, shops, schools, faith spaces, health facilities, community and cultural facilities, access to local jobs and access to a range of quality open spaces as well as the countryside generally For the health and well-being of its residents.

CONTRIBUTE TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE ...

... by including measures that will help the community adapt to the changes caused by climate change such as designing a place that has a low impact on, or positively improves, the environment, health and well-being of the residents..

HAVE AN EMPHASIS ON DESIGN ...

... by taking the best design cues from the area and designing a place that has character with a local distinctiveness that offers an opportunity to give people a sense of pride in their environment.

PROVIDING FOR NEW BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES...

... by providing land and facilities that will allow for a place that supports the development of sustainable business growth and that helps provide a wide range of good local jobs and training opportunities.

PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE WATER ENVIRONMENT...

...by encouraging the use of sustainable methods to protect and improve the groundwater and surface water quality and quantity, and enhancing surface water hydromorphology

3.0 AIMS

3.1 All planning applications that are made within the Houghton Regis North and associated areas should demonstrate how the *Vision* is to be achieved. The planning applications must also demonstrate how the following headline aims are to be achieved:

1. To positively contribute to the delivery of new housing stock which meets a range of needs as well as assisting in resolving issues of affordability and housing supply in the wider area;
2. To mitigate the impact on the area, due to the scale of the development, on local infrastructure.
3. To contribute to providing a wide range of new employment opportunities to help enable the diversification and enhancement of the local economy;
4. To contribute to a greater level of public access to a broad range of open spaces within, and on the edge of the urban area;
5. To create opportunities for promoting and realising the regeneration of adjacent communities, including the regeneration of the physical environment within Houghton Regis and for supporting the Town Centre of Houghton Regis and the Town Centre of Dunstable;

access achieved
applications business
area buildings centre
changes community
create contribute
cycling development economy
employment enhancement
design environment
existing flood follow form
generally health help
houghton housing
impact including local open
opportunities people
planning proposed providing
public quality range
regeneration regis safe
spaces supporting vision
water wide sustainable
countryside urban

6. To contribute to the provision of new supporting community infrastructure to meet the needs of the new development but in a way that also benefits the health and well-being of the existing community;
7. To contribute in managing and improving flood risk measures, water quality and water conservation. Improving the GI network, developing its role in ecosystem services To contribute to the protection and enhancement of ecological biodiversity, ecological networks, historic environment; and
8. To contribute to transport, walking and cycling links both around the area generally and to the centre of Houghton Regis and the forthcoming Guided Busway in particular.
9. To provide and maintain sustainable and healthy environments through the mitigation of proposals which are likely to cause pollution or are likely to be exposed to potential sources of pollution.
10. To ensure that the proposed development will deliver buildings which are highly resource efficient (especially in regards to energy and water use) and resilient to future climate changes such as flooding and overheating.
11. To follow best practice in the design and layout of the built environment to ensure development proposals demonstrate a strong character, with public spaces that are safe,

accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale. The buildings and layout will seek to improve social well-being and the quality of life for residents.

4.0 FRAMEWORK PLAN PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The proposal as put forward in the endorsed Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy and as re-inserted into the forthcoming Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy is for a *strategic allocation*⁸ that will accommodate about 7000 new dwellings, about 40 hectares of employment land and with sites for retail, leisure, strategic roads, open spaces, green infrastructure and associated development.
- 4.2 That part of the strategic allocation east of the Bidwell Road (A5120) is known as Site 1 and is relatively unconstrained. However, the site does contain landscape, surface water and ecological features that will need to be protected and improved, including an area of flooding in the south east corner near Kestrel Way and electrical power lines running along the eastern edge of the M1 corridor and through the site next to the Parkside estate.
- 4.3 The western end of the growth area between the A5120 and the A5 is known as Site 2 and is more challenging to develop with an existing sewage treatment works, steep topography in the south, a scheduled monument, areas of ecological interest and areas of flood risk. The site contains landscape, surface water, historic features and ecological features that will need to be protected and improved, including an area of flooding.

⁸ This is the formal terminology for a major allocation within a Development Strategy, aka an strategic urban extension.

- 4.4 The Framework Plan, attached to this document sets out the Council's general expectations on how the aims of the urban extension may take physical form. This is achieved principally by the Council considering outline planning applications in this area that will come forward. Such applications are expected to deliver a comprehensive overall development which will generally conform to this Framework Plan.
- 4.5 The Framework Plan includes the following main elements:
- 4.6 The strategic access to the development will be obtained from the proposed A5 to M1 link road, the associated Junction 11a to the M1 motorway and, where relevant, via the new Woodside Connection. The development is generally not expected to proceed without these critical elements of infrastructure. Should such early proposals be made, there will need to be a full justification given and any necessary mitigation made through the planning process.
- 4.7 There are three existing main access roads into and through the development:: Thorn Turn Road, the A5120 and the Sundon Road. There will be a new main road and combined bus route through the new area and a new link that is capable of linking buses to the forthcoming Dunstable to Luton Guided Busway linking through the Houghton Regis Town Centre.
- 4.8 Neighbourhoods of primarily residential use will be mostly contained within a multifunctional network of Green Infrastructure, including recreational open spaces and landscaped routes through which roads, footpaths and/or cycleways will run. This will provide connections

between the existing urban area and countryside to the north and activities to promote the health and well-being of the community. All these areas will have designated uses and maintained to the standard that designated use demands. The settlement of Bidwell will be set into one of those areas to retain its distinctive identity.

4.9 There will be three main employment areas.

- The area at Thorn Turn will form a commercial gateway into Dunstable from the north (A5) and west (A505) with high quality strategic landscaping at its entrance. This is also the location for a significant recycling facility for the area as a whole,
- The mixed use employment area in the north east corner of the site near to Junction 11a will offer an opportunity for commercial, retail, leisure and associated uses with, if appropriate, some residential uses to add variety and liveliness to the area.,
- The employment area on the eastern edge of the area will offer an opportunity for employment associated with a significant regional scale warehousing facility or other employment use This will also serve as a useful buffer to many of the residential and commercial areas from the M1 traffic.

4.10 It is envisaged that residents and workers at the completed development will have access to a number of new or expanded existing community hubs which will contain a number of uses and facilities. Central to the success of integrating existing and proposed communities is the shared community use of such spaces as leisure centres, community buildings and schools – the places where people come together every day. These nodes of activity are positioned to

provide convenient walking distances for all. Full advantage will be taken of opportunities to link with the Houghton Regis Town Centre as the central community and retail hub for the area as a whole.

- 4.11 There is an anticipated need for four new primary schools located as follows: to the east of the Parkside Estate, to the north-west of the Tithe Farm Estate, to the north-east of the Tithe Farm Estate and to the west of Bidwell. In addition, Tithe Farm Primary School will be proposed for expansion.
- 4.12 It is expected there will be two existing schools which will be improved and expanded to cater for the secondary school needs of the area: at All Saints School to the south west of Site 2 and at Kingsland Campus to the north-east. All Saints School will require 3 additional sports pitches to be provided.
- 4.13 There will be provision for formal sports pitches and associated facilities for general use in promoting the health and well-being of residents. This is anticipated to be provided in a number of locations: to the north of Kestrel Way; within a refurbished Kingsland Campus (with all-weather facilities potentially included); at an expanded Tithe Farm Road open area; to the south of the A5 – M1 link, east of the A5120; to the west of Roslyn Way and at, or in close proximity to, All Saints School.
- 4.14 It is expected there will be two large informal recreation areas to the west of Roslyn Way and to the south of the A5 – M1 link. These will be supplemented by smaller recreation areas within

the neighbourhoods, the location of which will be determined through the master planning process for those specific areas later. There will also be links to the existing recreation area at Houghton Hall Park and other local open spaces via links to existing footpath and road networks.

- 4.15 There are three open areas that will require management for their natural and ecological interest; the area along and around Houghton Brook to the south-east, the area formed south of the A5 – M1 link/ east of the A5120 and also to the south of Bidwell. In addition there will be areas which will require specific mitigation and management for their natural, wildlife, archaeological, historic environment (such as Thorn Spring and the old Houghton Regis Chalk Pit), important footpaths or other landscape interest throughout the area and where necessary, identified through the master planning process. There will be a specific protection for the ecological interest of the old Houghton Regis chalk pit and a local visitor centre will be established if shown it can be viably managed. Other open areas will be defined for specific purposes through the master planning process.
- 4.16 The impacts to the water environment due to the sensitivity of the site, as it is underlain by a Principal Aquifer of the Upper Bedford Ouse Chalk groundwater body which is a Drinking Water Protected Area (DrWPA) and of good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) will be mitigated against.

5.0 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 Any planning application within the strategic allocation and areas associated with it will be required to demonstrate how it incorporates and positively responds to the following design principles.
- 5.2 Central Bedfordshire Council has published a Design Guide ⁹ which represents the Council's policy on the urban design aspects of development in its area. However, CBC recognises that this strategic allocation represents a development on a scale and in a location that is not specifically mentioned in the Design Guide and therefore there may be additional requirements. The Design Guide will be applied appropriately and flexibly.
- 5.3 Development proposals should value the historic town centres, heritage assets, villages, open spaces and the vernacular forms found there and aspire to including the best from those sources of inspiration, with a modern take to suit modern living requirements.
- 5.4 The potential to add value and variety by introducing modern and innovative design will be encouraged provided that it does not compromise the general intent of the above statement. This particularly applies to new commercial and community facilities development
- 5.5 A wide range of residential densities is expected. There will be a requirement to provide lower density traditional family houses reflecting an aspiration for generous private spaces and high

⁹ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategic-planning/urban-design.aspx>.

privacy standards. It is expected that housing of higher density will provide a choice of a wide range of housing types and tenures across the area. Higher density housing will be carefully located in areas that support the viability of local centres and public transport routes. There will be an expectation that planning applications will ensure through their design approach, the delivery of inclusive rather than an exclusive place.

- 5.6 The Framework Plan anticipates that each appropriate part of each neighbourhood will be designed using design codes to ensure that all land within the urban extension (including open spaces, greens and landscaped areas) is used efficiently, designed for a stated purpose, provide variety, has the ability to be properly and economically maintained for the long term and the public realm treatment is consistent between different places.
- 5.7 The Framework Plan will seek to preserve and enhance the heritage assets within and surrounding the site. Opportunities for enhancing heritage assets, such as improved management of Thorn Spring and the improvement of Houghton Hall Park will be encouraged.

6.0 INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT MITIGATION

- 6.1 To deliver the Houghton Regis North extension the following infrastructure will be required:
- 6.2 **The Critical Infrastructure** that must be provided to enable the strategic sites to commence includes; the A5 – M1 link road, the Woodside Connection and the diversion and replacement of strategic services associated with those roads.

6.3 **The Essential infrastructure** that must be provided for growth to be achieved in a timely and sustainable manner and to ensure existing and new communities are provided with the facilities considered necessary to allow development to progress includes:

- a) Education – improved and expanded secondary schools (new facilities will be required), new primary schools and enhanced existing primary schools where necessary. Provision will also be made for additional “early years” places.
- b) Healthcare – Any necessary facilities will be provided dependent upon a Health Impact Assessment that will be made in association with the outline planning applications.
- c) Leisure and recreation – a replacement sports centre at Kingsland Campus, new formal sports pitches and a network of informal recreational spaces.
- d) Community – combined service community facilities, (capable of being shared) for community hall use, library outreach facilities, hub for access to public services, health services, performance spaces and faith facilities.
- e) Open Space – parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural green space (including green corridors), informal open space, provision for children and young people (play areas), outdoor sport pitches and courts, allotments, a cemetery and community gardens.

- f) Strategic Landscaping – at the “gateway” points along the A5 – M1 link road corridor, along the southern arm of the Woodside Connection, for any necessary visual, noise or pollution mitigation, associated with water and green infrastructure features, associated with protected hedgerows and as focal points within the design of neighbourhoods.
- g) Affordable housing – There will be provision of affordable housing to a level commensurate with the scale of the development proposed and in accordance with the policies of Central Bedfordshire Council. Some consideration will be given to off-site provision if this can enhance the existing affordable housing provision with the Houghton Regis area.
- h) Employment – provision of 40 hectares of specifically allocated employment land, small scale employment generating uses appropriate to predominantly residential areas and training support through defined links with local colleges or similar employment training organisations (with particular emphasis on the construction skills associated with the needs of the urban extension).
- i) Other requirements needed to specifically mitigate the impacts of specific application proposals which emerge through the master planning and planning application process.

- j) New utilities infrastructure (electricity, gas, potable water and telecommunications including next generation broadband access¹⁰) will be extended into the proposed developments and installed throughout development phasing. Potential connection points will be determined with the incumbent utility providers which, in some cases may require offsite reinforcement and/or upgrades to their existing infrastructure to provide sufficient available capacity.
- k) An on-site foul drainage strategy will be developed to discharge foul flows into either the public foul sewerage system or directly to a Sewage Treatment Works (STW)¹¹. Flood risk management will also be considered in a strategic and integrated manner throughout the development of the site.
- l) Police – Subject to the assessment of need, the provision of policing facilities may arise.

6.4 Each planning application will be required to demonstrate that it is providing an acceptable mitigation package. Mitigation will take the form of one or more of:

1. On-site provision by developer;
2. Off-site mitigation by developer;
3. Transfer of land from developer to Central Bedfordshire Council;
4. Off-site financial contributions paid by the developer to CBC for it to deliver mitigation;

¹⁰ As set out in the emerging Development Strategy

¹¹ By means of a Sewer Requisition application, under S.98 of the Water Industry Act.

5. CBC pooling of contributions from several developers to use to mitigate wider impacts arising from several developments in combination.

6.5 CBC will not have an adopted Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule until April 2014. Therefore until that date, all mitigation, including financial contributions, associated with these will be negotiated for individual planning applications and secured through planning conditions and formal Planning Agreements¹² prior to April 2014. In negotiating the mitigation packages regard will be had to:

1. The National Planning Policy Framework;
2. The endorsed Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy or as replaced by the Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy.
3. The Luton Gateway Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Funding Study, dated 15 October 2010 and as updated by CBC.
4. The financial viability of development proposals.
5. Other material considerations that may emerge during the master planning and planning application process, including relevant GI Plans..

¹² AKA S106 Agreements or Planning Obligations.

7.0 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The Framework Plan is part of the process of public consultation on the Development Strategy which will take place for seven weeks over the summer period in 2012. The Framework Plan will be presented before the Central Bedfordshire Council Executive to seek approval for its use for Development Management purposes.
- 7.2 The implementation of the Framework Plan will be dependant of the following actions by organisations other than CBC. Firstly, it is expected that a decision to approve the implementation of the A5 – M1 link road will be announced by the Secretary of State for Transport towards the end of 2012. Secondly, it is expected that the principal developer of Site 1 will be making a planning application in the autumn of 2012 which is likely to be followed by other significant developers and landowners in the months and years following. These will involve pre-application consultations during the summer of 2012 and beyond and it is expected that those consultations will inform illustrative Master Plans that will be expected to follow the principles of this Framework Plan.
- 7.3 In addition, Central Bedfordshire Council will be designing and submitting for approval the planning applications necessary for the Woodside Connection and ancillary infrastructure. This has been determined to be a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) that will require

approval by the National Infrastructure Directorate of the Planning Inspectorate. It is anticipated that the first outline planning applications will be considered in 2014¹³.

- 7.4 As part of any approval of outline planning applications to deliver the expansion of Houghton Regis, there will be a requirement for detailed overarching and neighbourhood level Master Plans to be prepared throughout the development process. These will be expected to be in accordance with the Framework Plan.

- 7.5 The development of the Houghton Regis North strategic allocation is expected to take place over a period of 20 years and possibly beyond. Therefore the developments will need to be phased in a consistent and efficient manner. This will be determined at the later master planning stages.

¹³ The decision date will be dependant upon timing set by the Secretary of State if he/she decides to “call-in” the planning applications.