

Sandy Town Council Planning Concept Statement

A Response to Central Bedfordshire's Local Plan Consultation

Introduction

This response deals with Central Bedfordshire Council's Call for Sites results, which form part of the its Local Plan development. The response deals only with Sandy specific sites and the Town Council's position on future development.

The response sets out the principles and context for a future vision of Sandy through planned and sustainable growth, which must meet the needs of the community and provide added value to Sandy. Site specific development in line with Central Bedfordshire Council's call for sites is addressed and preferred areas of growth highlighted.

It must be stressed that considering the town's constraints and pressures the Town Council strongly believes that Sandy is not in a position to develop further and the Council's primary stance is that there should be no additional development. Focus should be on creating new communities within Central Bedfordshire instead. The Council accepts that CBC is under pressure to provide 5 year housing land supply in its Local Plan. As such this response details the Council's preference in regards to sites. However, it ultimately believes that sustainable development will be extremely difficult to achieve. With that in mind it is crucial that any growth is sensitively and cohesively planned.

The Case for No Development

The council has reviewed potential sites for development and considered their impact. Later in this document the potential benefits of developing sites are stated. However, overall the positives for development in Sandy are limited and it is the Council's position that there should be no housing allocation to the town as it will result in overdevelopment.

Sandy is in a unique position as its growth is limited by physical boundaries. Development is limited by the rail to the east, flood plains to the South and West, and the A1 to the west, while development to the north would create an unbalanced town with little cohesiveness to the existing settlement.

Sandy has been subject to smaller piecemeal developments over the years. These have added to the strain placed upon its services without bringing the required investment. Sandy's health care, road infrastructure, parking and congestion, along with its relationship to the A1 are all currently overburdened which will be compounded by any development and ultimately will not function sufficiently enough to support a well planned community.

The Town Council believes Sandy is unable to support any housing development in the Local Plan and Central Bedfordshire Council should use the creation of new settlements to reach the required housing numbers and relieve existing settlements of the pressure placed upon them.

Sandy is still hampered by the uncertainty around the East West Rail route and changes to the A1. These will have a large and important impact on the town. It is impossible to appropriately plan for Sandy's future without clarity on the East West Rail Sandy Corridor and the A1 road structure. A decision must be unrushed and carefully considered.

The Local Plan should not allocate housing to Sandy until the future of the East West Rail and A1 are fully understood.

A unique town with unique considerations

A Portrait of Sandy

Before CBC can make any conclusions on Sandy's future growth and development it must first understand Sandy in its current state; its assets, its weaknesses, and its constraints. Sandy has a lot to offer its community and the Council recognises that these assets could be expanded and enhanced. However the town faces existing pressures which must be addressed if sustainable growth is to be achieved.

Town Assets

Social/Cultural



- People who live and / or work in Sandy, adding to its varied community, are one of its greatest assets and the wide range of community groups and other organisations must be consulted with and listened to if we are to achieve a shared vision for the future of Sandy.
- Health and social care facilities are suffering in Sandy and must be protected, expanded and enhanced if Sandy is to continue to offer its community the facilities it requires.

Physical/Environmental



- The town includes a central market place and high street.
- Green spaces, particularly The Riddy nature reserve and The Pinnacle.
- Sandy is well placed for transport connections, with the A1 and rail line, both of which could be enhanced or changed for the benefit of the town and future growth.

Economic



- The town has a mix of employment but this could be enhanced if properly planned and linked with East West Rail development. Enhancing growth in local employment skills and physical premises through extension/relocation is important.
- There is a variety of eating and drinking establishments, as well as independent retailers in the town; the core of the town centre should be protected and enhanced.
- Tourism is a recognised asset for any town and Sandy's link with the RSPB and proximity to walking and cycling routes must be encouraged and supported.

Sandy in Numbers

In 2013 the estimated population of Sandy was 13,100	2 Chemists
In 2015 the number of dwellings was 5,620	3 Supermarkets
4 Lower Schools	2 Nursing Homes
1 Middle School	4 Public Houses
1 Upper School	2 Chinese Restaurant
Two Doctors surgeries	3 Indian Restaurants
Two Dental Surgeries	1 Italian Restaurant
1 Bank	1 Diner
3 Sheltered Accommodation units	1 Library
1 Sports Centre	6 Play areas/recreation areas
1 Petrol Station	1 Free Town Centre Car Park
4 Churches	1 Hotel



Do the numbers add up? Can Sandy's existing facilities and infrastructure support an increased population?

The pressure on Sandy's infrastructure can not be underestimated, both in terms of facilities and road infrastructure. Until issues such as the level of health care available and access to and from the town are addressed Sandy is not in a position to develop sustainably .

Development Principles

The size, scale and pace of any development must be carefully managed through the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. Central Bedfordshire Council has acknowledged Sandy is a special case and the Council now has an opportunity to protect and enhance the community through careful long term planning, as opposed to detrimental significant increases over a short period of time.

The Council would like to see Central Bedfordshire Council consider creating new communities and avoiding overdevelopment of Sandy. However, the Council does recognise the pressure on Central Bedfordshire Council to find housing land and any development coming forward as a result of this must follow well established development principles to ensure any benefits to the community.

What are Sandy Town Council's desired development principles?



- Growth must complement the town, reinforcing the strong local identity of Sandy.
- Development must benefit and add value to physical, social and cultural assets and strengthen the town's economy.
- Development must be sustainable and integrate with existing infrastructure, providing amenities, jobs and housing for local people.
- Sandy needs to maintain its historic centre and development north risks detracting from this. The north could take development in the form of commercial and industrial, provided improvements were made to the road infrastructure and access to the A1.
- Development to the east of Sandy would encourage growth around its existing centre and for easy pedestrian and cycle links to the station and central shops.

Development Design and Life in Sandy



- New housing must meet local needs relating to age, family, social connection and affordability.
- Health services and education are fundamental to the future sustainability of the town and development must support the protection and enhancement of these facilities.
- Developers should engage with stakeholders on design principles to ensure a complimentary mix of styles.
- The scale of future development is to be in keeping with the character and sense of place of an historic market town.
- Developments must enhance the town's cultural offering and meet the needs of all age groups.
- Developments must connect informal and recreational spaces with reference to the Sandy Green Wheel.

Links and Accessibility



- Accessibility into and out of Sandy must be improved by addressing the access to and from the A1 and recognising access principles relating to cycle and pedestrian routes.
- Develop and improve cycle and pedestrian links across the town, including to the town centre, station and recreational areas.
- Future developments should address the infrastructure network and improve accessibility to surrounding areas, to and from local amenities and enhancing roads and walking/cycling facilities.
- If a development is to have a detrimental effect on parking mitigation measures should be identified and funded.

Development in response to Central Bedfordshire's Call for Sites Results

The Council has reviewed the sites which have come forward and its conclusions are detailed below. The Council's position is that Sandy should not be further developed because of the unique constraints it faces. The comments below are secondary to that position, but address areas for potential development if Sandy is allocated housing in the Local Plan.

A Preferred Direction of Development

The Council has reviewed the sites put forward by developers/landowners, gathered public opinion and considered the most sustainable ways in which Sandy could develop if the Local Plan allocated housing sites to the town.

West

The west of Sandy is unsuitable for housing growth due to its position within the flood plain and the negative impact any development would have on the already congested A1. Development would impact on the ecology and environment of the river Ivel and nature reserve. Developing west of the A1 would create a disjointed town with no interaction with the settlement.

Housing development to the west of Sandy should be discounted.

North

Housing development to the north of Sandy would expand the town away from its centre, creating a disjointed and uncoordinated community. Housing development to the north will create a dormitory town with poor connectivity and relationship to the existing settlement.

The road network to the north of the town and the A1 can not handle the increased vehicle movement and congestion that would be created as a result of commuter traffic flow.

The land to the north of the town is an attractive area for commercial and industrial development. While the Council would not want this to detract from the town centre some limited development could provide a shop for the north of Sandy and commercial/industrial units to encourage job growth. In the long term the current industrial estate may migrate to a new northern site, freeing up more land for central housing development and reducing the impact HGV movement currently places on the town, keeping it away from the main housing sites. Any development that occurs north will need to address access issues to the A1 by road improvement schemes.

East

Housing development to the east is considered preferable as it would create a balanced town and still offer significant housing numbers to generate the contributions needed for improved infrastructure. Development of the site would open up additional green spaces to the community and provide easy access to the train station and town centre, encouraging the town's economy rather than detracting from it. Pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the town would be easy to establish.

However, there would be increased congestion and access issues which any developer would need to address. This must include the junction at the Swaden/Potton road, which would not be able to handle the increased traffic a housing development would place on the road. There is scope for improvement of this junction if site NLP365 were to be incorporated into a development or treated as a stand alone project for much needed safety improvement work.

Swaden

This an area of historical importance and Roman archaeology. The site has massive landscape value and acts as a buffer for further development south. Due to its historical and landscape value the town Council do not wish to see this area developed at all.

Working with Central Bedfordshire Council and Developers for a Sustainable Future

The Town Council recognises that development can result in benefits for the town from investment into infrastructure. Regardless of what development may or may not come, Sandy is in need of investment and the Local Plan should clearly identify required investment.

Although the Town Council has stated its preference that no development should take place in Sandy in light of the difficulties in achieving sustainability in growth, the Council is aware that the Local Plan may identify areas of the town for development. As such the Council will always communicate and work with CBC and potential developers to ensure Sandy gets the investment and benefit it needs.

What a Developer Could Add to Enhance Sandy

Sandy Town Council has carried out consultation with the public over the last few months. As a result, it has catalogued assets which residents identified as lacking in Sandy and which any new development should address through planning obligations.

- New Medical Centre
- Allotment Site/s
- Swimming Pool
- Separate Leisure Centre
- Shops
- Care Home
- Community Hub
- Enhanced Children's Play Areas
- Cultural Performance Space
- Green Wheel Development
- Museum
- Indoor Skate park
- Family Pub (Part of Development)
- Improved Road Network
- Improved Car Parking
- Improved Access to A1
- Improved Transport Links

In Summary.....

- Sandy's physical and geographical constraints make sustainable development extremely difficult to achieve and as such the Council would like the Local Plan to acknowledge this and Sandy's unique position within Central Bedfordshire, *allocating no housing development to the town.*
- New communities within Central Bedfordshire would be the Council's preferred solution to housing supply, taking the pressure away from existing settlements would be and avoiding overdevelopment.
- Any decision on housing development in Sandy should be delayed until there is clarity on the route of the East West Rail link and changes to the A1.
- Sandy's current infrastructure is struggling and can not incorporate additional growth without significant investment and careful planning. Much of this will need to be agreed and in place prior to occupation of dwellings if sustainability is to be achieved.
- If the Local Plan does identify areas for development the Council believes this should be on the east of Sandy, creating a more balanced extension to the town around its centre and opening up more green space for the community.
- The Council has identified the north of Sandy as an area for some commercial and industrial growth. This could potentially fit in with the development of the East West Rail link and keep HGV traffic away from the main housing areas. This can also open up the potential for employment growth.
- Any development will need to address access and the pressure additional vehicle movement will place on the road network and the A1 junctions.
- Swaden should not be developed due to its historical and landscape value.
- Sandy has seen considerable new housing in recent years, through infill and redevelopment, without any commensurate improvement to social infrastructure. It is essential that any new development addresses the shortfalls identified above.