

Comments to PPWG - 22 June 2017

My comments relate to the Uttlesford Transport Study (Agenda Item 3) and to the many published claims made by Bidwells in promoting the Great Chesterford site on behalf of the landowners.

A Bidwells claims

The nub of Bidwells case is that science clusters in S Cambs **could** be accessible to the site by walking, cycling, rail, public bus services as well as the possibility of private bus services, which would thereby encourage sustainable methods of transport.

Measures to achieve these aims include (i) the creation of a network of foot and cycle paths; (ii) the need to make Great Chesterford station a stop for semi-fast trains; and (iii) transformation of the station into a transport hub by linking it to the Settlement by enhancing local bus service Citi7.

As regards road transport, Bidwells June 2016 transport infrastructure appraisal states at paragraph 6.1.5 that “for the purposes of this document a more balanced future modal share **is assumed** to eventually derive from national and local policies as to prevent an over-analysis of the highway dimension at the expense of sustainable modes”.

Bidwells estimated costs of such limited infrastructure improvements as it has identified (which apparently includes one new roundabout on the B184 at Park Road) have been adopted as they stand by UDC’s Consultants, Malin Associates, in its Economic Viability Study of the Great Chesterford proposal - subject, however, to the critical proviso that a full transport assessment of these figures will be required.

B Uttlesford Transport Study - Agenda item 3

Members may find it helpful to have in front of them the Agenda paper as I will comment briefly on different parts of the text.

Paragraph 6.4 of the paper recognises that long-distance commuting has implications for the local transport infrastructure, and that most travel is by car and use of some sustainable modes is negligible. Paragraph 6.6, final paragraph, notes that there is a requirement that new Settlements must minimise new trips by car, and that residual traffic impacts still need to be assessed.

So it is immediately conceded by UDC that current sustainable travel modes are largely negligible, and that traffic impacts of developing the Great Chesterford site remain to be assessed. So much for the evidence based determination on the basis of which sites are to be included in the draft Local Plan. Bidwells assumptions about sustainable travel are simply adopted without question by UDC, paragraph 6.9.2 of the paper stating that delivery of Great Chesterford is “subject to delivery of successful modal shift measures and more detailed Transport Assessment work”.

In fact, the paper also contains serious errors of fact which further vitiate the quality of the research that is supposed to inform the decision to include the Great Chesterford site:

* first, the statement in paragraph 6.11.3 that “Great Chesterford would use junction M11 J9 rather than J8” makes no sense. There is no access north at J9, so rat-runs through local villages etc to the M11/J10 will continue. It must also be asked why no attempt has been made to factor in improvements to J9 when prospective sites in Little Dunmow and Takeley are to be specifically excluded in paragraphs 6.7.9 and 6.7.10 from further consideration because “new junctions onto the A120...would be challeng[ing] to deliver”?

* second, the claim in paragraph 6.7.12 that “Great Chesterford has good access to the Strategic Road Network” is only partially correct as regards the M11 travelling South, and the A11 to which there will be no access except via the Stump Cross roundabouts.

* third, the statement in the same paragraph that “Great Chesterford has good access to walking and cycling facilities and is close to a rail station” has been lifted verbatim from paragraph 5.2.14 of WYG’s June 2017 Addendum Transport Study Report is simply untrue; the facts are:

- Great Chesterford has no dedicated cycling facilities. The closest is National Cycle Route 11 which passes behind Littlebury and enters Ickleton coming down Coploe Hill before heading into Whittlesford via Duxford. This fact could have been readily confirmed had the transport consultants bothered to consult the Cambridge to Saffron Walden Cycle Map available free of charge from the Tourist Office in Saffron Walden;

- as regards footpaths, Great Chesterford is connected by hard surface but uneven and ill-maintained paths only so far as Ickleton and Little Chesterford. There is no connection to Littlebury that is safe, Essex County Council providing on safety grounds a bus for children coming to school in Great Chesterford even though the distances between the two villages is within minimum walking distances. Hinxton cannot readily be reached by pedestrians because of the need to circumnavigate the A11 and associated roundabouts at Stump Cross;

- finally, the 2km distance between the station and the centre of the settlement is such that Bidwells envisages that frequent bus services will be required to transport intending passengers.

C Conclusions

The decision before you is to be taken against the backdrop of the 2012 South Cambs District Council officers’ recommendation that a new settlement at Great Chesterford should be resisted on a variety of grounds, not least that the site “has key weaknesses with no credible public transport link with Cambridge or other settlements in the M11 corridor”.

It is plain as a pikestaff that even today the necessary level of work to establish the viability of the proposal has not been undertaken. It is also clear from the various submissions from Bidwells and today’s Agenda Item 3 that the viability of Great Chesterford is based almost entirely on the wholly speculative premise that walking, cycling and availability of enhanced bus and rail services can replace car use to such an extent that the existing road network, in particular the B184, can cope with the additional traffic that the Settlement will generate for Saffron Walden and elsewhere.

Bidwells promotes the Settlement site on the assumption that local and national policies will deliver a more balanced future modal share. UDC accepts that successful delivery is dependent on modal shift measures but has yet to specify, let alone cost, them. And Malins’ view is that Great Chesterford is only financially viable on the basis of a full transport assessment which remains to be undertaken.

One final point. The latest transport study contains detailed information about roads in South Cambs, and the many traffic problems that afflict Saffron Walden. It has nothing to say about present and future traffic conditions on the stretch of the B184 between Stump Cross and Saffron Walden - the road most directly affected - account taken of size of the Settlement, and the proposed substantial developments at Wellcome Genome and the Agrihub proposal at Hinxton.

For these and other reasons previously notified to UDC, Great Chesterford Parish Council considers that the site is neither sustainable or viable, and should not be included in the forthcoming Local Plan.

David Hall

