

Green Lane, Clapham, Bedfordshire

Landscape Sensitivity and Opportunities Report

Prepared by Mrs. Clare Brockhurst FLI, BSc (Hons), Dip LA

on behalf of

De Merke Estates



Contents

Section 1: Introduction	1
Section 2: Landscape Character	2
National Scale.....	2
Borough Scale.....	2
Site Specific Character.....	4
Landscape Value.....	6
Section 3: Visual Environment.....	8
Views from the North.....	8
Views from the East.....	10
Views from the South.....	11
Views from the West.....	12
Section 4: Policy Issues.....	14
Section 5: Summary of Sensitivities and Implications on Capacity for Development.....	17
Landscape and Visual Sensitivities.....	17
Section 6: Landscape Framework for Development.....	18

List of Plates

Plate 2.1: 1887 OS mapping and 2020 aerial photography	4
Plate 2.2: Extract from OS mapping showing the alignment of Public Rights of Way	5
Plate 2.3: Photograph of leylandii tree belt	6
Plate 3.1: View from the John Bunyan Trail	8
Plate 3.2: At the junction of footpaths Clapham 9 and 10	9
Plate 3.3: View approaching Crabtree Spinney looking west	10
Plate 3.4: Views from footpath Clapham 9	10
Plate 3.5: View from Bedford Road	11
Plate 3.6: View from Green Lane	12
Plate 3.7: Church Tower – Positive element	12
Plate 3.8: Leylandii Tree Belt – Negative element	13
Plate 3.9: Crabtree Spinney – Positive element	13

List of Plans

- Plan 1: Landscape Sensitivities
- Plan 2: Landscape Framework

The contents of the report are valid at the time of writing. Leyton Place shall not be liable for any use of the report other than for the purposes for which it was produced. Owing to the dynamic nature of landscape resources, if more than twelve months have elapsed since the date of the report, further advice must be taken before you rely on the contents of the report. Notwithstanding any provision of the Leyton Place Limited Terms & Conditions, Leyton Place Ltd. shall not be liable for any losses (howsoever incurred) arising incurred as a result of reliance by the client or any third party on the report more than twelve months after the date of the report.

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1. Leyton Place Limited (LPL) has been instructed by Neame Sutton, on behalf of De Merke Estates, to undertake the necessary desktop studies and fieldwork to determine the landscape and visual opportunities and constraints to development of the land east of Clapham, Bedford.
- 1.2. The Site¹ is located to the east of Green Lane and south of Carriage Drive north of Clapham and Bedford Road, Bedfordshire. The landowners are seeking to promote part of the Site for housing through the emerging Bedford Local Plan, this would be limited to the parcel immediately north of the existing settlement edge. The remainder of the land will be retained in agricultural land use, whilst having the ability to accommodate landscape enhancements.
- 1.3. This report considers the landscape and visual environment in order to inform a landscape-led scheme which minimises the potential landscape and visual effects at the outset and delivers beneficial environmental outcomes.
- 1.4. This report is not a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), as a fully designed scheme is necessary to complete the assessment of effects. An LVIA will be required to accompany any planning application. This short report has been prepared in the context of the published professional guidance² and adopts a methodology consistent with the requirements of that guidance.

¹ Grid Reference TL 03799 52623

² Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, 2013, LI and IEMA

Section 2: Landscape Character

- 2.1. Landscape Characterisation is the process whereby areas are identified and classified into distinct, recognisable and consistent patterns of elements and features. This is a value-free process and does not provide for comparison of areas being 'better' than others. The determination of 'value' primarily comes through the application of designations, policies or local expressions of value which may be found in published literature, for example village design statements.
- 2.2. Published characterisations cascade from the National Character Areas (NCA), prepared by Natural England, through to regional and local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) and Landscape Character Types (LCT) prepared by County and District Councils. Typically, the smaller scale, local assessments are most relevant to small-scale projects. Having reviewed the published information, the local scale assessments are most pertinent to this project.

National Scale

- 2.3. At a national scale, the Site falls within the broad area classified as National Character Area (NCA) **88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands**. The classification and subsequent description relate to an extensive area. As a result, the commentary does not assist with the understanding of Site-specific issues, albeit it provides context to the smaller scale assessments.
- 2.4. This assessment does identify some general 'opportunities' for management of the landscape, with example of how the objectives may be achieved. Relevant to settlement expansion in this area is the third objective (SEO 3), namely:

"Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Forest of Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people's health and wellbeing."

- 2.5. As noted below the Site is located near to the house and gardens of Clapham Park, the fourth opportunity (SEO 4) is therefore a relevant consideration:

"Protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage and tranquillity of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA, including its important geodiversity, archaeology, historic houses, parkland, and Second World War and industrial heritage, by improving interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape."

Borough Scale

- 2.6. Within the Bedford Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (2014, updated 2020) the Site is located in the Landscape Character Type (LCT) classified as **2: Wooded Wolds**. Of the recorded key characteristics, the following are relevant to the Site.
 - Small to medium scale landscape with an enclosed, peaceful character.
 - Significant woodland cover, including several ancient woodland Sites.

- Predominantly linear hamlets and villages unified by consistent use of limestone as a building material.
 - A land use characterised by mixed arable and pastoral farming.
 - Gaps in tree cover provide commanding views across the adjacent Limestone Valleys.
 - The John Bunyan Trail is an important recreational route crossing through the landscape.
- 2.7. At a finer grain the Landscape Character Area (LCA) within which the Site is located is classified as 2A: Hinwick Wooded Wolds. Locally specific characteristics, in addition to the matters noted above, include:

- Enclosure consists of thick hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees of oak and sycamore.

- 2.8. The description of the LCA provides a detailed description of the area, some aspects being more pertinent to the Site, these include:

“The combination of woodland cover and undulating, sloping landform creates a sense of semi-enclosure with views that are generally framed or intermittent. Woodland blocks along rural roads provide channelled views. This provides for occasional contrasting views when a gap in the woodland cover affords commanding views across the adjacent Harrold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley. The area also forms a rural backdrop to this more settled valley landscape.”

- 2.9. In terms of the Site the most relevant ‘attribute’ of this landscape character area is the role of open areas and woodland in breaking up the urban form. Larger fields have resulted from the loss of hedgerows and enlargement to accommodate agricultural management. The description goes on to record:

“The distinctive settlement character is a key feature, with hamlets being connected by narrow rural lanes. There is an absence of main transport routes which makes for a peaceful, largely uninterrupted character area. The consistent vernacular of honey-grey limestone houses and walls, an intact hedgerow network and the network of rural roads create a simple and unified landscape.”

“The rural character, sparse settlement pattern and the lightly distributed network of tracks and paths combine to create a sense of tranquillity.”

“...Settlements are often associated with mature trees and small woodlands, visually integrating them with the surrounding rural landscape.”

- 2.10. The pressure for settlement expansion is noted and the relevant Landscape Sensitivities are:

- The strong network of hedgerows (although occasionally gappy) which are vulnerable to loss through lack of consistent maintenance.
- The pattern of nucleated, limestone villages which is susceptible to infill development and extension along the rural lanes.
- Good survival of ancient woodland and some areas of assart fields, along the boulder clay ridge, and generally good survival of historic field boundaries, all of which would be vulnerable to changes in management.

- The tranquil, rural nature of the landscape that is vulnerable to village expansion and increased use of the network of rural roads, and further development.
- 2.11. The overall landscape strategy for the Hinwick Wooded Wolds character area is to **conserve** the rural landscape of rolling arable farmland with its largely intact hedgerow network, parks and ancient woodlands and grasslands of high biodiversity value, while enhancing elements of the landscape which are in declining condition. The recommendations for new development are either general or relate to specific elements which are not associated with the Site. This report considers the Site-specific recommendations for development, in the context of the over-arching issues.

Site Specific Character

- 2.12. The Site comprises two distinct land parcels, the most westerly being pastoral and in close proximity to the existing settlement edge. The remainder is open arable land. Vegetative features are limited to remnant blocks of woodland (including Crabtree Spinney, a priority habitat) and scattered trees on the periphery of the Site.
- 2.13. Historically the woodland blocks were larger and more extensive, and the fields were smaller and defined by more frequent hedgerows (Plate 2.1)



Plate 2.1: 1887 OS mapping and 2020 aerial photography

- 2.14. The land falls from the north eastern edge (approx. 60m AOD) to across the Site to the south western boundary (approx. 35m AOD). The open character and landform enable extensive views to the south and south east, these are considered in the next section.

- 2.15. The Site is crossed by public right of way Clapham 10³. To the north is the John Bunyan Trail (Footpath Clapham 24/Carriage Drive) and from footpath 24 there is a footpath which reconnects with the John Bunyan Trail to the south east (Footpath Clapham 9). The John Bunyan Trail follows along Green Lane to the east of the Site (Plate 2.2). These connected routes appear (based on the site visit) to be well used.



Plate 2.2: Extract from OS mapping showing the alignment of Public Rights of Way

- 2.16. Beyond the Site there are two notable heritage features.
- 2.17. To the north east is the house (Grade II Listed Building) and grounds of Clapham Park. The house is set within extensive woodland, part of which is Ancient Woodland. The records describe the building in detail, and reference the woodland, little is noted, beyond ownership and general agricultural management, in respect of the wider estate. The Site shares few characteristics with the estate, beyond some areas of pastoral grazing. However, Carriage Drive, the approach to Clapham Park, abuts the Site.

³ References taken from the Bedford Borough Council definitive rights of way map

- 2.18. To the south/south west there is the Grade I Listed Church of St Thomas of Canterbury. The church lies on the northern edge of Clapham with development immediately to the east, west and south. To the north there is a field between the church and the housing on Green Lane. The Site is separate and distinct from the church and its setting. The church tower is a notable landmark in the local landscape.
- 2.19. There is a notable detractor in the landscape on the settlement edge, this is the leylandii tree belt around the business units and caravan storage to the east of the Hotel.



Plate 2.3: Photograph of leylandii tree belt

- 2.20. From the analysis of the published material and field observations, there are a number of opportunities to enhance the landscape features of the Site, incorporating hedgerow and woodland restoration.

Landscape Value

- 2.21. As noted above the landscape characterisation process does not assign 'value' to the landscape. This is typically determined through the application of statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. In this instance the Site is not affected by

- SSSI;
- Habitat Sites;
- Green Belt;
- Local Green Space;
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- National Park;
- Heritage Coast;
- Irreplaceable habitats;
- Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change; and
- Designated heritage assets⁴.

⁴ NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 6

- 2.22. In the absence of a formal designation an indication of value may be apparent by a 'conserve' guideline in the published characterisation. This is a landscape where the strategy is to 'conserve'. However, there are no other aspects⁵ which are sufficiently remarkable to indicate a value greater than of local scale.
- 2.23. Overall, in the context of the allocation, the landscape of the Site is not a 'Valued Landscape' as indicated in paragraph 170 a) of the NPPF.

⁵ Box 5.1 of GLVIA 3 Landscape Condition, Scenic Quality; Rarity; Representativeness; Conservation Interests; Recreational Value, Perceptual aspects, and Associations

Section 3: Visual Environment

- 3.1. The analysis of views relates to more than what is visible and the appreciation of the apparent character of the landscape. It is important to understand there is a distinction between the inter-related landscape and visual issues in the appraisal process.
- 3.2. Within the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, the following visual sensitivities are identified:
- Occasional views across the River Great Ouse Valley e.g., from south-facing slopes west of Sharnbrook.
 - The sense of enclosure provided by the combined undulating landform and hedgerow network.
 - Views to the largely undeveloped occasionally wooded ridges of the area from the adjacent Harrold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley and Oakley-Great Ouse Limestone Valley.
 - The open views and skylines which are affected by the prominence of wind turbines in the adjacent lowland clay farmland, particularly in views from the north east of the character area.
- 3.3. These have limited relevance to the Site. However, there are a number of accessible public vantage points from which the Site can be appreciated from.

Views from the North



Plate 3.1: View from the John Bunyan Trail

- 3.4. Views from this route are relatively contained as a result of the hedgerows alongside Carriage Drive. Occasional gaps, typically associated with gateways, allow views across the River Great Ouse Valley to the elevated landform west of Kempston. The character of the visual composition is distinctly rural.



Plate 3.2: At the junction of footpaths Clapham 9 and 10

- 3.5. From the elevated northern boundary of the Site looking south/south west, the visual composition is predominantly rural, with glimpses of the settlement. The settlement is nestled in the lower lying valley floor, fringed by mature deciduous trees.

Views from the East



Plate 3.3: View approaching Crabtree Spinney looking west



Plate 3.4: Views from footpath Clapham 9

- 3.6. The open arable landscape enables extensive views of the landscape to the west. Crabtree Spinney reduces the visibility of the Site from this footpath. The foreground is dominated by the agricultural landscape, with settlement becoming increasingly apparent as one walks westwards.

Views from the South



Plate 3.5: View from Bedford Road

- 3.7. Views of the Site from Bedford Road, within the valley floor, are limited by occasional groups of trees in the foreground. The Site is visible on the skyline with the lower slopes open, with little visual screening.

Views from the West



Plate 3.6: View from Green Lane

- 3.8. The sunken nature of the lane, combined with housing to the west and the dense hedgerow reduce the opportunities to see into the Site, albeit new housing is likely to be visible on the skyline because of the landform and relative heights of features in the landscape.

Notable Visual Landmarks



Plate 3.7: Church Tower – Positive element





Plate 3.8: Leylandii Tree Belt – Negative element



Plate 3.9: Crabtree Spinney – Positive element

Section 4: Policy Issues

4.1. Whilst the Local Plan 2030 is being reviewed, the current policies which apply to the Site are:

4.2. **Policy 7S**, in particular; the second limb:

“In addition, exceptionally development proposals will be supported on Sites that are well-related to a defined Settlement Policy Area, Small Settlements or the built form of other settlements where it can be demonstrated that:

vi. It responds to an identified community need; and

vii. There is identifiable community support and it is made or supported by the parish council or, where there is no parish council, another properly constituted body which fully represents the local community; and

viii. Its scale is appropriate to serve local needs or to support local facilities;

and ix. The development contributes positively to the character of the settlement and the scheme is appropriate to the structure, form, character and size of the settlement.

x. Where a community building is being provided, users of the proposed development can safely travel to and from it by sustainable modes and it is viable in the long term, ensuring its retention as a community asset.

All development in the countryside must:

xi. Recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and

xii. Not give rise to other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others; and

xiii. Not give rise to other impacts that would have a significant adverse effect on the environment, biodiversity or designated Natura 2000 Sites.”

4.3. **Policy 29** sets out the guidance on the approach to the design of new development:

“Design quality and principles All new development should:

i. Be of the highest design quality and contribute positively to the area’s character and identity, and

ii. Respect the context within which it will sit and the opportunities to enhance the character and quality of the area and local distinctiveness, and

iii. Protect and where appropriate, enhance heritage assets and their settings and successfully integrate with the historic environment and character, and

iv. Have particular regard to the environment and biodiversity within it and ensure there are no significant effects on Natura 2000 Sites (notably Portholme (SAC), The Ouse Washes (SAC/ SPA, Ramsar), Eversden and Wimpole Woods (SAC), Upper River Nene Gravel Pits (SPA/Ramsar)) designated species or habitats, and

v. Promote accessibility and permeability for all by creating safe and welcoming places that connect with each other, and

vi. Promote a sense of place to include attractive streets squares and other public spaces with a defined sense of enclosure, with multifunctional green spaces and corridors, and

vii. Incorporate measures to promote community safety ensuring that private and public amenity spaces are clearly defined and are designed to be inclusive, useable safe and enjoyable, and

viii. Integrate functional needs such as refuse / recycling storage and collection points, car and cycle parking.

Proposals meeting the following criteria will be expected to be guided by a design code to be agreed with the local planning authority as part of the application process:

- i. Proposals for residential developments of 200 dwellings or more.*
- ii. Proposals for residential developments of 50 dwellings or more in areas with a historic urban form or where the landscape interface with the built form is of importance.*
- iii. Other large-scale developments.*

The need for a design code should be discussed with the Council pre-application.”

4.4. **Policies 30-33** deal with detailed matters including infrastructure and traffic.

4.5. The Site lies in the Bedford Northern Fringes strategic Green Infrastructure project area. As a result, **Policy 35S**⁶ applies, namely:

“The existing green infrastructure in the borough shall be protected, enhanced and managed for the future benefit of the environment, people and the economy.

Development shall provide a net gain in green infrastructure, while seeking to provide a high quality multi-functional green infrastructure network in accordance with the Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan.

The Council will work with developers and other partners to deliver the three strategic green infrastructure projects: the Forest of Marston Vale, the Bedford River Valley Park and the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Park.”

4.6. The guidance which sets out the approach and opportunities for the Bedford Northern Fringes Green Infrastructure is contained in the Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan (extract at **Appendix 1**)

4.7. **Policy 37** addresses the general matters relating to Landscape Character, relying on the sensitivities identified and recorded in the 2020 updated Landscape Character Assessment (see above). This policy notes:

⁶ See also saved policy AD24: Green Infrastructure Opportunities Zones

“Development proposals will protect and enhance the key landscape features and visual sensitivities of the landscape character areas identified in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment May 2014 (or as subsequently amended).

Proposals will be required to:

- i. Where appropriate incorporate and implement the landscape management guidelines and development guidelines laid out in the BBLCA, and*
- ii. Protect and enhance the character and qualities of the local landscape through appropriate design and management, and*
- iii. Make provision for the retention and enhancement of features of landscape importance, and*
- iv. Safeguard and where possible, enhance key views and vistas, and*
- v. Protect the landscape setting and contribute to maintaining the individual and distinct character, and separate identities of settlements by preventing coalescence, and*
- vi. Where appropriate, provide landscape mitigation.”*

4.8. **Policies 38 to 40** deal with new landscape features and existing vegetation. The general message is to retain and protect, replace and enhance key vegetative features.

4.9. Overall, there is a requirement to understand the baseline situation and ensure that new development respects and complements its landscape context. Demonstration of a landscape-led solution to development is essential.

4.10. Finally, the Site is in a Local Gap (saved **Policy AD42**). The supporting text to the policy, in respect of the Clapham/Bedford gap notes:

“The gap between Clapham and Bedford varies between about 650 m and about 1 km. In order to preserve the separate character and identity of Clapham, the gap between it and the Bedford urban area requires additional protection from development to prevent coalescence. The intervening open land contains some development around Clapham Green. The effect of the proposed policy would be to constrain further development in this location if it were to conflict with the objectives of the policy.”

4.11. This is not a designation which relates to the quality or character of the landscape. It is a spatial planning policy seeking to ensure separation between Clapham and Bedford. Whilst the Borough wide Proposals Map indicates the gap by a line, suggesting that the gap only applies to separation along the Bedford Road. However, the inset map indicates that the Local Gap is that ‘area’ annotated as Bedford Northern Fringes. For the purposes of this report, it is presumed that all of the undeveloped land is included in the Local Gap. The approach to development as set out on Plan 2 to the rear of this report will avoid physical coalescence of the two settlements.

Section 5: Summary of Sensitivities and Implications on Capacity for Development

- 5.1. This section should be read alongside **Plan 1**, the references are linked to the numbers on the plan. The sensitivities are drawn from the published analysis and field observations.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

- 5.2. The landform results in the northern portion of the Site being located at a local high point in the landscape [1]. The character of the landscape is also open and therefore is particularly sensitive and a key constraint to development. From this high ground there are extensive views across the River Great Ouse valley and towards the church tower.
- 5.3. Crabtree Spinney [2] is a significant and historic element in the landscape. It provides visual containment in a predominantly open landscape. Its conservation, enhancement and management are important.
- 5.4. Alongside the southern boundary which abuts the housing off Church View there are a number of mature trees [3], which due to their size, form and open context give rise to the appearance of a remnant parkland. These trees filter and soften the built edge and complements the 'village' qualities in this part of the settlement. Their retention is strongly recommended.
- 5.5. The loss of the historic field boundaries. Woodland and hedgerow trees through the intensification of the agricultural operations has resulted in an open and exposed landscape [4]. This open character enables good intervisibility between the higher ground and Bedford Road. The sense of a visual 'gap' is appreciated travelling along this route.
- 5.6. The inappropriate use of leylandii in defining the boundary of the commercial use results in the hedgerow being a notable and unattractive detractor in the landscape [5]. It is not within the ownership of the current promoters so will be retained.
- 5.7. The Public Rights of Way [6] are important for the recreational opportunities afforded to the local and wider community. Their alignments are well established and should be unchanged by the proposals.
- 5.8. The eastern extent of the settlement is indistinct in the landscape due to the mature hedgerows along the developed areas. There is an abrupt change between the open and agricultural landscape and the vegetated townscape.
- 5.9. Visually, vegetation is important in screening the built elements and directing the eye through the landscape to the high ground beyond the valley floor. The public rights of way network provide extensive opportunities to appreciate local and distant views, so one is aware of the distinctive sense of place.

Section 6: Landscape Framework for Development

- 6.1. This section should be read alongside **Plan 2**.
- 6.2. The starting point is to retain the open and elevated land to the north of the Site [1]. This ensures that local views to the church tower and distant views across the valley are still available to the public. This open area will also ensure impacts on Carriage Drive are minimised and the historic route retains its current setting.
- 6.3. The provision of open land adjacent to the 'parkland' trees [2] will ensure that these features are protected and can be appreciated by the public passing along the footpath. Retaining this open area will also allow views of the church tower to maintain a relatively open foreground.
- 6.4. Crabtree Spinney can be enlarged to reflect its historic form and coverage, in line with the Council's Green Infrastructure project for the Northern Bedford Fringes. Extending this woodland will assist in optimising the capacity of the land to accommodate development.
- 6.5. New woodland [4], in a form consistent with the 1887 mapping, albeit on a slightly different alignment, will 'screen' the leylandii hedgerow and improve the appearance of the settlement edge; extend linkages from Crabtree Spinney as part of the wildlife network and optimise the development capacity of the Site.
- 6.6. The upper slopes of the River Great Ouse valley have previously been occupied by woodland and scattered trees. There is an opportunity to provide parkland trees [5] and pasture on the elevated land to both restore characteristic tree cover and maintain views across the valley. A more densely planted area would adversely affect the visual character and qualities of this landscape.
- 6.7. Restoration of the historic field pattern, either by the creation of new 'field' or simply implying a new field structure through the provision of trees is consistent with the Green Infrastructure requirements in the Council's policies, but also will filter views of the higher ground (and development without imposing inappropriate woodland features which would be inconsistent with the current baseline and significantly reduce the intervisibility across the landscape which is an attractive quality of the 'gap'.
- 6.8. Development can be accommodated within the landscape framework [7 and 8]. It is suggested that some development can be accommodated to the north of footpath 10 as this will mirror development to the west of Green Lane.

Appendix 1

Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan



Bedfordshire & Luton
Biodiversity
Recording &
Monitoring
Centre



**BEDFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**Bedfordshire
and Luton**

Green Infrastructure Consortium



4.6 Bedford northern fringes

The rolling northern fringes of the town contain a number of green infrastructure assets including Bedford Park and, further north, Renhold Brook, Renhold Wood, Clapham Park Wood, Mowsbury Park, Putnoe Wood and historic parkland at Howbury Park. Some of these woodlands are ancient, and contain archaeological earthworks, as does Howbury Park.

This network of existing assets means that there is an opportunity to create a green wooded edge to the town, and to create a „linear“ park, providing informal recreation, a buffer between the urban and rural areas, and protect the visual quality of the rising land to the north of the town. The area also provides an important opportunity to establish new habitats and routes for wildlife. This „linear park“ concept would provide a green infrastructure corridor around the northern fringes of Bedford, and has been identified as an ambition for the town since the 2002 Local Plan for Bedford Borough.

Opportunities include;

- Delivering the north west section of the Bedford Green Wheel project to create a green access route around and into the town
- Creating new accessible woodland linking Clapham Park Wood, Mowsbury Park, Putnoe Wood and Renhold Brook.
- Integrating the management and development of publicly accessible natural greenspaces between Parkwood Local Nature Reserve and Putnoe Wood to create a green arc to the north and west of Bedford.
- Conserving existing historic parkland and improving interpretation, particularly around Renhold, Clapham Park Wood and Howbury Park.
- Enhancing the existing public open spaces, and improving the interpretation of historic environment features such as the hillfort and moat on Mowsbury Hill, a scheduled monument.
- Creating walking, cycling and horse riding routes linking villages to the north of Bedford with the northern section of the Bedford Green Wheel.
- Managing and enhancing ancient woodlands and hedgerows, and linking habitats through adjacent green spaces associated with schools and sports fields.

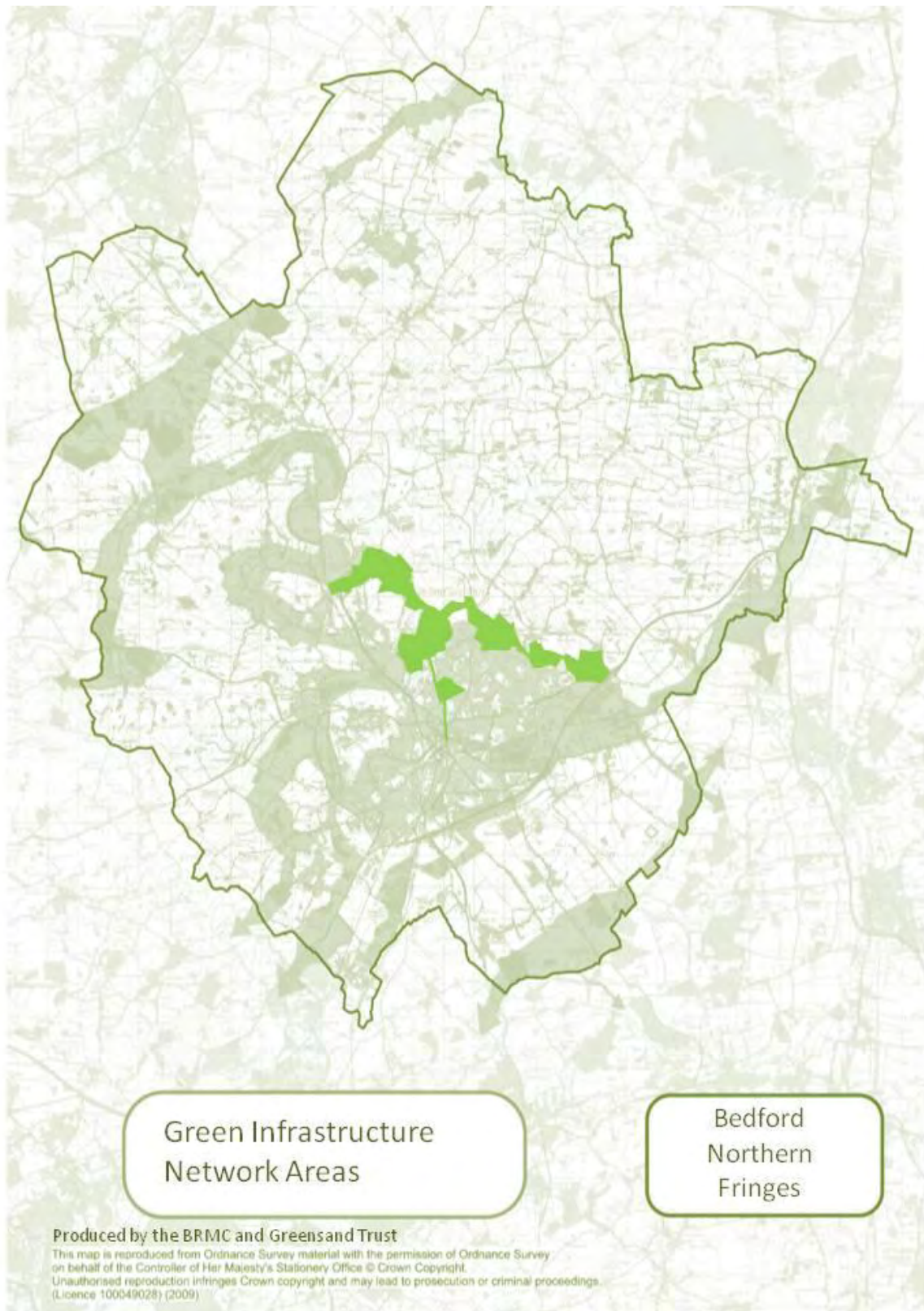


Figure 12 - Bedford Northern Fringes network area

5. Implementation

Although Green Infrastructure is a relatively new term the component parts are not. There are a range of organisations and mechanisms already in place across Bedford that manage, maintain, enhance and deliver existing and new GI components.

The new aspect of Green Infrastructure is the co-ordinated and integrated approach taken in the planning and delivery of Green Infrastructure in a specified area. In Bedfordshire and Luton the Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC) has been established to oversee this process. The GIC have developed methodologies for GI planning at the different levels and coordinated the prioritisation of GI Projects for specific funding opportunities. This chapter reviews some of the major influences on GI implementation.

5.1 Delivering through the Planning system

The impetus for this plan came through housing and employment growth planned for the area.

The planning system will have a vital role to play in the protection, delivery and enhancement of the GI network through effective spatial planning. It will provide guidance on the most effective and efficient areas for the new parts of the network that are needed to provide for new populations and to make good any existing deficiencies. Further investment from public and private sectors will be crucial to help address current and future needs for GI provision; however, it is equally important that new developments make commensurate contributions towards new and improved local infrastructure where that development will add to infrastructure needs and requirements locally. Even smaller developments create significant additional demands for new infrastructure.

The adopted core strategy for Bedford Borough includes policies on the protection, quality, provision, enhancement and management of green infrastructure in the core strategy.

This green infrastructure plan provides an evidence base to identify where the priority areas for protecting, enhancing and creating green infrastructure are. The plan will therefore provide information to inform the allocation of sites for future developments, the assessment of development proposals and the negotiation of planning obligations.

5.2 Grant Funding and other External Funding Sources

Members of the Bedfordshire and Luton GIC have an excellent track record in securing resources through external funding schemes for their aspects of GI. However many of the sources of grant aid are for capital expenditure and the costs of maintenance are rarely adequate to deliver the levels of quality required. This

situation has been in existence for some time and applies to many aspects of the existing GI components. It is therefore particularly serious when this plan is proposing a significant increase to provide a fully functional network.

A significant source of funding for green infrastructure is the Growth Fund (formerly known as the Growth Area Fund). This funding comes from the Department for Communities and Local Government as a grant to Bedford Borough. A range of green infrastructure projects are being funded until 2011. These projects include creating a „green gateway“ of community woodlands to the western side of Bedford, developing Bedford River Valley Park, a substantial part around the River Ouse to the East of Bedford, developing a series of green walking and cycling routes around and through Bedford, improving the river corridor through Bedford, and developing sections of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway which will create a new waterway linking the River Ouse at Bedford to the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes. These projects are led by organisations including the Marston Vale Trust, Bedford Borough Council and the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.

Other funding sources for green infrastructure projects include;

- Lottery Funding (including the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Big Lottery Fund, plus Sport England and Arts Council Funding)
- Landfill Tax Funding
- Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

It is not intended to provide full details of each and every funding opportunity, as this would become rapidly out of date. The Green Infrastructure Consortium acts as a forum for exchanging information, raising awareness of funding schemes and encouraging partnership working. It also seeks to prioritise projects in relation to funding opportunities at a strategic level.

5.3 Agriculture and Forestry

Within Bedford Borough, approximately sixty percent of agricultural land is managed under „Environmental Stewardship“ agreements, which bring in funding from the EU for positive management of the environment. As a result, fewer hedges are being cut every year with many being trimmed every three years, many arable fields are bounded by grass margins and many agricultural features are being managed in a more sympathetic manner than was perhaps the case in the past. These changes have significant implications to the quality and variety of the local landscape.

A growing number of both small scale and large scale farmers within the area are now within or are actively considering entering the more onerous Higher Level Scheme under the Environmental Stewardship system. Measures to reverse the decline in farmland bird populations and to improve peoples“ enjoyment and understanding of the farmed environment are particularly welcomed under these

agreements. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group provides support and help to farmers wanting to develop the environmental quality of their landholding.

In addition to the formal Environmental Stewardship schemes, there is also a voluntary approach; „A Campaign for the Farmed Environment“ which encourages farmers to undertake additional measures within or outside Environmental Stewardship. There will be significant benefits to the environment both in Bedford Borough and across the region.

Environmental Stewardship, the loss of set aside and the efforts that are being made to replace the perceived benefits of set aside, have all had or are likely to encourage changes in the agricultural landscape of Bedford Borough.

A significant belt of ancient woodlands runs across the north of the area from east to west. Grants are available to support and encourage management, and positive management of these areas of ancient woodlands has become increasingly common. Elsewhere small ancient woodlands are present and are often designated as being of County Wildlife Site status. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group employs an Ancient Woodland Liaison Advisor to work with owners of the woodlands in Bedford Borough and beyond to aid management and to encourage the control of deer that can pose serious long term problems for woodland regeneration.

5.4 Delivery through partnerships and communities

Town and Parish Councils and local community groups can play a significant role in delivering GI. It is important that the local authorities work in partnership with local communities to deliver against the objectives of the Bedford Sustainable Communities Strategy. Working through Local Strategic Partnerships has been an important method of doing this.

5.5 Monitoring and Review

The information base for each theme, along with the Plan itself, will need to be reviewed and updated as circumstances change, other plans and strategies are developed and GI projects are delivered. This plan should be reviewed in the Autumn of 2012.

6. Landscape

6.1 Introduction

North Bedfordshire has an attractive and diverse rural countryside, containing peaceful, tree-lined riverside landscapes, the distinctive “Bedfordshire Wolds” and tranquil farmed countryside. The River Ouse is the major landscape feature, linking the many characteristic limestone villages with the urban centre of Bedford and Kempston, and connection with the pastoral landscapes and urban areas beyond the County boundary.

Around Bedford, Kempston and the larger villages, urban fringe landscapes are undergoing significant and rapid change, as a result of housing expansion, industrial and road development.

The Borough contains part of the “Forest of Marston Vale” (FMV), the Community Forest designated to bring positive landscape improvement to the brickfields south of Bedford. The extractive industry and subsequent landfill operations introduced large scale lakes and raised landforms – opportunity areas for Green Infrastructure (GI) but also requiring additional mitigation to achieve integration into the surrounding rural landscape. The FMV has established extensive areas of new woodlands in the Borough, notably the Green Gateway at Kempston and has also been instrumental in promoting the Bedford River Valley Park and securing land within this regionally significant initiative.

The Marston Vale will continue to be a focus for GI provision: GI is required in addition to the landscape mitigation required to integrate the new housing and industry and to reduce the impact of new roads. Apart from woodland planting and management, priorities include creating landscape rich corridors linking the Vale with the Greensand Ridge, to the River Valley Park and to enhance the route of the Canal.

6.2 Landscape Character

The accepted approach to evaluating landscape is through landscape character assessment. This is an objective approach to description based on the premise that all landscapes are valuable but have different characteristics and condition. Characteristic features are described in an integrated approach taking into consideration the cultural heritage, biodiversity, relationship with settlements and accessibility. Only from an understanding of the landscape can new development be designed to ensure it does not detract from what is valued or characteristic. This applies to the siting and planting of new GI, which also needs to be sympathetic to landscape character.

A District level Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was completed in 2007¹⁶ This identified 14 distinctive *landscape character areas* within the framework of six broad generic landscape *types* described in the County Landscape Assessment, 2003.¹⁷

These are illustrated on figure 13, overlain with hatching depicting the strength of character.

¹⁶ Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, 2007

¹⁷ County Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, 2000

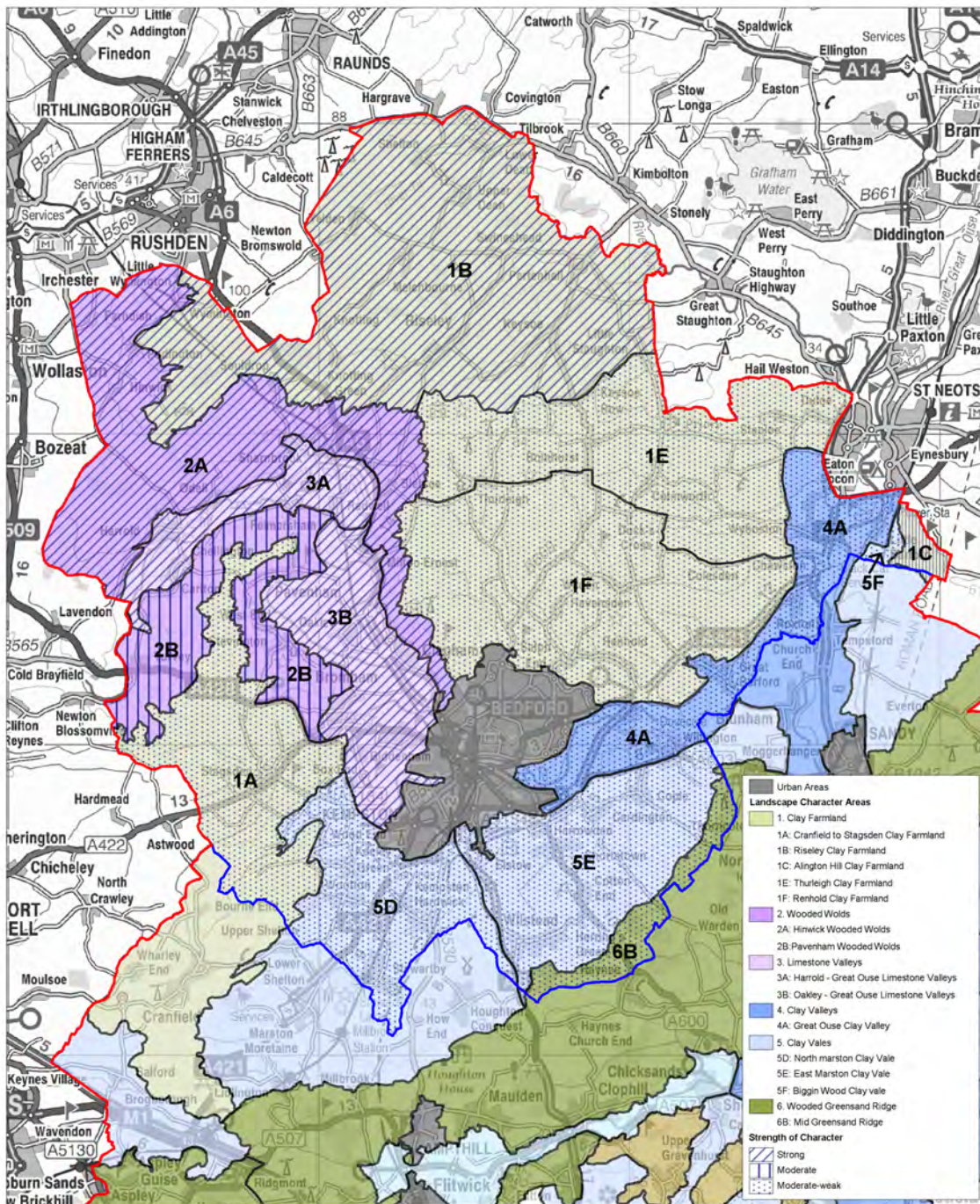


Figure 13 - Landscape Character

The fundamental principle of the landscape character approach is that all landscape has value and has the potential to be improved sympathetically.

The Borough contains a significant area where the *strength of character* is considered to be *strong* and the condition of the key features to be *good*. Thirteen out of the fourteen *lcas* have either moderate or strong condition – stronger character is maintained in the Wolds and the Upper Ouse Valley. Character is considered to be *moderate* in the clay vales, where farming practice has resulted in a loss of traditional features and urban influence can form a hard edge to the rural area.

The *condition* of the landscape is a major factor for concern as ten of the *Icas* are considered to be in a '*Declining*' or '*Declined*' condition, even though the *Icas* in the Marston Vale are considered to be improving.

This overall decline is a result of various factors – post-war farming change, industrial and mineral activity and the pressures of urbanisation and highway development. The extensive loss of trees as a result of Dutch Elm Disease led to a decline in quality of the farmed landscape to the north of Bedford. However, there are many examples of investment in the rural landscape which have brought positive improvements e.g. the new woodlands planted by the Community Forest, the habitats created through mineral restoration and by farmers and landowners with the support of Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

Tranquillity is an increasingly important factor affecting the enjoyment of landscape. The CPRE Tranquillity map for Bedfordshire (figure 14) has been a useful reference; the Borough has the greatest area of tranquil countryside in Bedfordshire – a reflection on the absence of major road corridors in the north of the District. With increasing urban pressures, peaceful landscapes and those free from visual intrusion are a rare commodity, especially south of Bedford.

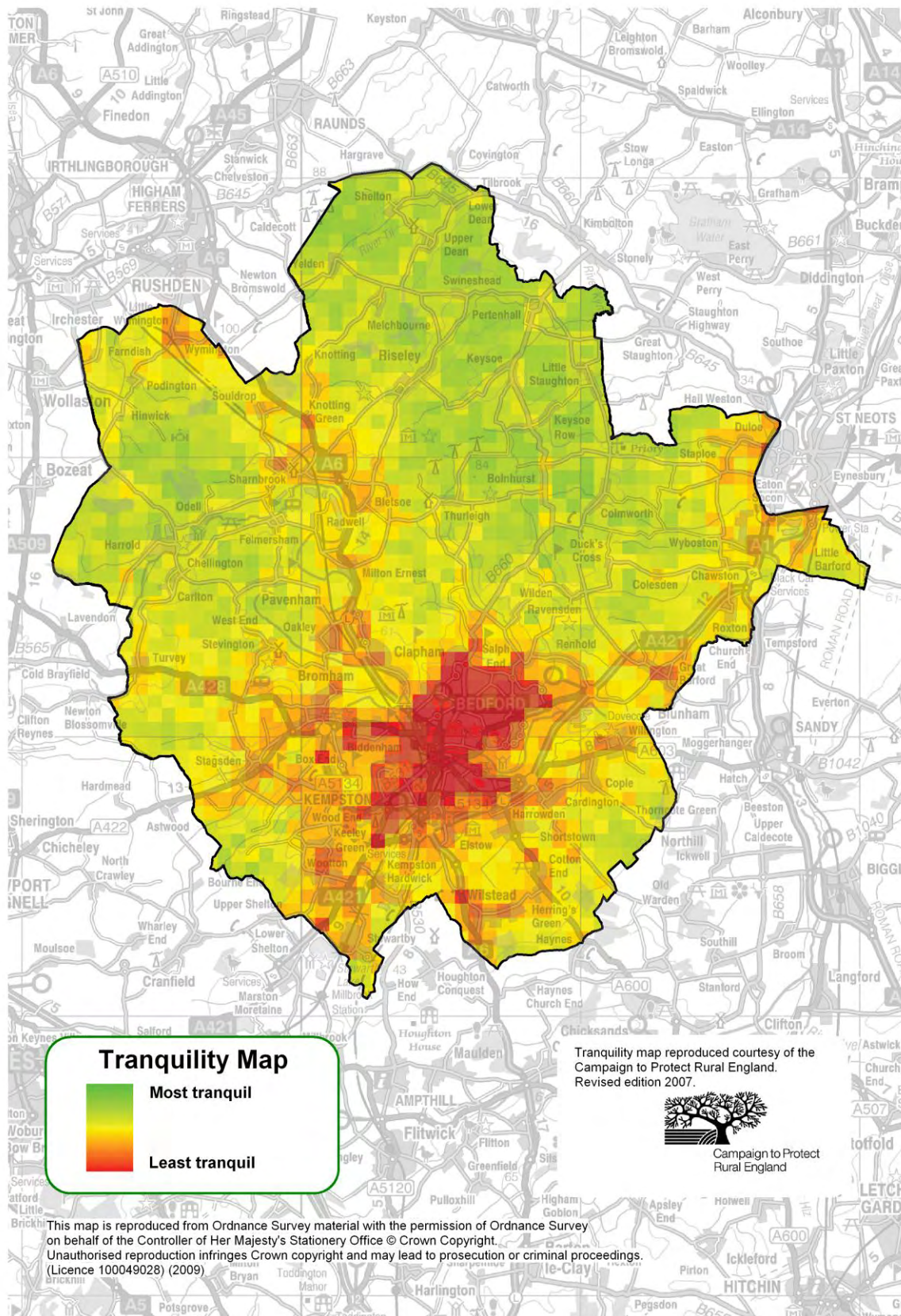


Figure 14 – Tranquillity across Bedford Borough

Community input is a vital part of the LCA process. A workshop was held to assist with the production of the LCA and a consensus emerged about landscapes valued by the community and where conservation, improvements or gains are needed.

The establishment of green infrastructure secured through the planning process brings the resources to undertake enhancement at the scale necessary to conserve existing landscape assets and create new greenspaces where most appropriate.

Conservation and enhancement undertaken to benefit Green Infrastructure needs to be seen as part of a wider landscape strategy for the Borough.

6.3 Landscape opportunities identification methodology

A more detailed approach than that utilised at the Strategic Level has been used for this District level plan. The variation within the Borough landscape is reflected through analysis of the *landscape character areas* rather than continuing with the broader approach of categorising the landscapes using the management prescriptions. Landscape quality will vary within each character area and so a range of management treatments are required e.g. within the Great Ouse Valley the overall prescription may be for *renewal*, but at the District level the variation of sites within the corridor can be considered, which range from the degraded urban fringe through to areas of intact river valley character. There is a need for the conservation of existing features, enhanced management of features in decline and reinstatement to create connections or enhance screening.

Certain landscapes can be identified as being the most important for GI investment - these will typically be areas:-

- Valued by users
- Having high scenic quality
- Where there is public access
- Where improvements create connectivity
- Sites rich in biodiversity and/or cultural heritage
- Areas of relative tranquillity.

As such, the urban fringe is considered the key area for enhancement. Landscape enhancement would complement the access based Green Wheel initiative. Corridors linking the urban fringe to the countryside are also important. Elsewhere in the County it was felt that improving the landscape quality of transport corridors was also relevant to GI. This is less relevant in north Bedfordshire, but sections of the trunk roads and the urban edge railway corridors are degraded. The greatest GI opportunity lies with the numerous unclassified roads, green lanes and bridleways to the north of the District, which are an unusual and distinctive feature of the countryside. Landscape enhancement to increase enclosure with reinstatement of hedging would support a “Quiet Lanes “initiative.

Lcas were used as the subdivision within which opportunities could be assessed in relation to the landscape strategy for each area.

The analysis of the *lcas* and the workshop results have been used to define the Opportunity Areas and to develop a list of priority landscape projects.

The results are described under the LCA headings and grouped into the following search areas:-

- Upper Ouse Valley and Wolds
- Plateau Farmlands
- The Marston Vale
- Lower Ouse Valley

These broadly correspond with the key corridors identified in the Strategic Plan.

A number of themed landscape opportunities are also described:-

- Enhancement of the Rural –Urban Fringe
- GI within the agricultural landscape
- Enhancement of road and rail corridors.

From this analysis, those areas where the most advantage can be gained from GI investment in landscape conservation, enhancement or renewal have been mapped as the Landscape Opportunity Areas (figure 15). These include both urban fringe and rural landscapes; the differentiation being made to indicate the key areas of search for urban fringe enhancement.

Additional areas of land have been identified as a “Wider Area of Search” – where GI features would also bring landscape benefit and strengthen character.

Both categories are still indicative as “landscape” covers wide panoramas and a continuum of condition and feature and is not as site specific as the other themes.

The Priority Opportunity Areas will be taken forward into the integration process.

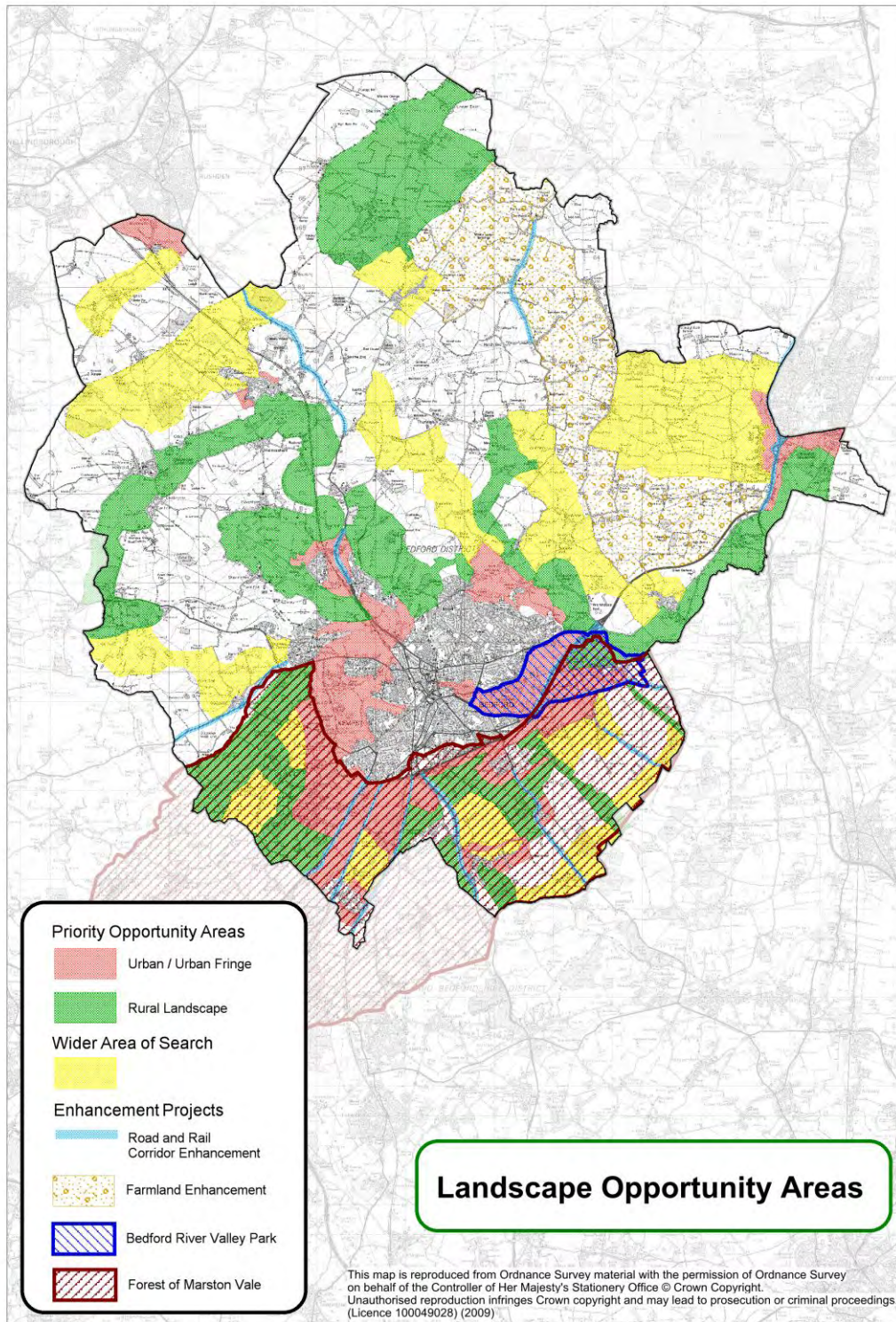


Figure 15 Landscape Opportunity Areas

6.4 Landscape opportunity by Landscape Character Area

6.4.1 Upper Ouse Valley and Wolds (Landscape Types 2 and 3)

There is a close visual relationship between the undulating limestone wolds and the river valley landscape which it encloses. The wolds are well wooded, with strong hedgerows and to the west the estate landscape of Hinwick has a special identity.

Although the river corridor is quite narrow, the presence of willows and poplars are a significant. Large lakes arising from gravel extraction are now an accepted feature. The wide open views over attractive farmland to villages with landmark churches, is an important characteristic.

The Ouse Valley is a priority for landscape led GI – it is of high biodiversity interest and important for informal recreation. A key area of potential is the urban fringe between Oakley and Bedford, Bromham and Kempston. The river landscape retains a natural quality – it is essential that GI provision is appropriate in scale and design and maintains rural tranquillity.

i) LCA 2A - Hinwick Wooded Wolds

The countryside in the northern part of the *lca* is attractive farmland, remote and largely tranquil despite being in the wider urban fringe of Wellingborough, Irchester and Rushden. The post-war industrial development of the airfields has created visual intrusion – at Podington, Thurleigh and Twinwoods, with noise pollution an issue relating to motorsport and the increase in traffic on rural roads. There is scope to enhance Three Shires Way through restoration of woodland and farmland features, a biodiversity objective for this area.

The *lca* extends into the western edge of Bedford, a landscape undergoing rapid change and requiring landscape renewal to integrate new development and ensure rural character is retained to maintain identity and enhance amenity of access routes into the countryside.

Green Infrastructure opportunities include:

- *Securing management of ancient woodland, new woodland planting where appropriate.*
- *Creating links between woodlands, with hedges or woodland belts, particularly to enhance the rights of way network.*
- *Conservation and enhancement of Parkland e.g. at Hinwick, to benefit landscape and biodiversity and enhance public access.*
- *Conservation of existing grassland habitats – pasture is important visually within this landscape.*
- *Hedgerow planting and management – to re-establish lost patterns of enclosure, especially to enhance rights of way.*

- *Urban fringe enhancement: Clapham/ Manton Heights/ Ravensden- to aid screening of intrusive features and conserve rural features.*

ii) LCA2B - Pavenham Wooded Wolds

This area is predominantly arable farmland, although at Turvey there is a significant area of historic parkland and pasture. Hedges and woodlands create enclosure.

Larger villages e.g. Oakley and Bromham have undergone significant expansion. Village scale GI is required to provide amenity, aid integration or safeguard features such as pasture. Small scale tree planting and hedgerow renewal would add structure to the village fringe landscapes.

Green Infrastructure opportunities include:

- *Village fringe improvements e.g. to enhance integration of development and improve connectivity and appearance of rights of way.*
- *Woodland planting / management of existing woodland.*
- *Hedgerow renewal, especially to enhance rights of way.*

iii) LCA3A - Harrold - Great Ouse River Valley

The river corridor retains a natural, enclosed character despite some of the mineral activity that has taken place and hedgerow removal. The former gravel pits at Harrold-Odell (part of the Country Park), Pinchmill and Radwell would benefit from landscape integration– especially the establishment of woodland and meadows. The lakes have great recreational potential, which needs to be managed to avoid conflict with other interests, any facilities need to be appropriate in scale and design.

Green Infrastructure opportunities include:

- *Expansion of Harrold - Odell Country Park*
- *Recreation of river valley meadows*
- *Floodplain woodland*
- *Tree and hedgerow planting*

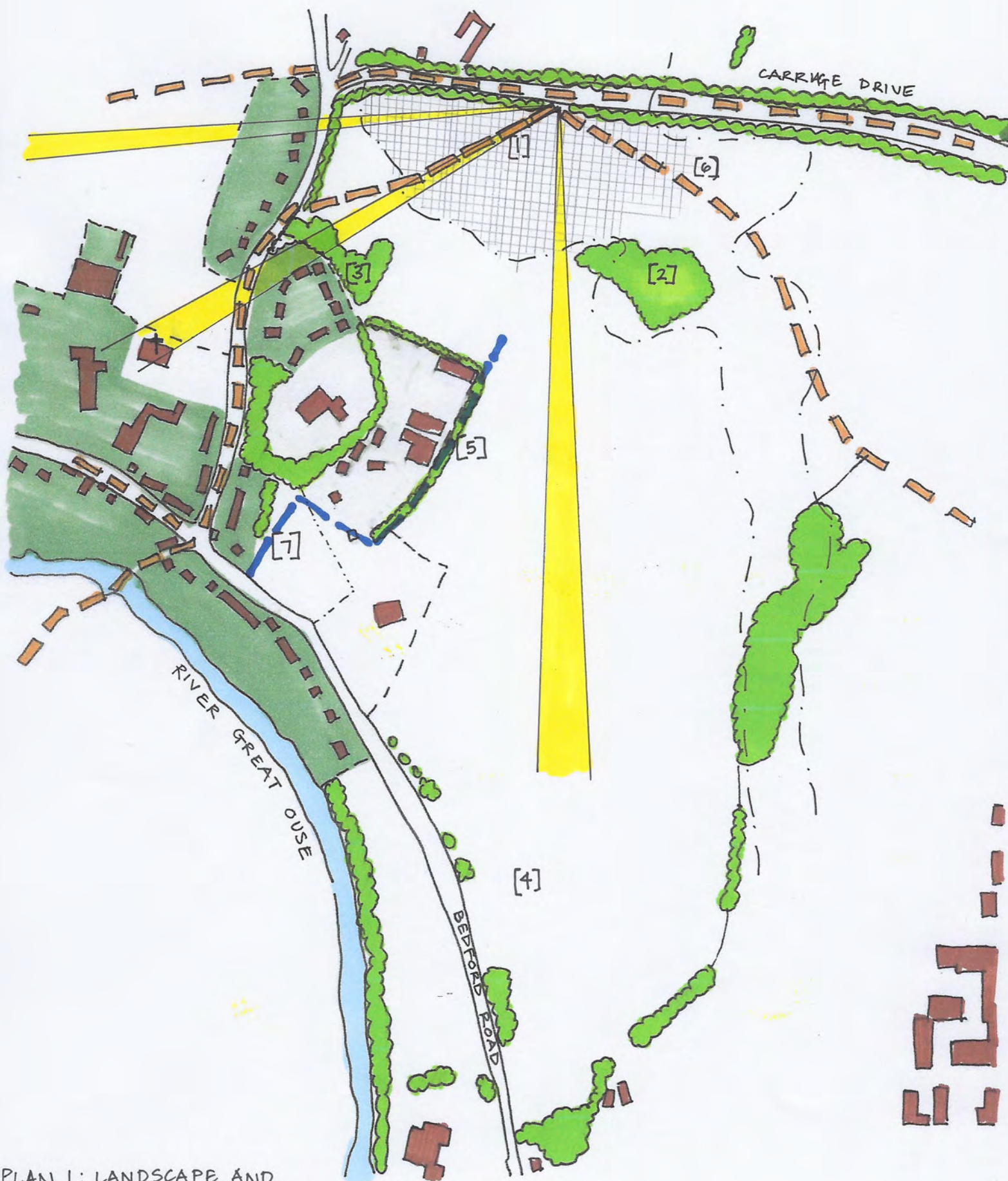
iv) LCA3B - Oakley - Great Ouse Limestone Valley

This *lca* is subject to major change, with development increasing the scale of the villages and recently with the urban extensions and the Western Bypass. New parks and open spaces will buffer the river corridor, but the rural character and tranquillity will decline as the parks contain extensive sports facilities which introduce urban elements.

The river valley landscape between Oakley, Clapham and Bromham and the urban area is a GI priority. The scale and design of new features e.g. achieved through the

Plan 1

Landscape Sensitivities



PLAN 1: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SENSITIVITIES

Plan 2

Landscape Framework



PLAN 2: OPPORTUNITIES



*Leyton Place Limited
Mrs. Clare Brockhurst, FLI Bsc (Hons), Dip La
Lilac Cottage, Gloucester Road, Hartpury
Gloucestershire, GL19 3BT*

Company Number: 11886708

Web: www.leytonplacelandscape.co.uk