

Land at Bell Lane, London Colney

Submissions on behalf of Tarmac

Hertsmere Borough Council
Draft Local Plan

Employment Land Call for Sites
February 2021

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Client
Tarmac

Our reference
TARC 3000

17 March 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These site submissions have been prepared by Turley, on behalf of Tarmac, pursuant to the Draft Hertsmere Local Plan, call for potential employment sites consultation, 2021. Tarmac is an established land promotion and development company with a significant portfolio of freehold and other commercial land interests both within Hertsmere Borough and in the neighbouring St Albans District. Tarmac is also a major national employer with nationwide experience of bringing forward strategic development sites of all scales for new residential, mixed-use, commercial and industrial development.
- 1.2 Tarmac is promoting two of its freehold sites in the north of the Borough within the M25 corridor, east and west of Junction 22, for new employment development. Turley has been instructed to prepare separate site submissions in relation to each of these two promoted site locations and the inter-relationships and connectivity between these Tarmac sites is set out in our overarching correspondence. The following site-specific submissions relate to Tarmac's **Land at Bell Lane, London Colney**, which is located south of the M25, as shown on the attached red line plan at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 The promoted site at Land at Bell Lane, comprises a linear parcel of approximately 3.86 hectares of flat, open land adjacent to the westbound carriageway of the M25 with direct access the M25 via Junction 22. The site is promoted for new employment land with the potential to provide an early deliverable opportunity. For the purposes of illustration we have included a Framework Plan which illustrates how the site could accommodate approximately **75,000** sqft of new employment floorspace for the specified uses. The remainder of the promoted Site (circa 2.10 ha) is proposed as open space with new structural landscaping within an area adjacent to the M25 motorway. An illustrative Framework Plan is attached at **Appendix 2** for reference.
- 1.4 The Site is completely bounded to the north by M25 and to the south by Bell Lane (B556). The Site is well connected to the existing community at London Colney through a well-developed network of public rights of way. The existing pedestrian and cycle links are also capable of further improvement to ensure that the new development becomes fully integrated. There are also several existing bus services on Bell Lane and London Colney to the north which can also be easily accessed from the site.
- 1.5 The following site evaluation describes the illustrative scheme in the Framework Plan and sets out the availability, suitability and deliverability of the proposals by reference to the current and potential use of the Site, the timescales for delivery and relevant constraints.
- 1.6 This evaluation concludes with a summary case as to why exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of **Land at Bell Lane, London Colney** by Hertsmere Borough Council for 2.10 hectares of new employment development. To demonstrate the potential for early delivery, multiple expressions of relevant commercial interest have been provided at **Appendix 3**, which are self-explanatory.

2.0 SITE EVALUATION: LAND AT BELL LANE, LONDON COLNEY

Location and Site Characteristics

- 2.1 The promoted Site at Bell Lane comprises approximately 3.86 hectares of vacant, open rough grassland, enclosed with peripheral boundary trees and mixed hedgerow, located directly adjacent to the westbound carriageway of the M25, at Junction 22, as shown on the attached red line plan at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 The Site is broadly linear in form and is bounded to the north by M25 corridor and to the south by Bell Lane (B556). The Site is also bisected north to south by a Public Footpath, which directly connects the site to London Colney via a pedestrian footbridge over the motorway as shown below. The Colney Fields Retail Park is located approximately 150 metres due north of the Site and there are adjacent bus stops on Bell Lane, as shown on the submitted Framework Plan (**Appendix 2**).
- 2.3 There are two electricity pylons on the Site, with overhead power cables which broadly subdivide the Site along most of its length, which run broadly parallel with the motorway.
- 2.4 The majority of the promoted Site lies within the administrative area of Hertsmere Borough Council, although a small linear section to the northwest of the Site, lies within the administrative area of St Albans Council.
- 2.5 The respective administrative boundaries within the Site are shown on the Framework Plan at Appendix 2. However for the avoidance of doubt, the proposed new employment development and all of the new floorspace shown on the Framework Plan, falls entirely within the administrative area of Hertsmere Borough Council.



Accessibility

- 2.6 The Bell Lane Site is well connected to the existing community at London Colney through a well-developed network of public rights of way. The Watling Chase Timberland Trail runs north-south through the Site with a motorway footbridge across the M25 to the north and a toucan crossing on Bell Lane to the south.
- 2.7 The pedestrian and cycle links are capable of further improvement to ensure that the new development becomes fully integrated. In addition to the walking and cycling opportunities, there are several existing bus services on Bell Lane and London Colney to the north which can be accessed from the site. These bus services provide regular public transport connections to nearby destinations including St Albans and New Barnet (No-84) and Watford and Hatfield (No-602). Employees will therefore have sustainable travel choices and alternatives to the private car.
- 2.8 London Colney which has a range of facilities within convenient walking distance to meet the day-to-day needs employees including the large retail park at Colney Fields with several large food and non-food stores. Vehicular access onto Bell Lane can be readily achieved from a new priority or roundabout junction.
- 2.9 The site frontage is largely unconstrained by existing accesses or junctions. The site has good road connectivity within its journey to work catchment on the regional road network via B556, B5378 and A1081 and is exceptionally well connected to the strategic road network at Junction 22 of the M25.

Site Context and Constraints

- 2.10 Pursuant to these site submissions, Tarmac commissioned Turley to identify the relevant constraints to the proposed development of the Site for employment purposes to inform the submitted illustrative Framework Plan. The Site has some identified constraints and we summarise these below and how the Framework Plan has responded in terms of presenting an achievable and deliverable employment scheme.
- 2.11 There are two electricity pylons on the Site, with overhead power cables which broadly subdivide the Site along most of its length. However the Site is of a sufficient size that a suitably scaled commercial development can be achieved either side of the requirement easement, as illustrated on the submitted Framework Plan. Accordingly, the presence of overhead cables on part of the promoted Site is not an overriding constraint, subject to appropriately located buildings, of an intermediate scale, as illustrated at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.12 The Site is located in Flood Zone 1, with very low flood risk and has an agricultural land classification of Grade 3 (moderate). Other neighbouring development and features in the general vicinity of the Site include the Watford FC Training Ground, the University College London Sports Fields and Arsenal Training Grounds to the south. These other developments are not however considered to represent any constraint to the nature of development proposed, subject to appropriate design considerations.

The Illustrative Framework Plan

- 2.13 The illustrative Framework Plan proposals set out at Appendix 2 take into account the identified constraints and illustrate a scheme for approximately **1.76** hectares of new net employment land with direct westbound access to the M25, together with the provision of **2.10** hectares of open space and new structural landscaping to the northwest of the Site broadly parallel with the motorway (3.86 hectares in total).
- 2.14 The illustrated scheme shows a developable net site coverage of approximately 45% with five illustrative buildings totalling circa **75,000 sqft** of new employment space.
- 2.15 For the purposes of illustration these have been presented as five separate buildings, each of around 15,000 sqft, orientated southeast and northwest either side of the route of the overhead power lines.
- 2.16 The proposed overall land budget for the illustrative scheme at **Appendix 2** is as follows:

Land at Bell Lane: Proposed Land Budget	
Red Line Site Area	3.86 ha
New Employment Land (Net Developable Area)	1.76 ha
Open Space associated with New Development	2.10 ha
Potential New Employment Floorspace	75,000 sqft

Green Belt Impact of the Proposed Development

- 2.17 Whilst the proposals contained in Appendix 2 are purely illustrative, in terms of assessing the release of the Site against the five purposes of Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the evaluation of the promoted Tarmac site at Bell Lane can be broadly summarised as follows:

a) To check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 2.18 The Tarmac proposal is for a high quality, landscape-led, employment development with good standards of design, landscaping and social integration with the existing nearby settlements of London Colney and St Albans, including the provision of new landscaping and green infrastructure to further contain the Site. The nearest settlement of London Colney to the north-west does not represent a large built up area and is permanently separated from the Site by the intervening M25 corridor.
- 2.19 The release of the promoted site for employment use and 1.76 ha of new landscaped open space, as set out in the attached Framework Plan, would maintain the existing settlement identities of London Colney and nearby Shenley, the latter of which, is located approximately 1.5 kilometres south of the site.

- 2.20 The proposals would also be subject to full public consultation and examination and brought forward via the Plan-led system and so would not represent any unrestricted sprawl in this area of the Borough.

b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

- 2.21 The nearest affected settlements are London Colney, St Albans and Shenley which could not be physically coalesced by the partial development of the promoted site, by reason of the permanent severance caused by the M25 corridor and the 1.5 kilometre distance to Shenley. The location within the Site for the new employment use is particularly well contained by the M25 to the northwest and by Bell Lane to the south east. As such, the built element of the proposed employment use would be visually well contained within the consolidated boundaries shown on the Framework Plan and would not be prejudicial to this Green Belt purpose.

c) To safeguard the countryside from encroachment

- 2.22 The Tarmac site is flat and open in character, having a semi-pastoral appearance, albeit it is crossed from southwest to northeast by overhead power lines for most of its length. A good percentage of the Site (55%) will be largely maintained and enhanced, as the north-western section of the Site which falls within St Albans District will be retained as semi-natural and natural open green space.
- 2.23 The areas proposed for built development on the Site are strongly contained to the northwest given the prevalence of major transport infrastructure and directly adjacent to established and permanent boundaries. Therefore the partial development of the identified sections of this Site, close to the M25, in conjunction with the establishment of a high percentage of dedicated new boundary planting adjacent to Bell Lane would not represent any significant visual encroachment into the wider open countryside in this particular location.

d) To preserve the setting and character of historic towns

- 2.24 The promoted site at Bell Lane is not proximate to any historic towns, being located some distance away from the nearest historic town at St Albans. The site is proximate to the Shenley Conservation Area to the south, although this village is 1.5 kilometres distant. Accordingly any residual impacts can be appropriately managed through the detailed design process, as set out in principle by the illustrative Framework Plan.

e) To assist in urban regeneration

- 2.25 The planned release of part of this site for the sustainable new employment development proposed would not be prejudicial to the delivery of urban regeneration elsewhere in the Borough. The combination of the scale of the employment requirement in Hertsmere, the limited urban capacity for brownfield redevelopment and the predominance of Green Belt throughout the Borough, means that the planned release of Green Belt will be a key and necessary element of the spatial strategy of the new Hertsmere Local Plan.

Availability, Suitability and Deliverability

- 2.26 The promoted Site comprises 3.86 hectares and is within the sole freehold ownership of Tarmac. The Site is available now for the proposed employment uses, as illustrated in the Framework Plan. The Site can be brought forward immediately after the adoption of the Local Plan and can be allocated for development to take place at an early stage in the plan period with confidence. Essentially the Site is viable, exceptionally well located and easily connected, so is suitable for a wide range of general employment uses, subject to a scale of buildings which are compatible with the identified site constraints. The site is also highly accessible to other major infrastructure in the M25 corridor, with direct pedestrian linkages to London Colney.
- 2.27 There are no therefore no overriding constraints to the development of this Site for new employment use. Where off-site constraints exist, such as the Shenley Conservation Area to the south, these are capable of mitigation through the design process.
- 2.28 The development of the Site for employment use will provide the opportunity to deliver a significant scale of new employment floorspace for the Borough in a strategically well suited location whilst also improving the sustainability of the wider area by providing high quality, local employment facilities, easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. This is demonstrated by the numerous expressions of interest and commercial validations for this Site, as set out in **Appendix 3**, which suggest that it is of a scale and location which is particularly attractive to the market.

National Policy on New Employment Development

- 2.29 The NPPF states at **Paragraph 80** that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.
- 2.30 **Paragraph 81** of the NPPF states that planning policies should set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth and also set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period. Paragraph 81 also advises LPA's to address barriers to investment and be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.
- 2.31 **Paragraph 82** states that planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; and for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations.

Conclusions and the Exceptional Circumstances Case

- 2.32 The NPPF does not provide decision makers with a strict definition with regards to what constitutes ‘exceptional circumstances’. However Paragraph 137 of the NPPF sets out a number of matters that should be identified and dealt with in order to ascertain whether ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist to justify releasing land from the Green Belt.
- 2.33 The approach taken in the ‘Calverton’ judgement (*Calverton Parish Council v Greater Nottingham Councils - 2015*) also provides useful guidance when considering whether exceptional circumstances exist. These include; the intensity of the assessed need, inherent constraints on the supply of land suitable for sustainable development and difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt.
- 2.34 The intensity of the assessed employment need in Hertsmere Borough is self-evident in that a call for sites exercise has been initiated at a very late stage in the Draft Local Plan making process. Accordingly the question of whether development should take place in the Green Belt has moved from a question of principle to the practical application of the advice in Paragraphs 80 – 82 of the NPPF and the application of sustainability criteria for newly promoted employment sites.
- 2.35 In conclusion, the promoted site on Land at Bell Lane, London Colney, will help support economic growth and productivity in the local area, taking into account local business needs and also wider opportunities for development. The Site can assist in the long term sustainable economic growth of this part of the Borough by attracting inward investment to support the wider economic strategy and meet anticipated needs over the plan period.
- 2.36 Reference to **Appendix 3** demonstrates that the Site is suitable for clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries and for storage and distribution operations, at an intermediate scale, as this is a highly suitable, accessible and viable Site location, adjacent to national transport infrastructure.
- 2.37 These Site submissions have identified a suitable site for sustainable new employment development on Land at Bell Lane, London Colney and have set out a summary case for the allocation of the Site in the emerging Hertsmere Plan. Where the Council requires additional information, Tarmac and its consultant team are able to address any technical queries on request and welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Council.

Appendix 1

Land at Bell Lane

Site Location / Ownership Plan

Appendix 2

Land at Bell Lane

Illustrative Framework Plan

Appendix 3

Land at Bell Lane

Expressions of Interest and Local Market Appraisal

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