



Looking for

development viability experts

Introduction

If you are looking for development viability experts Optimis provides a specialist service to clients who wish to ensure that their projects are financially viable, sometimes challenging the policy requirements of the Council.

Financial viability is now an intrinsic part of the planning process because it is essential that all development is deliverable and achievable within five years. National Policy requires them to be viable.

When might an FVA be required?

To demonstrate that a proposed development is deliverable, commonly applicants are required to present a Financial Viability Assessment (FVA) to the Council to demonstrate that the project is viable.

Alternatively if an applicant wishes to challenge the Council's request for financial contributions towards infrastructure or affordable housing provision, an FVA may be prepared to rigorously test the Council's position and potentially reduce the contributions.

Who is best placed to prepare an FVA?

An FVA is a specialist piece of work that requires an expert to prepare it. An expert who can act in the best interests of the client, whilst being able to fully comply with Planning Policy at National and Local level and in line with planning procedure.

We believe it is essential to appoint an expert who understands the commerciality of development and is an expert in planning policy. Moreover, the expert needs to have a full understanding of the development process and experience of working in the development industry.

Optimis has this knowledge, skill and many years of relevant experience. We have successfully acted at application stage and in appeals. It is why we are able to say that we are FVA experts.

Our Service

At Optimis we have acted on behalf of clients to present viability arguments to support projects since 2010. We have worked on over 50 projects requiring FVAs on behalf of our clients to support appropriate levels of financial consideration and affordable homes, but only where the development is viably able to achieve this, in planning terms.

Our role is to present robust, defendable evidence and then negotiate with the Council on behalf of the client to deliver a viable scheme, to the best interests of the client. This can reduce excessive requirements and ensure that the scheme is viable, deliverable and therefore policy compliant.



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Our expertise at Optimis

At Optimis our main expert is our Managing Director, Justin Wickersham. Justin is a Fellow of the RTPI, having been appointed in 2022 after 30 years of experience in the planning industry.

Justin has also worked for several national and regional housebuilders over a ten year period where he undertook financial appraisals as part of the process of acquiring land across the south east of England.

This all round experience gives Optimis a unique in-house expertise, that enables us to act successfully on behalf of clients to present a robust basis for demonstrating the viability of development projects in the context of the planning process.

Testimonials

"Justin utilises his planning and development expertise to build an excellent rapport with Council officers and their appointed assessors; this enables him to negotiate solutions and achieve compromise."

Matt Briffa

Architect

"I've worked on a couple of projects with Optimis and they have always tried to find the balance between taking a hard approach to the Council's policy, whilst finding an acceptable position to the Council. They understand the art of negotiation and how to meet expectations."

John Gill

Developer

"I have worked with Optimis on many projects over the past 8 years and I have found Justin to have a very good understanding of the mechanics of development and cost analysis; probably as a result of his days as a land manager at various housebuilders. This helps the credibility of the service that he provides because his analysis is technically robust."

Tim Pearce

Quantity surveyor



Expertise in presenting Financial Viability Assessments to support projects, by using extensive experience of the commerciality of development in navigating planning policy.

Our projects

Optimis has worked with numerous clients to seek a reduction in the requested Planning Obligations on major residential projects. Where necessary we have successfully demonstrated that the provision of onsite affordable housing or the unrealistic burden of unjustified financial contributions was unviable.

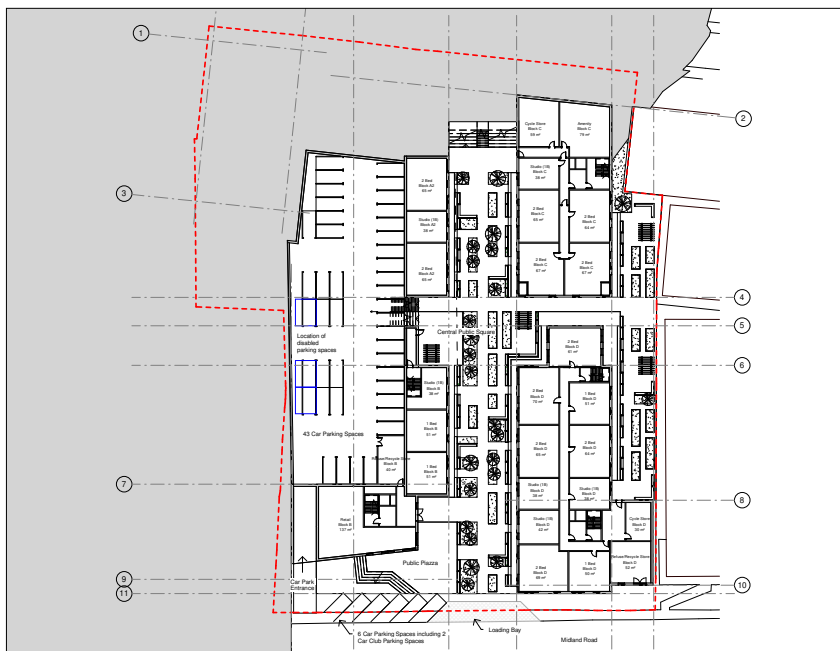
Here are some examples of our work over the past ten years.



Seymour Av, Luton (2022)

Luton Borough Council
20/00785/FUL

An application was submitted for 27 flats and the LPA requested £460,000 as a commuted sum towards affordable and other financial contributions. Optimis was able to negotiate to £zero.



Midland Rd, Luton (2019)

Luton Borough Council
18/01207/OUT

An application of 227 dwellings was refused at committee in July 2019 due to lack of provision of affordable homes, despite an officer recommendation to approve. LPA wanted £820,136 towards community infrastructure and 20% affordable on site. We offered £602,806 and no affordable on site. The subsequent appeal by Optimis was successful (APP/B0230/W/19/3235438).

Highgate Hill, Islington (2019)

APP/V5570/W/19323941

On application the LPA requested £50k and refused due to a lack of agreement. On appeal Optimis successfully agreed that £zero was required.



Peckworth Ind Estate (2018)

Central Bedfordshire

Scheme of 16 residential dwellings required both affordable at 30% and financial contributions. Optimis challenged the LPA's evidence base and successfully negotiated to a £zero contribution and no affordable delivery.

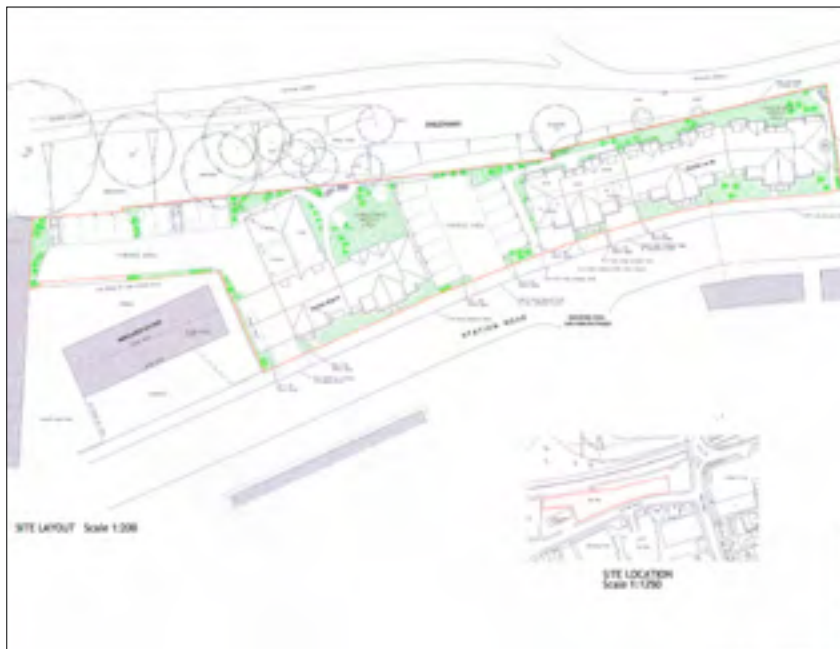




Mare Street, Hackney (2017)

London Borough of Hackney 2016/4722

A proposal was successfully made to the LPA for 21 dwellings with zero affordable and £zero contribution.



Nissan Garage, Rushden (2017)

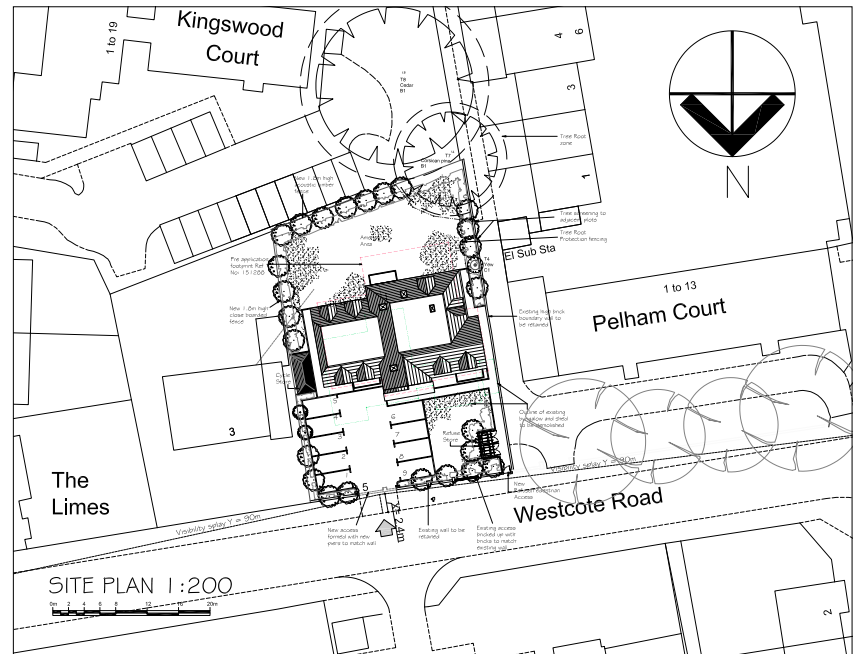
East Northamptonshire Council
08/00595/FUL

A signed S106 contained provision for 40% affordable housing and £83,000 towards community infrastructure. An application by Optimis sought to reduce this to zero affordable and £zero contributions due to the scheme otherwise being unviable. After debate the LPA agreed and approved a variant to the S106.

5 Westcote Road, Reading (2017)

Reading Borough Council
160246

Optimis argued that any contributions, either S106, or commuted sum for affordable housing would make the scheme unviable. After discussions with an independent assessor the LPA agreed a figure of £70k, reduced from £200k requested by the LPA.



Eye Road, Peterborough (2015)

During construction the client had financial difficulties. Optimis renegotiated the approved S106 and argued for a commuted sum of £30,000 in lieu of affordable housing. Reduced S106 sub from £80,000-£72,000.





Ladysmith Rd, Enfield (2012)

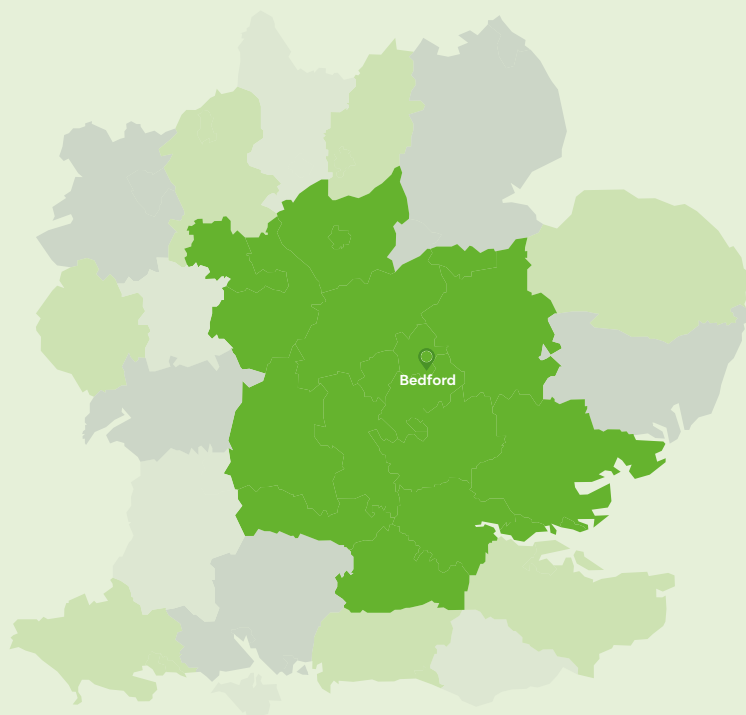
Optimis proved that it was unviable to provide affordable housing on a site of this size (less than 10 dwellings) or affordable housing through a financial contribution. As a compromise Optimis agreed to a contribution of £900 per unit (£5,400 in total).



York Street, Luton (2018)

Optimis submitted a scheme of 16 flats and argued that it was unviable to impose any affordable dwellings or any financial considerations.

Main areas of operation



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