3.0 constraints & opportunities
3.0 Constraints & Opportunities

There are a number of natural and man made constraints within the site. The summary diagram illustrates the foremost of these. Please refer to the Environmental Statement for a more in depth description of these.

3.1 Existing Constraints

Ecology & Hedgerows

3.1.1 There is a network of hedgerows present throughout the site. They are often gappy and are typically of the Hawthorn species. A number of species have been recorded on site including water voles, badgers and golden plover. Where appropriate hedgerows will be incorporated into open space and potential effects on local wildlife have been identified and where appropriate, mitigation measures have either been incorporated into scheme design or put forward as recommendations to be implemented through conditions of planning consent.

Flooding and Drainage

3.1.5 The site is split into two catchment areas, draining to the west via the Ouzel Brook and the east via Houghton Brook. The majority of the site is flood zone 1 where development should be focused. Areas of flood zone 2 and 3 are present around the Brooks. The Environment Agency identified a site for a potential flood storage area in the south east corner of the site around Houghton Brook. This part of the site is within the Environment Agencies strategy for the area and the proposed development will not preclude their ability to make it a flood storage area for Luton.

Heritage

3.1.6 Baseline data for the heritage assessment of the Application Site was obtained through a staged programme of archaeological evaluation comprising: desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and trial trenching. The scope of this was agreed in advance with the CBC Archaeologist.

3.1.7 The majority of the significant below-ground heritage assets identified by the evaluation of the Application Site comprise archaeological remains of Iron Age to Roman date. They represent settlement in the form of farmstead sites, set within a wider hinterland characterised by trackways and fields, and other more isolated occupational evidence. The most notable exception to this is the possible Calcutt moated site, which may be medieval in date.

3.1.8 The farmstead sites are of local to regional significance and have the potential to address a number of regional research priorities. Construction activities, particularly groundworks, associated with this type of development are typically highly destructive of sub-surface archaeological remains. It can, therefore, be anticipated that a condition will be attached to the outline permission, requiring the agreement and implementation of a scheme of archaeological resource management. The nature of the work will be determined by the significance of the affected heritage assets and the severity of the effect of the proposed development. For example, for the more significant archaeological sites it is likely to comprise further investigation in advance of construction.

Topography

3.1.2 The ridgeline of the Chiltern Hills dominates the site to the north. High points are found within the site to the north east and southern urban edge. The site rises gently from south to north on the eastern side of the site and undulates in the central and western areas of the site. A landscape and visual impact assessment has determined the most appropriate height for built form at high points within the site.

Noise

3.1.3 Noise mitigation will be needed to deal with potential traffic noise from the M1 and the A5 - M1 Link Road.

Utilities

3.1.4 There are a number of overhead power lines throughout the site - the dominant one running along the existing eastern urban edge, will be treated with a 25m buffer either side where residential development is not appropriate. A trunk water main and gas main also run along the eastern boundary and these will be protected within an easement strip.

3.1.9 The proposed development may also have minor adverse effects on the setting of heritage assets in the vicinity of the Application Site, particularly the two listed buildings in the hamlet of Bidwell. These will be addressed through controls on construction activities and through landscaping of the western edge of the Application Site.
Fig 3.1 Summary of Constraints Diagram
3.2 Opportunities

3.2.1 An urban design analysis of the Site was undertaken to understand the constraints and opportunities which development could bring to HRN1 and the wider area. The opportunities generally fall into one of three categories: landscape, built form or movement, and this is reflected in the key to the opportunities plan, right. A brief summary of the opportunities is given below and shown in more detail at fig. 3.2.

Landscape

3.2.2 Although much of the site is farmland and paddocks, there are a number of existing features, such as the Ouzel and Houghton Brooks, which could be incorporated into the masterplan to create a mature and interesting landscape setting from the outset. Properly integrated as part of a green infrastructure network, these natural assets could become attractive recreation and wildlife corridors that contribute to the development’s unique sense of place. Additional green spaces, located to benefit as many people as possible within walking distance, will enhance the overall network and combined with framed views and vistas within and through the development will help to make HRN1 feel connected with nature and the landscape beyond.

Built form

3.2.3 The opportunity to create a new front door and new public face for Houghton Regis is one of the strongest opportunities at HRN1. The long edge to the proposed A5-M1 Link Road creates a fantastic potential to create a new welcoming urban edge with the potential to ‘rebrand’ the town in the eyes of visitors and residents so that presents a new, confident face to the world. Integrating the existing built form with the new through sensitive treatment of density, massing and block forms will help to remove the potential for a ‘them and us’ scenario. Careful location of land uses to make the most of the site’s aspect will make the best use of all parts of the site.

Movement

3.2.4 Aside from the benefits brought by the WSC and A5-M1 Link Road, the development at HRN1 will bring further benefits to residents by creating a network of safe and pleasant streets and paths between existing and new destinations. A number of new gateways into the development are possible; most prominently Junction 11a which will act as the strategic front door to Houghton. For most residents Sundon Road will feel like the main gateway, linking into the east and west sides of HRN1 and creating a direct connection with the new mixed-use area and education campus. Integrating with the wider PROW and cycle network will anchor the development in the landscape, and a connected network of naturally calmed streets and spaces will create pleasant, walkable neighbourhoods.

Opportunity to ensure direct links to proposed pedestrian bridges over the A5-M1 Link Road to overcome barrier effect.

Opportunity to create recreation and ecology areas incorporating the Ouzel Brook.

Green connectivity for pedestrian and recreational movement and wildlife corridors and opportunity to create habitats.

Opportunity for a positive relationship between the edge of development and the wider countryside.

Potential for good pedestrian and recreational connections to villages and countryside tracks.

Opportunity to link neighbourhoods via meandering pedestrian network through formal and informal green space.

Land in close proximity to strategic road network is most suitable for non-residential uses.

Opportunity to frame views to the Thiodweg ridge and wider countryside.

Ensure Bidwell village remains a visually and physically separate by providing a green buffer.

Opportunity for residential development that benefits from views to the countryside.

Opportunity for framed views towards the new development from the new motorway junction.

Opportunity to create good connections to Houghton Regis town centre.

Opportunity to create a recreation space that is central to existing and new neighbourhoods, linking the two.

Opportunity to create an education and leisure hub in the vicinity of Kingsland Campus and new district centre that is central to new and existing neighbourhoods.

Opportunity for framed views towards the Downs.

Opportunity to create recreation area, ecology corridors and habitat creation with a focus on Houghton Brook.

Opportunity to create attractive section of National Cycle Route through new green space.

Opportunity for a coherent pedestrian network that connects existing green spaces with anticipated destinations.

Opportunity to connect to existing road network and bus link.

Opportunity to round off the existing development edge.

Opportunity for new gateway to Houghton Regis.

Opportunity to create a mixed use area in a convenient and accessible location.
4.0 vision & concept

HRN1 | Design & Access Statement
4.0 Vision & Concept

Our Vision for Houghton Regis is that the town be extended in such a way that both existing and future residents benefit from an improved environment and the investment such a large scale development can bring.

4.1 Vision

4.1.1 We see the existing town growing outwards towards the countryside whilst at the same time the countryside extends into the town so that the urban form and natural landscape work hand in hand to create a harmonious and balanced townscape that can be enjoyed by all. Our Vision encompasses the design of neighbourhoods, economic regeneration and improved social well-being, such that the investment in new infrastructure, open spaces and homes will improve the quality of life of all residents of Houghton Regis, not just those who are to come. Ultimately we see the Houghton Regis of the future as a more sustainable, desirable and liveable place as a result of development at HRN1.

4.1.2 Our Vision sees Houghton Regis turn its face outwards, taking advantage of the opportunities that a new gateway from the M1 presents. Taking local villages and towns as precedents, as well as inspiration from attractive and successful towns further afield, we envisage HRN1 as the new front door to Houghton Regis with the new development wrapping around the old to build a positive edge for the town with a strong identity that addresses the natural landscape and presents a welcoming face to the world.

4.1.3 Our vision builds on ‘the 5 C’s’ envisaged for HRN1 in CBC’s framework document (see chapter 5 of this document), and introduces a 6th C – ‘Countryside’. The landscape setting will be a defining feature of HRN1; the natural brooks and historic hedgerows forming an attractive green network within the new neighbourhoods. Green fingers will extend from the new urban edge into the existing town to connect with existing green spaces, helping to embed the whole community in the great outdoors. Parks and play spaces will enable children to play and explore safely, activities for older children will encourage healthy, active lifestyles and attractive outdoor spaces will enable adults to meet and socialise.

4.1.4 We envisage a development that, far from being a one dimensional housing estate, will help to turn Houghton Regis into a thriving, welcoming place for all the community to enjoy. Our Vision aims to fully integrate the proposed land uses and urban form with the existing town so that the new residents will genuinely come to feel part of Houghton Regis’ strong existing community. There will be no buffer between the existing edge and the new development to ensure a seamless interface which avoids emphasising the boundaries between old and new. Maximising opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport connections between all of the neighbourhoods will encourage the whole community to come together and experience HRN1.

4.1.5 HRN1 will be genuinely mixed-use, with walkable neighbourhoods that provide for residents’ daily needs without the need to resort to the car. These neighbourhoods will not only be attractive in their own right with a mix of high quality new homes, but will also seamlessly integrate with their neighbouring communities to bring a host of regeneration benefits to existing residents of the town. Investment will bring new employment opportunities for full and part time workers in skilled and unskilled jobs, a broader retail offer, more schools and health facilities and improved leisure and community venues. Activity will centre around a conveniently located hub close to convenient public transport and cycling routes that will complement existing facilities at Bedford Square to avoid competing with existing businesses.

4.2 Key Structuring Principles of the Masterplan

4.2.1 Concept Design

The design concept for HRN1 is derived from a careful consideration of the site and its surroundings to achieve a sensitive, contextual response that works within the site’s constraints and makes the most of the opportunities presented by the landscape setting, existing facilities and planned future infrastructure. Analysis of the site identified a number of core objectives that new development should achieve;

- A new, welcoming urban edge,
- A responsive and attractive landscape framework,
- Integration with the existing urban structure and public transport routes,
- A sympathetic townscape with a strong identity,
- A mix of land uses that provide for residents’ daily needs,
- Provision for biologically rich and diverse landscape.

4.2.2 Our approach to accommodating these objectives is explained and illustrated in the following chapter:
Green fingers
Linkages with town centre
Schools
Public transport routes
Neighbourhood centre
M1
Existing town centre

Fig 4.1 Early Concept Diagram for HRN1
Create a new, welcoming urban edge

Houghton Regis appears to discourage visitors with a lack of clear gateways and an urban edge that turns its back on the countryside beyond. Development at HRN1 should reverse this by creating a new urban edge that embraces its setting and looks outwards to the world with confident, high quality design. The new edge should be visually rich and vary in character along its length; at times presenting a strong, continuously defined edge and at times allowing the countryside to penetrate through a softer, more fragmented development form.

A major new gateway from the M1 should encourage people to visiting Houghton Regis by announcing the town’s presence through high quality landscape and building design. Smaller, lower key gateways from the Bedford Road and Sundon Road should follow a similar formula with landmark buildings signalling the entrance to a place worthy of exploration.

- Treat the countryside edge as a positive design element with outward facing buildings.
- Vary the design and composition of the edge along its length.
- Use taller buildings at gateway points and to emphasise views.
- Allow the countryside to flow through the edge at key locations.

Extend and enhance the town’s green grid

Houghton Regis already benefits from a fairly well connected green grid of open spaces within its urban form. Development at HRN1 should extend and enhance this network, using the site’s topography and natural features to create an attractive and connected green grid that visually integrates the new buildings with the landscape and provides a variety of open spaces for people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive.

- Align the green grid with existing public rights of way and desire lines so that wherever possible they retain their countryside character.
- Create SUDs and swales within the green grid to manage water sustainably.
- Create linked green spaces, parks and other outdoor leisure activities at key intersections.
- Allow for the proposed EA flood storage area (for Luton) as a wetland park and recreation area.
- Create new wildlife habitat areas to encourage biodiversity and provide a variety of outdoor experience and new, well connected habitats.
4.2.7 Houghton Regis is surrounded by attractive towns and villages that demonstrate the local vernacular in their spatial qualities, building styles and use of materials. The development at HRN1 should respect this local vernacular, using materials, building forms and elements in a contemporary way to create a townscape that is appropriate to its context.

4.2.8 The development should identify broad character areas based on their location within the site and their relationship with the landscape to create variety in the street scene without resorting to pastiche. Landmark buildings that differ from their neighbours by virtue of their form, mass, scale or materials, or a combination of these, should be used in key locations to create a legible environment that people can easily find their way around.

- Identify character areas based on the site and its setting,
- Identify main gateways and landmarks,
- Identify a broad materials palette to govern site-wide design,
- Encourage authentic architecture that avoids pastiche,
- Create open and framed views towards immediate and long distance landscape features.

4.2.9 From our discussions with existing residents, it is clear that Houghton Regis supports some strong and active communities; however there is little interaction between some of these. People also talked to us about their concerns that new development will create a “them and us” situation with boundaries between the old and new being strongly defined in peoples’ minds so that they won’t venture out of their own local area. Development at HRN1 should aim to integrate the existing population with the new so that everyone can benefit from the new opportunities development will bring:

- Design walkable neighbourhoods with facilities located at the centre of a 10 minute walking distance,
- Provide a mix of private and affordable family housing,
- Provide inclusive, accessible and flexible community facilities at the heart of each new neighbourhood,
- Design a mixed use ‘urban’ quarter with retail, leisure and food store close to Kingsland Campus where it will act as a hub for new and existing residents,
- Encourage community interaction through the provision of shared community infrastructure between existing and new residents,
- Encourage exploration by creating a network of walks and cycleways that link the existing town to the countryside through HRN1,
- Ensure streets and spaces are overlooked by development to reduce crime and the fear of crime.
4.2.10 New development at HRN1 has the potential to help the existing town’s regeneration by bringing new employment, education, leisure and social opportunities to the area. The town suffers high unemployment and residents would benefit from new skilled and unskilled job opportunities development will bring.

4.2.11 In terms of education, existing primary schools are improving but are at capacity and there is no secondary school within walking distance for many children. There is a feeling among residents that despite being recently refurbished, existing leisure facilities are inadequate and they particularly miss the swimming pool that used to be available at Kingsland Campus. Development at HRN1 should address these issues by:

- Locating the employment area adjacent to the M1 where it will benefit from improved accessibility and act as a noise buffer for the housing.
- Locating the secondary school close to the community hub to reinforce its function as a resource for the whole community.
- Co-locating new leisure facilities with the secondary school in the mixed use area where they will be easily accessible by all residents, both new and existing.
- Locating primary schools at the heart of the new neighbourhoods so that most children can walk to them within five minutes.
- Co-locating community and small scale retail with the primary schools for ease of access and to reduce trips.

4.2.12 The measure of success of development at HRN1 will be how well it integrates with the existing urban form and how easily people can move around it. Strong connections between key destinations such as schools, shops and places of employment are essential and should be put in place as soon as possible to encourage good transport habits from the outset. A connected grid of streets that provides a choice of routes is preferred, and attention must be paid to all modes of transport, with greener alternatives prioritised. The movement network at HRN1 should be designed to:

- Create a network of safe, direct and convenient bus, cycle and walking routes.
- Locate pedestrian crossings on desire lines.
- Extend existing bus services into the site and provide new more convenient bus services.
- Integrate existing PRoWs wherever possible.
- Create a number of car free routes through the green grid.
- Reroute the National Cycleway 6 from Kestrel Way through the site to create a safer, more attractive route.
4.3 Illustrative Masterplan

4.3.1 This illustrative masterplan demonstrates one way, but not the only way, of designing the site. It takes on board the concept design principles and the development parameters and interprets these to deliver an attractive, mixed-use development that is in keeping with its setting. The main design features are indicated in the key.
Green Infrastructure

1. Ouzel Park (incorporating some or all of: multi-functional play area, formal pitches, pavillion, park, community gardens, ecological and natural landscape corridors and habitats, cycle and pedestrian routes)

2. Town Park (incorporating some or all of: formal park, multi-functional play area, formal pitches and games areas, pavillion or community facility, ecological habitat and cycle and pedestrian routes)

3. Wetland Park (incorporating some or all of: wetland area, wet woodland, pond, wildlife habitat, ecological corridor, formal pitches and games areas, pavillion, park, cycleway and pedestrian pathways)

4. Northern Linear Green (incorporating some or all of: wildlife and ecological corridor, swale, pond, multi-functional play area, community gardens, ecological and natural landscape areas, formal park area, pedestrian and cycle routes and man-made landform)

Other Uses

5. Mixed Use Area (incorporating residential flats and houses, food store, retail space, cafe, business units, health and community facilities)

6. Local Centre (incorporating flexible community facility, small shops or business units and cafe)

7. Employment

8. Primary School

9. Secondary School and shared leisure facility

Movement & Access

10. Potential access point

11. New bus route

12. Potential bus gate

13. Crossing to a new link road

Children’s play areas catering for all age groups includes a mixture of play equipment and multi-functional games areas. Exact location and function will be determined at detail design stage.
4.4 Illustrative Masterplan Alternative Scenarios

4.4.1 The site analysis undertaken and design evolution of the Masterplan identifies two areas where, because of technical constraints and delivery matters, the design team had to look in more detail at variations on the proposals.

4.4.2 The outline application includes for provision of a 9 Form Entry Secondary School and Leisure Facility within the application site. The location of this facility has been discussed with CBC, and the design team was asked to explore the potential for locating the school and leisure facility with existing facilities on the Kingsland Campus. This is shown in Fig 4.11 (below left).

4.4.3 Existing overhead powerlines and pylons present on the eastern part of the site have the potential to remain as technical constraints to development in that area. Fig 4.12 (below right) illustrates one way an alternative design could be delivered that allows the pylons and power lines to remain in-situ.

Alternative Masterplan Scenario 1: Secondary School and Leisure Facility off site.

4.4.4 Figure 4.11 shows how the area occupied by the Secondary School and Leisure Facility can be developed if these uses are located off site, maybe on the Kingsland Campus (CBC).

- The area will be developed as mainly residential in accordance with the Character type this area falls within (The Long Ridings, see Chapter 7 of this document).
- There will be no principal changes to access or main road network for the alternative scheme. The area will have increased accessibility due to the added network of streets and public spaces that is associated with residential development.
- There will be no principal changes to green connectivity or landscaped routes through this part of the site. The green corridor provides connectivity with adjacent green infrastructure/recreation areas.

Alternative Masterplan Scenario 2: Development with pylons and power lines retained

- The residential, mixed use and employments areas will be developed with limitations to the extent of built form development derived from stand-off distances to power lines. The detailed design and configuration of development will be worked up in subsequent Area Masterplan or Reserved matters Applications.
- There will be no principal change to access or the road network servicing this area although the alignment of routes may differ.
- The principle of a green connection from north to south remains with this design option. The alignment and configuration of the green space will be different due to the restriction the power line corridors impose on the land.

4.4.5 Plans showing both on and off site school scenarios were presented at the public exhibition.
Approximate location of viewpoint

Fig 4.13 Indicative bird’s-eye view of the site from the north of the illustrative masterplan.
5.0 design evolution
5.0 Design Evolution

This chapter explains how the proposals for HRN1 have evolved from the earliest framework plans through to the illustrative masterplan that accompanies this application. It takes the form of a timeline highlighting the various stages of consultation and how feedback at each stage has informed the emerging plans and should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

5.1 Illustrative Masterplan Evolution & Community Engagement Process

5.1.1 HRDC has evolved the masterplan for HRN1 over a number of years and at the heart of their approach has been a process of engagement and consultation with local people and stakeholders. Most recently, design work produced by HRDC which illustrated ideas from the public workshops held in June 2012, were presented at public exhibitions in Bedford Square in July 2012. Ongoing meetings with local Councillors and presentations to nearby Towns and Parishes have also informed the illustrative masterplan. The process and timeline is summarised below:

1. HRDC Framework Plan Document, June 2010

5.1.2 In the Framework Plan document Sites 1 and 2 are identified by the Joint Technical Committee, (JTC) as being suitable to accommodate proposed growth in Central Bedfordshire. This allocation was endorsed by the Joint Technical Unit (JTU) as a proposed Site Specific Allocation (SSA) in the Draft Luton and South Bedfordshire Preferred Core Strategy. (See Fig. 5.1, right)

5.1.3 Site 1 is located to the east of the Bedford Road and Site 2 to the west. HRN1 is located within Site 1 of the framework plan.

5.1.4 The Framework Plan incorporates the design principles of the 5 C’s, outlined on the opposite page, setting out a vision for delivering high quality sustainable development on the site adhering to the principles of connectivity, community, climate, character and commerce.

5.1.5 Together, Sites 1 and 2 are deemed capable of accommodating an urban extension of 7,000 new homes with jobs, schools, shops, community facilities, transport connections, parks and open space.

2. Initial Concept Masterplan by Jon Rowland for HRDC - March 2011.

5.1.6 The Jon Rowland concept plan for HRDC applies quantums and overall land parcels to both Sites 1 and 2 of the Framework Plan. This masterplan starts to explore the relationship between the existing urban edge and the residential and mixed use proposals. (See Fig. 5.2, below). It also identifies land adjacent to the M1 as being the most suitable to accommodate employment and mixed use development.

5.1.7 Key components of the Jon Rowland concept plan:

- Supermarket
- Logistics warehouse
- Retail and leisure
- 7000 residential units
- Open space
- Education
CONNECTIVITY. A place with good transport connections and easy access to the places people visit as part of their everyday lives. We want to encourage the use of public transport, paths and cycleways.

At present Houghton Regis and Dunstable suffer from congestion and many people have to rely on private cars for their travel needs.

The government wants people to use trains, buses, cycles and their own feet more often than their cars. Proposed local improvements already include:

- Increasing the capacity of the A5 and M1;
- Providing good quality pedestrian and cycle networks;
- Creating areas of shared spaces to reduce vehicular dominance;
- Building a new road to link the A5 and M1;
- The proposed Woodside Connection; and building a ‘guided bus’ route.

COMMUNITY. Building a place where people want to live that allows for a good quality of life and sense of well being. We want to build good neighbourhoods not just houses.

People usually want to live in an area which has a mix of houses with plenty of good local facilities and jobs so they do not have to travel far for their everyday needs. The provision of a variety of uses and improved facilities will help ensure that the development will deliver regeneration to both new and existing residents.

We are intent on providing a mix of houses, which respond to the needs of the local community. We will also consider what size, type and style as well as providing community facilities, open space, and associated social infrastructure facilities.

CLIMATE. A place adapted to climate change with a low impact on the environment and world resources. We want to reduce all our impacts on the environment.

Many people are worried about climate change and the problems we may face if the planet becomes warmer.

People are also concerned about their impact on the world’s resources. The site to the north of Houghton Regis is large enough to allow the efficient introduction of renewable energy and to make a contribution towards reducing carbon emissions from the new development. We will be looking at using the sun, the wind and heat from the ground.

CHARACTER. A place which has its own character and gives local people a sense of pride in their environment. We want people to be proud of where they live.

Houghton Regis is a historic town but recent development has not reflected this aspect of the town. The character of an area can be formed by creating neighbourhoods with different features and styles.

Design is influenced by a variety of considerations including: cost, technology, car use, energy efficiency, as well as gardens, landscaping and open space. Density, the number of houses per hectare has a significant influence on design. We will be looking at developing different characteristics and housing density to develop a good quality, sought after urban extension.

COMMERCE. A place that supports sustainable wealth creation and that helps provide good local jobs and training opportunities.

New homes cannot be provided on their own. We will also need new jobs which will meet the needs and aspirations of both new and existing residents.

The proximity of the site to the M1, Junction 11a (J11a) access, the distance to the town centre, the proposed A5 / M1 link and Woodside Connection and designated employment areas will increase the attractiveness of the area to job providers, which will in turn help to improve the town’s skills levels through education and training, which will also help to increase prosperity within the area.
3.4 Illustrative masterplan informing discussions with CBC December 2011 - May 2012

5.1.8 HRDC held an internal consultants’ workshop, where site constraints were discussed in detail. By bringing together the full range of design and technical disciplines, and working through ideas and constraints in an holistic way, a masterplan emerged that is more responsive to the site and that makes the most of the site’s natural landscape and connectivity opportunities. This masterplan is shown at Fig. 5.4 below. The draft illustrative masterplan was discussed with CBC technical officers and the CBC Members Advisory Committee. Key ideas are as follows:

- The masterplan explores initial ideas of creating a new front door to Houghton Regis through high quality open space, creating a strong urban interface between the countryside and the town.
- Using existing green infrastructure to connect back into the wider green loop - in particular existing hedge rows and brooks provided a strong framework for green links and wildlife corridors.
- Creating a community ‘hub’ focused around Kingsland Campus where mixed use could be concentrated.
- Maximising other points of interaction between the existing urban area and the proposed urban extension - in particular areas where communities can come together - play areas, informal open and schools.

5. Community and stakeholder workshops June 2012

5.1.9 For a week in June 2012 the consultant team decamped to Houghton Regis to undertake a series of workshops and discussions with invited consultees from the local community. These events were held at various locations around the town and at various times of the day, including evenings, to enable as many people as possible to attend at a time and location convenient to them.

5.1.10 The workshops offered participants a blank canvas to discuss their concerns and aspirations for the site as a group, after which they were encouraged to work through their ideas in more detail with a member of the HRDC team. This allowed people to share their experiences of Houghton Regis as a place and talk through their aspirations for Houghton Regis in the future.

5.1.11 The workshop sessions helped people to see if and how their ideas could be incorporated in the plans and also enabled a wide range of people to hear and understand different points of view. Feedback from participants was very positive.

5.1.12 Particular issues in Houghton Regis identified by participants included:

- Traffic congestion,
- Lack of aspiration,
- Local public transport – particularly the new guided bus way,
- Lack of safe recreational/play areas,
- High unemployment,
- Negative reputation.

5.1.13 Positive aspects of Houghton Regis included:

- New Library and health facilities in the Bedford Square Centre,
- Local/Independent shops and businesses,
- Popular local schools,
- Volunteer Groups,
- Civic pride.

5.1.14 The second session focused on more detailed themes that came from the general discussions and concentrated on concerns and aspirations for the HRN1 development. Groups of around 4 to 6 people sat with one or more member of the HRDC team and discussed the themes, marking ideas on plans and photos of the site. Emerging themes included:
5.1.15 Concerns – The participants’ concerns about development at HRN1 centred on its potential impact on the local area:

• Lack of infrastructure to support the increased local population,
• Lack of job opportunities to keep residents in Houghton Regis,
• The integration of the new scheme into the existing town and community,
• The size and affordability of the new housing,
• Protection of the local wildlife and nature,
• Provision of safe road crossings,
• Provision of additional health facilities,
• Facilities for the young / youth.

5.1.16 Ambitions – The participants’ aspirations for the scheme and local area included:

• Skills training and jobs,
• Incorporating Houghton Brook,
• ‘Good’ public green space for all ages,
• Safe cycle and walking routes to key locations,
• A reduction in the town’s traffic and congestion,
• A wider variety of retail provision,
• A safe place to live.

5.1.17 In addition to the public workshops, we also held a session with Central Bedfordshire College students which focused on jobs and training for young people and open space facilities. In particular, the students would like to see more variety of open space provision and not just sport pitches. Students would also like to see more leisure and retail opportunities in Houghton Regis so they do not have to travel further afield to Luton.
5. Illustrative masterplan following community workshops for public exhibition

5.1.18 For the July 2012 public exhibition many of the ideas from the June workshops were incorporated into an illustrative masterplan that illustrated one way of bringing the site forward. (See Fig 5.8, opposite page). The plans were then exhibited for 5 days with consultants in attendance to explain the plans.

5.1.19 The design team looked in more detail at incorporating existing green infrastructure and tested a number of potential design solutions, (including Figs. 5.6 & 5.7, below). The resulting plan showed more detail in the types and locations of open space and play areas. Existing site features have been incorporated into wildlife corridors, amenity space and creation of valuable new areas of habitat for wildlife. In particular the Ouzel and Houghton Brooks are features of new parks and pedestrian and cycle routes. A linear park to the north of the site provides a buffer between development and the proposed A5 - M1 Link Road.

5.1.20 Further work was done looking at ways to integrate the existing and proposed movement networks. Cycle, pedestrian and bus routes serve Bedford Square – linking up with proposed clusters of community facilities and primary schools within the illustrative masterplan. Existing public rights of way are strong organising features now, with development blocks and green ways adhering to their strong, north/south alignment.

5.1.21 Most people agreed that employment had been located in the most sensible place on the site, but were keen to see different configurations. The team looked at how flexible the allocated area was, and tested a number of building configurations to ensure a range of solutions could be brought forward.

5.1.22 The employment areas and larger local centre are still located near to the M1 and Kingsland Campus. Concentrating a mix of retail, health and community uses in a convenient location that is already well-known to the existing community. Within this mixed use area, additional retail is located adjacent to a proposed food store. Apartment blocks are located adjacent to the retail to encourage people to walk to the shops and provide more local retail choice.

6. Illustrative masterplan update

5.1.23 After the public exhibition, design work continued, picking up the additional comments from the public and CBC where possible. Many of the public’s ideas had already been incorporated by the time of the exhibition, so updates to the plan were more about points of detail than sweeping structural changes. (see Fig 5.9, far right). Key additions included better overlooking of open space from residential properties as suggested by CBC and a wider variety on the built form to illustrate a finer grain of residential development to help people understand the scale of the proposals.
Testing mixed-use scenarios

Locating the centre

Diagram B - Indicative Sketch for Tithe Farm School, Houghton Regis

Creating linkages between existing & proposed communities

Fig 5.8

Fig 5.9

Fig 5.8  Selection of sketches and studies produced during the masterplan evolution