

# **MMAG** - Comments on Draft Development Brief for Marston Vale New Villages

The following submission from the Marston Moretaine Action Group (MMAG) engages with the stakeholder process established by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). However, this does not mean we see the stakeholder process or this submission as a new process that replaces/avoids the Local Plan or provides for a quicker planning approval process for the Marston Vale New Villages.

In addition, MMAG would like clarity on how CBC will make the new Stakeholder Group approach transparent and widely accessible. How will CBC present the work on its website, in its communications etc. rather than assuming that local Parish Councils and community groups will do this on their behalf?

## **The Draft Development Brief**

The Development Brief states the location and context of the Marston Vale New Villages presents an exceptional opportunity to deliver an exemplar development. Does the Development Brief live up to that vision? Only time will tell but for now in 2020 what key questions would the existing communities expect to be answered when reading the development brief? After all most members of the public would expect a development brief to explain how, where, when and what will be done by whom - to realise the Marston Vale New Villages and how it will impact on existing communities.

### What comes first – canal, roads, housing, employment?

There is no outline timetable or itemized schedule of building works. The Development Brief refers to a sequence of delivery with phases of development; initial, interim and later but this is qualified to accept there can be overlap provided this does not compromise the delivery of key infrastructure and services. O&H website refers to provision of benefits to existing communities e.g. traffic calming in Marston Moretaine. Does the development brief ensure this happens and early enough to give meaningful benefit to those trying to continue living in a giant building site? Similarly, what absolute commitment do local residents get from the development brief that the promised screening / planting around various vulnerable individual and small collections of existing houses will happen early to mitigate the negative impact of mass house and road building?

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## Who will be accountable for delivering the project?

The Development Brief refers to a multi-faceted and comprehensive governance strategy allowing for meaningful and ongoing community involvement and oversight. To whom does a member of the public pick up the phone to in the first instance? Who or what will be the coordinating body? There are numerous agents active here ranging from O&H as master builder – what precisely does that mean? Central Bedfordshire Council, the Parish Councils and community groups, the individual housing developers and utility companies, the Forest of Marston Vale and the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park. Is Central Bedfordshire Council as a planning authority sufficiently resourced to monitor a development of this scale? Is there an argument for the Forest of Marston Vale and the Waterways to be represented on the Stakeholder Group?

## How will existing communities be protected against the disturbance involved in major earthworks and construction activity?

The development brief acknowledges there will be a long term build out reflecting its scale and complexity but goes on to say that unusually for a scheme of this scale, the nature of the site which incorporates much existing infrastructure allows for development to commence and continue in more than one area at any stage of the project. So existing residents can expect the existing roads to be used by construction traffic at any time any place? What mitigation is proposed for condemning a community to live within a large building site for 20-25 years? Should the Development Brief be explicit about which community will bear the brunt of construction traffic and whether any of the only existing four ways in and out of the site will have a permanent ban on such use?

## What will the new housing look like?

The Development Brief refers to new market homes, a broad range of affordable housing, a variety of housing types across a range of densities, opportunities for self-build and accommodation for older people . In what way is that different from Marston Park or Marston Fields or exemplary in respect of housing design? The O&H proposals suggest Lower Millbrook will be the more rural of the villages with lower density of housing. Does the draft development brief acknowledge and deliver this?

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## How will residents get to and from the new and existing villages?

The development brief focuses on walkable neighbourhoods, cycling routes, alongside new public transport provision? What form will the public transport take? How will existing commuter patterns be taken account of especially for those who work in London?

## How will the ecological impact be measured?

The excavation of a canal will involve major earth works – where will this earth be taken and is it to be utilised elsewhere on site as bunding? Similarly will the new villages lead to a net loss of habitat and what will be the carbon footprint of the new community compared with now?

## What guarantees are there that anything aspired to within the development brief will actually happen?

The development brief recognises the lifespan of the development will extend beyond the plan period for the Emerging Local Plan and goes on to explain that policies, village pattern books and planning reserved matters will also change. So nothing is guaranteed and as with existing planning applications developers can seek to amend plans. So what's different or exemplar?

Stewart Long

Secretary

MMAG

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