

Greater Cambridge Local Plan – Responses to the consultation and calls for sites.

Comments on proposed sites for Balsham

Overview

There are 6 sites proposed for housing development in Balsham, plus one set of three sites proposed as a 'green site'.

(Information from the responses to the calls for sites is available [here](#). Click on the site of interest shown on the map and then click on the 'Link to JDI record' which you can find by scrolling down to the bottom of the pane which comes up on the left. The names in the table below are also direct links to the individual JDI records)

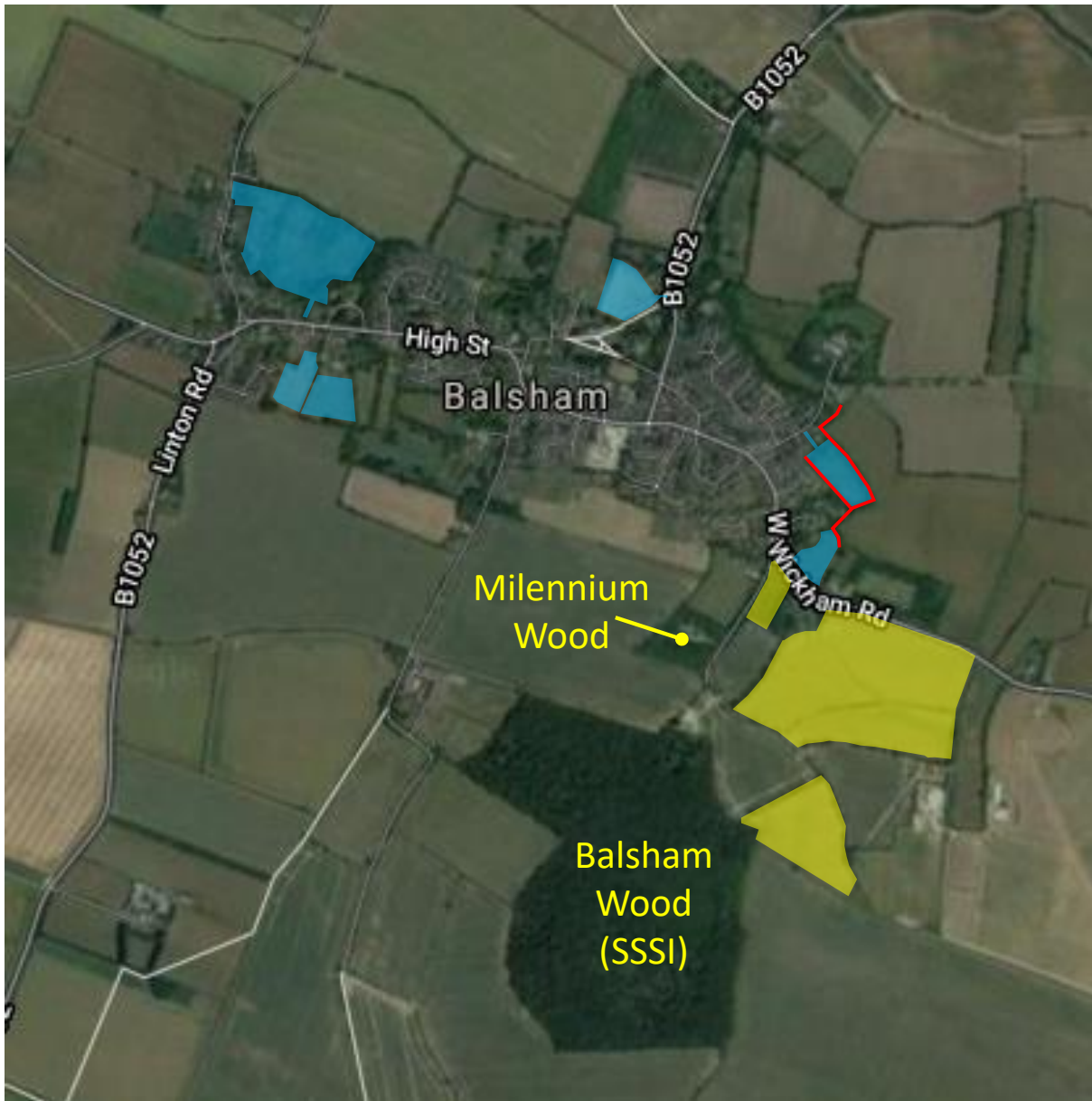
Name	URN	Opus no.	Agent	Area, Ha	Dwellings		
					total	Per hectare	
						stated	calculated
Fox road to High St.	406	40421	Carter Jonas	5.37	(160) 70	(30)	(29.8) 13
Rear of Lower Farm	523	40538	Cheffins	0.93	20	25	21.5
South of High St.	484	40499	Savills	1.07	35		32.7
West Wrattling road	383	40397	Carter Jonas	1.3	37	30	28.5
Old House road	323	40438	Carter Jonas	1.16	23	30	19.8
West Wickham road	522	40537	Cheffins	0.9	15-20		17-22
Between Balsham Wood and West Wickham Road	G013	48089	Cambridge Past Present and Future	16.24	NA	NA	NA

Of the development sites, South of High Street and Old House Road have provided site layout plans, and the others are vaguer. The consultation has assumed 40 dwellings/ha for sites for which no number is indicated, but all proposals for Balsham show fewer than this.

We should be prepared for the possibility that some of the Balsham sites will be included in the next Local Plan. The aim of the PC should be to ensure that the most appropriate site(s) are chosen, and that sufficient constraints are imposed to ensure that village life and facilities and biodiversity are enhanced rather than damaged.

The proposed green site is close to Balsham Wood (Site of Special Scientific Interest), and is mostly cultivated farmland under tenancy agreements. The owner (Cambridge Past Present and Future) would require financial compensation for the loss of income. They state "...the land would either have to be purchased or leased from us for use as a green site or there would need to be an ongoing compensatory payment."

I have attempted to present facts and highlight issues which should be included in any consideration of suitability of sites, without making judgements on individual sites.



Development sites marked in blue, and green sites in yellow. Critical hedge/ditch marked in red (see under Biodiversity below)

Access

Traffic

Consideration should be given to where the majority of traffic from any development will head. If (as I suspect will be the case) most will be towards Cambridge, Abington area and Linton, then it would

be less desirable to have significant development at the Eastern end of the village. In that case the additional traffic would have to pass through the length of the village, past the school entrance and two pubs.

[Fox Road to High Street \(Opus 40421; URN 406\)](#)

It is stated in the submission that “There are access points into the site from High Street and Fox Road.” Fox Road is currently not suitable for traffic from another at least 70 dwellings, and has no foot way for pedestrians. There are currently 27 properties fronting onto Fox Road with a further 12 in Orchard Close (based on interactive map [here](#)). Access via Fox Road would also result in significantly more traffic travelling towards Cambridge, Linton and the Abington area having to turn right across traffic on the High Street at a bend with poor visibility.

Access directly onto the High Street would have good visibility along a straight stretch of road, but would also involve all traffic travelling towards Cambridge, Linton and the Abington area to turn right across traffic on the High Street.

It is possible that pedestrian access could be provided directly onto the High Street even if vehicular access were into Fox road, although that would not address the issue of interaction of increased traffic in Fox Road with pedestrians accessing properties in Fox road and/or the popular rural public footpaths which continue from the end of the metalled road.

[Rear of Lower Farm \(Opus 40538; URN 523\)](#)

Access is proposed either through Dairy Way (assuming that the adjacent site is developed) or through Queen’s Close, or both. (Is there any concern regarding creation of a through route from the High Street to Linton Road?) There is an existing access to the field from Queen’s Close, but it is narrower than the roads in the close, and very close to the frontages of Nos. 17, 19, 22 and 24 (see <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@52.1325178,0.3076147,3a,75y,102.04h,73.12t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sL4w4Pu1Hmaq9B1PXTnl5Q!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>). It would not be possible to include a footway in this stretch.

Access through Dairy Way would result in traffic exiting the site towards Cambridge, Abington area or Linton turning left which is the safest option. Access through Queen’s Close would require traffic heading for Cambridge and Abington area to turn right across the Linton Road.

[South of the High Street \(Opus 40499; URN 484\)](#)

It is stated in the submission that “Access permitted under S/0460/17/FL See enclosed site plan for consent granted”. Access through Dairy Way would result in traffic to Cambridge, Abington area or Linton exiting the site turning left, which is the safest option.

[West Wratting Road \(Opus 40397; URN 383\)](#)

The submission states that *“There is an existing vehicular access to the site. The current access will need to be upgraded to accommodate the proposed development. An assessment of the access arrangements will need to be undertaken to demonstrate that a safe and suitable access can be provided for the proposed development.”*

Access is on a bend with generally poor visibility, where there is also a public foot path crossing.

Traffic exiting the site towards Cambridge, Abington area or Linton would turn right, across traffic on the West Wratting Road.

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323)

Road access to the Old House Rd site has been criticised in the past. The Inspector considering the appeal for application S/1545/81/O considered that it would adversely affect the amenity of the residents in nos. 12 and 14 Old House Road:

'Pedestrians and vehicles visiting the proposed bungalows would pass close to these houses and alongside the full length of the gardens. I consider that the residents would suffer a severe loss of privacy and could be disturbed by the movement of vehicles. If walls were built along the boundaries as suggested by your clients, this would minimise the loss of privacy and might reduce the disturbance factor, however the residents at present enjoy an open aspect, and I am sure that the high walls would result in a loss of amenities and they would be resented by the residents.'

The Design Development Brief states as follows:

"A shared surface access of 5.5m wide with 0.5m service strips either side is achievable from Old House Road. 6m radii are achievable where the new access road meets Old House Road.

The access, including visibility splays can be provided wholly within the landowners land and the adopted highway."

It is not clear whether this access would include a footway. If not, there is a considerable distance (nearly 60m, scaled off the 'Access Arrangement Visibility' plan presented in supporting evidence [here](#)) to be covered down the proposed access strip where a pedestrian or wheelchair user would be in conflict with vehicles.

According to South Cambridgeshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) Report August 2013, Appendix 7i (<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/4325/20-appendix-7i-balsham.pdf>) *"The 2011 Call for site questionnaire also highlights that there is a ransom strip relating to access of the site."* Has this changed? (The stated site area is 1.16Ha in both cases)

It should also be recognised that this development would put pressure on the Old House Road : West Wickham Road junction, where all traffic heading towards the centre of the village, Cambridge, Abington area and Linton has to turn right across traffic in West Wickham Road.

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522)

According to the Planning Statement presented in supporting evidence in the JDI record for the submission *"...The current field access is not in an ideal location due to a bend in the road and therefore we suggest that the access is located closer to the village, further west, where visibility appears greater i.e. to the east of No 39 West Wickham Road. Even at the existing access point there is a wide highway verge which does allow adequate visibility when exiting the site."*

Traffic exiting the site towards the village, Cambridge, Abington area and Linton would be turning across traffic on the West Wickham Road. Moving the entrance closer to the village would result in it being closer to a blind bend on the village side.

There would need to be a foot way (suitable also for wheel chairs, with dropped kerbs where needed, including on the southern side of The Brambles) for access to the village. This would impact on the frontages of 38a, 38 and 39 West Wickham Road, and require destruction of the hedge. To achieve a flat (un-cambered) foot way, the access to No 39, and possibly No 38, would have to be steepened, to an unacceptable degree.

Pressure on services

None of the submissions give any consideration to the current capacity of local schools or health care facilities. The general assumption appears to be that developments will be welcome, as they will support these services and facilities. This needs to be considered, and needs to take into account proposals for neighbouring settlements, particularly Linton, where very considerable development is proposed. Local facilities (particularly outdoor and indoor community/recreational facilities) also need to be considered. Extracts from submissions below:

Fox Road to High Street (Opus 40421; URN 406): *"The proposed development would support the existing services and facilities in Balsham including the convenience store, public houses and bus services."*

South of the High Street (Opus 40499; URN 484): *"...the introduction of new housing, including affordable housing, new investment and spending power into those settlements is an important strategy to ensure that the services and facilities in the villages is enhanced."*

West Wratting Road (Opus 40397; URN 383): *"The proposed development would support the existing services and facilities in Balsham."*

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323): *"The proposed development would support the existing services and facilities in Balsham including the convenience store, public houses and bus services."*

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522): *"Balsham is an appropriate location for further development given its range of services and facilities including shops, pub, primary school, recreational facilities, bus service and so forth."*

Information on the current situation with regard to outdoor and indoor community/recreational facilities can be found in the following extract from Plumbs Dairy Section 106 Heads of Terms (<https://scamb.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s103137/Heads%20of%20terms.pdf>) (my bold):

*"The Recreation and Open Space Study July 2013, forming part of the Local Plan submission, showed that **Balsham needed 1.30 ha Children's Play Space whereas the village had 0.07, i.e. a deficit of 1.23 ha of Children's Play Space.**"*

*"The Council undertook an external audit and needs assessment undertaken in 2009, in respect of all primary community facilities in each village." "...the audit recommended the provision of 111 square metres of indoor community space per 1,000 people" "In accordance with the policy **Balsham needs 180 m² of indoor community space whereas it has 140 m², i.e. a deficit of 40 m².**" "Based on the likely number of people arising from the development **an area of circa 4 m² is required further exacerbating the situation.**"*

In summary, the starting point is that there was a deficit of 1,23ha of children's play space, and 44m² of indoor community space after completion of Dairy Way. This does not take into account the Linton Road development.

Utilities

Most developments assume that connections can be made to existing utilities, and there is no consideration in any of current capacity of water, sewage, electricity or telecoms. A review of all of these is essential. Extracts from submissions below (my underlining):

Fox Road to High Street (Opus 40421; URN 406): *"The proposed development will need to provide new utilities infrastructure, but there are services to the neighbouring urban area and so new connections will be possible."*

Rear of Lower Farm (Opus 40538; URN 523): *"The site is located close to existing roads serving Balsham (Linton Road and High Street) and it is considered that connections can be made to existing services – including electricity, gas, telecommunications and water as required" (there is no gas, of course!)*

South of the High Street (Opus 40499; URN 484): *"Provision can be made to link up with existing utilities given existing and proposed new development granted planning permission immediately to the north."*

West Wratting Road (Opus 40397; URN 383): *"The proposed development will need to provide new utilities infrastructure, but there are services to the neighbouring urban area and so new connections will be possible."*

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323): *"The proposed development will need to provide new utilities infrastructure, but there are services to the neighbouring urban area and so new connections will be possible."*

(It is recognised in the 'Design Development Brief' for Old House Road that pumping of sewage will be required due to the level of the site.)

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522): *"The site is located close to existing roads serving Balsham (West Wickham Road) and it is considered that connections can be made to existing services – including electricity, gas, telecommunications and water as required" (there is no gas, of course, and sewage would need to be pumped)*

Accessible dwellings (Part M compliant)

There is no mention in any of the proposals of accessible dwellings. All properties at Old House Rd are at least 2 storey. There is insufficient detail to judge from the site layout plan given for South of High St. Note – there were no accessible dwellings at Farrier's Yard. There are apparently 3 ground floor affordable flats (1 bed, 2 person) in the existing Dairy Way development, but no indication whether they were built to Part M building regulations standards. There is a tremendous shortage of housing suitable for full-time wheelchair users, with accessible bathrooms and sleeping areas as well as flat entry.

Conservation area

There is a perception by the developers that rough grassy areas have no value in a conservation area. Extracts from submissions below:

Fox Road to High Street (Opus 40421; URN 406): *"The site is also within Balsham Conservation Area. An assessment of the impact of the proposed development on these heritage assets will need to be undertaken. It is likely that development will need to avoid the setting of the listed buildings. It is considered that a suitable design could be achieved on site that would not result in harm to those listed buildings." – no mention of any heritage conservation value of ancient rough pasture.*

Rear of Lower Farm (Opus 40538; URN 523): *“The [site] falls within the Balsham Conservation Area but we are unclear as to what contribution it makes to the character of the Conservation Area given it is a fairly unremarkable grassed field.”*

The West Wrattling Road site is very close to the church. This has two implications – impact on the setting of the church, and proximity to the bell tower, where there is regular bell ringing.



Loss of amenity

Four of the six development sites are currently grazing land. Furthermore the Fox Road to High Street site is described as ‘pasture’, and the Old House Road site is described as ‘Field/redundant grazing land’. Is there sufficient grazing land available to meet current and future demand for equestrian use?

Biodiversity

Grassland

There is a general perception by the developers that ‘low grade grassland’ is essentially worthless from a biodiversity perspective, and of no great value as ‘countryside’ – virtually a brownfield site. Extracts from submissions below:

Fox Road to High Street (Opus 40421; URN 406): *“An ecological assessment of the site will need to be undertaken, but it is unlikely that there will be any constraints to development”*

Rear of Lower Farm (Opus 40538; URN 523): *“To the south... ..lies open arable land comprising large cropped fields, and this in our view represents true ‘open countryside’.*

“The site comprises a grass field and in itself, does not appear to have any high biodiversity value.”

West Wrattling Road (Opus 40397; URN 383): *“An ecological assessment of the site will need to be undertaken, but it is unlikely that there will be any constraints to development”*

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323): *“The site mostly contains semi-improved neutral grassland, with small areas of dense scrub. There are hedgerows at the site boundary; it is only those hedgerows on the eastern boundary that are identified as species rich.”*

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522): *“The site comprises a single grass field and in itself, does not appear to have any high biodiversity value.”*

Ecological enhancement

There is also a perception that it is possible to increase biodiversity of a greenfield site, despite covering the majority of it with buildings/paving/monoculture lawns, and introducing the disturbance associated with people and pets (particularly cats) living there.

Fox Road to High Street (Opus 40421; URN 406): *“...the proposed development will seek to retain any ecological features on site and include ecological enhancement measures.”*

Rear of Lower Farm (Opus 40538; URN 523): *“...any development at the site would have the potential to incorporate any appropriate mitigation, should that be necessary or indeed to bring about an enhancement of local biodiversity”*

West Wrattling Road (Opus 40397; URN 383): *“The proposed development would include open space and landscaping, which would also provide ecological benefits.”*

“...the proposed development will seek to retain any ecological features on site and include ecological enhancement measures.”

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323): *“the landscaping strategy will incorporate ecological mitigation and habitat creation where possible, leading to biodiversity enhancements”*

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522): *“...any development at the site would have the potential to incorporate any appropriate mitigation, should that be necessary or indeed to bring about an enhancement of local biodiversity”*

One way in which developments could increase biodiversity would be to create ponds and marshy areas. These need to be large enough, not ‘manicured’, and be sited next to other wildlife habitat.

Consideration also needs to be given to siting of any other mitigating features designed to increase biodiversity. They also need to be connected to neighbouring habitats.

‘Green areas’ in developments will only benefit biodiversity if they are mixed species, and not mown too assiduously. A closely cut grass monoculture would be of no benefit.

Hedgerows

A number of applications refer to ‘mature hedgerows’. It is important that these are not ‘sanitised’, either by the developer or once they are the boundaries to a private property. Of perhaps more concern is that other applications do not mention existing hedgerows at all.

Rear of Lower Farm (Opus 40538; URN 523): *“There are a number of mature hedgerow boundaries forming the south and eastern boundaries of the site and these will assist in integrating new development into this site without adverse impacts on the wider landscape or on adjacent residential areas...”*

South of the High Street (Opus 40499; URN 484): *the substantial landscaping that exists on the field boundaries and which is planned to be retained as part of any new housing scheme”* (It is not clear whether this refers to hedgerows, or just trees.)

Old House Road (Opus 40438; URN 323): "...it is anticipated that the existing trees and hedgerows would be retained and any that are removed will be replaced"

West Wickham Road (Opus 40537; URN 522): *"The site is well-defined on all its boundaries by existing mature hedgerows with trees and these will assist in integrating any new development into this site without adverse impact on the wider landscape or on adjacent residential properties..."*

Most of these hedgerows have been there for over 400 years, contain much food for birds, mammals and insects and act as wildlife corridors. Mature trees within them enhance biodiversity. Grassland near these is frequented by hunting owls and other birds of prey, many other bird species, mammals, dragonflies and other insects. Everything possible should be done to retain such hedgerows and the species they provide for.

Context of developments within Balsham

The proposed **development sites** (which are all green field) should be looked at within the context of other green areas and ponds within and around Balsham, and the proposed green site. Consideration should be given to the extent to which conversion of any green field development area would fragment surrounding wildlife habitats. At best such fragmentation would be limiting passage of mammals and amphibians between remaining areas, and at worst it would be reducing the area to an extent that would make it non-viable for populations of certain species. Consideration of immediately adjacent land and access to ponds is particularly important in this regard. This could affect mammals (such as hares, badgers, deer and hedgehogs), amphibians (toads, frogs and newts, including Great Crested Newts) and birds (such as owls which need sufficient hunting areas).

The proposed **green site** would link to land around Plumian Farm, and thence round to the North of Balsham if the West Wickham Road and Old House Road development sites were retained as meadow, although the West Wickham Road does provide some barrier to the passage of amphibians and smaller mammals. If these sites are developed, then the existing, mature boundary hedges and ditches become critically important. They are currently wide, and provide excellent shelter and habitat for a wide range of species.

Considerations for detailed planning review

Looking further ahead, the Parish Council should look closely at ecological improvements proposed for any developments. I note that the ecological improvements agreed for Dairy Way (see [here](#)) include measures for allowing hedgehogs to roam, the inclusion of sparrow terraces and bat boxes on buildings, and 'general purpose' bird boxes on trees. The opportunity to include swift nesting spaces in buildings, and boxes for raptors such as owls has been missed, however, and no wet areas (marsh and/or pond) have been included, which could have been linked to surface drainage. Note, sparrows require dense, untidy shrubs, as well as nesting sites, and installation of swift boxes may require further measures to attract the swifts. Advice on birds is available from the Cambridgeshire Bird Club amongst others.