

Redevelopment of RAF Brampton
RESPONSE OF BRAMPTON PARISH COUNCIL TO THE URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

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Redevelopment of RAF Brampton

RESPONSE OF BRAMPTON PARISH COUNCIL TO THE URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

PREAMBLE

The Draft Urban Design Framework (UDF) for RAF Brampton was discussed by Brampton Parish Council at its meeting on the 19th of October, 2011. This is our considered response.

INTRODUCTION

The future of the RAF site at Brampton has been a major issue in Brampton since the announcement that the MoD were preparing to vacate the site.

Defence Estates, as it was then called, held a pre-emptive consultation in the Autumn of 2010. This was very badly received by the village. The feedback responses were subject to a Freedom of Information Request by the parish. Some 160 were received and a small group of councillors analysed each response.

Whilst there was little outright opposition to the concept of redevelopment, indeed some positively welcomed it, the overwhelming response was horror at the suggestion of 830 houses. This was seen as gross overdevelopment that would ruin the character of the village and overwhelm village facilities and local traffic arrangements.

There were also strong representations that:

- any development should be part of the village and not a separate cluster,
- some new housing would be welcomed, especially if it met local needs,
- new jobs would be welcomed as long as the employment was of the right sort,
- there were concerns about how primary schooling should be provided,
- there were concerns about the future provision of health services,
- there was need for additional community facilities,
- any retail expansion should not jeopardise existing retail outlets in Brampton,
- there was concern about the worsening of traffic access to Huntingdon,
- many people advocated expansion of sporting facilities, including a gym,
- ideas were mooted about the future of the Officers' Mess, and the other listed structures,
- the retention of the theatre was a high priority for a number of respondents

Since then the Parish Council has been in almost constant discussion with HDC Planning Department. There have been formal and informal discussions and round table meetings with the Planning Department, other local councillors and councillors from further afield. There has been a presentation to councillors by the Planning Department, a village meeting and three manned consultation events, with an ongoing display available at the parish offices during the period of formal consultation.

The Parish Council wishes to place on record its appreciation of the amount of effort invested by HDC Planning staff in seeking the views of the council and local people and the manner in which this has been carried out.

The early imposition of a blanket TPO order covering the site is seen as a positive contribution to the preservation of key assets of the site - the numerous mature trees and extensive tree belts.

The result is that the UDF is seen as largely a collaborative work. There is little with which the parish fundamentally disagrees, though naturally there are still some outstanding concerns.

CONSIDERATION OF THE UDF

As part of an earlier planning process the parish council had accepted the inevitability of development on the base once it was vacated. The current question therefore largely resolved to “How” not “Whether” or “Why”. The current estimate of approximately 400 houses is in line with previous discussions and therefore is not contested.

The overriding concern of the parish council, reflecting the strong view of the questionnaire respondents, **is that the development should yield a single, integrated village** and not, as one person put it, Upper and Lower Brampton.

Overview

The proposals show evidence of a detailed knowledge and sympathy with the site and its geographical and historical context.

The outlined concept of a mixed-use development of housing, employment, open space, play areas, community facilities and limited retail, all with good links to the village, is in line with parish wishes.

Many matters of detail are listed in the remainder of this document.

Given the prime location of the site, close to major road and rail links and its proximity to Huntingdon and Cambridge this is seen as a prestigious site. The detailed planning and subsequent development need to ensure that these high standards are not compromised.

DETAILED CONSIDERATION

Access

a) To/from the site

i) The Parish Council welcomes the reopening of an exit to the north west of the site. This will enable those wishing to come to the village to do so on foot/bike. (See also Footpaths). The slight deviation in the access point is welcome as it moves foot/cycle traffic away from existing houses and a dangerous sight-restricted exit from a drive.

It is essential that this access be available from the first day after the withdrawal of security.

ii) The Parish Council supports the opening of the Park Lane access to the site at the earliest opportunity once security is no longer paramount. As a corollary the 30mph sign must be moved so that this egress and the garage are included in the speed restricted area.

As movements will be relatively light a roundabout is not considered necessary.

b) Within the site

Clearly it is essential that the occupants of the Annington-owned houses have freedom of movement within the site to continue with their normal business. (See Security).

Other residents of the village should have access to the open spaces at the earliest opportunity.

In particular, the tennis courts are a much needed facility that will generate from the outset a sense of the interdependency of Brampton Park with the remainder of the village.

Once the changing rooms have been completed, junior teams and their managers and supporters will need access to the football pitches.

Allotments

The decision to include a provision for allotments is entirely appropriate as there is no spare capacity on the existing village site.

Locating them in the walled garden, with parking close by, seems inspired.

Annington Homes

The Parish Council welcomes the consideration given to the visual and physical integration of the Annington properties with this development. It should avoid the creation of two separate enclaves.

The Parish Council accepts the modest proposals for infill within the Annington sector.

Any future proposal for large scale infill would be fiercely resisted.

Buses

a) Service buses

To reduce dependency on cars it is important that there is ready access from the outset to service buses for residents on the site, including residents of the Annington houses.

The Parish Council welcomes the proposed diversion of existing bus routes into the site.

Discussions should be held with providers of bus services to improve the current frequency of buses. If this is not forthcoming then the Parish Council would wish to see alternative provision by means of a temporary increase in frequency funded from S106. If necessary, this should be through a separate provider. This would enable the commercial viability of such a service to be assessed, whilst reducing the number of car journeys in the early years when travel habits will be being established.

As a means of encouraging use of buses the Parish Council would like to see each person moving onto the site given a one-year free bus pass by the developers.

b) Shuttle buses

Existing congestion in Brampton High Street is a major cause for concern even before the additional 400 houses come into being. As a means of reducing additional delay and confusion the Parish Council will seek the provision of small shuttle buses running from Brampton Park into the village. Stops should include the Post Office, the row of shops, the school and the doctors' surgery. It is important that the frequency of these buses is such that people will not need to work by timetable but just go along in the knowledge that one will be along soon. The Parish Council would be pleased to discuss frequency but our starting point is that at peak times it should be no less than every 10 minutes. (See also Sustainability).

Community Facilities

The addition of an extra 1,000 people requires the provision of additional community facilities. These are shown most conveniently co-located with the changing rooms (see Sport). The location indicated has good parking adjacent.

The Parish Council envisages the provision of three rooms, one quite small to act as a base for local police and to be shared with any local health visitor service provision. The remaining two rooms, one bigger, one smaller, would be for meetings of community groups, possibly housing pre-school education facilities. It is expected that some groups will transfer from existing community facilities in the village, releasing capacity there. Some of the use would be to meet locally generated need, e.g. coffee shop/meet-and-greet to reduce initial loneliness. The specification is very dependent on the decision to be made regarding theatre provision (and will need to be revisited once the decision on the viability of the Little Theatre Trust and whether its intentions will be realised (See Theatre)). Also, discussions need to be held to see if the above would meet any need for the local doctors' surgery to provide a service here.

The "integral tool store" referred to in 4.4.10 should be large enough to accommodate a tractor and other grounds maintenance equipment.

Contaminated Land

The Parish Council seeks assurance that any contaminated land will be remediated to the appropriate standard before construction begins.

Demolition

Whilst there is a reference in the UDF to "a phased plan for demolition" it is important that consideration be given to minimising the duration of noise and dirt imposed on the existing occupants of the Annington site.

With the exception of the listed buildings, the Parish Council is not concerned to preserve any MoD buildings. The Little Theatre Trust is strongly committed to retention of the theatre and it is understood that the Regiment Building will be retained for use by the Air Training Corps.

Education

We welcome the proposal that the village school be expanded to accommodate the additional children resulting from this development. The alternative of a separate school would have largely destroyed the hopes of an integrated development.

The existing cycle path to Hinchbrooke School is a valuable asset. However the movement between the RAF gate and the beginning of the Huntingdon Road cycle path is problematic.

Employment

The allocation of land for employment is accepted as desirable. The location is close to, and benefits from good access from, the main road, the B1514.

To the extent that this provides work for local residents it will diminish the need for car travel to work. There is also potential for future use of the Officers' Mess to provide catering and housekeeping jobs that could be attractive to local residents.

There is concern about the types of employment that would be permitted. The Parish Council wants strict control to be maintained over the type of employment and would wish this to be agreed now. How successful marketing the opportunities will be, given the advantages of the Alconbury Local Enterprise Zone, remains to be seen, but the council would not wish to compromise on the type of employment deemed acceptable. We wish the District Council to consider now the alternative use to which the "employment area" could be put should there be insufficient take up by new employers.

Flooding

The flood risk maps of the Environment Agency indicate that most of the employment areas and some of the high density housing areas are susceptible to a "1 in 100 year + climate change" event. The Parish Council wishes to see measures incorporated to protect the housing and employment areas from high flows in the River Great Ouse.

As a considerable area of the site is already covered with buildings and non draining surfaces the Parish Council will want to see calculations which indicate the net additional run-off consequent upon the development. Existing housing outside, but close to, the site has been subject to significant external flooding in the past so any increase in run off would be considered a major cause for concern. The council will expect to be reassured that flood alleviation proposals, such as retention lakes, increase in porous surfaces, and other attenuation measures, will not increase the risk of local flooding, allowing for the sharper rainstorms predicted as a consequence of global warming.

The Parish Council also wishes to have sight of, and the opportunity to comment on, the Surface Water Drainage and Flood Risk Strategy.

Footpaths

It is important to take this (probably one-off) opportunity to improve existing RoWs and links to the countryside for residents of the development and the wider community.

The Parish Council agrees with the criteria used in the design of pedestrian routes.

The separation of cyclists along Central Avenue and the provision of dedicated cycle lanes on the cross-field route to school, are seen as important safeguards. However the upgraded FP4 must be out of bounds to horse-riders. It would be inappropriate to have children, cyclists and horses (and what they leave behind!) on a busy path to school and village.

Map 28 (p58) seems to show that pedestrian and cycle routes inside the development join with roads shared with motor vehicles. As it is a school route it is recommended that they be separated until they reach Central Avenue (which has a cycle path) where the concentration of users will disperse.

This is an important opportunity to improve links to the wider landscape. However present proposals do not achieve the best possible improvements:

- The proposed new route to the W from Park Lane to Grafham Rd and the fishing lakes is excellent. It will also provide the possibility of crossing the A1 to reach Brampton Wood and the RoW network beyond.

- The SW part of FP3 around the current perimeter fence leading to Buckden Rd should be retained. It links with countryside routes for walkers, who would then not have to pass through the built environment. It would not be near the farmhouse and buildings or the few houses on Park Rd. There seems no reason not to keep it.
- The above two paths together could provide a route linking to both the village and the countryside to the W of the A1 including Brampton Wood.
- They could also be made suitable for horse-riders. Provision in Brampton is currently poor.
- Looking to the future: the exit onto Buckden Rd opposite the WRG waste tip will eventually be closed and restored as amenity land. The SW part of FP3 could form an important link to that area and access to the Ouse Valley Way.
- Stopping up of FP 3 to the W of the camp is a pity because it is an informal countryside route across fields. It will mean taking a route through a built-up area instead. Rather than being stopped up it could be linked with the changed route of FP4 and diverted through the tree belt on the western edge of the site. It would then not affect Park Farm or Park Rd residents.
- Instead of stopping up FP2 from Park Rd towards the A1 it should be diverted to the inside of the hedge parallel to the road, joining up with the suggested path from the W of the development to the fishing lakes. This would save pedestrians from having to walk in the road with fast (if not heavy) traffic. This suggestion has been mooted before but was not pursued at the time because of the pending A1/A14 improvements, subsequently cancelled.
- We would welcome the extension of the footpath on the W side of the road from Centenary Way to the start of the path in the field.

Health

The numbers of residents on site is not seen as warranting a full surgery. This applies even after the MoD release the Annington houses into civil ownership. However, although many residents will wish to apply to the Brampton Surgery it is expected that some on-site expansion will be required. A part-time surgery at the new community centre, say one morning and one afternoon a week, is seen as a positive way of reducing parking congestion around the existing Crane Street site.

Housing

The proposal for approximately 400 houses is deemed acceptable, as is the separation into two areas of "Higher" and "Lower" density. The allocation of the two areas is seen as appropriate in that the lower density houses would be closer to the Annington homes of the same broad specification. The recommendation to introduce interest in the site by encouraging a variety of building styles and sizes is welcomed.

It is noted with concern that there is no direct encouragement of bungalows, a number of which will be necessary to create an all-age development.

The Council notes with concern the suggestion of 2 ½ and 3 floor housing close to Buckden Road. We have a clear preference that there should not be a significant difference in style between the new houses and the existing properties on Buckden Road unless they are comprehensively hidden by the tree screen.

The 5 metre deep frontages for semi-detached houses seem generous and should be reviewed. Clarification will be needed at an early stage as to whether the affordable housing proportion is to be "40%" or "up to 40%".

"Pepper potting" these properties rather than creating "ghettos" is seen as essential.

It would be extremely popular if some of the new houses could be reserved for the children and grandchildren of local residents, thereby reinforcing the sense of community.

Implementation

Issues surrounding access, the availability of the sports facilities and the phasing of demolition are dealt with elsewhere.

The Parish Council would like to see a clear and legally binding schedule that ties the provision of infrastructure to the completion of specific numbers of houses.

Library

The Parish Council would like at least a mobile library facility for this site.

Listed Buildings and History on the site

The retention of the listed buildings and a sense of the history of the site will be particularly welcome to the current and previously serving officers and their families, many living in the village. A community orchard in the walled garden would complement the allotments. (See also Officers' Mess).

Maintenance

The clear message on maintenance of both the listed buildings and the open space is appreciated. Unless the sports areas, including the tennis courts, are maintained they will rapidly lose any merit. It may be that owners would welcome an early transfer of responsibility to the Parish Council (accompanied by a suitable commuted sum) so that they are relieved of this burden.

Name

There is a preference within the Parish Council for the development to be called Brampton Park. The Parish Council has a strong wish to be involved in the naming of new streets.

Nursery

The Parish Council wishes to see space allocated for early years' nursery/education. Whilst this might be a commercial venture, space would be required unless it was co-located with the community buildings.

Officers' Mess

The Parish Council is concerned that Brampton Park House, now the Officers' Mess, should have a viable and productive future. Discussions are urgently needed with those charged with preserving such buildings to identify the extent to which internal modifications can be made that would increase the range of opportunities available.

If no economic use can be found for the building it changes from an asset to a liability for developers. Rather than reduce the site sale price, MoD might consider retaining it for training and conference purposes.

Parking

The Parish Council welcomes the general stance that "Car parking does not dominate". The minimum width of garages, the provision of car ports, and the intention to avoid on-footpath parking and rear-of-house parking have the enthusiastic support of the Parish Council.

Play

The village is underprovided with play areas. So the proposal for two LEAPs, a NEAP and a woodland trim trail, and the retention of the Annington play area, is most welcome. It will be important to consult local young people, including the Youth Forum, over the contents of these play areas.

Retail

The proposal to restrict retail operations to “a small convenience store and possibly one or two other small shops” is seen as realistic. On the one hand the council would not wish there to be high volumes of traffic on the High Street for trivial purchases, on the other hand there is acute concern lest the viability of existing retail operations in Brampton be put at risk. The proposed location at the eastern end of the development, whilst not central to the new houses, would offer a facility to residents along Buckden Road and its off-shoots.

Roads

The Parish Council considers it to be important that on-site road width be sufficient to allow the free flow of traffic, including buses. In this assessment allowance will need to be made for areas where on-street parking is envisaged.

The Parish Council welcomes the suggestion that services should be installed in verges to preserve the condition of the main road surface when repairs are required.

The UDF includes a reference to the adoption of the Annington roads. It is not clear if this is to be part of the development or await till the Annington houses turn into civilian use.

S106 and CIL

The Parish Council wishes to be closely involved with the determination of the level of S 106 payments required under this proposal and to be consulted on the allocation of the “meaningful proportion” of CIL money allocated to this neighbourhood.

It wishes to place on record acute disappointment that the District Council has decided to deny Brampton its share of the New Homes Bonus, unless and until Government guidance changes.

Safety

The Parish Council wishes to place on record its wish that the final design should take into account the advice of the Police Architect.

Security

a) Security Fence

The exterior security fence should, in the main, be demolished at the earliest opportunity. This will remove the visual blight currently experienced when accessing the village from the South. Responsibility for this should be made explicit. The Parish Council would welcome the opportunity to discuss this aspect with the site owner at the earliest opportunity.

b) Internal

As soon as the site is vacated there is a security issue for the remaining buildings. The Parish Council wish to see all areas that are not open to the public fenced off with effective high fencing to reduce the risk of vandalism. As the site can not be isolated from the public because of the Annington presence the security needs to be in place immediately the MoD leave the site. This is particularly true of all the listed buildings.

Sport

The loss of the existing cricket pitch and pavilion is regretted. The existing cricket pitch on the Memorial Playing Fields is far from ideal.

The availability of the tennis courts is seen as an asset and the parish could see merit in retaining three courts.

The retention of the large area of open space in front of the Officers' Mess is welcomed. As is the adjacent car parking.

It is not possible to fit a senior football pitch into the space available.

The current proposal is to allocate areas so that a variety of junior teams can have reserved areas of appropriate size for a range of playing ages. This will require the provision of changing facilities to Football Foundation (FF) standards to compensate for the accelerated redundancy for junior players of those previously funded by the FF on the Memorial Playing Fields (MPF). The FF is aware of the proposal and, subject to suitable alternative provision, will not claim back the significant grant given for the MPF facility.

Given the popularity of the junior teams and the number of players taking part it is important that cycle racks be provided, with the possibility of extending the numbers in the light of experience.

Street Scene

There is little detailed information within the UDF regarding benches, street lights, pillar boxes and other street furniture. The Parish Council would wish to be consulted before the frequency and positioning of these items is finalised. Bus stops should have shelters to encourage usage even in unkind weather.

Sustainability

The Parish Council places great importance on sustainability considerations being at the forefront of design criteria and implementation methodology. The downgrading of government targets to level 5 is regretted, but this is seen as requiring greater emphasis on peripheral matters such as water capture, heat pumps and the on-site use of demolished materials. Light wells, though not mentioned, can reduce use of lighting. We would welcome the implementation of district heating. We would expect to see photovoltaic tiles on all appropriately aligned, new-build roof surfaces. (see also Flooding.)

Adequate provision must be made to preserve and enhance animal habitats, bird boxes, etc.

Theatre

The future of the Brampton Park Little Theatre is a contentious issue. The Parish Council has received many representations (often from people outside the village) seeking to ensure the continuing use of the existing structure. The responsibility of the Parish Council is to seek to meet the needs of the residents that it represents.

However, the decision does not lie with the Parish Council, but elsewhere. There are a number of critical potential barriers that need to be overcome before the Theatre Trust can commit to taking over the site:

- The structure must be deemed insurable by a commercial insurer.
- The MoD or the subsequent site owner has to agree to sell the site. This could become an early test of localism and community buildings legislation currently going through Parliament.

- The Theatre Trust needs to find the capital to acquire the site.
- The Theatre Trust needs to find the capital to isolate the site from the base heating and electrical systems, make any modifications necessary to the kitchen area, and carry out any necessary refurbishment.
- Finally, the Theatre Trust needs to convince itself that it can afford to run the site.

None of this directly affects the Parish Council. The decisions lie with the MoD and the Theatre Trust. However there are significant implications for the Parish Council.

If they are to proceed, the Theatre Trust would seek to assist their cash flow by renting out space to local groups. As such, they would be in direct competition with the Parish Council which would likewise seek to defray expenditure on its new community space. If the Theatre Trust were to proceed, the Parish Council might decide to avoid costly overprovision of space by limiting the size of the new-build community centre.

The dilemma is that, were the PC to make that decision and the Theatre Trust be unable to continue with their operation because of a failure to meet income targets, then we would be in the worst of all worlds: community buildings with inadequate capacity.

This is a fast-moving situation.

The Parish Council welcomes the decision of the District Council to prepare a “Plan B” layout which shows the theatre in its existing location. The Parish Council intends to delay any decision on the size and layout of the community building as long as possible and, hopefully, until firm decisions have been made about the future of Brampton Little Theatre.

Timing

It would be of great benefit to the planning that the Parish needs to undertake if a firm date could be established for the final departure of MoD from the site.

Traffic

a) Buckden Road/Church Road

There is serious concern about the implications of the proposed development on the ability of local residents to go about their business. Extra loading is expected to come from people travelling to and from the site for work, to and from both junior and senior schools and people seeking to go to the hospital, the station and the town.

Residents claim the new loading will simply restore the situation to that applied when the site was fully operational. It is also claimed that MoD personnel will be bussed to Wyton.

Those expressing concern point out the general increase in traffic and the addition of housing along Buckden Road since that time. The provision of a village shuttle bus will go some way towards mitigating this load. The upgrading of the north west passage towards the village across the fields may divert some people. It remains a matter of concern that there are no other proposals to alleviate traffic flow along Buckden Road.

b) High Street/Buckden Road/Church Road junction

Many residents from Brampton Park visiting the post office/shops/school can be expected to return using the High Street. The turning towards Brampton Park from the south eastern end of the High Street is a right hand turn across a stream of north-east bound traffic. At times, this already causes significant delay, especially at peak school times or when the A14 is suffering. The addition of 400 houses would significantly exacerbate this situation. The Parish Council therefore welcomes the provision of the mini roundabout at this point.

c) Parking

The High Street is already seriously congested and a cause of many complaints from residents and shop owners. Outside the main shopping arcade is a particular cause for concern. With 400 extra houses parking demand is likely to increase. If it becomes too unmanageable residents will abandon Brampton shops in favour of those, albeit further afield, where parking is less of an issue. Paradoxically, the provision of extra shoppers could kill off shops in Brampton High Street. One small opportunity to mitigate the situation exists. The Parish Council would like to see the area outside the shops owned by the County Council turned into a lay-by funded by this development. Although this has been rejected out-of-hand by County Engineers, the Parish Council would like assistance in getting this small remedial measure implemented.

d) Access to Huntingdon

The Parish Council views with great concern the delays and uncertainties already associated with travel into Huntingdon at peak times and when the A14 is disrupted. As the major A14 scheme is now unlikely to proceed, the relief road exit to the North East of the Hinchingsbrooke site is now unlikely to become available. Extra traffic from this development can only make this already difficult situation worse. The Parish Council requests that plans be drawn up now so that in the event that remedial action is deemed necessary, the solution has already been identified.

e) With the extra traffic moving to and from the A1 the junction at the old station on Buckden Rd. should be reconfigured as a T.

f) The Parish Council would be grateful to have sight of, and the option of commenting on, the traffic impact assessment and travel plan when they become available.

Trees

As has been mentioned the application of the blanket TPO order across the site was seen as a welcome move. The parish has a proud history of maintaining many established trees and looks forward to assuming responsibility (safeguarded by an appropriate commuted sum) for the many fine specimens on the site.

The strengthening of the perimeter tree barriers and the creation of areas of new or reinforced planting is likewise welcomed. It is recognised as sad but inevitable that some trees will need to be felled to ensure through new planting the continuity of the barriers in years to come.

The parish looks forward to collaborative discussions about which trees to retain or remove.

Views

It is clear that careful thought has been given to the creation of sight-lines within the development and also across the Annington site and beyond to the wider countryside. This will help to create a positive environment and a quality development.

MOVING FORWARD

Parish Council representatives would be pleased to clarify or discuss any of the points raised in this note. And the Council looks forward to working closely with site developers.