



**Architecture
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Statement in Support of Planning Application Reference 15/00275/OUT

You may be aware that this application for the redevelopment of Prebendal Farm yard is scheduled for presentation to your Planning Committee on 16 September. One of the main drivers for this redevelopment has been the Neighbourhood Plan, prepared by Slip End and Caddington Parish Council's which has now reached an advanced stage of development.

Within the Plan this site is promoted for redevelopment, albeit that it sits within the current Green Belt boundaries, and because of this we feel it is important to explain what we consider to be the special circumstances that need justifying the removal of this site from the Green Belt.

Both Prebendal Farm and its immediate neighbour, Woodside Farm, have been owned by a single family for several generations and both were run by brothers up until the death of one some years ago. At that time the farms were amalgamated into a single holding and operated from Woodside Farm.

Part of the case we would make in support of this planning application is around the viability of the farming operation & ensuring its long term future through investment in modern machinery.

This amalgamation has brought several undoubted economies by doing away with any need to duplicate resources or operations that are an integral part of the agriculture business. However, the doubling of the land holding into a single entity also requires a high level of investment in manpower and machinery to successfully farm the land; because of this it seems reasonable to introduce a degree of lassitude to allow the farm to realise assets to generate capital. Prebendal Farm yard is one such asset that currently adds very little to the value of the farm so we would plea that allowing this relatively small village site to be redeveloped will let the current owners reinvest back into the business of farming, allowing this local family run business to remain in operation for the undoubted benefit of Slip End and the surrounding area.

Of course, farm land is farm land and this farm could be operated by anyone with the correct expertise. The relationship between Prebendal Farm, Woodside Farm and the local family, however, should not be dismissed lightly because of the effect on the community that such relationships bring, a fact that adds more weight to the case for special circumstances.

The role of the Neighbourhood Plan in the promotion of this site for housing needs also to be understood to ensure that the weight of that evidence is fully balanced, especially as that Plan is now reaching a point where it will be formerly lodged with this Council and will then be a material consideration in any planning matters that affect Slip End and Caddington.

The Plan has been some three years in the making and has been subjected to several consultation processes along the way with officials and local residents. The intention of the Plan has always been to promote a responsible agenda of growth for this small area, recognising the pressures on the other parts of Central Bedfordshire and the adjoining Borough of Luton.

In doing this the Plan has promoted several similar sites, both large and small, where development could be accommodated without any adverse effects on the community or the local environment but as the village is constrained with the Green Belt, the arguments for special circumstances will apply equally to each.

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The case then is which parts of the village can accommodate expansion (into the Green Belt) with the least impact. The Neighbourhood Plan recognises that the answer 'none' is simply not viable. The remnants of Prebendal Farm sit on the edge of the village but the land is very close to the centre and the village development extends along the frontage of Grove Road opposite the site and to its south.

Separating the land from Grove Road is a range of original farm buildings (stables?) that are now used as retail premises with parking in the original yard and the farmhouse that is now let to tenants.

The yard itself is separated from the productive fields by some remnant hedging and spoil heaps and is used for open storage of materials and vehicles. It has very little value therefore in promoting or extending the ethos of the Green Belt, having none of the landscape, environmental or aesthetic characteristics you would normally associate with the Green Belt and for this second reason, we believe that these special circumstances should contribute to the removal of this site from the Green Belt.

As part of the Council's Development Strategy (DS) there is a 'Call for Sites' process which then takes a broad view of the potential impact of each option. The Neighbourhood Plan would seem to pre-empt this by nominating land ahead of the Development Strategy. However, such an assumption would be wrong as the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to inform rather than pre-empt by adding substantially to the selection process and by promoting smaller sites that are specifically exempt from the 'Call for Sites' (under 15 units). These smaller sites form a substantial element of new housing in the area and the Neighbourhood Plan is the ideal forum for them to be promoted, with the support of the local community.

A third element of the Neighbourhood Plan that adds substantial weight in support of the case for special circumstances is that a key element of the Plan is the provision of a Heritage Greenway to run from Pepperstock to Caddington and beyond and that Greenway requires the cooperation of land owners.

Part of the route crosses land owned by the family as part of the Woodside Farm/Prebendal Farm land holding and they have worked alongside the various stakeholders to agree several footpath diversions and access rights to make the Greenway a reality.

The Neighbourhood Plan plays a critical and crucial role in the growth of Slip End and the improvement of the immediate environment and the implementation of infrastructure to support the village and the surrounding area. An intrinsic part of the Plan is the strategy of growth this role should be considered a key plea to see this site removed from the Green Belt.

In summary we feel that the promotion of this land for small scale development with housing is given support and weight by these main factors:

1. To allow investment in the local rural economy for the benefit of the community
2. To continue to promote local employment in farming and other allied businesses locally
3. The promotion of this site for development within the Neighbourhood Plan and the support that development will give to delivering the goals of that plan
4. The role of the Neighbourhood Plan in allowing small sites such as this to continue to make a meaningful impact in the deficit of new housing
5. The redevelopment of this land which is very central to the village would allow the re-use of a derelict site that adds nothing to the integrity or value of the Green Belt

I would hope that our case has been properly explained and that you will appreciate the role the owner has played in bringing the Neighbourhood Plan forward and will continue to do for the village. I think it is worth recalling that the site has been promoted by the Neighbourhood Plan, rather than by a Developer or the owner and as such it is presented to you at Committee with no objections from the Parish Council, local residents or any other statutory consultees – a rarity and indeed one that reinforces the fact that this proposal should be supported by your Committee.

