

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 working days have passed and the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

- (1) That the proposed collaboration agreement with the consortium and option to purchase agreement with Bloor Homes Limited as the land promoter in respect of land at Bedford River Valley Park be approved, on the basis outlined in the attached report prepared to accompany the decision.**
- (2) That the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy be authorised to enter into the collaboration and option agreements, subject to the legal advice provided by Freeths LLP acting on behalf of the consortium.**

2. Date of decision

20 November 2025

3. Reasons for decision

Council owned land in this area is effectively a former agricultural holding with no genuine development prospects without merging with the adjacent land holding owned by the other consortium members. In becoming part of the proposed large scale regeneration project, this proposal offers the potential to:

- (a) Bring forward redundant/low-value agricultural land for a high-quality development which will potentially enable the provision of significant housing numbers alongside a long-standing strategic objective of the Council namely the new regional park with public access to enhanced water sport leisure facilities.
- (b) Provide a significant capital receipt for Council owned land which, without the collaboration agreement, remains largely incapable of effective development in isolation and of limited value.
- (c) The Council takes no development/promotion risks in that it is only required to contribute to a maximum of £500,000 of these costs (40.02% of the total) in the event of a sale.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

Not entering into either the collaboration agreement or option and to dispose of its land in isolation without the benefit of planning permission. This would mean that the Council would not benefit from the uplift in value and the development of BRVP would not be realised.

5. How decision is to be funded

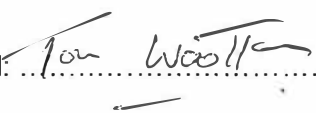
The proposal will generate a significant capital receipt for the Council. Costs of disposal will be deducted from the proceeds of sale and are subject to a cap.

6. Conflicts of interest

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision

Not Applicable

Signed: 

Date: **20 November 2025**

Name of Decision Taker: **Mayor Tom Wootton**

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published:20November2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:1December2025.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

Bedford Borough Council – Report to the Mayor

Date: 20 November 2025

Report by: Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy

Subject: Collaboration and Option Agreement for Joint Sale and Development of Land at Bedford River Valley Park

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the Mayor's approval to agree a collaboration agreement and option agreement in respect of land at Bedford River Valley Park, north of the A603 at Willington, as shown approximately outlined in red on the plan attached herewith at **Appendix A**.
- 1.2 The Council's land ownership within the area capable of development (41.96 ha (103.7 acres)) represents a 42.02% share of the total developable land area (as shown coloured purple on the plan).
- 1.3 The proposal is to enter into a Collaboration Agreement with the consortium of adjoining landowners and to simultaneously enter into an Option Agreement with Bloor Homes Ltd to promote the development of the jointly owned site for mixed use development, including residential, water sports and leisure).
- 1.4 All of the land promotion work and costs thereof will be undertaken and funded initially by Bloor Homes Ltd. The costs will be deducted out of any sale proceeds up to maximum figure specified in the Option Agreement. If no sale takes place the Council will not be liable for any promotion costs. The option agreement includes a minimum land price, and the Council is not obliged to sell its share of the land for less than the specified price (less agreed deductions). It is proposed that the collaboration agreement and option agreement will last for 5 years, subject to extension in specified circumstances

- 1.5 Bedford River Valley Park is a longstanding regeneration project listed under Policy AD26 of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013, with an enabling development also proposed under Policy AD23 of the ADLP 2013. As this enabling development had not taken place a new scheme to deliver the project was put forward as an allocation in the emerging Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040 (Draft Policy HOU11).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayor is invited and, if satisfied, to:

- 2.1 Approve the proposed collaboration agreement with the consortium and option to purchase agreement with Bloor Homes Limited as the land promoter in respect of land at Bedford River Valley Park.**
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy to enter into the collaboration and option agreements, subject to the legal advice provided by Freeths LLP acting on behalf of the consortium.**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Council owned land in this area is effectively a former agricultural holding with no genuine development prospects without merging with the adjacent land holding owned by the other consortium members. In becoming part of the proposed large scale regeneration project, this proposal offers the potential to:
- (a) Bring forward redundant/low value agricultural land for a high-quality development which will potentially enable the provision of significant housing numbers alongside a long-standing strategic objective of the Council namely the new regional park with public access to enhanced water sport leisure facilities.
 - (b) Provide a significant capital receipt for Council owned land which, without the collaboration agreement, remains largely incapable of effective development in isolation and of limited value.
 - (c) The Council takes no development/promotion risks in that it is only required to contribute to a maximum of £500,000 of these costs (40.02% of the total) in the event of a sale.

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Bedford River Valley Park (BRVP) is a longstanding regeneration project to create a new regional scale park between Bedford and the wider countryside around the village of Willington. Policy AD26 of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 (ADLP2013) states that the Council will seek the creation of BRVP as an area where opportunities exist for landscape enhancement, nature conservation, recreation, access improvements, increased public access and the preservation and enhancement of the historic environment.
- 4.2 To deliver watersports and other leisure opportunities which are an integral part of BRVP, Policy AD23 of the ADLP2013 allocated an enabling development of employment, leisure and education uses within BRVP. Whilst planning permission for a water sports lake was granted in 2006 and development legally commenced, the project has progressed no further. The enabling development has not taken place, but the Council's aspiration to deliver a facility for watersports and other leisure uses in support of wider growth in the borough remains a priority.
- 4.3 In February 2014, an Executive Decision by the Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services approved adoption of the BRVP Master Plan for the Council's landholdings.
- 4.4 As such, a new scheme to take the project forward was put forward as an allocation in the draft Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040. Draft Policy HOU11 proposed an enabling development within BRVP for a mix of uses including residential, education, open space, recreational facilities and strategic green infrastructure improvements. The proposed development responds to this draft Policy
- 4.5 Whilst Local Plan 2040 has been withdrawn from the Examination at the recommendation of the Inspector, the draft Local Plan and its accompanying evidence base remain a very important consideration for the emerging proposals.
- 4.6 The land to be included within BRVP sits within six different ownerships. To date, these owners have been working together informally as a consortium to bring forward the development.
- 4.7 As part of the process for achieving allocation within the Local Plan 2040, the consortium via their advisors ran a tender to select a promotor for the development. Bloor Homes were selected through that process and have been working with the consortium to deliver the development. Bloor Homes have now received positive PreApp feedback to their proposals and it is, therefore, necessary to formalise the arrangements between the land-owners and also for a formal option to purchase to be granted by the consortium to Bloor Homes.

5. **DETAILS**

5.1 The total area of the entire project (shaded in various colours on the plan) is approximately 160.78 ha (397.4 acres) which includes the area capable of development (edged red on the plan) which is in the region of 111.57 ha (275.7 acres), plus an additional area of land of 49.2 ha (121.6 acres) (hatched blue on the plan), which is included for woodland/BNG purposes as required. A plan showing the respective land ownerships within the proposed BRVP and to be subject to the collaboration agreement is attached at **Appendix A**. The parties to the agreement and their respective proportions of the total land ownership are as follows:

- Bedford Borough Council – 42.04%
- Forest of Marston Vale Trust – 30.47%
- Garrard Trustees Limited – 9.73%
- Samual Whitbread – 2.51%
- Peter Bennie Limited – 9.56%
- The Connolly Foundation (UK) Limited – 5.71%

5.2 The objective of the owners is to maximise the value of their respective landholdings by treating their land as part of the Collaboration Area. They aim to enter into the Option Agreement to promote the Collaboration Area through the planning process, with the intention of securing planning permission over as much of the area as reasonably possible, and to grant the Bloor Homes the option to acquire the Collaboration Area. The draft collaboration agreement is attached to the report as a confidential document at **Appendix B** and the key terms of the proposed agreement are as follows:

- (a) The agreement will operate for the term of the Option Agreement to be granted to Bloor Homes.
- (b) Early termination or extension requires unanimous agreement among the parties.
- (c) The option fee will be split in accordance with the ratios set out in 5.1 above.
- (d) Proceeds from the sale of the land within the collaboration area will be split in accordance with the ratios set out in 5.1 above.
- (e) Owners cannot dispose of the land within the collaboration area except under specific conditions, such as the Option Agreement or compulsory purchase orders.
- (f) Owners must provide necessary information to each other to ensure compliance with the agreement.
- (g) Owners must not object to planning applications unless they conflict with specific policies or objectives.
- (h) Owners must not create ransom situations or diminish the value of their property.

- 5.3 In summary, the Option Agreement is a long-term land promotion and acquisition structure. The Developer bears planning risk and costs in return for an exclusive right to buy the land if planning consent is achieved, while the Grantor benefits from expert-led promotion and a structured route to sale at Market Value. The draft Option Agreement is attached as a confidential document at **Appendix C** and key terms of the option to be granted to Bloor Homes are as follows:
- (a) The option will run for a period of 5 years with provisions for extension.
 - (b) The agreement set out the option fees.
 - (c) The Developer must prepare and deliver a Planning Strategy and Masterplan, promote the land for allocation, submit planning applications, and pursue appeals where advised. All planning work is at the Developer's cost.
 - (d) The land-owners must co-operate, enter into planning agreements, and avoid actions that could harm planning prospects.
 - (e) Once a qualifying planning permission becomes "Free from Challenge," the Developer may issue a Price Notice setting out its valuation. If parties cannot agree the Market Value, it is determined by an independent RICS Expert. A minimum price mechanism protects the Grantor and may suspend the exercise period if values fall too low.
- 5.4 The details of Bloor Homes proposals will be made public through the planning process, but in summary it comprises a mixed-use development including up to 1,000 dwellings; a two-form-entry primary school with early years provision; two watersports lakes with associated buildings, infrastructure and parking; up to 1,000m² of retail floorspace (Use Class E(a)); a mobility hub; and an integrated network of pedestrian and cycle routes linking to existing connections. The scheme also provides extensive open space, landscaping, habitat creation, play areas, new highway accesses from the A603, and all ancillary drainage and engineering works.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 Not entering into either the collaboration agreement or option and to dispose of its land in isolation, without the benefit of planning permission, would mean the Council would not benefit from the uplift in value and the development of BRVP would not be realised.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 **Legal Issues** – The Council has a statutory duty under Section 123 of the 1972 Local Government Act to obtain best consideration from property disposals. Without entering into the collaboration agreement with the owners of the adjacent site the Council's land has limited value. As part of the collaboration agreement, the parties will be obliged to jointly dispose of the site for 'best value'. The option agreement requires Bloor homes to purchase the land at market value and includes provisions for determination via the RICS in the event of dispute. The consortium of landowners has been advised by Freeths, and the Council has sought its own advice in respect of its obligations under the agreements.

- 7.2 **Policy Issues** – The BRVP development will contribute towards the Council's goals of optimising its assets and achieving financial stability and it will also make a positive contribution to the four priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28. It will also make a positive contribution to all of objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Asset Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28. The Council's aspiration to deliver BRVP is set out in Policy AD23 of the ADLP2013 and the development proposed by Bloor Homes is consistent with Policy HOU11 within the now withdrawn Local Plan 2040.
- 7.3 **Resource Issues** – The Council will receive a capital receipt on completion of the sale. The option agreement sets out a minimum net receipt, and the Council may opt to abort the sale if this is not achieved. All development consultancy resources will be met out of the gross sale proceeds; the collaboration agreement includes a cap on the total costs to the Council. As The Council is not proposing to directly develop or build out the units, there will be no abnormal costs for the Council to meet.
- 7.4 **Risks** – All development risks will be borne by the developer (Bloor Homes) not by The Council. The development risks themselves are significant. These include:
- Planning risks
 - Highways risks
 - Flood risks
 - Market change risks
- The collaboration is coterminous with the option agreement, if the latter is not exercised, the parties will be free to deal their respective landholdings as they choose the capitals and other benefits of the proposed development will not be delivered unless the parties enter into a fresh agreement.
- 7.5 **Environmental Implications** – All environmental issues linked to the development will be addressed as part of the planning process.
- 7.6 **Equalities Impact** – The activity has no relevance to Bedford Borough Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, promote good relations, promote positive attitudes and eliminate unlawful discrimination. An equality impact assessment is not needed
- 7.7 **Impact on Families** – There are no immediate impacts arising out of the recommendations of this report.
- 7.8 **Community Safety and Resilience** – There are no immediate impacts arising out of the recommendations of this report.
- 7.9 **Impact on Health and Wellbeing** – There are no immediate impacts arising out of the recommendations of this report.

8. **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME**

8.1 The following Councillors, Council units, Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Corporate Leadership Team
Finance
Legal Services
Head of Planning and Building Control

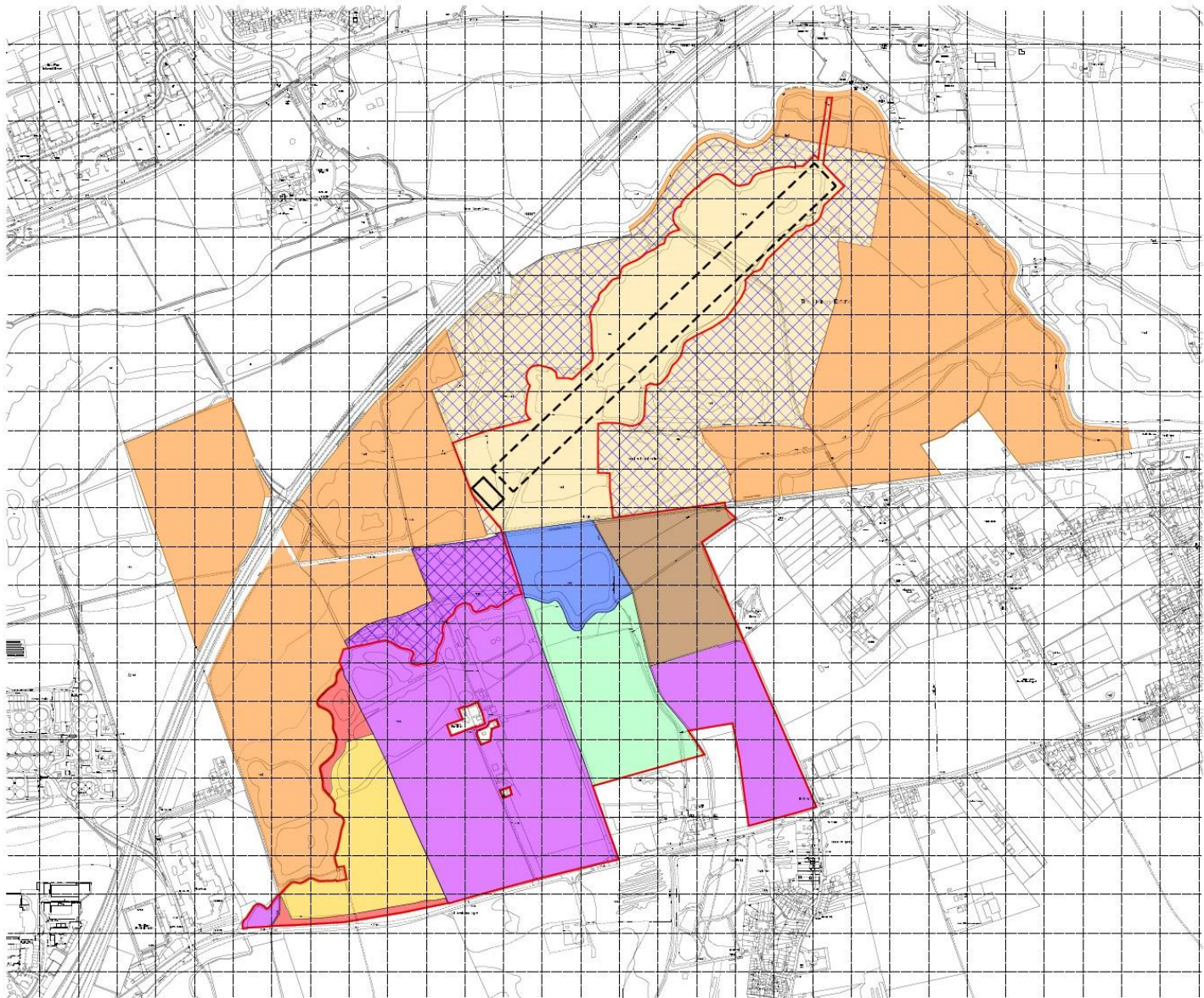
9. **WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

9.1 None – Ward Councillors will be consulted as part of the planning process

10. **CONTACTS AND REFERENCES**

Report Contact Officer:	Margaret Birtles, Manager for Asset and Development
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	None
File Reference:	None
Previous Relevant Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	Decision 1174
Appendices:	Appendix A – Bedford River Valley Park Land Ownership Plan Confidential Appendix B* – Draft Collaboration Agreement Confidential Appendix C* – Draft Option Agreement * Not for publication (Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12a to the Local Government Act 1972. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the authority holding that information).

Appendix A: Land Ownership and Option Plan



KEY

- RED Land - 275.7 Acres
- BLUE Land - 121.6 Acres
- Grants Adjoining Land
- Bedford Borough Council
- Peter Bennie Ltd.
- Connolly Foundation
- Forest of Marston Vale Trust
- Lafarge
- Garrard Trustees & Monamy Trustees
- Samuel Whitbread Excavators

OWNERSHIP	RED LAND AREA (Acres)	BLUE LAND AREA (Acres)
Bedford Borough	185.7	13.1
Peter Bennie Ltd.	2.6	0.0
Connolly	14.1	0.0
Forest of Marston Vale Trust	7.2	104.5
Lafarge	28.9	0.0
Garrard Trustees & Monamy Trustees	18.0	0.0
Samuel Whitbread Excavators	6.2	0.0
TOTAL	275.7	121.6

Revision:

1	TOTAL AREA OF RED LAND	275.7	AC
2	TOTAL AREA OF BLUE LAND	121.6	AC
3	TOTAL AREA OF GRANTS ADJOINING LAND	140.0	AC
4	TOTAL AREA OF BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL LAND	14.1	AC
5	TOTAL AREA OF PETER BENNIE LTD. LAND	2.6	AC
6	TOTAL AREA OF CONNOLLY FOUNDATION LAND	14.1	AC
7	TOTAL AREA OF FOREST OF MARSTON VALE TRUST LAND	7.2	AC
8	TOTAL AREA OF LAFARGE LAND	28.9	AC
9	TOTAL AREA OF GARRARD TRUSTEES & MONAMY TRUSTEES LAND	18.0	AC
10	TOTAL AREA OF SAMUEL WHITBREAD EXCAVATORS LAND	6.2	AC

Bedford River Valley
Willington
Bedford

Contract Plan With
Land Areas

DATE: May 2025
SCALE: 1:5,000 @ A1
DRAWN: NC
CHECKED: AS



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