

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 granting of an option to the Welcome Break Group Limited to purchase Council owned land adjoining the Black Cat Roundabout, as shown in the marketing brochure at Appendix B, and the terms of the disposal in line with the detailed heads of terms outlined in the confidential Appendix D, both forming part of the attached report prepared to accompany the decision, be approved.**
- (2) That the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy be authorised to finalise the option agreement subject to appropriate legal advice being obtained.**

2. Date of decision

8 December 2025

3. Reasons for decision

The Council owned land is currently agricultural land that has been subject to mineral extraction and subsequent restoration. Granting the option to Welcome Break provides the Council with the opportunity to bring forward a significant capital receipt and inward investment.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

- Retaining the land in its existing use, which will result in minimal revenue returns and will not realise the significant capital receipt.
- Disposing of part of the site or a leasehold interest which were discounted following marketing of the site on the grounds that these would not maximise the capital receipt or result in certainty of development.

5. How decision is to be funded

The proposed sale will result in a significant capital receipt to the Council.

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: **8 December 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:8December2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:17December2025.....

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

Bedford Borough Council – Report to the Mayor

Date: 8 December 2025

Report by: Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy

Subject: DISPOSAL OF LAND AT BLACK CAT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report recommends granting an Option to purchase land adjoining the Black Cat roundabout to Welcome Break Group Limited for a period of 3 years, and identifies the terms of the disposal for approval.
- 1.2 The site, identified on the plan attached at **Appendix A**, is located to the east of the Black Cat Roundabout. The site comprises a total area of 3.22 ha (7.94 acres) and is strategically located with access from both the A421 (linking Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes) and the A1 (linking Peterborough, London and the North-East).
- 1.3 National Highways are currently completing a significant upgrade to the A1 Black Cat junction as part of its scheme for the A428 Black Cat – Claxton Gibbet scheme. This upgrade has resulted in closure of the existing service station, retail/hotel provisions on the A1 (northbound) and the Council's owned site is strategically located to capture traffic from all directions and, as such, a major roadside offer will be required in this location.
- 1.4 The site has been extensively marketed by the Council appointed agents, Carter Jonas, and offers have been evaluated. The report sets out the criteria for scoring the bids received and the rationale for the recommendation to accept Welcome Break as the preferred bidder.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayor is invited and, if satisfied, to:

- 2.1 Approve the granting of an option to the Welcome Break Group Limited to purchase Council owned land adjoining the Black Cat Roundabout, as shown in marketing brochure at Appendix B, and the terms of the disposal, in line with the detailed heads of terms outlined in the confidential Appendix D, both forming part of the attached report prepared to accompany the decision.**
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy to finalise the option agreement subject to appropriate legal advice being obtained.**

3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council owned land is currently agricultural land that has been subject to mineral extraction and subsequent restoration. Granting the option to Welcome Break provides the Council with the opportunity to bring forward a significant capital receipt and inward investment.**

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The land at Black Cat, identified in the plan attached at Appendix A, has a total area of 3.22 ha (7.94 acres) and comprises agricultural land that has been subject to minerals extraction. The Council acquired the land from the former Bedfordshire County Council, and it forms part of the former County Council estate. Although revenue income from the land is subject to disaggregation, under the 2014 Property Disaggregation Agreement between the Council and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), is not listed as Local Development Framework (LDF) site and, therefore, capital receipts are not subject to sharing with CBC.**
- 4.2 A small area at the front of the original site has been subject to compulsory purchase to facilitate the construction of the A428 Black Cat – Claxton Gibbet junction improvements currently under construction. National Highways have temporary possession for use as a compound during construction and are expected to be on site until spring/summer 2027.**
- 4.3 The original East West Rail (EWR) Safeguarding Directions included the land in question; however, subsequent discussions between EWR and Carter Jonas advised that the land would be removed from Safeguarding and this was confirmed on 18 November 2025.**

- 4.4 Acting on the Council's behalf, Carter Jonas submitted a submission in response to the Council's Call for Sites in August 2020 proposing allocation of the land for roadside service and employment land. This was accepted and included in the draft Local Plan 2040 under Policy EMP7, Land at College Farm, Black Cat Roundabout. Whilst the Local Plan has been withdrawn from the Examination at the recommendation of the Inspector, the draft Local Plan and accompanying evidence base remain a very important consideration for emerging proposals.
- 4.5 Prior to formal marketing of the site, in 2022 the Council commissioned Stantec to undertake a Feasibility Study and Junction Capacity Assessment to establish that the forecast traffic flows for the new junction at Black Cat would support a roadside services development. Subsequently, Carter Jonas were instructed to undertake soft market testing to establish market demand for the development opportunity at Black Cat. Both studies were positive and paved the way for formal marketing of the site.

5. DETAILS

- 5.1 Carter Jonas were instructed to commence marketing of the Black Cat site in late November 2024. This involved the preparation and distribution of a comprehensive marketing brochure, which was published across a range of platforms. A copy of the brochure can be seen at **Appendix B**. In addition, a targeted direct marketing campaign was undertaken, with particulars sent directly to over 40 known commercial developers.
- 5.2 At the initial stage of marketing, the primary objective was to gauge market demand and identify the nature of potential interest. In parallel assessments were undertaken to establish the cost of securing power capacity, which was considered to be an essential piece of information for prospective bidders to make informed proposals.
- 5.3 Following completion of the power work and in light of the strong market interest received, Carter Jonas advised that the most appropriate disposal strategy was via an informal tender process. All parties that had expressed interest were invited to submit proposals, with an eight-week bidding period set and a submission deadline of 11 July 2025. Bidders were invited to submit proposals for the whole or part of the site, on either a freehold or leasehold basis, and with no restrictions on end use.
- 5.4 A total of 21 bids were received, comprising:
- 8 freehold offers for the whole site
 - 8 freehold offers for part of the site
 - 5 leasehold offers.

- 5.5 Following consultation with Carter Jonas, it was agreed that the Council's preference was for sale of the site in its entirety, as this approach delivered the highest overall value and offered the most deliverable development solution. Among the eight freehold offers for the whole site, four parties submitted proposals that were significantly ahead of the others. To ensure best consideration, Carter Jonas recommended inviting these four parties to submit Best and Final Offers, and the submission deadline was set at 30 July 2025. One of the bidders withdrew from the process and, therefore, three submissions were received. Details of the offers received can be found in the Carter Jonas Report attached at Confidential **Appendix C**.
- 5.6 The bids received were assessed against a series of key criteria which reflect both the commercial attractiveness of the offer and the likelihood of successful delivery. Each criterion was scored on a scale of 1 to 3, where 3 = strong, 2 = satisfactory and 1 = weak. These scores were then multiplied by a weight given their material impact on deal viability. The criteria used were as follows:
- Price
 - Funding certainty
 - Offer conditions
 - Approvals
 - Non-refundable deposit
 - Contribution to vendor's fees
 - Planning and delivery track record
 - Design quality and scheme suitability
 - Reliability in transaction execution
- 5.7 Further information relating to criterion definition and the detailed scoring of bid together with the rationale to support the assessment can be found in the Carter Jonas report in Confidential **Appendix C**.
- 5.8 The overall assessment concluded that Welcome Break offered the strongest combination of price, deliverability, execution certainty and development capability, resulting in the highest score.
- 5.9 Following agreement that Welcome Break would be invited to be interviewed by senior members of the Council as the leading bidder, the two under bidders were informed that they had not been selected. This resulted in unsolicited bids increasing the amounts with all other terms remaining unchanged. Welcome Break also provided an unsolicited bid improving their offer. The scoring matrix was updated to reflect the improved pricing/terms by each party, which concluded that Welcome Break remained the highest scoring bidder. The updated scoring matrix can also be found in the report attached at Confidential **Appendix C**.

5.10 The draft heads of terms proposed by Welcome Break are appended at Confidential **Appendix D**. Key terms are as follows:

- Option period – 3 years
- Purchase price – The terms agreed for the purchase of the land are detailed in the Confidential Appendix D and payment is to be made in staged payments as set out in the heads of terms.
- Planning Application – The option holder will submit a planning application for use as a Trunk Road Service Area.
- Deductions – No costs will be deducted from the purchase price for archaeological, environmental, geotechnical, infrastructure, BNG and S106/CIL.
- Legal fees – The option holder will make a one-off contribution to the Council legal costs subject to an agreed cap.
- Assignment – Not assignment of the option will be permitted without the Council's consent.
- The option holder will work with the Council to provide a suitable electricity connection, the cost of which will be deducted from the sale price subject to an agreed cap.
- Completion conditions – The option will be exercised once conditions have been met, the key ones being:
 - Contract and clean freehold title
 - Detailed planning including highways signage
 - Highways agreement cost not exceed a specified cap
 - Vacant possession
 - Acceptable topographical and geophysical surveys

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 Retaining the land in its existing use, which will result in minimal revenue returns and will not realise the significant capital receipt.
- 6.2 Disposing of part of the site or a leasehold interest which were discounted following marketing of the site on the grounds that these would not maximise the capital receipt or result in certainty of development.

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. The site has been fully marketed and the scoring of the bids was designed to demonstrate that the Council has achieved best consideration. An independent opinion is being sought to verify this.

- 7.2 Policy Issues** – The Black Cat development will contribute towards the Council's goals of optimising its assets and achieving financial stability and it will also make a positive contribution towards stimulating economic growth in Bedford Borough one of the four priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2024/2025 to 2027/2028. It will also make a positive contribution to all of objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Asset Strategy 2024/2025 to 2027/2028. The proposal is consistent with Policy EMP7 within the now withdrawn Local Plan 2040.
- 7.3 Resource Issues** – The Council will receive a fee on completion of the Option and a significant capital receipt upon exercising of the Option. These are outlined in Confidential **Appendix D**. The deductions from the sale price will be minimal and subject to a cap. In addition, a contribution towards the Council legal costs has been agreed.
- 7.4 Risks** – All development risks will be borne by Welcome Break, except for the permitted deduction for provision of a power supply. The development risks themselves are significant. These include:
- Planning risks
 - Highways risks, in particular the costs not exceeding the specified cap
 - Flood risks
 - Market change risks
- The Option will be exercised once the conditions have been met and there is the risk that the sale will not proceed in the event of these being unmet.
- 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:


Finance Portfolio Holder
Corporate Leadership Team
Finance
Legal Services
Head of Planning and Building Control
Parish Councils

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
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	None
File Reference:	None
Previous Relevant Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix A – Site Location Plan Appendix B – Marketing Brochure Confidential Appendix C – Carter Jonas Scoring Report* Confidential Appendix D – Draft Heads of Terms* * 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).



Issues

Settling Ponds

Pond

Workings

UA & CP Bdy



FOR SALE

7.94 ACRES OF PRIME ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT LAND

LAND TO SOUTH EAST OF BLACK CAT ROUNDABOUT
A1, BEDFORDSHIRE
MK44 3BE

Carter Jonas

LOCATION

The Site is located to the east of the Black Cat Roundabout, and borders the A1/A421 to the west and River Great Ouse to the east.

The site currently has access to both the A421 (linking Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes) and the A1 (linking Peterborough, London and the North East). As such it is strategically located on major east-west and north-south routes linking East Anglia with the rest of the country.

DESCRIPTION

National Highways are currently completing a significant upgrade to the A1 Black Cat junction as part of its scheme for the A428 Black Cat - Caxton Gibbet scheme. This scheme will provide a continuous dual carriageway 'Expressway' route between Cambridge and Bedford.

The upgrade to the Black Cat junction will provide a new three tier junction which will allow traffic to flow freely on the A1 by travelling under the junction and on the new dual carriageway over the junction.

The new junction will significantly improve strategic traffic movements north - south on the A1 and east - west on the A428 / A421. It will improve safety, create quicker and more reliable journeys, helping to grow the local and regional economies.

The proposed 'Expressway' route between Cambridge and Bedford aims to bypass traffic east-west on the A428/A421 and in doing so, the existing service station, retail/ hotel provisions on the A1 (Northbound) have been nullified. The subject site will capture traffic from all directions and as such a major roadside offer will be required in this location.

Highways have estimated that by 2025 daily flows entering the junction will be 100,000 vehicles and by 2040 it will be 125,000 vehicles.

ACCOMMODATION

	Size
Acres	7.94
Hectares	3.22

Site area subject to survey.

PLANNING USE

Policy information available on request.

RIGHTS OF WAY

The property will be sold subject to and with the benefits of all rights , covenants, agreements and declarations affecting the property

TERMS

Interested parties are to provide expressions of interest and high level proposals of what they wish to do with the land.

Freehold and Leasehold proposals will both be considered along with subject to planning deals.

LEGAL COSTS

Each party to be responsible for the payment of their own legal costs.

VAT

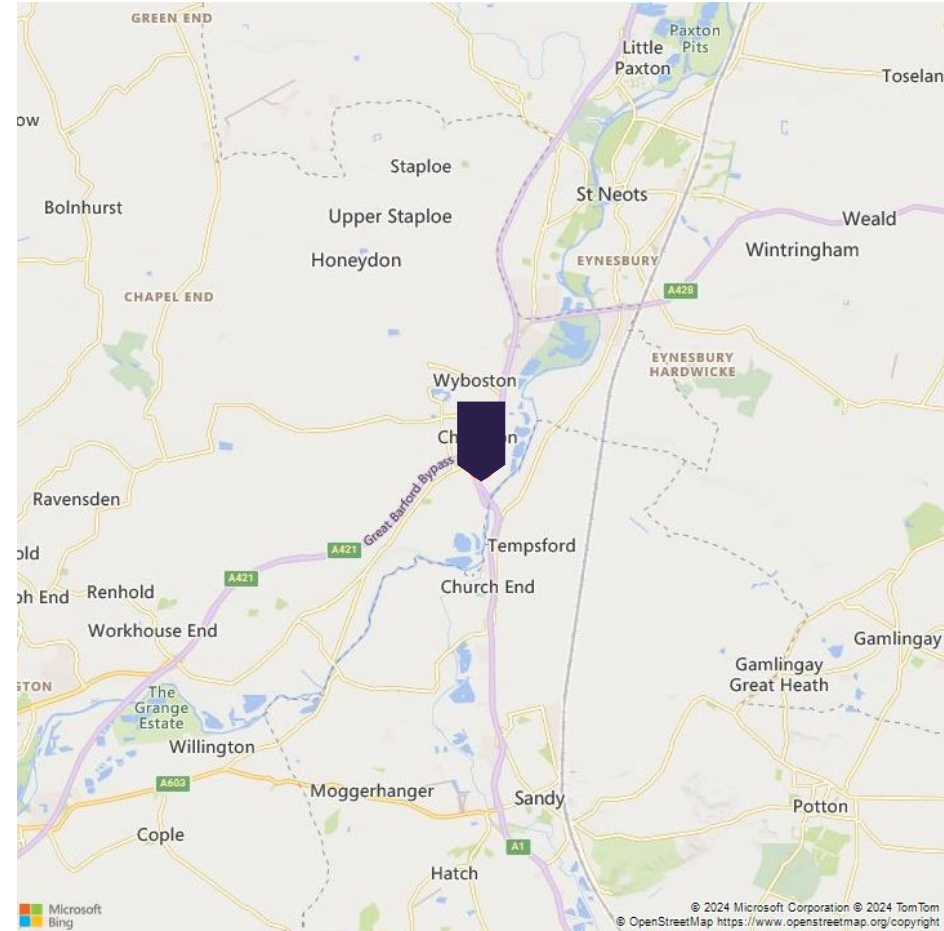
We understand that VAT is payable.

ANTI MONEY LAUNDERING

Anti-Money Laundering Regulations require Carter Jonas to formally verify prospective purchaser's identity, residence and source of funds prior to instructing solicitors.

VIEWING

Strictly by appointment with Sole Agents
Carter Jonas LLP



CONTACT NATIONAL COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Samuel Turner MRICS
Partner
020 751 83338 / 07800 571 972
samuel.turner@carterjonas.co.uk

Oliver Sigurdsson
Graduate Surveyor
020 7062 3084 / 07890 300 103
Oliver.Sigurdsson@carterjonas.co.uk

carterjonas.co.uk/commercial

IMPORTANT INFORMATION These particulars are for general information purposes only and do not represent an offer of contract or part of one. Carter Jonas has made every attempt to ensure that the particulars and other information provided are as accurate as possible and are not intended to amount to advice on which you should rely as being factually accurate. You should not assume that the property has all necessary planning, building regulations or other consents and Carter Jonas have not tested any services, facilities or equipment. Any measurements and distances given are approximate only. Purchasers must satisfy themselves of all of the aforementioned by independent inspection or otherwise. Although we make reasonable efforts to update our information, neither Carter Jonas LLP nor anyone in its employment or acting on its behalf makes any representations warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, in relation to the property, or that the content in these particulars is accurate, complete or up to date. Our images only represent part of the property as it appeared at the time they were taken. If you require further information please contact us. September 2024

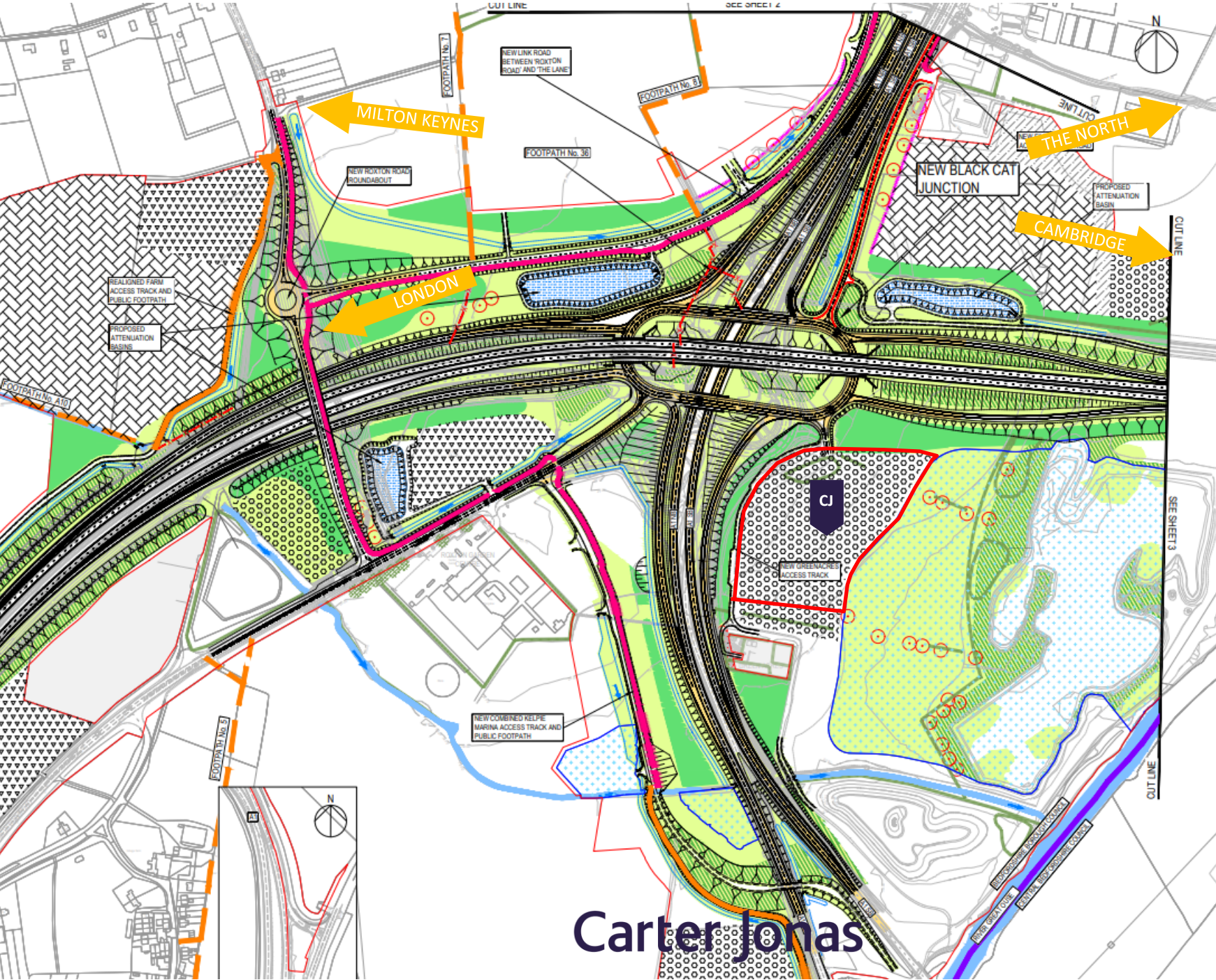


Carter Jonas

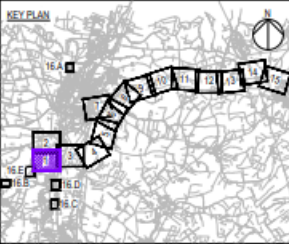


Carter Jonas

NOT TO SCALE AND AREA SUBJECT TO SURVEY



- NOTES
1. THIS DRAWING IS TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH:
 - THE GENERAL ARRANGEMENT LEGEND; AND
 - THE DRAFT DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER AND ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION DOCUMENTATION.
 2. DO NOT SCALE FROM THIS DRAWING, USE ONLY PRINTED DIMENSIONS.
 3. ALL DIMENSIONS, CHANGES, LEVELS AND COORDINATES ARE IN METRES UNLESS DEFINED OTHERWISE.

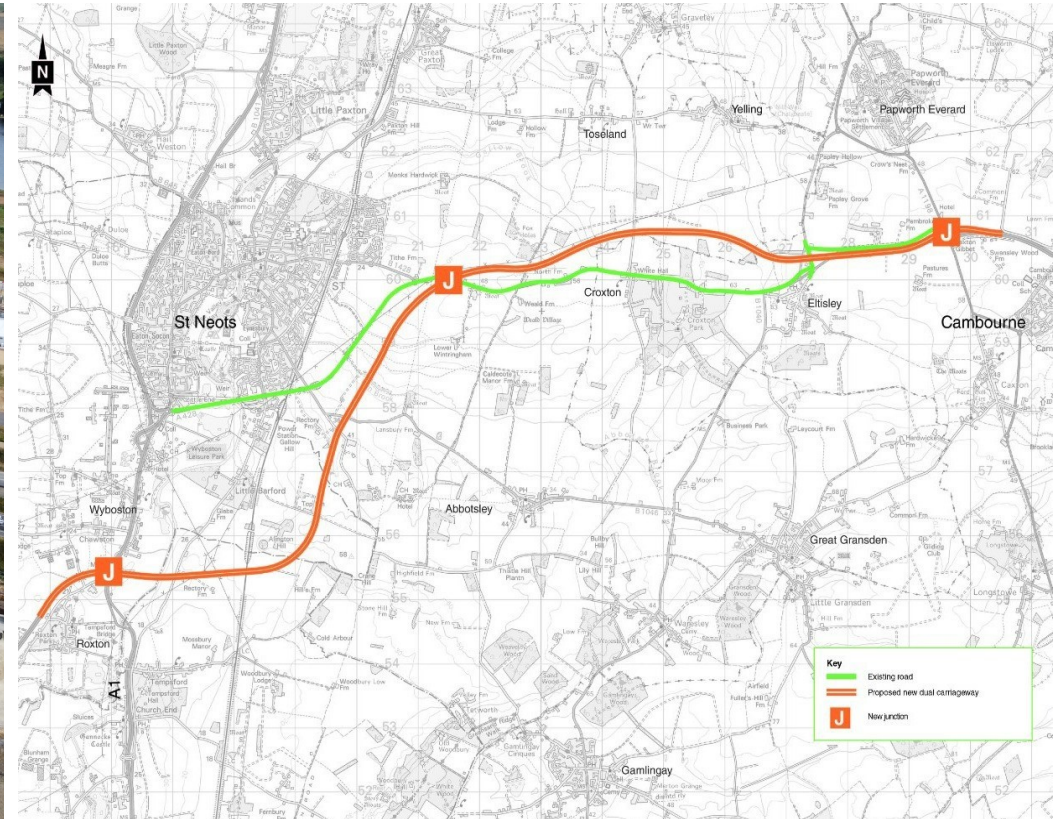


Drawn by	AD	TD	26/03/21	1007
Revised by	AD	TD		
Check				

Purpose of issue				
DCO APPLICATION				
Client				
Highways England				
Woodlands				
Manton Lane				
Manton Industrial Estate				
Bedford				
MK41 7LW				
Development Consent Order Number				
TR010044				
Project Title				

A428 BLACK CAT TO
CAXTON GIBBET
IMPROVEMENTS

Carter Jonas



CONTACT

NATIONAL COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Samuel Turner MRICS
Partner
020 751 83338 / 07800 571 972
samuel.turner@carterjonas.co.uk
carterjonas.co.uk/commercial

Oliver Sigurdsson
Graduate Surveyor
020 7062 3084 / 07890 300 103
Oliver.Sigurdsson@carterjonas.co.uk



Carter Jonas

Exclusive UK affiliate of
CHRISTIE'S
INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE