

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND POLICY CONTEXT

## THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Marston Vale New Villages (MVNV) is a strategic allocation within the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (the Local Plan) for a mixed-use development including approximately 5,000 dwellings and 30 hectares of dedicated employment land. Its development will be governed principally by the criteria and requirements set out in Policy SA2 of the Local Plan.

This Development Brief has been prepared to meet the requirements of Policy SA2. Reference has also been made to Central Bedfordshire Council's (CBC) *Development Brief & Design Code Guidance* (Feb 2020) which has been adopted as technical guidance for development management purposes.

O&H Land (O&H) is the owner of the MVNV allocation site and will act as the Master Developer for its delivery. This Development Brief has been prepared by David Lock Associates on behalf of O&H, working collaboratively with CBC and in consultation with technical and community stakeholders. A Consultation Statement is provided at Appendix A.

The Development Brief sets out the Council's and O&H's shared vision for the MVNV, the concept for the development, the key development tests which will be met to ensure that the vision and concept is achieved, and the main considerations governing its effective delivery and implementation.

## THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF – WHERE DOES IT FIT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?

The MVNV is the largest allocation in the Local Plan. A series of new villages will be developed to provide approximately 5,000 new homes. The MVNV will also include approximately 30 hectares of dedicated employment land, open spaces, green infrastructure, schools, new community facilities and services.

This development of the MVNV will commence during the period for the Local Plan which extends to 2035. However, its construction will continue beyond this period to provide a supply of market and affordable houses over the long term to meet local housing needs and support economic growth.

Through the lifetime of the development, at each stage of the planning process the Development Brief will have a key role as a material consideration for planning decisions, to assist CBC, stakeholders and those bringing forward detailed applications for development to ensure that development proposals for the MVNV meet the requirements of Policy SA2 and other relevant policies of the Local Plan.

Figure 1.1 shows the various stages of the planning process and where the Development Brief fits within this structure:



FIGURE 1.1: THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

## Central Bedfordshire Local Plan

- The Local Plan sets out how Central Bedfordshire will grow over the 20-year period between 2015 and 2035. The MVNV is a key strategic allocation of the plan. The development proposals for the MVNV must accord with the principles and detail set out in the policies of the Local Plan.
- Policy SA2 of the Local Plan relates specifically to this allocation and requires that the development of the MVNV is delivered in accordance with a series of principles which are provided at Appendix B.

## The Development Brief

- Para 17.8.2 of the Local Plan explains that *“A Development Brief is intended to bridge the gap between the Local Plan and a planning application. It will focus on planning issues and must be consistent with the Local Plan. A Development Brief often details a site’s constraints and opportunities, and outlines what type of development is expected by the Local Planning Authority. The guidance in Development Briefs will focus on planning issues”*.
- Para 17.8.3 makes the distinction between Development Briefs and Design Codes, stating that *“A Design Code is a detailed technical guidance document which plans for high quality design across a site through the use of written text and supporting drawings. Design Codes clarify the quality and type of design which is expected for a site, setting out key design principles. This provides certainty for developers and the local community, whilst ensuring high quality development”*.
- Policy SP3 relates specifically to strategic sites. It states that *“development proposals brought forward at the identified strategic allocations should be accompanied by a comprehensive Development Brief for the whole site”*.

- In respect of master planning requirements for strategic sites, the first two objectives for strategic sites set out within Policy SP3 are:
  - » *“Creation of distinctive, well integrated new communities which respect their local context enhance the standards of sustainable design in the locality and relate well to neighbouring settlements”*; and
  - » *“Preparation of a comprehensive master plan for the whole site which includes an indicative layout and phasing plan. The master plan should reflect the location of the site, incorporate the highest standards of design and make effective use of the site through application of appropriate densities, layout and form”*.

## Requirements for Marston Vale New Villages

- Policy SA2 for MVNV reinforces the policy position that the principles described in the policy will be explained and defined in more detail through the preparation of a Development Brief.
- SA2 also states that the Development Brief for MVNV must include a concept plan and an indicative phasing plan.

The Marston Vale is a complex landscape and is home to existing communities. The MVNV is a strategic and long term development proposal set within this context. The Development Brief describes the strategic context for the MVNV including the main development constraints, influences and opportunities as well as details of the overall development concept and the key design principles which will govern its detailed design and implementation.

### The Development Concept for MVNV

- The concept for MVNV – Section 4 – sets out the key structuring elements for the development, recognising its unique location at the heart of the Forest of Marston Vale and the extraordinary opportunities this gives to defining its character.
- The Concept Plan is an indicative spatial framework intended to articulate the vision for the MVNV described in this Development Brief and will inform more detailed master planning work and applications to be undertaken subsequent to the grant of outline consent.

### Outline Planning Application (OPA)

- An outline planning application (OPA) will fix the parameters for the development of the allocation. It will establish the spatial extent of the villages, the green infrastructure, and the spatial distribution of the mixture of other uses to be provided, including the necessary schools and community facilities. The OPA proposals will be in accordance with Policy SA2 and other relevant policies of the Local Plan.
- An OPA will be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), setting out the effects of the proposed development. It will also be accompanied by other technical assessments including a Transport Assessment (TA). The TA will establish the impact of the development on the strategic and local road network. It will also define the Sustainable Transport Strategy for the development and the mitigation necessary to reduce its impact on highway infrastructure and capacity.

### Approval and Conditions

- Any outline planning consent will include planning conditions which will, amongst other matters, secure the requirement for the submission and approval of design codes and a detailed strategy for managing the construction effects of the development throughout its delivery period.

- As part of any outline planning consent, a legal agreement will secure the infrastructure which will support the development as described in Policy SA2. This is known as a Section 106 (S106) agreement and will be a legally binding agreement between the Council and the applicant. For example, the S106 agreement will fix the number and type of schools; the type of health care and community facilities; new public transport infrastructure; new highways infrastructure and the affordable housing which will be provided. Critically, the S106 agreement will also fix the timing of the delivery of the necessary infrastructure to support the new community.

### Design Coding

- Following any outline consent secured by planning condition, site wide and phase-specific design codes will be prepared by the developer and submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for approval. Each Design Code will be subject to public consultation through the part of the planning process necessary for the condition to be satisfied.
- Through diagrams and text, the design codes will establish the key placemaking principles, design characteristics, requirements and design fixes for the villages and the wider landscape including for the infrastructure, open spaces, landscape, streets and buildings.
- The design codes for the MVNV will be agreed between the developer and CBC and will ensure that development is delivered to a high level of design quality.
- Each village will have its own design code(s), and each will be in accordance with the parameters established by the outline consent and the development concept for the site set out in this Development Brief. Each code will provide a consistent and coherent design language for the development as a whole whilst also allowing each village to be distinctive, responding to its context and local design influences.

## Reserved Matters Applications (RMA)

- Following the approval of Design Codes, detailed development proposals will then be brought forward for individual development parcels or infrastructure within a phase or village. Once these reserved matters applications (RMA) have been approved and any pre-commencement work undertaken, development can commence.
- RMAs will provide a greater level of design detail for infrastructure, open space and built development, fixing details of:
  - » Landscape;
  - » Appearance;
  - » Layout;
  - » Scale; and
  - » Access.

## THE STATUS OF THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

The Development Brief is not a part of the statutory Development Plan and as such does not have any formal planning policy status. The Development Brief cannot establish new or additional policy requirements and is not intended to be prescriptive.

However, the Development Brief will be endorsed by CBC as technical planning guidance. Through this process, the document will be a material consideration for the determination of any future OPA, design codes and RMA.

Throughout the lifetime of the development, the Development Brief will be a key tool to assist the Council in determining whether the development proposals for the MVNV at each stage of the planning process described above meet the requirements of Policy SA2 and other relevant policies of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

This Development Brief has been subject to detailed discussions with CBC. This engagement has informed the content of the Development Brief. A Consultation Statement is provided at Appendix A. In accordance with CBC's emerging draft *Development Brief & Design Code Guidance* this sets out who has been consulted on the Development Brief, how they have been consulted, a summary of responses made and how they have been taken into account.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

This Development Brief is structured as follows:

- Introduction and Policy Context
- Site Context and Key Development Influences
- The Vision for the Marston Vale New Villages
- The Concept for the Marston Vale New Villages
- Development Tests
- Next Steps – Implementation and Delivery

## KEY POLICIES AND GUIDANCE: SUMMARY

### Planning Policy Context

#### *The National Planning Policy Framework*

The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the NPPF) comprises the Government's planning policies for England and describes how these policies should be applied. It is the policy foundation for Local Plans for the delivery of housing and other development adopted by LPAs. The NPPF must be a material consideration for any planning decision.

#### *Delivery of New Homes*

The NPPF places great emphasis on meeting the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes of the right variety on land which can come forward where it is needed. It sets out the three overarching objectives for achieving sustainable development. In summary, these are:

- (a) **an economic objective** – to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time.
- (b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that there is a sufficient range and number of new homes which are well-designed, supported by accessible services and open spaces supporting health, social and cultural well-being.
- (c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

The NPPF recognises that the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for new settlements and that consideration should be given to the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, the area's economic potential and the scope for environmental net gains. Planning for new settlements must ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities, ensure a variety of homes and set clear expectations for the quality of the development and how this can be maintained.

The delivery of the MVNV presents a unique opportunity to meet the Government's objectives by delivering an exemplar sustainable development at the heart of the Forest of Marston Vale, at the centre of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and at the gateway to Central Bedfordshire.

#### *Importance of Design*

The importance of good design is clear within the policies of the NPPF. Section 12 of the NPPF is focused upon policies to achieve well-designed places. The policies described in Section 12 of the NPPF require that the creation of high quality buildings and places is a fundamental purpose of the planning and development process, that design expectations should be established at an early stage including through the use of design codes to create a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design.

#### *Community Forests*

The MVNV is located at the heart of the Forest of Marston Vale. The Forest of Marston Vale is a nationally designated Community Forest. The NPPF provides specific policy support for Community Forests at Paragraph 142. This recognises that Community Forests have a valuable role in improving the environment around towns and cities by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife. An approved Community Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and deciding planning applications.

#### *The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan*

The Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 30 April 2018. Hearings were undertaken in the summer of 2019 and further hearings were held in December 2020.

Once adopted, the Local Plan will be the key strategic planning document for Central Bedfordshire. It will guide the delivery of new infrastructure, homes and jobs to achieve the Council's objectives during the period 2015–2035.

The policies of the Local Plan cover a wide range of objectives and requirements which apply to the Marston Vale New Villages development to varying degrees. A fuller analysis of the relevant policies of the Local Plan is provided at Appendix B.

There are a number of key policies of the Local Plan which have specific relevance to the Development Brief and relate to key spatial components of the development:

**Policy SA2 The Marston Vale New Villages** – allocates the MVNV for a mixed use strategic development comprising approximately 5,000 dwellings and 30 hectares of dedicated employment land.

**Policy SP3 Generic Requirements for Strategic Sites** – sets a range of policy requirements for the delivery of strategic sites including that they should have a comprehensive development brief based on a series of principles and objectives.

**Policy EE9 Forest of Marston Vale** – developments within the Forest of Marston Vale will deliver 30% tree cover across the development site through the retention and protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows and the planting of new trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

**Policy EE10 The Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park** – developments on the route of the Bedford and Milton Keynes (B&MK) Waterway Park will be expected to deliver the section of the Waterway Park within the development boundary.

*The Principal Policy Relating to Design*

**Policy HQ1 High Quality Development** – seeks to ensure that all developments are of the highest possible quality and respond positively to their context. The Policy includes twelve bullet points which describe the specific policy expectations. In summary, these are:

- **Distinctiveness:** proposals should reinforce local distinctiveness.
- **Form:** size, scale, massing, orientation, materials and appearance should reinforce local distinctiveness.
- **Character and density:** should be considered to make efficient use of land whilst responding to local character.
- **Connectivity and sustainable/active travel:** proposals should be well connected to support sustainable and active travel.
- **Public and private spaces:** there should be a clear distinction between public and private spaces.
- **Landscape and green infrastructure:** proposals should complement the natural environment, landscape setting and character. Landscape design should be used to integrate development into the environment.
- **Inclusive design:** should be considered from the outset.
- **Reducing opportunities for crime:** layouts should maximise surveillance and increase pedestrian activity.
- **Amenity:** development must not have an unacceptable adverse impact upon nearby or existing uses.
- **Energy and water efficiency:** resources should be used efficiently.
- **Lighting:** should not have a detrimental impact on the surrounding area.
- **Waste management:** development should support the sustainable management of waste through its layout and building design.

## Key Guidance and Other Main Considerations

### *National Design Guide*

The Government's ambition within the NPPF to achieve high quality design in new development is reflected in the recently published *National Design Guide* (NDG) (October 2019). The purpose of the NDG is to illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. The NDG highlights that specific, detailed and measurable criteria for good design are most appropriately set out at the local level. The NDG forms part of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and should be read alongside the separate PPG on design process and tools.

Part 2 of the NDG sets out the ten characteristics of a "well-designed place" which contribute to meet the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the NPPF. In summary, these are:

- **Context:** An understanding of context, history and the cultural characteristics of a site, neighbourhood and region influences the location, siting and design of new developments.
- **Identity:** Comes from the way that buildings, streets and spaces, landscape and the infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.

- **Built form:** The three-dimensional pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings and open spaces. It is the interrelationship between all these elements that creates an attractive place to live, work and visit, rather than their individual characteristics.
- **Movement:** Successful development depends upon a movement network that makes connections to destinations, places and communities, both within the site and beyond its boundaries.
- **Nature:** Contributes to the quality of a place, and to people's quality of life, and it is a critical component of well-designed places.
- **Public spaces:** The quality of the spaces between buildings is as important as the buildings themselves. Public spaces are streets, squares, and other spaces that are open to all. They are the setting for most movement.
- **Uses:** Sustainable places include a mix of uses that support everyday activities, including to live, work and play. They should provide a mixture of tenures, should be inclusive and adaptable.
- **Homes and buildings:** Well-designed homes and buildings are functional, accessible and sustainable. They provide internal environments and associated external spaces which are adaptable, that support the health and wellbeing of a diverse range of users, and all who experience them.
- **Resources:** Well-designed places and buildings conserve natural resources including land, water, energy and materials. Their design responds to the impacts of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising embodied energy; and through adaptation to anticipated events, such as rising temperatures and the increasing risk of flooding.
- **Lifespan:** Well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term. They add to the quality of life of their users and as a result, people are more likely to care for them over their lifespan. They have an emphasis on quality and simplicity, are designed and planned for long-term stewardship, are robust, easy to manage and maintain, and are adaptable.

## Central Bedfordshire Guidance

### *Design in Central Bedfordshire*

Design considerations feature prominently in local policies and guidance, most notably in *Design in Central Bedfordshire* (adopted in 2014 as technical guidance for Development Management purposes) which sets out CBC's key principles and standards to ensure all new development is of the highest quality. *Design in Central Bedfordshire* also seeks to deliver the Council's expectations in relation to layout; street developments; parking provision and home dimensions. The guide is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications intended to be used to guide all types of new development in Central Bedfordshire.

*Design in Central Bedfordshire* is presented in ten parts covering the key principles and expectations of each: Placemaking in Central Bedfordshire; Green Infrastructure, Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Buildings; The Historic Environment; Public Realm; Residential Development; Accommodation Specific Housing Needs; Householder Alterations and Extensions; Larger Footprint Buildings; Town Centre Vitality; and Movement and Streets.

Supplement 10 of the guidance has been superseded by the Council's *Highway Constriction Standards and Specifications Guide* (2019).

The relevant parts of *Design in Central Bedfordshire* have been considered in this Development Brief and will continue to guide the development of the scheme through to final delivery.

### *CBC Development Brief and Design Code Guidance*

CBC adopted its *Development Brief and Design Code Guidance* as technical guidance for development management purposes in February 2020. This guidance sets out the expected content and approval procedure for all development briefs and design codes submitted to CBC. This guidance seeks to ensure high-quality design is considered at the outset and enshrined within development brief(s) and design code(s) to hold developers accountable for the delivery of development of the highest design standard.

The guidance sets out the purpose of a development brief which is to establish:

- the vision and objectives for the site;
- the opportunities and constraints;
- the key principles for the development; and
- the spatial framework for the development.

The guidance confirms that the development brief should be prepared by the applicant and must be subject to appropriate public consultation agreed with the Council.

### **The Forest Plan**

The Forest of Marston Vale is a nationally designated Community Forest. The NPPF provides specific policy support for Community Forests at Paragraph 142. The Forest of Marston Vale *Forest Plan* (2000) provides the strategic framework and long-term vision for the creation of the Forest. It sets out the key aims, objectives and broad principles to be implemented. It notes the key target for the Community Forest of achieving 30% tree cover.

Beyond meeting the policy requirements of the Local Plan to deliver 30% tree cover, the delivery of the MVNV presents a major opportunity to make a meaningful and significant contribution to achieving objectives of the Forest Plan. As such the Forest of Marston Vale, the delivery of the objectives of the Forest Plan and the overarching context of delivering a sustainable development at the heart of a Community Forest will be an intrinsic, distinguishing and defining influence for the character of the landscapes and villages of the development.

There are many additional guidance resources which are very relevant to the key topics of the Development Brief and the design and delivery of large scale new settlements. A list of reference material is provided at Appendix D which sets out a wider list of resources to be considered.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

The MVNV is a major component of the Local Plan and its delivery is critical to the delivery of its objectives and growth strategy. The MVNV will be a very large project undertaken over a long period. It must be an exemplar sustainable development and success can be supported by drawing upon the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders. This includes the existing communities of the Marston Vale and their special understanding of the constraints and opportunities for the development. Consultation is also a key opportunity to understand the local aspirations which should be met as part of the significant change that the development will bring.

This Development Brief has been prepared by O&H in collaboration with CBC. It has been subject to multiple stages of consultation including public consultation undertaken in January 2020. A Consultation Statement is provided at Appendix A.