

The proposed enabling development accounts for just 5% of the Bedford River Valley Park – part of it is the Community Care Retirement proposal, but so much more forms part of this golden opportunity.



Landscaping delivering a mix of woodland, pathways, cycleways and wildlife habitat

A WALK IN THE PARK

The site for the Bedford Rowing Lake is approximately 40 hectares, about 50 football pitches and stretches from Bedford Eagles Football Club, abattoir and sewage works in the west through to the Danish Camp at Willington in the east with the Hanson batching plant and LaFarge processing plant in between.

Included within the area is Octagon Farm, and part of the National Cycle Network, which reaches directly into the heart of Bedford via Priory Marina.

The design for landscaping will be in accordance with the Bedford River Valley Park framework document delivering a mix of woodland, wetland and water bodies that will give the development a unique ambience.

The rowing lake itself will be the major feature of the park and will have vegetation and an indented shoreline to create a natural feel and to act as a habitat for wildlife – see below:



The proposed mix of enabling development reflects the emphasis on sport and leisure, delivering opportunities for further education in sports as well as opportunities for informal recreation.

The Council's Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan adopted in April 2008 as part of the Bedford Development Framework sets out 'the spatial objectives and policies needed to deliver the vision for the district'.

The regeneration and development catalysed by the 2300 metre rowing lake would assist in delivering the following objectives of this Core Strategy:

- Deliver the planned growth in Bedford, Kempston and the northern Marston Vale.
- Ensure future development is based upon sustainable development principles
- Provide quality housing to meet current and future needs of all sectors of the community
- Foster significant employment growth
- Protect and enhance the countryside, biodiversity and geodiversity and the quality and connectivity of green infrastructure in the borough with particular emphasis on enhancing the Marston Vale.

FURTHER EDUCATION

This aspect of the scheme is based on expressions of interest by several educational institutions for a new campus supplementing current facilities in and around Bedford (shire).

The proposed campus would comprise approximately 8 hectares of which half would be built development and the remainder being sports fields. Access to both would be available to the public in line with many current academic institutions fulfilling community benefits from their assets.

The existing University of Bedfordshire has specialist sports science facilities at the Polhill Campus and has already physiologically tested many local rowers to increase its knowledge base.



Such facilities would be eminently suited to a location integrated with the rowing lake and the adjoining employment development would facilitate spin off knowledge based businesses. For assessment purposes a student population of around 1800 has been assumed together with around 300 staff – more investment in the local economy.

80% COMMUNITY

It must be recognized that close to 80% of the BRVP 3.5 square mile area is owned by our Councils and by local Charities. As a result much of any benefit generated by the regeneration and development on the site comes straight back to the community.

This presents a clearly thought out strategy and secures a structured vision for the future in contrast to the ongoing creeping development that so often results in ill thought out development that is of little benefit to the wider community.

HOUSING

The saying goes that 'Location, Location, Location' is always paramount when it comes to buying a property. So what could be better than housing in a niche location overlooking a beautiful lake and park?

Add into that the golden opportunity for such housing to be an example of sustainable design and construction benefiting from its location within the park.

Clearly the site itself represents a sustainable location, adjoining employment regeneration developments plus the leisure facilities inherent in the park. The hamlet proposed by the scheme would fit with the context of existing listed buildings at the Octagon Farm site.

EMPLOYMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The East of England Plan, the Regional Spatial Plan published by the Secretary of State on 12 May 2008 states 27,000 new jobs are required in Bedford and Mid Beds in the period to 2021.

The Borough Council's Employment Land Study predicts that there will be an increase of between 54 – 61% in demand for 'B1' uses which encompasses offices, research and development and light industry which the park will provide.

At present there is a shortage of such sites in Bedford as much of the employment land consists of town centre offices, large industrial premises near the railway line and other large premises on the outskirts of town.

The proposed enabling development would be a step towards meeting this shortfall, providing high quality jobs for Bedford in a high quality, eco-friendly environment – all as part of the regeneration of the Bedford River Valley Park.

A business park is proposed next to an education facility and so creating a knowledge based park building on the opportunities of the Oxford Cambridge Arc. This employment site is then well placed to take advantage of road access in a similar vein to the two other clusters to the east of Bedford.

The Council's own Core Strategy gives priority to the development of B1 uses and states that Priory Business Park is reaching capacity and there is demand for a new site.

This site could not be better placed: close to Priory Business Park so allowing for linkages and expansion of those businesses currently there plus good links to the road network – all creating further inward investment for the future of Bedford.

The area meets the recommendations of the Bedford Employment Land study with a prominent location; access to the local and national road network and other infrastructure; its own internal roads and parking; within or alongside existing settlements; no significant impact on the local environment, and viable and attractive to the market.

LEISURE

The population of Bedford continues to grow and with further significant additions to the area such as the Wixams development, the provision of matching leisure facilities will be crucial.

This may well be even more relevant to young people today as it is often cited that there is not enough provision made for them, leading to potential negative impacts on society and there have been no major developments in Bedford in the last 20 years. The shortfall in suitable leisure facilities can therefore only worsen unless addressed immediately as part of a long term, strategic and co-ordinated policy.

The rowing lake could catalyse such development with a new leisure centre adjacent to it, facilities within the Continuing Care Retirement Community being available to the public, the park itself and not least all of the sport and recreational activities available from the lake.

The proposed facility envisages a 100 bed hotel, private sports club and potential restaurant facilities. The hotel alone would create 50 jobs, another 50 for the private sports club and 60 jobs for a restaurant.

The total job provision just for the leisure element would be around 220 and there is potential for more with a boat club facility for the lake plus, for example, crèche facilities within the overall employment allocation.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The Council is preparing an 'Allocations and Designations Plan' which flows from the Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan adopted by the Council earlier this year.

As part of that process the Council asked landowners, their agents, organisations and other interested parties to submit potential development sites for consideration by the deadline of 18 August 2008. Almost 300 sites were submitted and all of these have now been published on the council's website with paper copies available at the Town Hall.

All of the sites will undergo a robust assessment against the national, regional and local policies including the Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan which is a 'higher level plan' and one to which the Allocations and Designations Plan must conform.

The suitability, availability and deliverability of land for particular uses will be taken into account. A clear methodology will be used to appraise the relative suitability of various sites and to help inform the identification of preferred development sites.

A detailed Site Assessment Methodology (SAM) has been prepared and includes detailed criteria against which proposed sites can be assessed and compared. This was the subject of two rounds of consultation, the first in December 2007 and the second in May 2008. The SAM is available on the web site.

Over the coming months, each of the sites will be assessed against the SAM criteria along with national, regional and the local planning policies with a view to identifying which are the Council's preferred sites from the ones which fit best with the adopted strategy.

Public consultation on the preferred sites is currently scheduled for Autumn 2009. This process will also take account of the responses to the 'Issues and Options' consultation which was undertaken earlier this year.

A summary of the response to the 'Issues and Options' consultation can also be found on the website.

For up to date information on the Allocation and Designations Plan visit the website at www.bedford.gov.uk/default.aspx/web/AllocationsandDesignationDPD1

BEDFORD ROWING LAKE COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY

Community Interest Companies (CICS) are limited companies, with special additional features, created for the use of people who want to conduct a business or other activity for community benefit, and not for private advantage.

For the rowing lake to proceed there must be enabling development to help fund it, however the enabling development cannot go ahead without the Planning Permission for a 2300 metre lake being implemented.

The company will manage the lake and its 'officers' are well qualified to handle this task with Chairman Peter Mulkerrins, Star Club senior coach and former Great Britain Olympic rower, David Russell, Chief Executive of the Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust), Gavin Dods Transport Consultant, multi lane rowing course Umpire, Bedford Regatta Secretary plus Kate Watts, Chartered Accountant and financial controller.

For more information visit: www.bedford-rowing-lake.com