

Luton Local Plan - Call for Sites

Land at Auction House, Luton

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Ref: P1044a



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Optimis Consulting is acting on behalf of the landowners to promote the site known as Land at Auction House, Crescent Road, Luton in response to the 'Call for Sites' consultation being undertaken by Luton Borough Council as part of the new Local Plan preparation. The following provides a description of the site, the surrounding area and the potential merits in its future development and supports the Call for Sites Proforma.

Background

- 1.2 Luton Borough Council (LBC) is currently working on the preparation of its new Local Plan which will direct the location, scale and type of development over the next period. Part of the new Plan preparation involves a Call for Sites consultation, which is an invitation to landowners, developers and agents to promote sites that may be used for the future development needs of the town.
- 1.3 An initial Call for Sites took places from December 2024 to February 2025 and a second is now underway. LBC has invited the submission of opportunities relating to the following:
- Housing
 - Affordable housing
 - Custom and self-build housing
 - Gypsy and traveller and traveller showpeople pitches and plots
 - Employment including commercial, service, industrial land
 - Brownfield land to be included on BLR
 - Tourism, culture and leisure
 - Biodiversity net gain
 - Nature recovery
 - Renewable energy

2.0 The Site and Surrounding Area

The Site

- 2.1 The site of approximately 1.3ha is situated on the south of Crescent Road to the northeast of Luton Town Centre. It is shown by the red line boundary in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Site Location (Source: Google Earth)

- 2.2 The site is a brownfield site, with the current use on the western part being a car park (meet and greet) associated with Luton Airport. On the site's eastern side there are multi-functional buildings comprising various commercial uses including a wine wholesalers, clothing and retail store and a wedding and conference centre. The far eastern side of the site comprises a small industrial area comprising a packing and recycling centre. Immediately to the south and southwest of the site is the main railway network. To the northwest there is a small commercial site in operation as a car dealership. Beyond this is the Church Street railway goods yard.
- 2.3 The opposite side of Crescent Road contains both residential and commercial buildings. To the southeast of the site and far side of Crescent Road there are places of worship and residential dwellings. Directly opposite the site to the north is a four-storey modernist residential building known as 'The Martindales' and in between is brownfield site that has a consent for 90

dwelling, granted in 2023 and due to be built out. The Power Court site is situated to the site's south, across the railway.

- 2.4 The site received temporary permission recently the use to remain as such for 2 years from March 2025 (LPA Ref. 24/01428/TEMP). Prior to this, the site has been in use as parking associated with nearby properties. Historically the site's use has varied with it formerly being a railway storage yard.

The Surrounding Area

- 2.5 The site occupies a relatively central location within Luton, being approximately 800m away from the train station, which provides regular stations to several major stations including Lon St Pancras, Bedford, Nottingham and Sheffield. There are similarly a number of bus stops close to the site with it being walking distance from the interchange.
- 2.6 The site is only around a 10 minute walk into the town centre, which offers a significant amount of services and facilities ranging between retail, restaurants, employment, convenience stores, health and wellbeing amongst others. As is stated above, the Power Court site is located a short distance away which highlights the strong strategic position of this area of the town.
- 2.7 Figure 2 below shows the site in the context of Luton town centre.



Figure 2: Site Context (Source: Google Earth)

Luton Policies Map

- 2.8 The Policies Map, which forms part of the adopted Local Plan, allocates the site as a Category B Employment Site. The Local Plan identifies such sites to represent poorer quality employment sites, though it is recognised that their release should be managed to ensure ample opportunities for continued employment remain.

Site Planning History

- 2.9 The western part of the site recently received temporary planning permission to use the site as car parking ('Meet and Greet') associated with Luton Airport. This was issued in March 2025 for a period of 2 years (LPA Ref. 24/01428/TEMP). Prior, this area of the site has been in use as parking associated with the buildings on the site and historically, it has varied, with it formerly being a railway storage yard.
- 2.10 Other applications have been submitted in the past related to the site's commercial operations including small scale extensions, roof alterations, conversions and advertisement consents.

Relevant Planning Applications

Residential development of 90 dwellings at Crescent Road, Luton (LPA Ref. 21/00731/FUL)

- 2.11 Given the proximity of this application to the site and the wider similarities, it is relevant to discuss the assessments made by the LPA in its approval. The application was submitted in full and approved by the Planning Committee.
- 2.12 The Committee Report discusses the principle of development and describes the site to be a brownfield site in a sustainable location, within walking distance to town centre amenities and transport links. As a Category B employment site, an assessment was made on the loss of its protection for employment purposes. The applicant referred to an Employment Land Review which was undertaken in 2015 and identified the site to have shortcomings with regard to the proximity to residential properties which hindered its ability to enhance employment use. This, in combination with the vast investment required to bring the site up to the appropriate standard, the LPA agreed that sufficient justification for the loss had been provided.
- 2.13 More broadly, the site's location on the outskirts of the town centre is considered highly sustainable and one that could help contribute to the council's targets around carbon neutrality. Reduced parking spaces with a focus on cycle storage and the site's strong position with regard to bus and train services ensure that this site can meet such standards. The council similarly recognises that the importance of bringing forward much-needed regeneration and its associated economic benefits, as well as the improvements to both social and environmental sustainability objectives that this site can provide.



Figure 3: Proposed Site Plan at Crescent Road (CMI Architecture)

Conclusion

- 2.14 There are strong parallels between the site at Crescent Road and the current site being submitted to the call for sites, particularly with regard to the brownfield nature, highly sustainable location within the town, opportunities for significant housing delivery and the associated contributions towards the three pillars of sustainability.

3.0 Site Analysis

- 3.1 This section identifies site features and how they can be appropriately considered within the context of a housing development.

Flood Risk

- 3.2 The site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1, which represents the lowest possible risk of flooding. There are scatterings of higher surface water flood risk on the outside of the site's boundaries but away from the site itself.

Heritage

- 3.3 The site itself does not contain any designated heritage assets and there are similarly none adjacent or close to the site. This includes a designated conservation area, listed buildings, scheduled monuments and assets of other historic significance.

Tree Preservation Orders

- 3.4 Neither the site, nor its immediate surroundings are affected by the presence of Tree Preservation Orders. There is a small amount

National Designations

- 3.5 Luton Borough is not affected by nationally significant designations such as the Green Belt or AONB.

Site Analysis Summary:

- Least risk of flooding
- No national land designations
- No impact on protected trees
- No impact on public rights of way
- Good opportunities for BNG enhancements
- No impact on designated heritage assets

4.0 The Development Opportunity

- 4.1 The site extends to approximately 1.3ha, which represents a sizeable brownfield opportunity within a central area of Luton. Luton Borough Council actively seeks higher density housing proposals within central and highly sustainable locations which suggests this site could achieve between 150-300 dwellings.
- 4.2 This is a housing-led opportunity that has the capacity to deliver a strong proportion of affordable homes, family-sized housing and other specialist housing types. There is similarly good opportunity to incorporate mixed-use elements including commercial uses, connected amenity spaces, and biodiversity enhancements.
- 4.2 The site has the ability to come forward quickly, following the conclusion of a short-term lease. There are limited barriers to prevent the site from being delivered within 3-5 years.

Five Year Housing Land Supply

- 4.5 Luton's latest 5 Year Housing Land Supply Statement (October 2024) states that there is currently 3.36 years worth of supply, which is substantially below the 5-year target. There is therefore a recognised need for additional housing sites to come forward. The new Local Plan will seek to allocate sustainably located sites that can aid in addressing the continued shortfall. The current site represents a strong opportunity for housing and inclusion within the Plan.

Housing Delivery

- 4.6 The NPPF places significant importance on making effective use of land in meeting the need for homes. It states that strategic policies should set out clear aims for accommodating objectively assessed needs in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously developed or 'brownfield land'. Furthermore, substantial weight in the context of policies and decisions should be applied to sites and developments that utilise brownfield land unless substantial harm would be caused.
- 4.5 This site presents the opportunity for positive urban regeneration which supports continued town centre vitality and well-connected and integrated communities. As with the approved site on Crescent Road, this site is similarly able to promote walkable and low-carbon methods of transport and align with Luton's sustainability goals and the wider national strategies identified in the NPPF.

Conclusion

- 4.8 This site represents a highly accessible location within a recognised sustainable location in Luton's town centre. It has excellent access to services and facilities and has the capacity to deliver strong contributions towards recognised housing need. It is a brownfield site that, with an absence of any significant technical constrain and other barrier to development, has the ability to be delivered quickly with the new Plan period.