Bedford Station Quarter – Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary

Introduction

Bedford Borough Council has commissioned Halcrow Group Ltd to summit an outline planning application for the redevelopment of the Bedford Station Quarter to form a mixed use development.

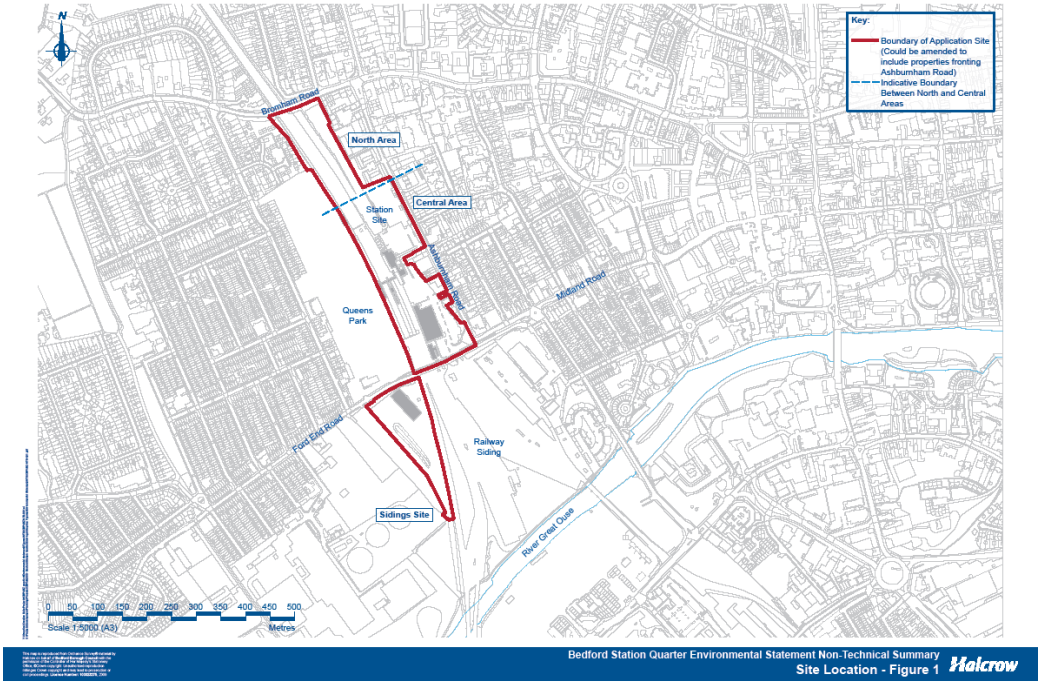
An environmental impact assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 as amended.

The aim of the environmental impact assessment was to identify the likely consequences for the biological, physical and geomorphologic environment for human beings arising from the proposed development, and to enable any such consequences to be taken into account as the development progresses into detailed design and construction.

The findings of the environmental impact assessment have been presented in an Environmental Statement published by Bedford Borough Council. The Environmental Statement is intended to ensure that the planning authority, statutory and non-statutory bodies with interests in the environment and the public are fully informed of the proposed development, and that they are provided with the opportunity to comment on the environmental effects of the proposed development.

This document comprises the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Statement as required by the Regulations. It summarises the key findings arising from the environmental impact assessment in an easily understandable form.

The location of the proposed development is shown in the figure below.



Background and Need for the Development

The Application Site currently comprise a mix of commercial, residential, operational and derelict railway related uses, including the existing Bedford Midland Mainline Station areas, associated rail tracks and platforms, surface car and cycle parking, a DIY store and an assortment of residential, commercial and industrial buildings alongside Ashburnham Road.

The redevelopment of the Application Site will form a key part of the development of Bedford within the Milton Keynes/South Midlands Growth Area. Initial proposals for the Application Site are set out in the Town Centre Area Action Plan, adopted 8th October 2008.

The Town Centre Area Action Plan outlines a vision for the town centre, identifies investment priorities and provides guidelines on shaping the form of the town centre over the next 15 to 20 years. The redevelopment of the Application Site is an integral part of this plan and a priority in achieving the renaissance of the town centre.

It is one of a number of Area Action Plan sites which have been envisaged as bringing forward development in the wider Bedford Town Centre area.

Scheme Objectives

The objective of the proposed development is to provide a complementary mix of residential, office and retail use, alongside an improved transport service at the Application Site. The proposed development aims to provide a state of the art station building and concourse with additional passenger handling capacity, as well as providing an opportunity to create new and additional housing and employment opportunities for Bedford town centre.

The Proposed Development

An illustrative plan has been prepared for the proposed development. This shows the Application Site divided into three main areas; the 'North Area', 'Central Area' and the 'Sidings Site'.

The North Area will comprise car parking to serve the station and hotel or office accommodation. Car parking will be accommodated within three separate multi-storey car parks. Two car parks at the northern-most end of the site adjacent to Bromham Road will be three storeys in height (two decks with parking proposed on the roof). The third car park will be provided to the south of these comprising six floors of car parking (five decks with parking on the roof). The southern and eastern elevations of this car park will be adjoined by five storeys of office or hotel accommodation. The car park will provide parking to serve these offices/ hotel and the station. Taxi waiting ranks will be provided at ground level adjacent to the western elevation of the car park.

The Central Area will be organised around a new station building relocated slightly to the south of the existing station. To the north of the new station, a transport interchange is proposed which will accommodate short stay car parking, disabled car parking and cycle parking.

Commercial development will be provided to the south of the station building. This will be accommodated within a building that will be mainly between 3 and 6 storeys in height, but which will extend up to ten storeys at it highest point. Part of the ground floor will be retained for retail use, with office floorspace proposed above. Car parking for the office floorspace will be provided within a car parking 'core' of the building. Vehicular access will be gained at the junction of Midland Road and Ashburnham Road, via an access road that will extend around the building to its rear adjacent to the railway line.

A two way 'loop' access road will extend into the Central Area off Ashburnham Road. This is proposed exclusively for buses, with bus stops proposed either side of the access road. A total of 6 bus bays will be provided.

The Central Area includes two infill sites along Ashburnham Road. The redevelopment will comprise new residential development. This will take the form of apartments over 4 floors.

The Sidings Site, located on the western side of the railway line, will accommodate residential development. The illustrative layout shows how the site could be developed to provide townhouses of up to 79 new homes, made up of 29 town houses and 50 maisonettes. The ground floor of any accommodation will not be habitable, and is likely to comprise garaging.

Details of the construction programme will be determined during the detailed design of the proposals in discussion with the Contractor. At present, it is proposed that the station building will be constructed by 2011, followed by hotel or office and commercial building within the central site being constructed by 2012. Other works will be phased accordingly to follow, with the construction being complete by 2018.

Alternatives Considered

The preferred option for the redevelopment of the Station Quarter has evolved through examination of a number of different approaches to achieve the design objectives. The underlying requirements for this development that apply to all recommended options arise from the Area Action Plan. The Option Appraisal looked at three different concepts 'Minimal Option', 'Medium Option' and 'High Density Option'.

The Options Appraisal Stage was completed in close consultation with the Bedford Station quarter Steering Group which is made up of key stakeholders including Bedford Borough Council, Network Rail and Renaissance Bedford.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Environmental Overview

Bedford Station Quarter is located to the west of Bedford town centre, at National Grid reference (NGR) TL 041 497. The Application Site includes Bedford Midland Mainline railway station and surrounding land and is located within an area dominated by residential land use. The community of Queen's Park is located to the west of the Application Site. Areas of housing and open space are located to the north, Bedford town centre is located to the east, and a large area of railway sidings is located to the south, with the River Great Ouse located further south. In general, the Application Site, particularly to the east of the railway, is surrounded by residential properties with an area of industrial land to the south west.

The area surrounding the Application Site has undergone some redevelopment in recent years. Land to the west of the railway, north of Ford End Road, has recently been developed as residential housing on the site of the former Rolls Royce factory. Immediately south of the River Great Ouse, the site of the former Britannia Ironworks is currently being redeveloped for residential use and includes a footbridge to link the development with the northern bank of the river to the south of the railway sidings.

Planning Policy

The Milton Keynes and South Midlands Strategy states that the emphasis within the Bedford Growth Area is to strengthen the role of this key sub-regional centre through economic regeneration. Other

strategic priorities identified for the area include urban renaissance and improved economic performance.

A key aim of the adopted Bedford Local Plan (2002) is to encourage the beneficial reuse of derelict and under-utilised urban sites in order to expand the range of housing available, foster the vitality and viability of Bedford Town Centre and to encourage the creation of new and additional employment opportunities. The Local Plan also supports the improvement of facilities at Bedford Midland Station. Proposals for the redevelopment of Bedford Station and surrounding area are cited within the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008).

Local Community and Economy

Over the last two decades, Bedford's economy has been hampered by low population growth, sluggish employment growth and low economic growth. The proposed development will result in an increase in residents who rely on local community facilities. A review of local community amenities showed that there are sufficient pupil places amongst the local schools and capacity in general practitioners and dentist surgeries operating locally to adequately cater for new Station Quarter residents. There is sufficient open space within the local area for the proposed development residents.

The proposed development is likely to benefit the local community and Bedford as a whole in terms of the creation of construction employment and high quality employment related to the commercial side of the proposed development.

Landscape and Visual Amenity

The townscape character of the Application Site and its surroundings is predominantly urban and residential. There are some more recent residential developments in the area, some currently under construction, others built in the last 5 – 10 years, most of which are between two and eight storeys. The Bedford Town Centre Conservation Area lies to the east and north of the site and represents the historic town core of Bedford and areas of early suburb.

The Application Site is situated within an area of generally low topography and, coupled with the surrounding built form and tree planting, this means that the visibility is limited both into and out of the site.

The proposed development will have both positive and negative impacts on the townscape and visual amenity of the local area. The construction phase will have a negative impact on visual amenity, as will the change in landscape resulting from construction 2-3 story buildings in existing open car park. However, beneficial impacts will occur as a result of the development due to improvements made to derelict or dated areas of the Station quarter.

Traffic and Transport

The transport assessment has evaluated the potential impacts the proposed development will have on the road network surrounding the Application Site. Bedford town centre experiences high levels of traffic and congestion during peak times in certain area, although it is envisaged that this (in part at least) will be relieved by the opening of the Western By-pass and the introduction of other town centre travel demand management measures.

During the construction period there will typically be negligible impacts as a result of changes to traffic and travel patterns, although some minor adverse impacts will be experienced in relation to accidents and safety. This impact is generally reflective of the overall increase in traffic volumes on the network and the addition of HGV movements.

Upon occupation and operation, the assessment has identified that typically the development will result in changes to traffic and travel patterns that will be negligible, over and above those conditions which would have otherwise prevailed through the delivery of the broad Town Centre Area Action Plan sites, although there will be some localised minor adverse impacts and some localised minor beneficial impacts on a number of the junctions in terms of Driver Delay and Pedestrian Delay. Again, although there would continue to be locations on the town centre network where traffic conditions would be congested, the effects are not primarily caused by the proposed development.

Air Quality

The Air Quality assessment focused on changes to nitrogen dioxide and particulates. Concentrations of nitrogen dioxide are currently above national air quality objectives alongside some of the road network in the study area. Concentrations are particularly high along Prebend Street where there are residential dwellings at roadside locations. This area has been declared an Air Quality Management Zone by Bedford Borough Council; the source of the pollution is vehicular emissions.

Nearby residential, healthcare, community, leisure and retail properties have been identified as potentially sensitive to dust arising from construction activities. It is not possible to predict the amount of dust generated by construction activities; however, it is known that in the absence of any mitigation measures complaints are most likely at receptors closest to construction activities. With the adoption of best practice management on site the impacts of nuisance dust, plant and construction vehicle emissions from the construction phase are predicted to be temporary, of slight adverse significance with no long term adverse impacts.

The contribution of the full development only serves to impart a slight adverse impact on local air quality, whilst elsewhere, the impact of the development on annual mean NO_2 concentrations is considered negligible.

Noise and Vibration

The Noise and Vibration assessment had two main purposes. The first was to study the potential noise and vibration impacts on the surrounding environment resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed development. The use of national and international guidelines was used to deal with specific noise and vibration issues, and Impact Scales and relevant Significant Criteria were used to establish the significance and effects of the environmental impacts. The second purpose was to establish, through a baseline survey, whether existing noise and vibration levels at the station car park site posed a constraint to proposed development and whether relevant mitigation measures were required in the development design to achieve suitable requirements. The baseline results confirmed that noise and vibration levels were typical of an area characterised by significant road traffic and railway line movements.

The assessment concluded that noise impacts during the construction phase of the project were the most significant impact identified that required mitigation. A construction noise management plan was recommended in order reduce construction noise levels as far as practically possible. Mitigation will also be required to reduce noise levels with the proposed residential parts of the development in the form of secondary glazing that would reduce rail and road traffic noise within internal living environments.

Ground Conditions

An assessment has been made of the existing ground conditions including geology, groundwater and potential sources of contamination that could constrain the proposed development and that could have impacts on surrounding receptors. The assessment concluded that no impacts on designated features of geological interest will occur.

Potential sources of contamination associated with past land use include the former use of the site for railway land. The proximity of the North and Central Areas to the former Rolls Royce Engineering Factory and the Sidings Site to a former Gas Works indicate further potential risks from groundwater migration onto the site.

Potential impacts during the construction phase can be mitigated by the application of suitable Personal Protection Equipment, site methods, the use of a Construction Environmental Management Plan, and the use of best practice. Potential impacts during operation (impacts such as the long term exposure of site workers and residents from exposure to potential contaminants) can be avoided by the use of a remedial strategy. The nature of any remediation works will be assessed in line with the findings of the further ground investigations. Potential remedial measures will include removal of contaminated soils and/or constructing an impermeable surface.

Flora and Fauna

An Ecological Impact Assessment was completed. Surveys of the Application Site highlighted the presence of roosting and foraging bats, habitat for reptiles, breeding birds, and possibly great crested newts, as well as ecologically important urban habitats. The railway and adjacent land also act as a wildlife corridor though Bedford.

The proposed development will adversely affect each of the species mentioned above, due to loss of habitat which provides areas for feeding, breeding and hibernation. There are several recommended mitigation options which could potentially reduce the impacts such that no residual impacts of more than minor adverse significance are predicted. The details of the mitigation measures will be finalised during detailed design.

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

Bedford town is an historic market town that contains a number of listed buildings and features of archaeological interest. However, a desk based assessment did not highlight features of archaeological importance including Scheduled Monuments or any existing Listed Buildings within 500m of the Application Site.

Although no known buried archaeology of significance to cultural heritage is known within the Application Site, there is the potential for buried palaeo-environmental deposits. These may require investigation prior to development in order to reduce any potential impact to unknown features of interest. The outcome of any such an investigation will be used to determine a programme of mitigation in agreement with the local authority archaeologist.

The removal of the Engine Shed can be adequately addressed by measures to preserve the structure by record. It is not envisaged that the building will form a constraint to the proposed development.

Waste Management

The Application Site currently generates waste streams. The development of the Application Site is likely to lead to an increased amount of certain waste during both the construction and operational phases.

Construction activities would lead to the generation of demolition waste, spoil from earthworks and packaging and surplus supplies that requires disposal. However, the design of road alignments, and the location, level and grading of the development, the re-use of spoil and landscaping can be used to minimise the volume of earthworks waste requiring off-site disposal, such that no residual significant impact is envisaged. A robust Site Waste Management Plan will be produced to ensure that impacts resulting from the disposal of other forms of construction waste are minimised, so that the residual impact on Bedfordshire waste management infrastructure is likely to be minor.

During operation, waste sorting and recycling facilities will be provided for all residential and commercial properties to maximise recycling, and sustainable design principles will be adopted to ensure maximum energy and resource efficiency. The residual impact on the waste management infrastructure is likely to be minor. These measures will also help minimise greenhouse gas emissions resulting from waste management and handling. Ensuring waste is handled by the nearest waste management site should ensure transport of residual waste is minimised.

Sustainability

An assessment has been made of how the proposed development will comply with the aims of sustainability. The assessment has addressed compliance with best practice as outlined in local policy and the BRE Environmental Assessment Method and the Code for Sustainable Homes standards. Issues covered by the assessment include climate change, community issues, place making, transport, ecology, use of resources, business and building standards.

No areas of conflict have been identified, and although some issues can not be fully assessed due to the outline nature of the proposals at present, appropriate standards have been selected to which the proposed development will adhere as it progresses towards detailed design. In particular, The Application Site will seek to achieve BRE Environmental Assessment Method 'Good' standards and Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 standards.

The proposal offers a strong emphasis on providing a suitable and high quality site, and on providing an efficient, and a healthy built environment in which to live and work. By considering sustainable design and acknowledging the principles of sustainability at the outline stage in the development process, the site will aim to provide a comfortable, high quality, and valuable strategic site solution. The proposed achievement of the Building Research and Code for Sustainable Homes standards adds further weight and robustness to the sustainability performance of the site.

The Climate Change and Pollution Supplementary Planning Document (December 2008), further identifies the importance of sustainability and policy CP26. It gives standards that each development should meet. The overall strategy for the site is in line with standards in the Climate Change and Pollution Supplementary Planning Document.

Comments

The Environmental Statement will be made available to the public for viewing at Bedford Borough Council planning department during the planning application consultation and determination process at the following address:

Bedford Borough Council
Planning Services
Town Hall
St Paul's Square
Bedford
MK40 1SJ

The dates and times of viewing will be advertised in a Public Notice by Bedford Borough Council.

Copies of the Environmental Statement will be available as electronic copies on application in writing to Jim Caffrey at the same address.

Following the publication of the planning application and the Environmental Statement, there will be a 21-day period, during which representations may be made in writing to the Planning Authority. The closing date for any such representations will be as specified in the Public Notice.