



Comparative Landscape and Visual Assessment

Sharnbrook Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan

on behalf of:

The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust
and Bedfordia Developments Limited

October 2020

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Author	[REDACTED]
Reference	SES 17005-LS02
Report Status	FINAL
Date of Issue	23/10/2020

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Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	3
2.0	Site Descriptions.....	5
3.0	Policy Constraints	9
4.0	Landscape and Settlement Character	12
5.0	Green Infrastructure	18
6.0	Site Visibility and Representative Views	26
7.0	Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base.....	31
8.0	Comparative Assessment of Sites.....	33
9.0	Conclusion	37

Figures

- Figure 1:** Site Locations
- Figure 2:** Environmental Designations and Policy Areas
- Figure 3:** Landscape Character Areas
- Figure 4:** Topography
- Figure 5:** Site Analysis
- Figure 6:** Location of Representative Views
- Figure 7-21:** Representative Views

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 SES Strategic Ltd. (SES) has been instructed by DLP Planning Ltd on behalf of Bedfordia Developments (the promoter) to undertake a landscape and visual assessment of potential development sites within the Parish of Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire. The assessment accompanies representations made by DLP Planning on behalf of Bedfordia Developments to the consultation on the Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan ('the Neighbourhood Plan').
- 1.2 As a Key Service Centre, the Adopted Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 requires that the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan allocates a site (or sites) to deliver 500 new homes over the Plan period.
- 1.3 This statement concerns two areas of land (together referred to as 'the Site') which are situated on the south western edge of the village, both within the ownership of the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust. The parcels are identified in the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying documents as Site References 527 (Land Adjacent to School Approach) and 620 (Land east of Odell Road).
- 1.4 The purpose of the assessment is to provide appropriate evidence from a landscape and visual perspective to confirm that the location of the Site is suitable as an allocation within the Neighbourhood Plan to provide 500 new homes with associated infrastructure.
- 1.5 A comparative assessment is made with the proposed site at Hill Farm identified as Site Reference 901 ('the Proposed Site'), which is allocated in draft by Policy S5 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.6 The assessment was undertaken by Chartered Landscape Architect, Rachel Bodiam CMLI and follows the completion of an earlier site-specific Landscape and Visual Assessment prepared to inform a Landscape and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook¹ in September 2017 by SES. The report accompanied representations made to the Bedford Borough Council Regulation 19 Local Plan Consultation by DLP Planning.
- 1.7 This statement was prepared following a desk-based study of information including OS Maps, Aerial Images and published reports, alongside adopted and emerging planning policy. A site visit and visual survey was undertaken in September 2020 in bright conditions; the supporting photographs taken in late summer / early autumn demonstrate the best cast scenario with regards to visibility with vegetation fully in leaf.

Site and Study Area

- 1.8 The location of both sites and the study area is shown on **Figure 1**. The area lies within Sharnbrook Parish and the authority of Bedford Borough Council.

¹ Landscape and Visual Assessment and Landscape / Green Infrastructure Strategy, SES, September 2017

- 1.9 The landscape of the study area comprises the Limestone Valley and slopes (Wooded Wolds) of the River Great Ouse, with the elevated undulating farmland of the clay plateau beyond the valley to the north and south. The core of Sharnbrook, a typical limestone village, is situated on the fringe of the more densely settled valley landscape type² on the change in slope overlooking the river and its floodplain.

Planning Context

- 1.10 The Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan³ was published for consultation on 19th August 2020. The Neighbourhood Plan establishes a vision for the parish for the period 2020-2030 and the associated policies to guide future development and protect the existing assets which give the area its character.
- 1.11 The Neighbourhood Plan has regard to the National Planning Policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and must be in conformity with the strategic policies in the Adopted development plan. These comprise the 'saved' policies of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013, the 'saved' policies of the Bedford Local Plan 2002 and the adopted Local Plan 2030.
- 1.12 In recognition of its size and existing facilities the spatial strategy for Bedford Borough identifies Sharnbrook as a Key Service Centre. In accordance with Policies 3S (Spatial Strategy) and 4S (Amount and Distribution of Housing Development), Sharnbrook will need to accommodate 500 homes. The site (or sites) required to deliver this level of growth will be allocated through the Neighbourhood Plan process. As outlined in Policy 4S, generally such sites should be located *"in and around defined Settlement Policy Area boundaries."*
- 1.13 As established by the Proposals Map, the main built-up area of Sharnbrook lies within the defined Settlement Policy Area (SPA) boundary. Cofle End to the east is identified as a separate and distinct 'Small Settlement'.
- 1.14 To meet the objectives of the Borough's housing land supply to the period 2030, the Neighbourhood Plan has undertaken an assessment of potential housing sites. Based on the supporting technical evidence the Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan makes a single allocation for new housing at Hill Farm, Mill Road (site 901), with the primary access off the A6 to the east.

Evidence Base

- 1.15 This statement draws on evidence prepared for the local development plan and Neighbourhood Plan and in particular:
- **Bedford Local Plan:**
 - Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, May 2014;

² Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, May 2014

³ Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan Pre-Submission Version, August 2020

- Bedford Borough Landscape Sensitivity Study Group 1 and Group 2 Villages, BBC, April 2017;
 - Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan, Bedfordshire & Luton Green Infrastructure Consortium, February 2007;
 - Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan, November 2009; and
 - Village Open Space Review Background Paper, July 2013.
- **Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan:**
 - Landscape Character & Built Assessment, December 2018;
 - Sharnbrook Site Options Assessment Report, Aecom on behalf of Sharnbrook Parish Council, September 2020; and
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Aecom on behalf of Sharnbrook Parish Council, September 2020.

1.16 Comments on the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base are set out in **Section 7.0**.

2.0 Site Descriptions

2.1 Plans showing the Sites and their context are provided in **Figures 1 & 5**. The areas are located on opposite sides of Sharnbrook; the Site immediately adjacent to the south west of the main built-up area of the village, with the Proposed Site adjacent to the separate small settlement of Coffle End between the railway line and A6 main trunk road.

2.2 The key features of each site are summarised below.

Site Reference 527 (Land at School Approach)

2.3 Site 527 (approximately 5.3ha), comprises an arable field which falls gradually north to south towards Odell Road on the mid- to upper- slopes of the Ouse valley at around 65-60m AOD. The field is inset to the north by the Sharnbrook Academy student and visitor car park which is fenced off from the rest of the site.

2.4 The area immediately adjoins the SPA boundary and is bordered on two sides by existing development (Sharnbrook Academy to the north with School Approach and properties on Fox Hedge Way to the east). To the west and south, existing woodland (including Clay Piece Plantation) and a 35m wide native tree belt (planted circa 2005) visually encloses and separates the field from the surrounding open countryside.

2.5 To the east, the arable field is bordered by a wide margin of mown grassland with scattered young trees that extends down to an off-site surface water balancing pond inset into the site to the south east. Implemented as part of the adjoining residential development the area of

landscape is identified as a 'Village Open Space'⁴ establishing a transition between the village and countryside and providing a landscaped approach to the school.

- 2.6 The southern edge of the site is delineated by an agricultural concrete track and public right of way (Bridleway BW10). From the bridleway, views of the site to the north are enclosed by the tree belt; with open views across the Ouse Valley to the high ground between Felmersham and Odell to the south and west, with framed views east beyond Odell Road to Thurleigh.
- 2.7 Historic maps show the parcel as a single field, with Clay Piece Plantation to the north and a brick works to the west. Linear development along Odell Road occurred from the early 20th Century with the school opening in 1975. The school has expanded significantly since this time (including the construction of Sports and Sixth Form Centres). The adjoining housing and associated balancing pond were completed around 2005.

620 (Land east of Odell Road)

- 2.8 Site Reference 620 (approximately 46.8ha), comprises agricultural land falling north west to south east from the edge of the village to the River Great Ouse (approximately 60 to 40m AOD). The topography of the low- to mid-valley slopes is undulating with areas of flatter ground alongside Odell Road separated by a shallow valley and ditch draining to the river. The main break of slope runs through the centre of the site with low-lying ground along the river to the south.
- 2.9 The area adjoins the SPA boundary on two sides with linear development on Odell Road to the north west. This is also the established edge of the Sharnbrook Conservation Area. A number of large detached properties on Odell Road are inset into the north western boundary, with properties on modern estates (Pinchmill Close, Pinchmill Way and Wellpond Close) backing on to the north east where garden boundaries are defined by a variety of fences and hedges with mature trees. The edge of development is separated by a small area of greenspace that connects to allotments to the north. Both areas are designated as 'Village Open Space.'
- 2.10 The majority of vegetation encloses the site boundaries with a mix of native hedgerows and mature trees. Other significant vegetation is limited to a single field boundary comprising a line of semi-mature native trees along the break in slope and encloses the western side of the site from the river to the east. The medium- to large-scale arable fields are otherwise separated by ditches fringed by wide grass margins with occasional scattered scrub.
- 2.11 To the south west of the site lies the Felmersham Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The area comprises a mix of open water with tall fen surrounded by neutral grassland, scrub and broadleaved wooded. The margins of the site are bordered by dense vegetation to the south, becoming more scrubby to north. East of the lake adjacent to Pinchmill Islands, there is a small open section of boundary, beyond which the river is defined by a line of mature poplars.

⁴ Policy AD40 - Allocations and Designations Local Plan, Bedford Borough Council, July 2013

- 2.12 The area is accessible via a number of well used public rights of way including a small section of the Ouse Valley Way long distance footpath route. Footpath FP9 crosses the site south west to north east connecting Odell Road with Wellpond Close where it continues to the village centre. Bridleway BW15 from Kennell Hill crosses the eastern corner of the site and continuing south west along the river linking Sharnbrook to the Ouse Valley, Felmersham Gravel Pits and village. To the south east footpaths FP2 and FP11 continue via Pinchmill Islands up the valley slopes to Radwell. The rights of way are linked by a network of permissive paths around field margins.
- 2.13 Due to the topography views from the site are varied. From the upper sections beyond the vegetation fringing Odell Road, there are open views east, south and west to the high ground on the opposite side of the Ouse Valley between Thurleigh and Odell. These views from the village into the countryside are recognised as a 'Village View.'⁵ Views to the north and east comprise the settlement edge, with existing properties set against a strong framework of trees. The spire of St. Peters Church is a prominent feature.
- 2.14 Within the valley, views are substantially enclosed by topography and vegetation. There are partial to glimpsed views along the river towards Kennell Hill, Station Road and Mill Road to the north east, and the tower of St. Marys Church Felmersham set in trees to the south west.
- 2.15 Historic maps demonstrate the site experienced a significant loss of field boundaries during the late 20th Century; the original pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees has subsequently been eroded. Historic development in the area was limited to the Victorian Villas (Prospect Place) on Odell Road, with the windmill on the fringes of Sharnbrook and Ouse Manor on the river to the east. In the early 20th Century, the land to the north was used as allotments and a gravel pit before the development to the north along Odell Road, along with the estates at Home Close and Pinchmill Close in the 1970's and 80's. The Gravel Pits (former agricultural land) at Felmersham to the south were active during the Second World War.

901 (Hill Farm, Mill Road)

- 2.16 Site reference 901 (approximately 53.7ha) comprises agricultural land associated with Hill Farm, Mill Road, Sharnbrook. The area lies adjacent to the separate settlement area of Coffle End but is physically separated from it by the mainline railway with scattered linear development along Templars Way to the north west and Mill Road to the south, with the A6 to the north east. The main core of the village is located some distance to the west.
- 2.17 The topography of the area comprising the mid- to upper slopes of the Ouse Valley is gently undulating, falling gradually from a high point to the north west at the junction of Templars Way with the A6 towards Mill Road to the south east (approximately 80 to 45m AOD).

⁵ Policy AD40 - Allocations and Designations Local Plan, Bedford Borough Council, July 2013

- 2.18 The small settlement at Coffle End has no defined SPA. To the north west along Templars Way there is scattered linear development with predominantly large detached houses set in extensive treed grounds giving a strong village edge character; a single detached property ('Greenacres') and a group of dwellings ('Station Cottages' and the later cul-de-sac of 'The Crofts') are inset into the site boundary.
- 2.19 To the south west adjoining the railway is an industrial unit set on a bank surrounded by trees, with small clusters of development along Mill Road interspersed by small fields from the railway through to the A6 comprising a mix of residential properties (of varying ages and styles) with industrial buildings, hotel / restaurant and theatre associated with Stoke Mill. To the northern side of Mill Road a bungalow and a small cluster of houses (No's 80-80 even) are inset into the site. The road verge is dominated by a mixed avenue of mature trees which provides a strong approach into the village from the A6.
- 2.20 Within the site, Hill Farm is approached along a driveway from Mill Road lined by mature poplars. The farm comprises a cluster of buildings (residential and agricultural) with a mix of ages and styles. The C17 former farmhouse (Grade II Listed) on the southern edge of the group is currently used for storage. The large modern barns, along with the poplars are prominent features in the landscape.
- 2.21 The area forms part of a smaller network of fields that forms the eastern edge of the village and forms a transition with the wider arable landscape. The land comprises grassland separated into medium-scale fields, that become larger and more open to the east. Fields are bordered by a network of maintained hedgerows (sinuous and straight) with ditches and occasional mature hedgerow trees. Similar maintained hedgerows are present around the boundaries adjoining Templars Way and the western section of the A6 allowing views into the site, while to the east and along Mill Road, the hedgerows are taller providing more enclosure. The area is crossed west-east and north-south by a number of overhead electricity routes.
- 2.22 To the north adjoining the A6 is a linear block of broadleaved deciduous woodland (Deadmans Spinney), with other clusters of trees around field ponds to the south of the woodland and adjoining the farm. There some disturbance from the A6 and railway line, but overall, the area retains a rural character, with the rising ground providing a backdrop to the village from the south.
- 2.23 The eastern part of the site is accessible by a series of public rights of way (FP6 and FP8 and BW19) that link Mill Road to the A6. FP6 and FP8 provide access to Bourne End and the surrounding countryside via BW6 south of Vicarage Farm.
- 2.24 The elevated topography of the site and its relative openness allows views to the high ground to the north (Bourne End and Galsey Wood), along the valley slopes east towards Thurleigh and through gaps in the trees across the Ouse Valley south towards Radwell. Sharnbrook Church Spire can be viewed from locations within the area. While the village within the valley is not discernible, there are also views through the site to the church from the east including the A6 and Bourne End Lane.

- 2.25 Historic maps demonstrate that the field pattern within the site has been retained largely intact, with minor modifications and removal of boundaries (particularly within the more open area to the east) and the loss of a small area of woodland to the centre of the site. Historic development in the area was limited to Hill Farm, the cluster of dwellings at Coffle End to the west, with Stoke Mill on the river to the south, and scattered properties and farms to the west and north. The Midland Railway and Sharnbrook Railway Station was opened in 1857.
- 2.26 During the early 20th Century land on the junction of Templars Way and Mill Road (the 'Railway Triangle') was in use as allotments and later as a railway depot. Sporadic linear development (including properties inset within the site) occurred along Templars Way and Mill Road from the 1920's and 30's, including the construction of 'Station Cottages.' The Railway Triangle (Brittons Close) was redeveloped for housing in the 1990's with infilling of larger plots from the early C21 to the present day. The area along the railway, sidings and station has been retained as small commercial units.

3.0 Policy Constraints

- 3.1 The village of Sharnbrook and the surrounding area contains a number of environmental constraints (refer to **Figure 2**). These identify areas of ecological, landscape, historic and recreational value from the national to local level.
- 3.2 The primary environmental constraints receiving statutory protection (in conjunction with Adopted Local Plan Policy as relevant) are:
- The historic core of the village of Sharnbrook is a designated Conservation Area, an area of "*special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.*" The Conservation Area extends north west to south east along the High Street from Colworth Road to Kennell Hill Ouse Manor; and to the south along the western side of Church Lane, Castle Close and Odell Road. A section of the boundary of the Site (reference 527) adjoins the Conservation Area along Odell Road to the north west.
 - Located within the Conservation Area is the Scheduled Monument at Castle Close (SAM 20404). The area is described as a well-preserved example of a late medieval moat, and one of a number of medieval sites located on the northern slopes of the Ouse valley from Thurleigh to Odell. The moat is set in dense woodland surrounded by modern development.
 - The village includes over 45 Listed Buildings and structures dating from the 17th to 19th century. The majority (predominantly Grade II Listed) are located within the Conservation Area along the High Street and Church Lane, with Ouse Manor and associated buildings, Riverside Lodge Coffle End and former farmhouse at Hill Farm (Site 901) to the east. The Saxon Church of St. Peter in the centre of the village is Grade I Listed. The spire is a prominent feature of views both within and to the village.

- Other heritage assets within the study area include the Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings at Odell approx. 3km to the west; Felmersham, including the Grade I Listed St. Marys Church 1.8km to the south, and Bletsoe 3km to the south east. There are Scheduled Monuments at Chellington, Milton Ernest and Bletsoe.
- To the south of the village Felmersham Gravel Pits is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The area adjoins the boundary of Site 620. The disused and flooded gravel pits are managed as a Nature Reserve by the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. Public access is via a network of informal permissive footpaths, with a car park off Felmersham Road.
- The area incorporates an extensive public rights of way network, including a section of the Ouse Valley Way long distance footpath which follows the Great Ouse from its source near Milton Keynes to King's Lynn. The route enters the Sharnbrook from Odell to the north, through the village before crossing the River Ouse at Pinchmill Islands and continuing south to Radwell.

3.3 Secondary constraints subject to Adopted Local Plan Policy include:

- Within the village, Castle Close is a designated non-statutory Country Wildlife Site of local importance. The area incorporating woodland, scrub and grassland is owned and managed as a semi-natural open space by the Parish Council. Other County Wildlife Sites include the length of the River Great Ouse and Radwell Pits to the south east and Francroft Wood, Halsey Wood, Temple Wood and Pippin Wood (Ancient Woodland) to the north.
- The village of Sharnbrook lies between two identified Green Infrastructure (GI) Opportunity Zones; the 'Milton Keynes to Grafham Wooded Wolds' (Zone 1) to the north west and the 'Upper Great Ouse River Valley' (Zone 2) to the south. The zones reflect those areas in the borough where there is the greatest potential to maintain and enhance multi-functional GI. In accordance with Local Policy AD24, *"where appropriate, development should deliver or contribute to the protection, enhancement and/or creation of GI in accordance with the priorities set out for each zone."* This includes landscape, heritage and biodiversity enhancements, alongside the provision of accessible green space and access routes. For further information refer to **Section 6.0**.
- Within Sharnbrook a number of important open spaces and views are identified in the local development plan. All of these areas are considered locally important as they are either publicly accessible and valuable to the local community; they define the structure, form and character of the settlement; and/or assist the transition between the village and countryside. In relation to the Site, Area 'N' extends along the northern western fringe of site 620 on Odell Road; the area meets a single criterion by providing a gap or break in the frontage which contributes to the character of the settlement and views into open countryside establishing the relationship between the village and the countryside beyond. Area 'O' lies adjacent to and partly within site 527 on the roundabout with Odell Road and School Approach; the area meets a single criterion by assisting in the transition between

the village and countryside and providing a soft edge. Existing Local Plan policy AD40 states that *“development will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for designation are not compromised or that other material considerations outweigh the need to retain the open space or view undeveloped.”* Other key views have been identified in the Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan.

Development Plan Policy

- 3.4 Planning policy for Bedford Borough Council comprises the ‘saved’ policies of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013, the ‘saved’ policies of the Bedford Local Plan 2002 and the adopted Local Plan 2030. These establish the general principles and standards for all new development within the Borough.
- 3.5 General considerations for sustainable development are as follows:
- Promoting the highest quality design and place making, promoting local distinctiveness, integrating well with and contributing positively to the areas character and identity and creating a sense of place. Development should respond to the unique character of the River Great Ouse and its setting;
 - Protecting and enhancing the quality and character of the landscape, natural environment and built heritage, including designated sites or features, the form / built character of villages and their settings and important views;
 - Achieving high quality design and placemaking with a strong relationship to its context. Designs to consider scale, density, massing, height, materials and layout alongside the provision of high-quality public and private space and hard and soft landscaping;
 - Protecting, enhancing and managing existing green infrastructure. All development to provide a net gain in green infrastructure, while seeking to provide a high quality and multi-functional green infrastructure network in accordance with the Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan;
 - Retaining, protecting and enhancing the key landscape features and visual sensitivities of the landscape character areas identified in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment. Development to protect landscape character and qualities through appropriate design and management and the incorporation and implementation of the identified landscape and development management guidelines. This includes the retention and enhancement of features of landscape importance, safeguarding and enhancing key views / vistas and protecting the landscape setting and contributing to the maintenance of the individual and distinct character and separate identities of settlements, and providing appropriate landscape mitigation;

- The masterplanning of sites should consider landscape from the outset. Landscape features (such as existing trees, hedges and woodland of high environmental, amenity and nature conservation value) to be assessed and incorporated into the landscaping scheme in accordance with best practice. Proposed landscaping to take account of the character of the site and its constraints, with new tree planting to make a positive contribution to the streetscape and integrate with the built development;
- Protecting biodiversity including the retention, protection and enhancement of existing important sites, species and habitats of principal importance, alongside the creation of additional habitats and links to the wider ecological network to secure net biodiversity gain; and
- Safeguarding existing public rights of way and seeking opportunities to enhance the existing footpath, bridleway and cycleway network to improve access to the countryside, in particular along the Great Ouse River Valley.

4.0 Landscape and Settlement Character

- 4.1 The National Character Area Profiles (Natural England) provide an overview of the character of the landscape within England, its main attributes and information about landscape change. The supporting Statements of Environmental Opportunity offer suggestions where action can be best targeted to conserve and improve the natural environment.
- 4.2 Sharnbrook lies on the gradual transition between National Character (NCA) 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands which forms the majority of the study area, and NCA 91: Yardley Whittlewood Ridge which extends in a linear band to the north west (refer to **Figure 3**).
- 4.3 NCA 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands are described as a broad, gently undulating, lowland clay plateau dissected by shallow river valleys. The majority of the area comprises a predominantly open, arable landscape of planned, regular fields with some pasture, bound by open ditches and trimmed hedgerows, with hedgerow trees of oak and ash. Woodland cover is variable and scattered, with clusters of ancient woodland on the high ground to the north west. The Great Ouse meanders through the landscape in characteristic broad loops; the enclosed broad shallow valley, which widens as the river flows to the east, is lined with ecologically valuable habitats including floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadow, wet woodland, fen and reedbeds, with mature trees such as alder, poplar and willow. Along much of its length, the valley is flanked by large areas of water resulting from the extraction of sand, gravel and in parts limestone; naturally regenerated and restored sites are important recreational and ecological areas.

- 4.4 The Great Ouse river valley provides a concentration of archaeological remains, but historic features such as medieval settlements, moated sites, and deserted villages are found across the area. Away from the urbanisation of main towns such as Milton Keynes and Bedford, and major transport corridors (such as the M1, A14, A6 and Midland mainline railway) settlement is sparse, with villages concentrated along river valleys, with hamlets and farmsteads widely dispersed creating a rural character. There is a diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone; local quarried limestone is characteristic of villages on the upper sections of the Great Ouse.
- 4.5 Relevant Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) for the NCA include:
- **SEO1:** Maintain and manage a sustainable and productive claylands arable landscape, while managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats such as species-rich grassland;
 - **SEO2:** Enhance the quality, state and structure of the River Great Ouse, its valley and tributaries, habitats, waterbodies and floodplain by seeking to enhance their ecological, historical and recreational importance, to include increasing and linking areas of semi-natural habitat, appropriate management and promoting green infrastructure;
 - **SEO3:** Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats such as woodlands, grasslands and hedgerows; and
 - **SEO4:** Protect, conserve and enhance cultural heritage and the tranquillity of the NCA, including its important geodiversity, archaeology, historic houses, parkland, WWII and industrial heritage by improving interpretation and educational opportunities and understanding of the landscape. For example, by promoting high quality design in new development and the use of materials in keeping with local character to enhance a sense of place.
- 4.6 NCA 91: Yardley Whittlewood Ridge is described as a low and gently undulating limestone plateau that runs south west to north east. From the top, the land slopes away gently, giving long views over the surrounding countryside. The area is well-wooded with a patchwork of deciduous and coniferous woodland (including semi-natural ancient woodland), wood pasture, historic parkland, and veteran trees providing a diverse variety of semi-natural habitats; fields are medium-sized with mature, species-rich hedgerows and numerous hedgerow trees, usually oak and ash. Pasture and mixed farmland dominate in the west, giving way to predominantly arable towards the claylands in the east.
- 4.7 With a lack of major settlements, the area is rural, tranquil and sparsely populated with a scattering of small nucleated settlements and attractive villages mostly on the edges of the ridge linked by minor lanes; there are several large well-managed estates with historic country houses and parkland. Locally quarried limestone is a common building material in villages providing a unified built character; thatch, red brick and pantiles are also used.

4.8 Statements of Environmental Opportunity for the NCA relevant to the study area include:

- **SEO1:** Manage, enhance and extend the woodland resource around Salcey, Yardley Chase and Whittlewood, to inter alia support a strong sense of place and history and benefit biodiversity, to include the management of existing woodland and new woodland planting;
- **SEO2:** Protect, manage and promote the historic features and designed landscape, to ensure that local distinctiveness is preserved, a sense of place and history is maintained and to provide improved interpretation and educational opportunities;
- **SEO3:** Manage and plan for the recreational uses of the area's woodlands, parkland and visitor attractions, and conserve the overall tranquillity of the area, including strategic views from the elevated landform of the Ridge over the surrounding landscape. Enhance access connections for people and wildlife by putting in place multi-functional green infrastructure networks, building on existing resources, to create strong access and ecological networks; and
- **SEO4:** Manage agricultural practices and strengthen semi-natural habitats, for example by improving habitat connectivity by extending hedgerows, and grassland to create good ecological networks.

Borough Landscape Character

4.9 The Bedford Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment provides a comprehensive evidence base on the character and condition of the landscape. The document has been prepared to underpin planning and management decisions (Local Plan Policy 37 Landscape Character).

4.10 The study area incorporates three principal landscape types of relatively homogenous character; each of the landscape types are sub-divided into specific landscape character areas (LCA) with a distinct and recognisable local identity (see **Table 1** and **Figure 3**).

4.11 The village of Sharnbrook lies on the transition between the Limestone Valley and Wooded Wold Landscape Types. The majority of the settlement (including site 620 east of Odell Road) lies in LCA 3A: Harrold – Great Ouse Limestone Valley. The northern fringes of the village and Coffle End (including sites 527 School Approach and 901 Hill Farm) lie in LCA 2A: Hinwick Wooded Wolds. The boundary between the two parcels extends along Odell Road to the west and Mill Road to the east. Areas of high ground beyond the Parish Boundary comprise Clay Farmland.

4.12 The aspects of each LCA are summarised below.

Table 1: Borough Landscape Character Types and Areas

<p>1. Clay Farmland: Areas of higher ground on the plateau to the north and south of the Ouse valley, distinguished by deposits of boulder clay and a gently undulating, elevated terrain, dominated by large-scale open intensive arable fields bordered by variable and inconsistent hedgerows and hedgerow trees with dispersed woodland (some ancient). Settlement is low density, dispersed across the landscape and predominantly of linear form; water towers, churches and windmills are landmark features. Active and disused airfields and business parks located on areas of higher, level ground, are prominent on the skyline.</p>	
1D: Thurleigh Clay Farmland	1E: Renhold Clay Farmland
<p>2. Wooded Wolds: Sloping landform cut by the tributaries of the River Great Ouse forming subtle valley slope, providing an intermediary landscape linking the flat floodplain to the high ground of the Clay Farmland. Characterised by an underlying geology of Oolitic Limestone, the landscape is small-to medium-scale, with mixed arable and pastoral farming and significant woodland cover, including ancient woodland. Settlement, predominantly linear hamlets and villages connected by narrow rural lanes, is unified by a consistent use of limestone. Gaps in the tree cover provide commanding views across the adjacent Limestone Valleys</p>	
2A: Hinwick Wooded Wolds	2B: Pavenham Wooded Wolds
<p>3. Limestone Valley: Flat, wide open floodplain dominated by the meandering course of the River Great Ouse. The medium-scale agricultural landscape comprises a mixed land-use of pasture and arable land, with wetland vegetation, including meadows / marshes and willow and poplar trees, defining the course of the river. Settlement character varies from small scale limestone hamlets and villages to larger settlements with a variety of building materials and considerable modern development; an urban fringe character exists where the area abuts the edge of Bedford. Some enclosure is provided by the sloping valley sides of the adjacent Wooded Wolds and Clay Farmlands.</p>	
3A: Harrold – Great Ouse Limestone Valley	3B: Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley

4.13 The Harrold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley is delineated from the Wooded Wolds by the change in landform from the open level floodplain, to the sloping valley sides which rise to the north and south. The key characteristics of Harrold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley are defined as:

- Moderately wide shallow valley founded on Oolitic Limestone, with Alluvium along the course of the river and Valley Gravel on the level valley floor;
- The River Great Ouse gently meanders from west to east through the unsettled valley floor with multiple channels, drainage ditches and tributaries lined in places by poplar and willow;
- Predominantly arable farmland on gravel terraces and gently rising valley sides, with pasture grazed by sheep and cattle on lower ground;
- Medium scale geometric fields are enclosed by hedges with some hedgerow trees. Where hedgerows have been removed, the character is more open;

- Restored gravel and limestone extraction sites form a series of lakes which are important recreational and ecological resources, as well as important components of the strategic GI network e.g. Harrold-Odell Country Park and Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI;
- The River Great Ouse is of significant ecological interest and represents one of the most natural sections of river remaining in the county;
- The sloping valley sides provide a sense of enclosure and a rural backdrop to the area;
- Settlements located at the edges of the valleys above the floodplain vary from small scale limestone hamlets and villages to larger villages with a variety of building materials and considerable modern development;
- The tall spires of stone-built churches form distinctive landmarks in views across the valley;
- Rural roads travel across the floodplain, carried over the river by stone bridges, some with distinctive raised pedestrian walkways; and
- The Ouse Valley Way long distance route crosses the landscape.

4.14 The assessment identifies the following key positive landscape features / strategic sensitivities of the landscape relevant to the Sharnbrook area:

- The nucleated, limestone villages with historic cores;
- The naturalistic vegetated banks of the River Ouse which is sensitive to lack of management or changes associated with intensive leisure uses;
- Meadow land and riverside pastures on the valley floor which are an indication of historic land use and important landscape and biodiversity resource;
- Significant sites and structures which contribute to landscape character e.g. stone bridges, Odell Castle, churches and Felmersham Tithe Barn;
- The minor roads and bridges over the Great Ouse which reinforce the rural character of the area; and
- Open water bodies and associated wetland habitats providing a recreational resource and biodiversity interest.

4.15 Visual sensitivities include:

- Views to the wooded backdrop of the Wooded Wolds;
- Views to the spires of churches located on the lower reaches of the valley sides;
- The tranquil, rural views across the lakes enclosed by woodland for instance at Harrold-Odell Country Park; and
- Open views across the floodplain to limestone bridges.

4.16 The overall landscape strategy for the Harold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley LCA is to “*conserve the historic limestone villages, the riverside features such as stone bridges and mills and the tranquil river flanked by trees and lakes enclosed by woodland belts and ecological diversity. Elements to be enhanced include the field boundaries where these are in poor condition or lost and the management of the riverside pastures and wetland vegetation.*”

4.17 Relevant supporting landscape management guidelines are set out below. Those guidelines of relevance to the growth of Sharnbrook and in particular Site 620 Odell Road are highlighted in **[bold]**:

- **Conserving and enhancing the distinctive floodplain landscape and habitats** with areas of marshland, wet meadow/riverside pasture and features such as mature willows, **to enhance connectivity and contribution to the green infrastructure network;**
- **Conserving the natural river course of the Great Ouse** and associated wetland biodiversity;
- **Conserving enclosure boundaries**, the hedgerow and hedgerow trees, **enhancing the network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where these have become degraded or lost;**
- Safeguarding the landscape settings of the historic bridges and other monuments;
- Conserving the rural character of the network of minor roads, discouraging the introduction of suburban style materials e.g. kerbs and extensive lighting;
- **Ensuring that new infrastructure** for leisure use such as paths, signage and seating **is sympathetic in character to the rural setting of the river valley;** and
- Enhancing new and recently disused gravel workings to provide a source of new wetland habitats such as marshland, wet meadow and wet woodland as well as open water bodies and to strengthen the rural riverside landscape character.

4.18 Guidelines for development to manage and direct landscape change include:

- **Conserving views to church towers and spires;**
- Conserving and protecting the form and setting of the limestone bridges crossing the River Great Ouse;
- **Conserving the nucleated stone-built villages and avoid linear extension along roads which may threaten the individual identity of the villages;**
- **Improving settlement edges** where these form an unsympathetic relationship with the open countryside - **planting of floodplain woodland is a key opportunity;**
- **Maintaining landscape buffers around** existing areas of open space including the Harrold-Odell Country Park and **Felmersham Pits;** and
- **Enhancing access including physical links to the Ouse Valley Way.**

4.19 The Hinwick Wooded Wold is an elevated Oolitic limestone outcrop, which forms part of a limestone ridge extending to the west beyond the borough boundary and forming the northern sloping valley sides of the River Great Ouse. The Pavenham Wooded Wolds form the southern slopes. The key characteristics of the Hinwick Wood Wolds are defined as:

- An elevated plateau founded on solid geology of Oolitic Limestone with drift geology of Boulder Clay and some Glacial Gravel;
- Rolling, gently sloping landform cut by tributaries of the River Ouse forming subtle valleys;
- Small to medium scale landscape with an enclosed, peaceful character. Enclosure consists of a well-maintained network of thick hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees of oak, sycamore and ash;
- A land use characterised predominantly by arable farming with some pasture;
- Significant woodland cover (predominantly deciduous), including several ancient woodland sites, for example Park Wood and Odell Great Wood (SSSI);
- Sparse settlement of farmsteads and small villages unified by consistent use of limestone as a building material often with thatched roofs and prominent churches;
- Rural roads cross the area and connect the settlements but large sections of the landscape are accessible only by tracks and footpaths;
- Registered Historic Park and Garden at Hinwick Hall and at Hinwick House made evident in the landscape by avenue approach, woodland blocks and spinneys;
- Historic earthworks include the scheduled manorial earthworks at Castle Close, Sharnbrook and Bletsoe Castle and the shrunken medieval village at Milton Ernest;
- Network of footpaths and bridleways with The Three Shires Way forming an important recreational route crossing the landscape;
- Gaps in tree cover provide commanding views across the adjacent Harrold-Great Ouse Limestone Valley and the rising ground of the area forms a rural context for the valley; and
- Valley side settlements on the fringe of the adjacent LCA Area 2A overlook the character area, such as Sharnbrook and Odell.

4.20 The assessment identifies the following key positive landscape features / strategic sensitivities of the landscape relevant to the Sharnbrook area:

- The strong network of hedgerows (although occasionally gappy) which are vulnerable to loss through lack of consistent maintenance;
- The strong network of rural roads and green lanes with associated neutral grasslands that are vulnerable to damage by increased traffic and resurfacing operations;

- The pattern of nucleated, limestone villages which is susceptible to infill development;
- 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;
- Some areas of earthwork ridge and furrow, and a few other well-preserved manorial or settlement earthworks; and
- The tranquil, rural nature of the landscape that is vulnerable to village expansion and increased use of the network of rural roads.

4.21 Visual sensitivities include:

- 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; and
- Views to the largely undeveloped occasionally wooded ridges of Hinwick Wolds from the adjacent 3A Harrod-Great Ouse Limestone Valley LCA.

4.22 The overall landscape strategy for the Hinwick Wooded Wolds LCA is to *“conserve the rural landscape of rolling arable farmland with its largely intact hedgerow network, its scattered small-scale limestone settlements and farmsteads, and historic earthworks, parks and ancient woodlands and grasslands of high biodiversity value, while enhancing elements of the area which are in a declining condition.”*

4.23 Relevant supporting landscape management guidelines are set out below. Those guidelines of relevance to the growth of Sharnbrook and in particular Sites 527 School Approach and 901 Hill Farm are highlighted in **[bold]**:

- **Encouraging the planting or regeneration of new broad-leaved woodland**, in particular adjacent to and linking existing ancient woodland in the area and reflecting the historic pattern of woodland in the area;
- **Conserving and enhancing the historic field boundaries**, replanting hedgerow and hedgerow trees where necessary;
- **Managing and restoring woodland**, particularly ancient semi-natural woodland to conserve and enhance its biodiversity interest;
- Ensuring areas of grassland of high biodiversity value are conserved through appropriate management for instance grazing and/or hay cutting, and scrub control;
- Conserving historic earthwork sites and their setting; and
- Conserving the character of rural roads with their wide grass verges, limiting urbanising influences (widening/kerbing for example) and ensuring that traffic management measures are sympathetic to the rural character.

- 4.24 Guidelines for development to manage and direct landscape change include:
- **Retaining the historic character of the limestone villages** - encouraging any new development to be sensitive in its design by, for instance, incorporating existing character details in the style of buildings and materials;
 - **Retaining the individual settlements and avoid merging these** through linear development along roads;
 - Avoiding large scale vertical features disrupting views e.g. across the River Great Ouse Valley, and the occasional views to the wooded ridges;
 - **Conserving the largely unsettled slopes above the Great Ouse Valley that form a rural backdrop to this lower lying, more settled landscape;** and
 - **Providing green infrastructure opportunities, for example linking woodlands** with access routes and centres of population, **hedgerow planting and** management to re-establish the historic field pattern, **and enhancing rights of way** in accordance with the priorities of the 'Milton Keynes to Grafham Water – Wooded Wold' zone.

Local Landscape Character

- 4.25 Further information on landscape and visual sensitivity for Sharnbrook is provided in the Landscape Sensitivity Study for Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (BBC, 2017). The report was prepared to inform the site selection process for the Bedford Borough Local Plan and identify whether potential development sites were consistent with the guidelines of the Landscape Character Assessment, along with any mitigation measures that may be necessary to minimise the impact of development and enhance important landscape features. The report does not provide a site-specific assessment of potential areas of development.
- 4.26 The report summarises the key characteristics, positive landscape features / strategic and visual sensitivities and landscape management and development guidelines as described in the Borough Landscape Character Assessment (described above).
- 4.27 The report confirms that the key characteristics of the area around Sharnbrook are representative of the character areas as a whole. Particular features include the well-preserved scheduled manorial earthwork at Castle Close.
- 4.28 More specifically the visual sensitivities for Sharnbrook confirm the importance of occasional views across the valley of the River Great Ouse, for example those from the south-facing slopes west of the village (Odell Road). However, there is also a sense of enclosure provided by the combined undulating landform and hedgerow network. Views to the largely undeveloped occasionally wooded ridges of the Hinwick Wolds are particularly noted as sensitive to change.
- 4.29 In addition, there are some notable features including views to the 13-15th century Grade I listed Church of St. Peter, with a prominent tower and 15th century spire. There are also occasional views across the valley of the River Great Ouse including views of the 13th century Grade I Listed Church of St. Mary at Felmersham.

4.30 The Landscape Management and Development Guidelines are the same as the wider LCAs.

Settlement Character

4.31 The village of Sharnbrook was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 but was probably first developed in Saxon times. The settlement is named after the stream, the Sharn Brook, which lies to the north and was originally founded on agriculture, before developing as a commercial centre during the C19 after the opening of the railway and station in 1857.

4.32 The historic core of the village extends north west to south east in a linear form along the High Street on the southern side of the valley of the Sharn Brook, widening at the junction of Park Lane and Church Lane around a small village green and the church. The village expanded significantly during the C20 and is now nucleated in form, with development extending along Odell Road to the west along with more scattered development along Park Lane and Kennell Hill. The smaller settlement of Coffle End lies to the east with further scattered development along Templars Way and Mill Road up to the railway and A6 to the north and east. In proximity to the A6 is a hotel and a number of employment areas.

4.33 The oldest building in the village, St. Peters Church lies in the centre of the settlement on Church Lane. Many of the houses along the High Street were built between the C17 to C19 as farm cottages with some later Victorian and modern infill. Around the village there were eight manors; those that remain include Colworth and Tofte to the west, and Ouse Manor to the south east. The others live on in road names.

4.34 The main High Street is characterised by a variety of houses (including some large properties such as Sharnbrook House) with a mix of smaller cottages and former barns varying from 1.5 to 3 storeys in height. Properties, with wide frontages are generally set front onto the road, the majority located close to or on the back of the footpath providing strong enclosure to the street; occasional gables and mew / courtyards and changes in building height provide variety to the street scene. Where properties are set back boundaries are defined by limestone walls and a variety of planting. Occasional breaks between buildings are dominated by mature trees with glimpses through gaps in the built form to the vegetation that lines the brook.

4.35 Traditional materials comprise local honey-grey limestone rubble, with a variety of plain clay tile and thatched roofs, with some painted render and limestone rubble, along with occasional red brick detailing and gable ends. Red brick (including some buff brick detailing) and slate is used for later Victorian buildings.

- 4.36 There was limited linear development in the late C19 along Kennell Hill and Mill Road towards the station and the south along Odell Road (Prospect Place) which is characterised by Victorian / Edwardian villas. This was reinforced by further development in the 1940's and 50's, including the south side of the High Street. Major housing development took place between 1960 and 1985 including the Manor Farm estate, Loring Road, Glebe Rise and Stileman Way (within the grounds of the former Sharnbrook Grange) to the west along with Brittons Close in the 'Railway Triangle' adjacent to the station. More recent developments include Fox Hedge Way and Gibbards Close off Yelnow Lane on the edges of the settlement to the west, Hall Close on the High Street and Cowdwell Close and Lower Furlong off Mill Road.
- 4.37 Each of the estates are of standard design, reflecting the period of their construction, the majority comprising detached and semi-detached houses, one and two storeys in height. The majority of streets are characterised by a strong framework of vegetation including grass verges, street trees (both ornamental and mature native species) and garden planting, which reinforces the woodland character, particularly along Colworth Road and Lodge Road to the west and around the church. Development on the 'Railway Triangle' at Coffle End and Fox Hedge Way are higher in density and less well integrated.
- 4.38 Key spaces within the village include the village green, the church and churchyard, the Sharnbrook Allotments (off Church Lane), the recreation ground and Castle Close. All of the areas contain mature trees and are important for their recreational, ecological and amenity value. The woodland belts to the north along the river and around Colworth House are also a prominent feature.
- 4.39 The western approach to the village along the High Street (Souldrop and Colworth Road) is dominated by the woodland fringing Colworth House and Science Park; the north and east (Park Lane and Kennell Hill) is more varied with scattered development of larger properties set back from the road, with garden vegetation linked by mature field boundary hedges and trees. There are occasional views along the valley of the Sharn Brook and south to the River Great Ouse over the small irregular fields of pasture and areas of parkland that follow the course of the valley. The north eastern edge of the village is well integrated by vegetation along the brook.
- 4.40 To the south west along Odell Road, the gateway to the village is defined by the roundabout and School Approach creating a more suburban feel. Mixed linear development set back from the road with low walls and hedges is set against the backdrop of vegetation within Castle Close. Vegetation to the east generally restricts views to adjoining open arable fields and across the Ouse valley; however, where gaps are present, high ground to the south is visible on the skyline.
- 4.41 To the east the approaches along Templars Way and Mill Road are characterised by scattered linear development set back off the road. Properties in Templars Way are generally semi-detached or detached set in large, generally treed grounds. To the east there are views across open fields to the high ground along the valley slopes of the River Great Ouse.

- 4.42 Development along Mill Road is smaller / denser but more sporadic, with a mix of residential dwellings and the industrial development at Stoke Mill interspersed between small fields on the lower valley slopes. The avenue of trees to the north and other vegetation provides a strong landscape approach with a backdrop of rising fields to the north and occasional views across the valley to the south.
- 4.43 In views from the wider landscape, the valley location in conjunction with the level of vegetation cover integrates the majority of the village into the surrounding rural landscape with buildings and roofs set amongst a strong framework of mature trees and woodland. The spire of St. Peters Church is an important landmark which is visible from many locations throughout the area.

Sharnbrook Character Study

- 4.44 The Landscape Character & Built Assessment (the ‘Character Study’)⁶ prepared by the steering group and local community provides a description of the wider landscape setting of the village; the physical form of the village and its relationship to the adjoining countryside; and the “value” of open land within and surrounding the village in terms of landscape, views, setting, public benefits, biodiversity and historic character. The study *“is seen as a critical part of the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan (SNP), supporting policies on site allocations, design, landscape and open spaces.”*
- 4.45 In terms of character, the whole parish has been divided into eleven sub-areas (encompassing both built-up areas and surrounding landscape) and the key characteristics and potential planning issues identified.
- 4.46 Site 527 (School Approach) lies within sub-area 5 ‘The School and School Approach’ to the west of the village. The area is dominated by the Sharnbrook Academy, associated playing fields and sports centre. The remainder of the sub area to the west of the built-up area is described as rural comprising agricultural land with a large pond and woods. The assessment highlights the following landscape issues in respect of the Neighbourhood Plan:
- The importance of Castle Close open space; and
 - The protection of key views to the south across the Ouse Valley from the public footpath which runs west from the Odell Road / School Approach Roundabout (BW10).
- 4.47 Site 620 (East of Odell Road) lies within sub-area 6 ‘The River Great Ouse Valley’ to the south west of Sharnbrook. The area is described as an extensive open area which primarily comprises agricultural land and the floodplain and water meadows along the River Great Ouse. Features include the Mill Theatre and Railway Viaduct to the east and Felmersham Gravel Pit Nature Reserve to the west. A number of footpaths cross the area providing access to the valley (part

⁶ Landscape Character and Built Environment Assessment, Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan, Final Report – December 2018

of the Ouse Valley Way). The assessment highlights the following issues in respect of the Neighbourhood Plan:

- The importance of long views across the river valley and beyond from Odell Road (as identified in the adopted Local Plan);
- Views from Mill Road of the river valley and Ouse Manor;
- The overall landscape quality of the river valley, derived from its floodplain / water meadows along the riverside; and
- Value of Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve as a recreational resource and biodiversity interest.

4.48 Site 901 (Hill Farm) lies within sub-area 8 'Rural Areas SW A6 & Mill Road/Templars Way & NE of sub area 6' which is large area to the east and north east of the village. The A6 runs approximately north-south creating two parcels of land - a triangular area to the west bordered by Templars Way to the north and Mill Road to the south (predominantly the Hill Farm site) and the area to the east which extends up to the Parish boundary.

4.49 The land to the west of the A6 is described as predominantly agricultural and includes a farm, residential properties and an industrial unit with houses scattered along the length of Templars Way between the railway and its junction with the A6. The area to the east is also agricultural with farms and areas of woodland, with a "*feeling of openness and tranquillity*" away from the busy A6 trunk road. Public footpaths provide access east and west of the A6, and as the land rises to the north east there are views back to Sharnbrook.

4.50 The assessment highlights the following issues in respect of the Neighbourhood Plan:

- Landscape quality of the area to the north east of the A6;
- Views towards Sharnbrook from footpath at high point (BW3 near Temple Wood) and from the layby on the A6; and
- The impact of the levels of traffic on the A6.

4.51 Key views are discussed separately in **Section 6.0** below.

5.0 Green Infrastructure

5.1 The GI strategy for the County is established by the Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan (Bedfordshire and Luton GI Consortium, 2007), which sets out a broad spatial vision for GI across the area in the period up to 2021. This is complemented by the Bedford Green Infrastructure Plan (2009), which establishes detailed priorities within the Borough and supports policies in the Local Plan requiring the protection, enhancement and creation of GI.

- 5.2 The Countywide plan identifies the following environmental themes that contribute to, and form the context for GI – Landscape Character, the Historic Environment, Biodiversity, Accessible Greenspace and Access Routes. These have informed the identification of a sub-regional Strategic GI network of multi-functional areas and strategic corridors, linking and creating publicly accessible greenspace and semi-natural habitats and natural greenspaces.
- 5.3 The strategy recognises the need to ensure that development contributes to an improved environment, by protecting and enhancing environmental assets and providing related GI to meet the needs of existing and expanded communities. Key objectives subsequently include achieving a net gain in the quantity and quality of GI; promoting multi-functionality; enhancing landscape character, the historic environment and biodiversity assets; accessibility and connectivity for human movement and recreation (both informal and formal); environmental quality and sustainability including long-term management; and community ownership and involvement.

Green Infrastructure Network and Priorities

- 5.4 The sub-regional Strategic GI Network (refer to **Figure 2**) identifies the following broad corridors in the vicinity of Sharnbrook - Zone 1: Milton Keynes to Grafham Water – Wooded Wolds to the north; and Zone 2: Upper Great Ouse River Valley to the south. The GI opportunities within each zone are set out in the Bedford Borough GI Plan.
- 5.5 The relevant priorities for Zone 2 Upper Great Ouse River Valley are:
- Extending the current Bedford Green Wheel (an accessible network of parks, nature reserve and countryside), to link the town to surrounding villages through a network of green corridors;
 - Improving walking, cycling and horse-riding opportunities upstream from Bedford, including the Ouse Valley Way, Bunyan Trail, and links to and from the western section of the Bedford Green Wheel;
 - Extending Harrold – Odell Country Park to the south of the river, linking into Chellington;
 - Recreating river valley flood meadows and wet woodland, restoring wetlands and grassland for biodiversity benefit and flood alleviation;
 - Buffering and extending green spaces in the river valley, such as Harrold - Odell Country Park and Felmersham Gravel Pits;
 - Improving green spaces and visitor facilities on the urban fringe.
- 5.6 The relevant priorities for Zone 1 Milton Keynes to Grafham – Wooded Wolds are:
- Linking woodlands with access routes and centres of population;
 - Expanding and linking of woodland (especially ancient woodland) and grassland habitats;
 - Improved management and restoration of existing ancient woodlands;

- Hedgerow planting and management to re-establish the historic field pattern and enhancing rights of way;
- Interpreting historic environment features;
- Conserving historic parkland; and
- Improving the management of the historic byway network ('green lanes') balancing access and recreational use with historic and natural heritage conservation and enhancement needs.

6.0 Site Visibility and Representative Views

Context

- 6.1 The village of Sharnbrook is situated above the confluence of the Sharn Brook with the River Great Ouse forming the main valley to the south. The settlement extends from the lower slopes of the Sharn Brook to the north east along the south-facing slopes of the Ouse valley to the west. The majority of development lies between 50-70m AOD (refer to **Figure 4**). On the other side of the Sharn Brook beyond the Railway Triangle, development at Coffle End is more sporadic extending towards the A6 to the north east and east.
- 6.2 To the north the land continues to rise up to the plateau of the main south-west to north-east Yardley Whittlewood Ridge (95-100m AOD). Across the broad river floodplain (40m AOD), the land slopes up to the plateau of the Clay Farmlands at Thurleigh to the east and Pavenham to the south (80-90m AOD).
- 6.3 As described in **Section 4.0**, the woodland cover both on the Ridge and within the Ouse valley, combine with the undulating, sloping landform to create a sense of semi-enclosure with views that are generally framed or intermittent. However due to the relative elevation, from areas of higher ground on the edges of the village, gaps in the vegetation allow occasional long distance, panoramic views east and south across and along the valley. In contrast views within the valley of the River Great Ouse are generally more enclosed with a combination of vegetation and the valley slopes providing containment.
- 6.4 The edges of the Clay Farmlands to the east and south are more open. In views from the wider landscape to the south and east, the topography of the valley slopes in conjunction with the level of vegetation cover, integrates the village of Sharnbrook into the surrounding rural landscape. Where visible along the valley slopes, buildings and roofs are set amongst a strong framework of mature trees and woodland. The spire of St. Peters Church is an important landmark marking the centre of the village.

- 6.5 The A6 provides the main route through the area connecting Bedford and surrounding villages to Rushden and Wellingborough to the north. The area also incorporates a system of local roads / lanes with a good network of public rights of way (bridleways and footpaths), including the Ouse Valley Way long distance footpath. Many of the routes form part of publicised circular walks within the Sharnbrook and Felmersham area. Other areas with public access / permissive paths include the Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve, Pinchmill Islands and Radwell Pits.
- 6.6 Due to the location of the Sites, the topography and surrounding vegetation, the extent to which they are visible is considered separately. All of the Sites have separate ‘visual envelopes’ with near / middle distance views from the adjoining streets and spaces and middle to long-distance views from the wider countryside. The visual envelopes of the Sites overlap along the upper slopes of the Ouse Valley and plateau edge to the east and south.
- 6.7 Reference is made to a number of publicly accessible viewpoints, the locations of which are shown on **Figure 6** with photographs of Views 1-32 provided on **Figures 7-21**. These viewpoints do not provide continuous coverage of all locations where the sites are visible but have been selected to be either representative of the views experienced from roads, public rights of way or surrounding properties, or from recognised specific locations. These include key views identified in the Bedford Local Plan and Sharnbrook Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan.
- 6.8 Photographs taken in August 2017 and October 2020 represent the best-case scenario with regards to vegetation cover when deciduous vegetation is in full leaf. Consideration is given to winter views where relevant. As in all instances it is recognised that while the photographs are representative, views are best experienced in the field.

Site Reference 527 (Land at School Approach)

- 6.9 As described in **Section 2.0**, Site 527 to the west of School Approach is enclosed by development to the north and east and established woodland and a dense tree belt to the west and south.
- 6.10 Near distance views are restricted to a short section of Odell Road between the village gateway and open space / balancing pond filtered by vegetation, with more open views from School Approach, Sharnbrook Academy, and adjoining housing to the east (View 1). To the south, views from the adjoining public bridleway BW10 are prevented by the tree belt which due to the density of the vegetation is likely to screen the site in both summer and winter. Where oblique views are possible at either end through in the vegetation, existing development including the car park, school and housing is evident (View 2).
- 6.11 Within the wider area, middle- and long-distance views are potentially available along the western valley slopes towards Odell, incorporating Odell Road and Public Rights of Way BW10/BW8 and BW7. In these views, the existing woodland and tree belt is a prominent feature, screening the majority of the site, school and adjoining housing on the edge of the village (Views 3 & 4). Subject to height, development within the site would be contained; any glimpses would be seen in the context of existing development and extensively softened by existing vegetation, which will continue to mature over time.

- 6.12 Views within the Ouse Valley to the south (including the Ouse Valley Way as it crosses the floodplain and Felmersham Gravel Pits) are prevented as the land falls away towards the river (View 14). Limited views from the south east from FP9 on the edges of Sharnbrook are restricted by intervening vegetation with any glimpses seen in the context of existing development along Odell Road.
- 6.13 Beyond the River Great Ouse, the rising ground of the upper slopes and clay plateau affords long distance panoramic views across the valley along the ridge to the south (Radwell towards Chellington 1.5km+) and south east (Thurleigh 4km+). From these areas the village of Sharnbrook situated on the low- to mid-valley slopes is integrated by a strong framework of trees. Buildings on higher ground along Odell Road and the Sharnbrook Academy (more so due to scale and colour) are apparent set against a strong backdrop of woodland. Despite the elevation, the site set below the ridge remains contained by a strong framework of vegetation, including Woodend Plantation, the adjoining woodland and tree belt (Views 15, 16, 29, 30 and 32). While any development would be discernible, visual effects would be limited by distance and existing vegetation and set within the context of adjacent development. In the long-term the tree belt to the south will continue to mature and provide additional screening.
- 6.14 The site does not feature in any identified 'Key Views' to or from the village.

Site Reference 620 (Land East of Odell Road)

- 6.15 As described in **Section 2.0**, Site 620 comprises the south east facing slopes of the Ouse Valley, the land sloping down from Odell Road towards the river and its floodplain. Views from Odell Road (including the Conservation Area), are generally enclosed by vegetation, however, where gaps are present there are open views across the existing open arable fields within the site to the high ground of the Clay Farmlands on the opposite side of the river. These views are identified as 'Village Views' in the Bedford Borough Local Plan.
- 6.16 Near distance views are available from Odell Road (within the village and approaching from the west), School Approach and adjoining properties to the north east, filtered by existing vegetation (View 5). Along Odell Road the existing mature hedgerow and trees provides a relatively dense screen becoming slightly more gappy to the east (View 6). The site is likely to be more open in winter with a mix of partial and framed views through the site to the high ground of the plateau beyond. It is therefore important that any development of the site retains selected views and that existing vegetation along Odell Road is retained and enhanced where required.
- 6.17 A number of public rights of way cross through the site including FP9, FP16 and BW15 (a section of the Ouse Valley Way). To the west of the site visibility is enclosed by the tree line which borders FP9, with varying views of the existing settlement edge, which is increasing prominent to the east. The edges of Pinchmill Close and Wellpond Close are relatively abrupt, but in other areas existing development is integrated by a mix of hedgerows and woodland. The spire of St. Peter's Church is visible beyond the existing buildings (View 8). To the east, from higher ground there are panoramic views south east across the valley extending from the fringes of Sharnbrook to Felmersham (including occasional glimpsed views of St. Mary's Church set

amongst trees), with the high ground of the plateau beyond (View 9). On lower ground, as experienced from BW15, visibility is enclosed by the valley sides and vegetation along the river with views primarily north east to south west along the lower slopes of the valley. Views to the north west restricted by the tree line which follows the break in slope (View 10).

- 6.18 In the near- to middle-distance views from the upper valley slopes to the north west towards the site are filtered by vegetation (field boundaries and blocks of woodland), with distant views across the Ouse valley to the south (View 4).
- 6.19 Within the valley and along the River Great Ouse, depending on vegetation cover, there is a combination of both enclosed and open views. Similar to views experienced from BW15 within the site, from the footpaths along the river and Felmersham Gravel Pits, at points where intervening vegetation is absent the lower slopes within the site are the most apparent providing the immediate backdrop; the western area of the site and the existing settlement edge screened by the topography and tree line (View 13). Existing development, including Odell Road) is glimpsed, with the spire of St. Peter's Church set high above the tree line to the north. Views from Felmersham to the south west are substantially filtered by vegetation surrounding the Gravel Pits (View 14) with views to the north east restricted by the woodland to the rear of Norman Way (View 11).
- 6.20 Beyond the River Great Ouse, the rising ground of the mid- to upper valley slopes allows middle- to long distance views across the valley along the ridge to the south (Radwell towards Chellington 0.75km+) with wider panoramic views from the upper valley slopes and edge of the plateau to the south east (Thurleigh 3.5km+). In these views the village of Sharnbrook situated on the low- to mid-valley slopes is integrated by a strong framework of trees. Buildings on higher ground along Odell Road and the Sharnbrook Academy are apparent filtered by vegetation and set against a strong backdrop of woodland.
- 6.21 Sitting in front of the existing settlement edge and Sharnbrook Academy, the higher western side of the site is visible as a narrow section of land, partly contained by the tree line along the break of slope. From the mid- slopes (including the Ouse Valley Way) views are partially filtered by intervening mature vegetation along the valley slopes and within and along the valley, albeit views will be more open in winter. The lower slopes are contained with the valley (Views 15 & 16).
- 6.22 From areas of high ground (primary to the south east) the elevation allows a greater proportion of upper area of the site to be visible (Views 29, 30 & 32). While development would be discernible, visual effects would be limited by distance with buildings set against the context of established development. The vegetation within and around the existing settlement demonstrates the effectiveness of planting in providing mitigation to break up and integrate the built form into the landscape, while retaining the views to St. Peter's Church. This could include reinforcing existing vegetation along the break in slope and along the river as well as strategic trees throughout the built area to provide a strong landscape framework.

- 6.23 In addition to the 'Village Views' from Odell Road in the Bedford Borough Local Plan, the Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan identifies two 'Key Views' to and from the village. Key View 5 is located on the Ouse Valley Way (Pinchmill Island Footpath) at the footbridge on the edge of the site. The accompanying photograph (replicated as View 10) shows the view north west towards Odell Road as it approaches the village. The view is identified for its importance of the open valley of the Great Ouse gently sloping down from the built-up area. It is considered to contribute to the setting of the village and to the wider landscape of several villages (not identified). The view encompasses the lower valley slopes within the site, with the developable area predominantly enclosed by the rising ground and tree line to the west.
- 6.24 Key View 6 is located on Odell Road. The supporting text notes the position 'East of Bus Shelter', but the coordinates, photograph and Policies Map indicate slightly different positions along the street. The accompanying photograph shown in the Character Study lies inside of the vegetation that fringes Odell Road.
- 6.25 Notwithstanding this the broad location of the view (View 7) replicates the Village View identified in the Bedford Borough Local Plan east across the Great Ouse Valley (including Sharnbrook Church). It is identified for the importance of the open valley of the Great Ouse, gently sloping down from the built-up area and is considered to contribute to the setting of the village and to the wider landscape of several villages. The view encompasses the western section of the site, east towards the modern settlement edge of Odell Road, Pinchmill Close and Pinchmill Way with the high ground of the clay plateau including the Bedford Autodrome beyond. The valley itself is enclosed by topography and vegetation. The spire of Sharnbrook Church is visible above the buildings on Odell Road, set in trees. This view can be retained by setting back development from the frontage of the site with open space.

Site Reference 901 (Hill Farm, Mill Road)

- 6.26 As described in **Section 2.0**, Site 901 comprises the south facing slopes on the mid- to upper sections of the Ouse Valley sloping down from Templars Way to Mill Road.
- 6.27 Near distance views are available from the A6, Templars Way, Mill Road and associated properties, with the railway line to the south. From the A6 and Templars Way, the maintained hedgerows allow relatively open views into the site; while some views are contained by the internal woodland and trees, large proportions of the site are visible. Despite the proximity of the A6, the views are rural in character. To the north and west, the elevation allows views through the site across and along the Great Ouse Valley to the plateau at Thurleigh (Views 17, 18 & 19); to the east while there is glimpses of development at Coffle End, the majority of Sharnbrook is obscured by the topography. The spire of St. Peter's Church is visible amongst trees to the west with the industrial structure of Stoke Mill above the tree line to the south (View 24).
- 6.28 Views from Mill Road are more enclosed by hedgerows and trees in the verge to the north of the road. At gaps in the vegetation and in winter when views will be more open, the rising ground of the site provides a rural backdrop entering and leaving the village (Views 21 & 22).

- 6.29 A number of public rights of way cross through the Site from south to north (FP6, FP8 and BW19). Views from these routes are open, comprising agricultural fields and woodland. Existing development is limited to the cluster of buildings at Hill Farm (including the Listed former farmhouse), with the majority of development on Mill Road integrated by trees (Views 20 and 23).
- 6.30 In the near to middle distance, views of the site are possible from the rising ground to the north east and east towards Bourne End. The eastern boundary of the site is exposed in sections in between intervening vegetation around Vicarage Farm. Views are inherently rural; the village of Sharnbrook is not discernible apart from St. Peter's Church spire, with glimpses of development on Templars Way adjacent to the A6. The poplars at Hill Farm and Deadmans Spinney are prominent landscape features (Views 25 & 26).
- 6.31 Within the valley to the south of Sharnbrook views of the site are prevented by the topography and mature trees along the River Great Ouse and Radwell Pits. While there are glimpses of development at Brittons Close and the Railway Triangle, the site is not discernible with the exception of the poplars at Hill Farm which are occasionally glimpsed between intervening vegetation (Views 7, 9 and 12).
- 6.32 Beyond the River Great Ouse, the rising ground of the mid- to upper valley slopes allows middle- to long distance views across and along the valley in an arc to the south (Radwell towards Chellington 0.75km+), the fringes of Milton Ernest and Bletsoe (1.8-2.5km) with wider panoramic views from the upper valley slopes and edge of the plateau to the south east (Thurleigh 2km+). In these views the village of Sharnbrook situated on the low- to mid-valley slopes is integrated by a strong framework of trees.
- 6.33 The elevation of the site and orientation of the slope makes the site particularly from these areas, with the rising land, particularly to the north clearly visible above the vegetation along the valley floor (Views 28, 31 & 32). Despite the distance, given the visual separation between the site and the core of the village, any development of the site would be clearly apparent and represent a substantial addition in terms of the extent of built form within the view and separate from the village.
- 6.34 The site does not feature in any identified 'Key Views' to or from the village. The view from the A6 across the site to the church (View 24) was included as a potential key view in the Character Study but was discounted in the preliminary sift. While no particular views within the Parish are identified towards the site within the area to the north east of the A6, its openness, tranquillity and rural character are clearly noted.

7.0 Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base

- 7.1 A number of studies have been prepared as evidence to support the preparation of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan and inform the proposed site allocation.

Character Study

- 7.2 The Landscape Character & Built Assessment (the 'Character Study') prepared by the steering group and local community provides a description of the wider landscape setting of the village; the physical form of the village and its relationship to the adjoining countryside; and the "value" of open land within and surrounding the village in terms of landscape, views, setting, public benefits, biodiversity and historic character. The study *"is seen as a critical part of the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan (SNP), supporting policies on site allocations, design, landscape and open spaces."*
- 7.3 In terms of character, the whole parish has been divided into eleven sub-areas (encompassing both built-up areas and surrounding landscape) and the key characteristics and potential planning issues identified.
- 7.4 In this context no analysis or objective assessment has been made on the relative landscape, visual / perceptual and combined "sensitivity" of different areas around the settlement to accommodate residential development, taking into account the scope for mitigation. This assessment is the best way of understanding the potential landscape and visual impacts of residential development of the scale required by the Local Plan on different areas around the village edge. This is essential to inform the consideration of the general direction of growth.
- 7.5 The Character Study identifies the importance of key views to be addressed by policies, including potential site allocations and design issues. A number of candidate views were put forward; of which nine have been taken forward as Key Views to be protected. While some views initially put forward were dropped, or combined, it is not clear how the final views were selected for inclusion in Policy S11.
- 7.6 The location of Key Views 5 and 6 identified in the policies map in Appendix 3, do not match the photographs in the Character Study.
- 7.7 Key View 5 is in the correct broad location but should be positioned on the footbridge slightly further to the north in accordance with the coordinates listed in Section 5.
- 7.8 As highlighted in **Section 6.0** above, the position of Key View 6 on Odell Road is unclear with the coordinates, photograph and Policies Map all indicating slightly different positions along the street. The accompanying photograph shown in the Character Study is situated on higher ground to the west and inside of the line of vegetation that fringes Odell Road.

Site Options and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 7.9 Despite the importance of the Character Study (as described above), it is not listed in the evidence for the Site Options Assessment Report or SEA. It is not clear to what extent the findings have informed the assessment of individual sites and the site selection process.

- 7.10 The assessment of landscape and visual constraints uses a simple Indicator of Suitability, which based on the methodology has been informed by a combination of desk study and site visits. It is not clear of the degree to which professional landscape advice has informed the site assessments, along with whether the evidence base considers potential landscape and visual impacts beyond the Parish Boundary. For instance, the majority of comments consider the character of Sharnbrook, but there appears to be limited consideration of visibility from the wider area.
- 7.11 There is no formal consideration in either the Site Options or SEA of green infrastructure which can deliver landscape and biodiversity benefits as well as providing a resource for the local and wider community.
- 7.12 Both the Site Options Assessment and SEA place a strong emphasis on the protection of key views, and in particular those identified as a 'Village View' in the Bedford Borough Site Allocations and Designations Local Plan. This is used in the assessment process in making a judgement in the suitability of sites for development. This is in contradiction to the Inspector's report in relation to the Allocations and Designations Local Plan Policy AD40 which states:

"the Council has undertaken an assessment to identify village open spaces and views of significance. The Council's methodology for identifying these areas is thorough, systematic and clearly set out. Designations are made according to a set of five clearly worded and sensible criteria. As a result the Council's overall approach to the protection of open spaces and views is robust and merits strong support.

I am concerned, however, about the overly stringent wording of Policy AD42 which states that development will not be permitted on land designated as a village open space or view. I consider that in reality an important consideration in determining proposals on such areas will be whether the reasons for designation would be compromised if the development was allowed to proceed. There may, for instance, be occasions where the loss of a small part of an open space may not prejudice the overall integrity of the space or undermine its contribution to the local area. Furthermore it may be the case that the retention of a designated space may be outweighed by other material considerations, for instance significant community benefits that could not otherwise be achieved.

Consequently, I consider that the wording of Policy AD42 needs to be revised to make it clear that in determining proposed development account will be taken of the reasons for designation and other material considerations...."

8.0 Comparative Assessment of Sites

- 8.1 The Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Local Plan identifies Site 901 Hill Farm, Mill Road as the single allocation for Sharnbrook.
- 8.2 In accordance with Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road), 38ha of land are identified on the Policies Map for a comprehensive development subject to the following criteria:

- A minimum of 500 dwellings
- The scale, form, layout and density should be appropriate for this location;
- Land for sport and leisure facilities including sports pitches, changing facilities and parking provision;
- A potential location for a new community building and/or new doctors' surgery, provision of a serviced site for a new primary school and provision of small-scale retail units;
- Informal open space, SuDS systems, landscape buffering and sensitive boundary treatment around the proposed development;
- Pedestrian and cycle access along Mill Road to the village centre;
- Provision of vehicular access from Mill Road and a new roundabout off the A6 together with secondary access off Templars Way; and
- A scheme of parking to ensure safe and free movement of vehicles throughout the development.

8.3 In addition, the development should comply with all other policies of the development plan and respect the surrounding natural, built and historic environment.

8.4 Not all of the site area is included within the allocation as defined by the Policies Map, with the exception of the site access and roundabout onto the A6, areas of land to the north including Deadman's Spinney are omitted along with a parcel of land to the east.

Review of Site Options and Assessment and SEA

8.5 The purpose of the site assessment is to consider the identified sites in Sharnbrook Parish and determine whether they would be appropriate to allocate for housing in the Neighbourhood Plan in terms of conformity with national and local planning policy. The aim is to guide decision making and help the Parish Council to select the sites or sites that best meet the area's housing requirement and Neighbourhood Plan objectives.

8.6 Of the twenty-two sites, nine are identified as potentially suitable and available subject to constraints. These include Sites 527 Land at School Approach (capacity for 60-74 dwellings) and Site 901 Hill Farm, Mill Road (capacity for 500 dwellings). Site 620 Land east of Odell Road is one of several sites considered not suitable for development.

8.7 The Site Options report identifies that Site 527 Land at School Approach is considered to have a low landscape sensitivity and medium visual sensitivity. Located adjacent to and connected to the SPA boundary proposed development would relate well to the surrounding uses and be seen as an integrated part of Sharnbrook.

- 8.8 In respect of Sites 620 Land East of Odell Road and 901 Hill Farm Mill Road, the landscape sensitivity of both areas is assessed as medium and the visual sensitivity assessed as high. In considering the two growth scenarios, the SEA acknowledges in paragraph 6.2.10 that as a result of the delivery of significant growth on largely greenfield land that “*landscape impacts under either scenario are considered inevitable.*” However, despite the relative comparative assessment in the Site Assessment, Site 901 is considered more favourably in landscape terms with greater emphasis placed on the protection of views and the river corridor (Site 620), rather than the potential wider landscape and visual impact (Site 901).
- 8.9 As highlighted in **Section 7.0** above, there is no consideration in terms of the contribution of sites to the delivery of green infrastructure, particularly long the river corridor and the potential landscape, biodiversity and community benefits.
- 8.10 These observations are discussed in relation to each site below.

Site Reference 527 (Land at School Approach)

- 8.11 The findings of the landscape and visual assessment undertaken support the conclusions of the Site Assessment report.
- 8.12 In respect of landscape character, the area relates well to the existing settlement edge and with the exception of the tree belt and adjacent woodland, the site contains limited landscape features of value. The area is well screened and while it is visible from School Approach, a limited section of Odell Road and adjacent properties the area is enclosed. While views are possible from high ground across the valley to the south, any development would be set in the established framework of vegetation, seen at distance and in the context of surrounding development.
- 8.13 The eastern section of the site and adjoining land is designated as a Village Open Space, which while relatively recent in origin, assists in the transition between the village and the countryside providing a soft edge to the village. This does not preclude the development of the site for housing.
- 8.14 Considering the landscape and visual constraints the site is considered suitable for development with appropriate mitigation including the retention and where necessary enhancement of established perimeter vegetation, the retention of the existing open space, high quality design and landscape. There is opportunity through the design for the development to create a high-quality entrance to the village.

Site Reference 620 (Land East of Odell Road)

- 8.15 The findings of the landscape and visual assessment undertaken support the general findings of the Site Assessment Report. While it is acknowledged that the scale of the development proposed would have landscape and visual effects; the conclusions that the site is not suitable for development on landscape and visual grounds is questioned. In this regard, as noted in the Site Assessment report, the proposed Illustrative Masterplan (as informed by the landscape and visual assessment and other constraints) proposes that only the western area of the site is

developed with the creation of a significant area of semi-natural green space along the valley of the River Great Ouse providing a buffer to the Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve and delivering landscape-scale enhancements.

- 8.16 As noted by the Site Assessment, the site contains limited features of landscape value, with the erosion of the historic pattern of hedgerows creating large open arable fields. The fields on the lower valley slopes provide the immediate setting to the river but make a limited contribution to its distinctive character which comprises a mosaic of wetland, woodland and grassland. As agreed with Natural England the proposed natural green space would provide a buffer to the river corridor and Felmersham Gravel Pits, providing considerable opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancements alongside the creation of accessible multi-functional green infrastructure and a community resource. The creation of a mosaic of habitats such as wetland, grassland, and wet woodland; restoration of historic field boundaries; informal recreation and improvements to access along the river would make a substantial contribution to the landscape management guidelines set out in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment and meet the objectives of the Bedford Borough Green Infrastructure for Zone 2 Upper Great Ouse River Valley.
- 8.17 In landscape character terms, the undeveloped valley slopes are identified as being sensitive to change forming the rural backdrop and setting to the river; however, it is also these valley slopes which form the location for historic development with Sharnbrook being a traditional valley side settlement.
- 8.18 Development on the western side of the site follows the established nucleated pattern of the settlement along the valley slopes above the river. While development would be visible in the near, middle and long distance, it forms a logical extension to Sharnbrook with visual effects limited by distance and the framework provided by existing vegetation, with buildings set against the context of established development. The vegetation within and around the existing settlement demonstrates the effectiveness of planting in providing mitigation to break up and integrate the built form into the landscape while retaining the views to St. Peter's Church. This could include reinforcing existing vegetation along the break in slope and along the river as well as strategic trees throughout the built area to provide a strong landscape framework.
- 8.19 Through careful design of the development selected framed views across the valley can be retained. These include views from Odell Road (Key View 6) along the existing ditch / valley, within the development / open space and green infrastructure zone. Identified important views to St. Peter's Church to the east can be protected by the setting back of development along the frontage and the provision of open space. The immediate surroundings of Key View 5 (Ouse Valley Way) could be enhanced by the creation of green infrastructure along the river corridor.

Site Reference 901 (Hill Farm, Mill Road)

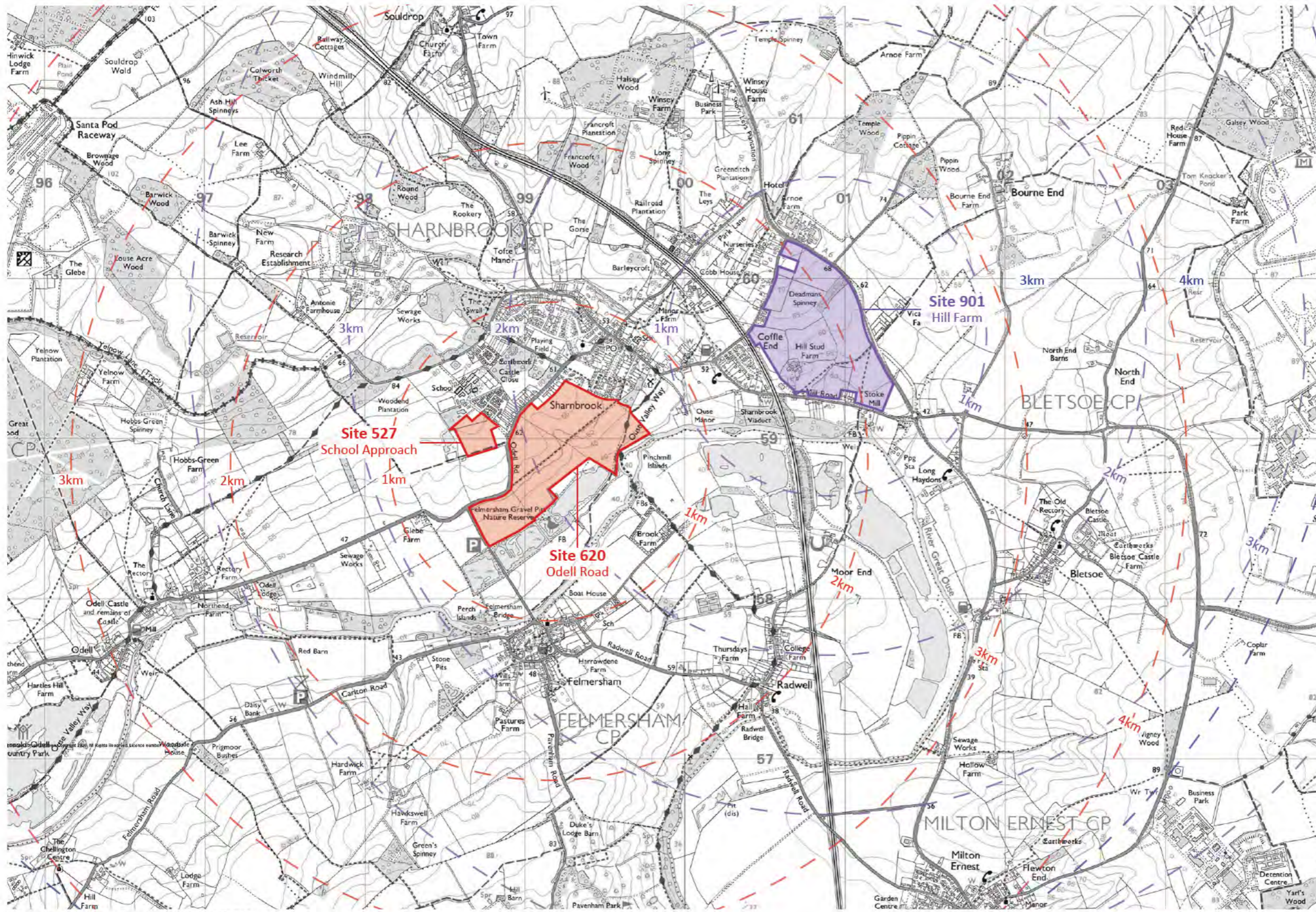
- 8.20 The findings of the Site Assessment report are not supported by the landscape and visual assessment undertaken.

- 8.21 The features within the site including field boundaries, woodland and farm buildings (including the Grade II former farmhouse) are relatively intact and form part of the network of smaller fields to the east of the village; and while there are some detracting features including road noise, the area is open with a rural character that makes an important contribution to the setting and approach to the village from the A6.
- 8.22 In comparison to the well-settled Great Ouse Valley, the landscape character of the Wooded Wolds is relatively undeveloped. The location of the site is at odds with the established nucleated settlement pattern along the valley side and totally remote from the core of Sharnbrook. While associated with the much smaller settlement of Coffle End, the land is physically separated from it by the railway line and intervening land. In effect, development would be creating a 'new village' outside of the perceptual extent of Sharnbrook, substantially extending its influence into the rural zone beyond the A6 to the east and fundamentally changing the character and identity of Coffle End.
- 8.23 While the proposal includes the provision of sports facilities, the development by virtue of its location makes a limited contribution to green infrastructure with areas of open space concentrated along the A6. Without protection, the adjoining areas of unallocated land to the north and east on the outer perimeter of the site are also vulnerable to future development up to the boundary of the road, leaving limited space for strategic landscape on the eastern boundary.
- 8.24 In visual terms, the elevation and orientation of the slope makes it prominent in views from the high ground to the east and across the Ouse Valley to the south. Such areas are identified in the Borough Landscape Character Assessment as visually sensitive with development management guidelines focussed on conserving the undeveloped slopes above the Great Ouse Valley that form a rural backdrop to the lower lying more settled landscape. Despite the distance, given the visual separation between the site and the core of the settlement, any development of the site would be clearly apparent and represent a substantial addition in terms of the extent of built form within the view which is completely separate from the village. Unlike the rest of the built area, which is nestled within the valley, despite the strategic landscape buffer and sensitive boundary treatment proposed, the elevation of the site makes it difficult to effectively mitigate.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 SES Strategic Ltd. (SES) has been instructed by DLP Planning Ltd on behalf of Bedfordia Developments (the promoter) to undertake a landscape and visual assessment of potential development sites within the Parish of Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire. The assessment accompanies representations made by DLP Planning on behalf of Bedfordia Developments to the consultation on the Pre-Submission Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan ('the Neighbourhood Plan').

- 9.2 As a Key Service Centre, the Adopted Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 requires that the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan allocates a site (or sites) to deliver 500 new homes over the Plan period.
- 9.3 This statement concerns two areas of land (together referred to as 'the Site') which are situated on the south western edge of the village, both within the ownership of the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust. The parcels are identified in the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying documents as Site References 527 (Land Adjacent to School Approach) and 620 (Land east of Odell Road).
- 9.4 This assessment provides appropriate evidence from a landscape and visual perspective to confirm that the location of the Site is suitable as an allocation within the Neighbourhood Plan to provide 500 new homes with associated infrastructure.
- 9.5 A comparative assessment is made with the proposed site at Hill Farm identified as Site Reference 901 ('the Proposed Site'), which is allocated in draft by Policy S5 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 9.6 It is agreed that the context of Sharnbrook and the scale of the development proposed will have an impact on the landscape / settlement character and views to and from the village.
- 9.7 Site 527 at School Approach provides a suitable small-scale extension with minimal landscape and visual effects.
- 9.8 The Proposed Site at Hill Farm is not considered to be a suitable location for allocation. The location is at odds with the established settlement pattern and landscape character of the area and visually prominent forming a rural undeveloped backdrop above the valley of the River Great Ouse to the south. Development of this scale remote from the established core of the village would substantially change the character of Sharnbrook and Coffle End and extend its influence into the rural landscape. The resulting substantial landscape and visual effects would be difficult to effectively mitigate.
- 9.9 While not without landscape and visual constraints, the development of land to the East of Odell Road provides a deliverable alternative which would form a logical and natural extension to Sharnbrook. The Illustrative Masterplan including the delivery of a large area of semi-natural green space alongside the provision of high-quality housing provides the opportunity for landscape-scale enhancement and the creation of a community resource of benefit to the village and wider area.



KEY

- Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
- Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

Note:
Distances are shown approximately from the centre of each site

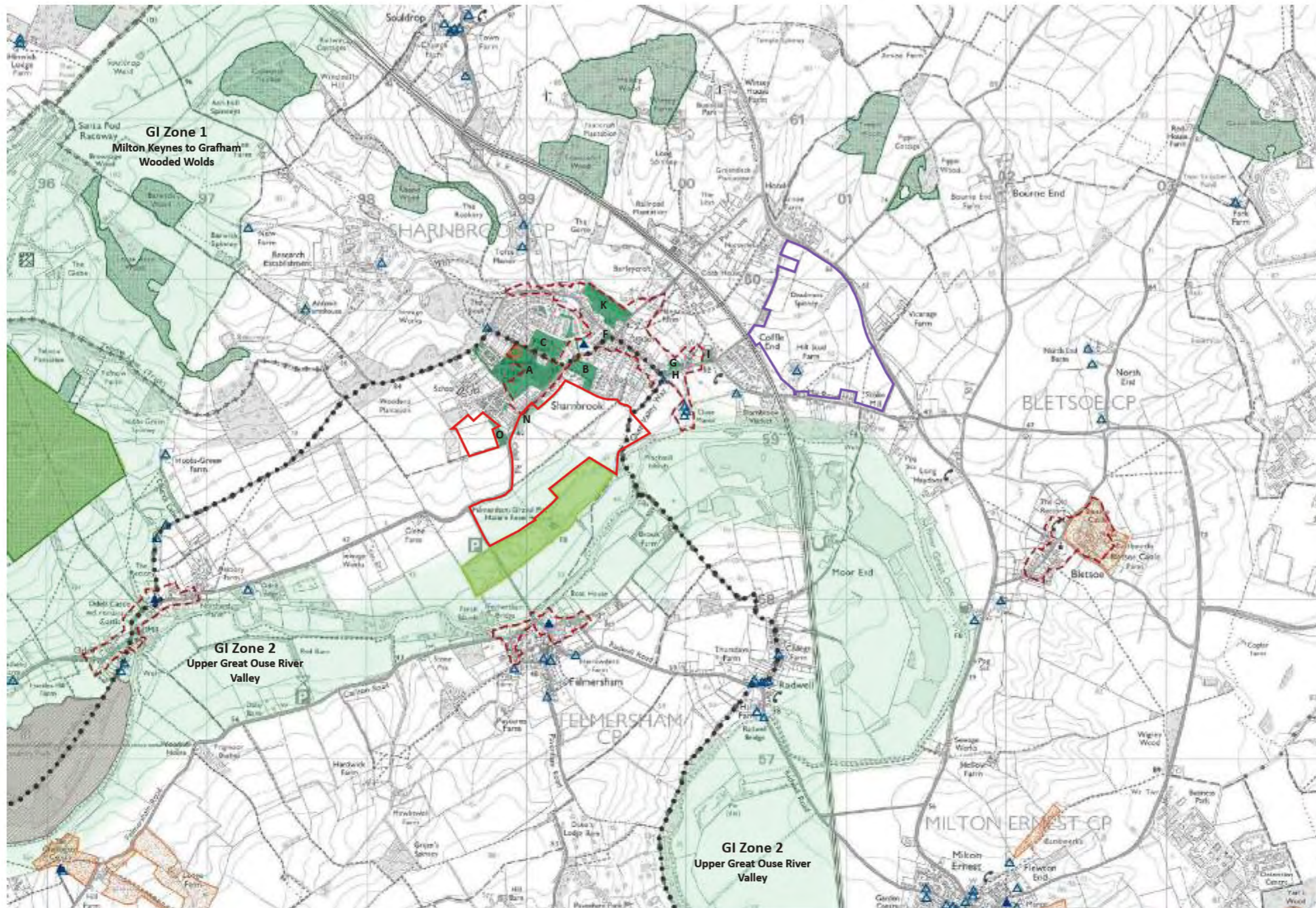
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Figure 1: Sites Location

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: 1:25 0000	Rev: .
Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	






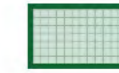

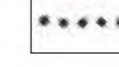






KEY

-  Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
-  Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

Primary Constraints

-  Scheduled Monument
-  Conservation Area
(including Grade II / II* Listed Buildings)
-  Listed Buildings - Grade I
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II / II*
(outside Conservation Areas)
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland
-  Local Nature Reserve / Country Park
-  Ouse Valley Way Long Distance Footpath
(refer to Figure 6 for PRoW)

Secondary Constraints

-  Bedford Borough Green Infrastructure Zone
Local Policy AD24
-  Village Open Space / View
Local Policy AD40 (Sharnbrook only)

County Wildlife Sites not shown

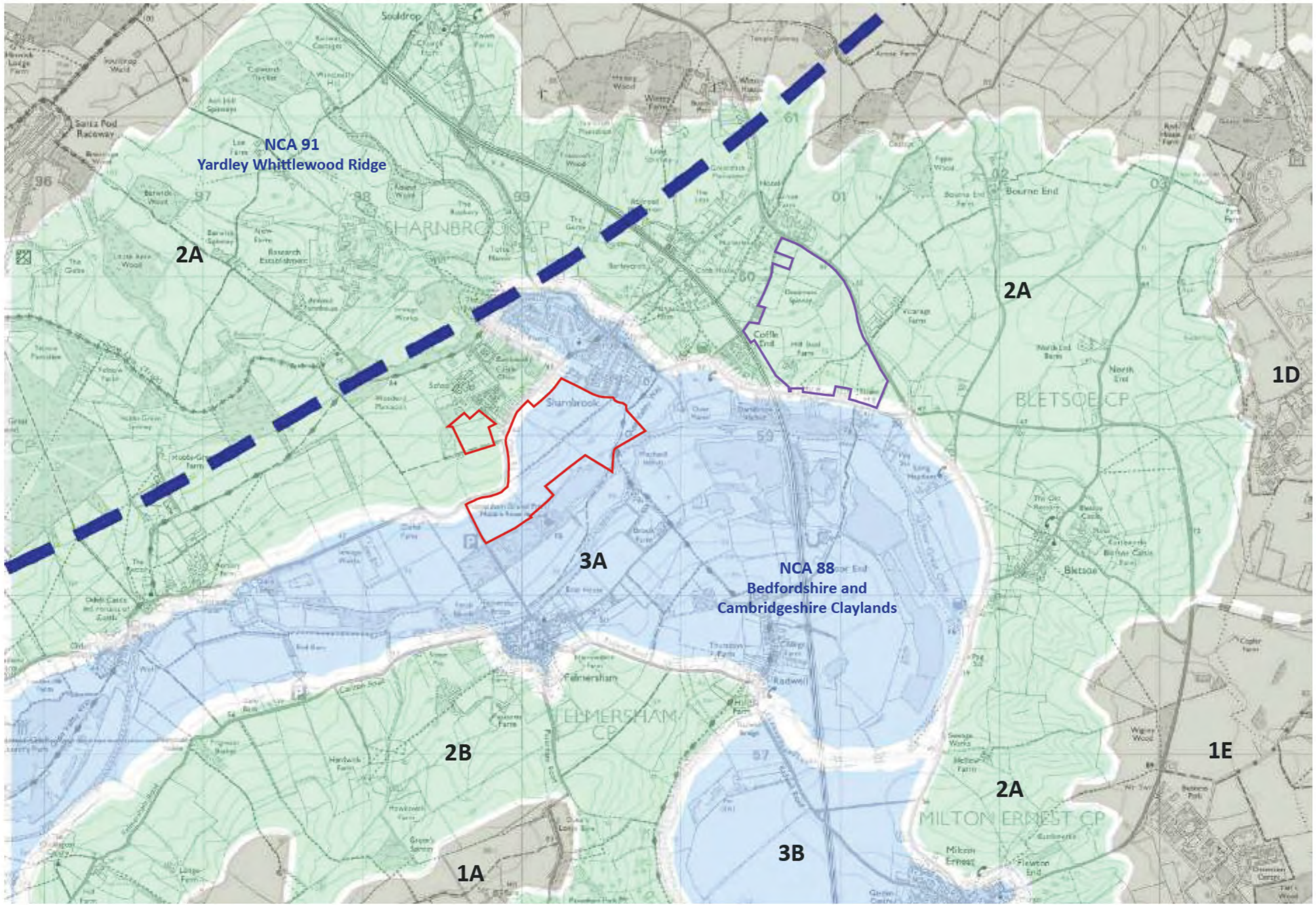
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Figure 2: Environmental Designations & Policy Areas

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Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	






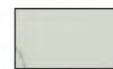


KEY

-  Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
-  Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

National Landscape Character

-  Natural England National Character Area
- NCA 91: Yardley Whittlewood Ridge
- NCA 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands

Bedford Borough Landscape Character

-  1. Clay Farmland
 - 1B: Riseley Clay Farmland
 - 1D: Thurleigh Clay Farmland
 - 1E: Renhold Clay Farmland
-  2. Wooded Wolds
 - 2A: Hinwick Wooded Wolds
 - 2B: Pavenham Wooded Wolds
-  3. Limestone Valley
 - 3A: Harrold – Great Ouse Limestone Valley
 - 3B: Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley

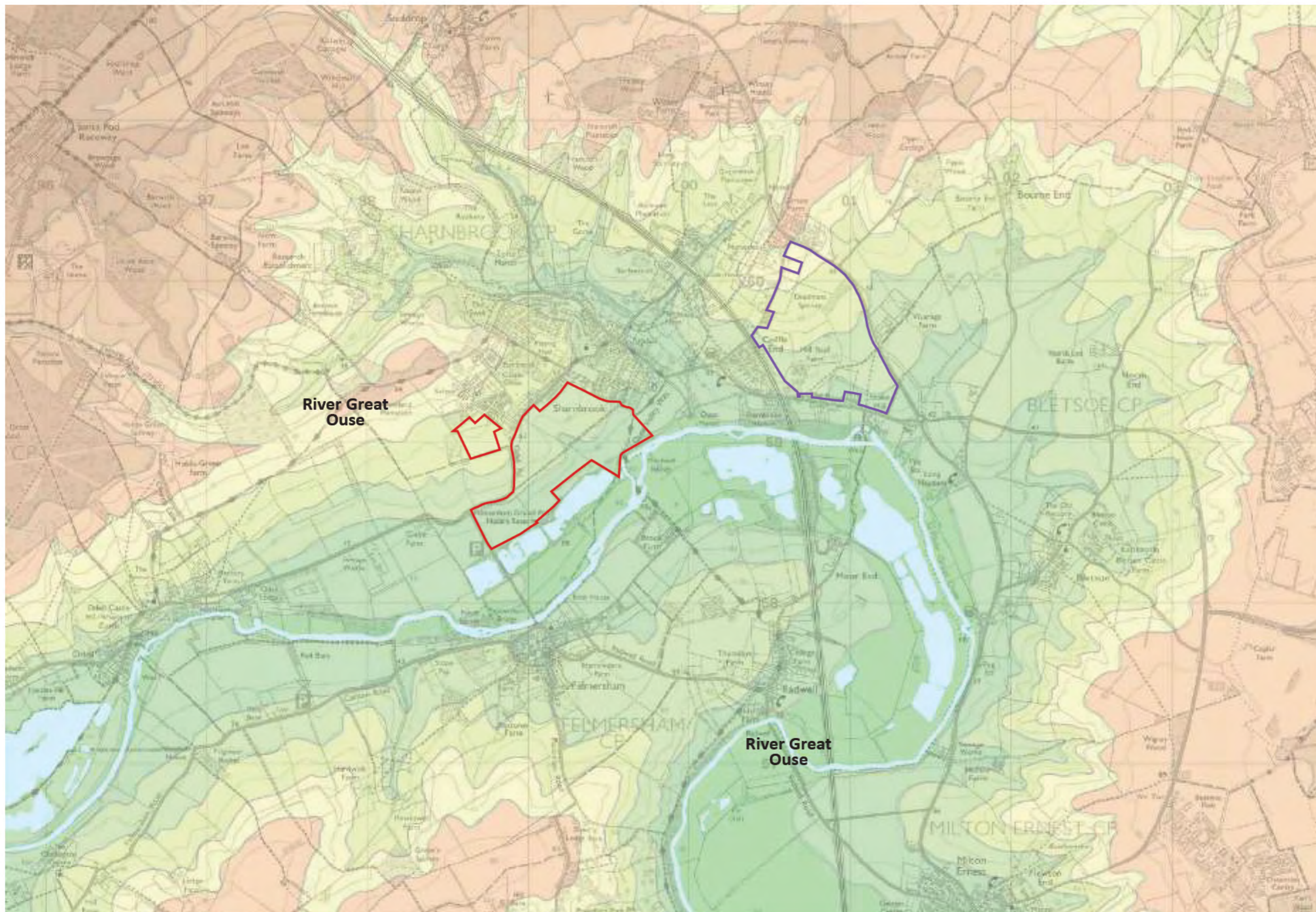
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Figure 3: Landscape Character Areas

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Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

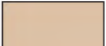

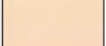





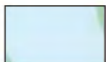




KEY

-  Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
-  Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

Topography

- Contours at 10m height intervals
-  100m
 -  90m
 -  80m
 -  70m
 -  60m
 -  50m
 -  40m
 -  30m
-  Main Watercourse / Waterbodies

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Figure 4: Topography

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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	








Sites 527 School Approach & 620 Land East of Odell Road






Site 901 Hill Farm, Mill Road

KEY

-  Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
-  Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

- Views**
-  Near Distance Views

Key Features

-  Topography / Slope
-  Important Landscape Features
(refer to plant notes)
-  Public Rights of Way
Refer to plan for reference number
BW: Bridleway
FP: Footpath

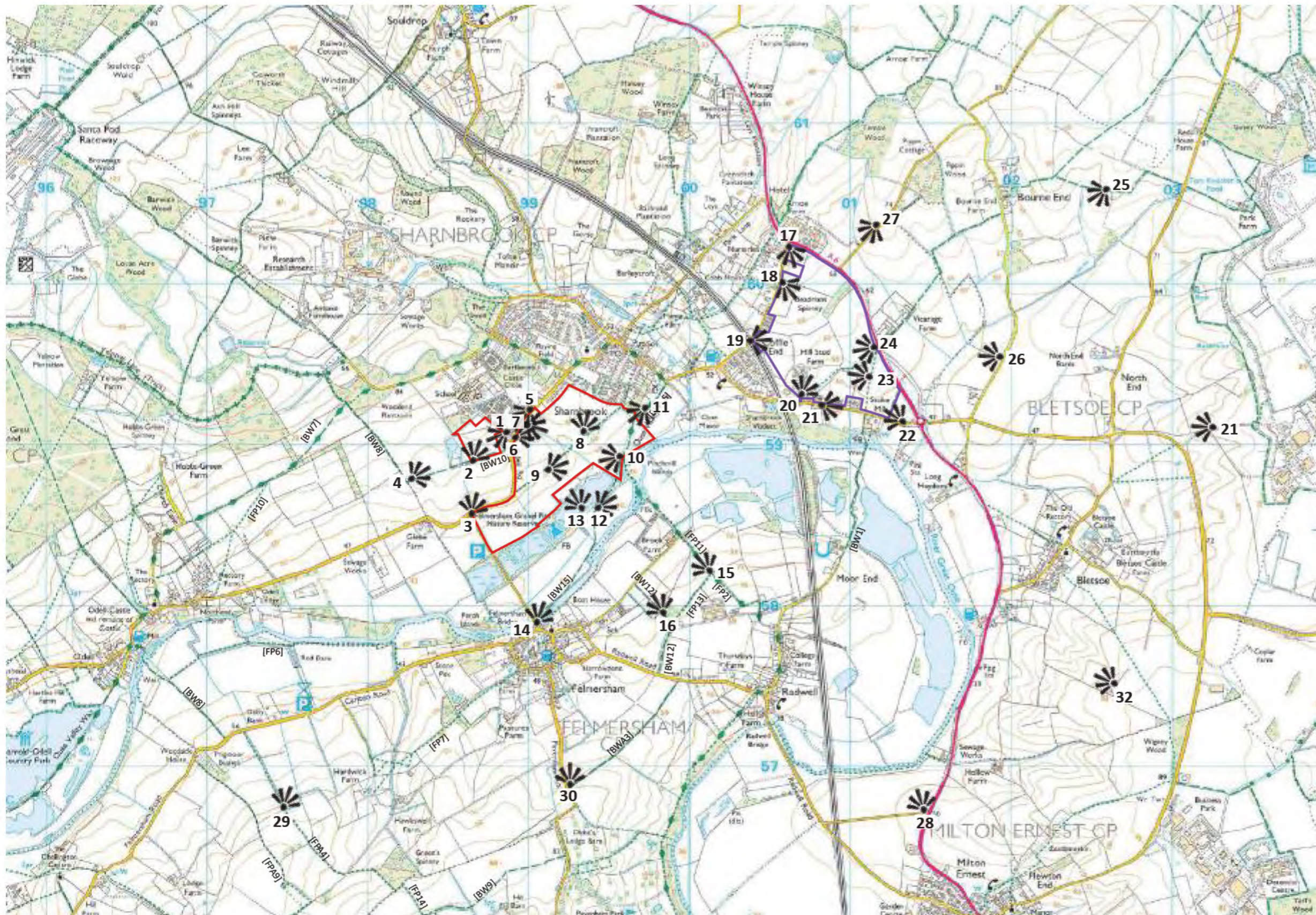


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Figure 5: Site Analysis

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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	






KEY

-  Site Boundary
Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook
(site reference 527 & 620)
-  Proposed Site Boundary
Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
(site reference 901)

Public Rights of Way

- Public Rights of Way
Refer to plan for reference number
BW: Bridleway
FP: Footpath

Representative Views

-  Photograph Location
Refer to Figures 7-21 for photographs

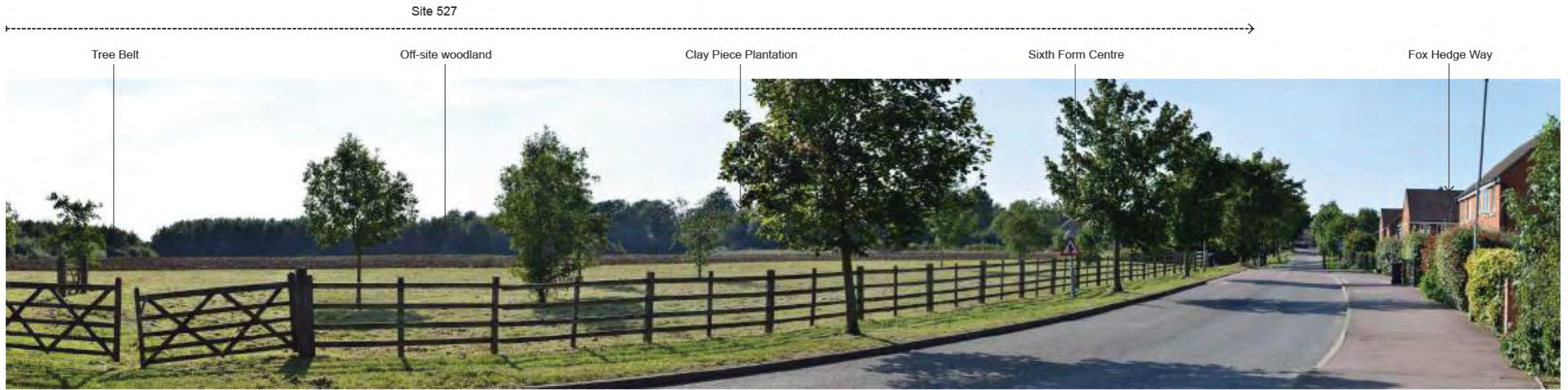
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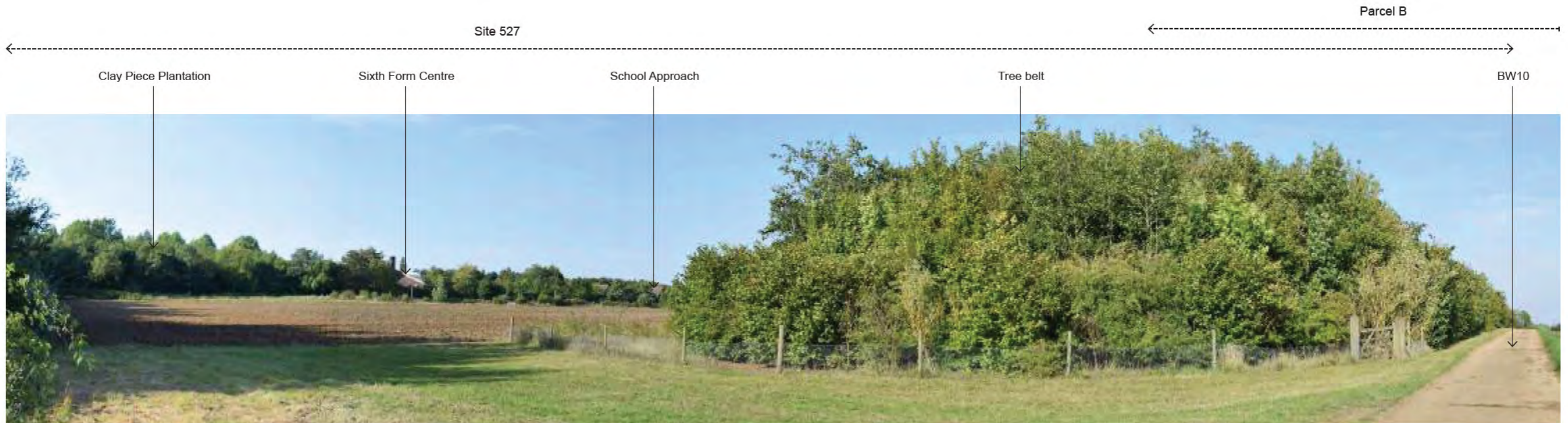
Figure 6: Location of Representative Views

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: 1:25 0000	Rev: .
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 1: School Approach adjacent to Site 527 - north west (foreground is Village Open Space)



View 2: Public Bridleway BW10 adjacent to Site 527 through gap in tree belt - north east

Figure 7: Photographs of Representative Views 1 & 2			
Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 3: Odell Road near junction with Felmersham Road - north east



View 4: Public Bridleway BW10 adjacent to field boundary - north east

Figure 8: Photographs of Representative Views 3 & 4			
Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

Site 620

Site 527
(beyond intervening development)



View 5: Odell Road - south west

Site 620



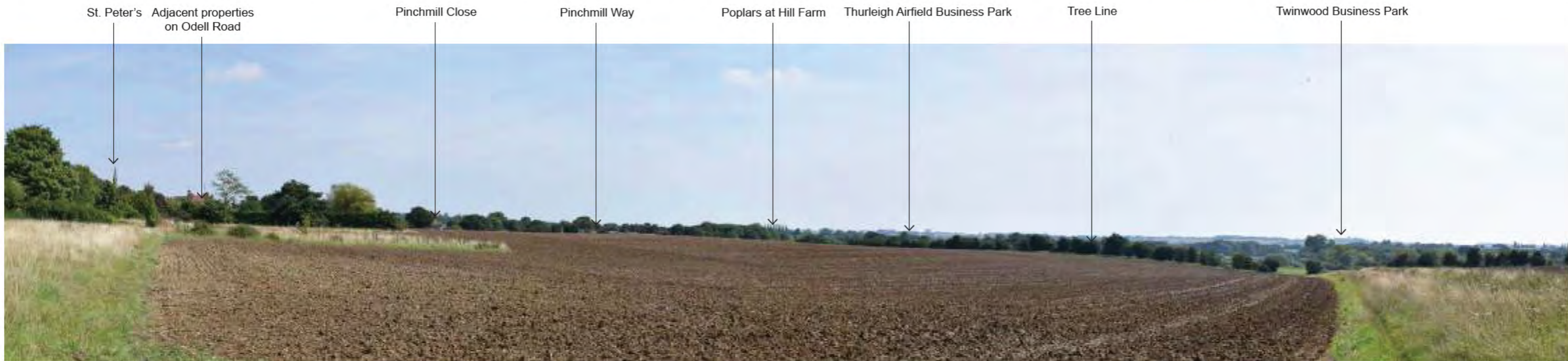
View 6: Odell Road - north east

Figure 9: Photographs of Representative Views 5 & 6

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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	



←----- Site 901 (beyond intervening vegetation) ----->
 ----- Site 620 ----->



View 7: Site 620 Public Footpath FP9 north of Tree Line - north east

Site 620



View 8: Site 620 Public Footpath FP9 north of Tree Line - north east

Figure 10: Photographs of Representative Views 7 & 8

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 9: Site 620 Public Footpath FP9 south of Tree Line - east



View 10: Site 620 Public Bridleway BW15 (Ouse Valley Way) adjacent to River Great Ouse - north west
Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan KV5

Figure 11: Photographs of Representative Views 9 & 10

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

Site 620 (Green Infrastructure to Foreground)



View 11: Public Bridleway BW15 (Ouse Valley Way) - south west

Site 620 (beyond vegetation)

Site 901



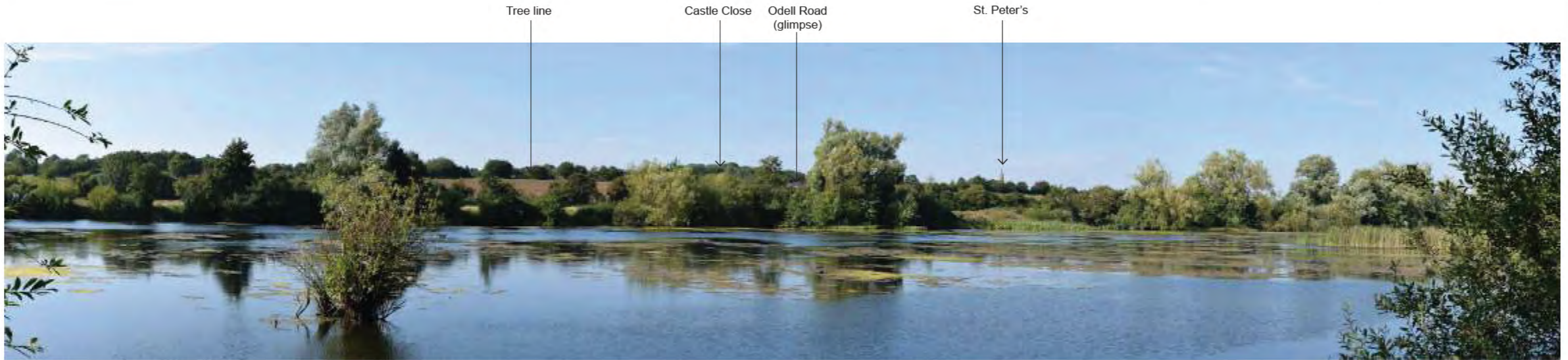
View 12: Public Bridleway BW15 south of Felmersham Gravel Pits - east

Figure 12: Photographs of Representative Views 11 & 12

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

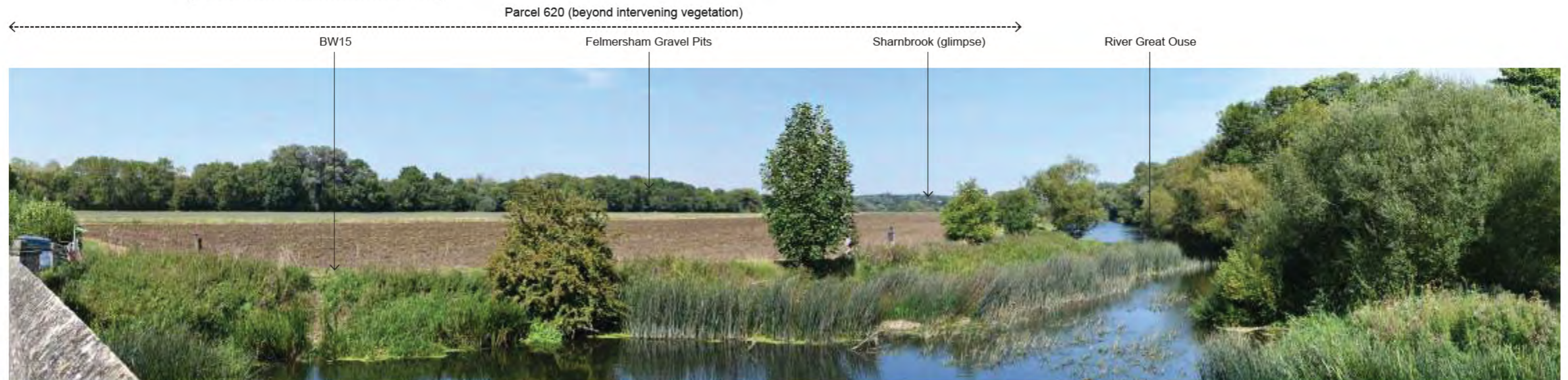


Site 620 (Green Infrastructure in Foreground)



View 13: Felmersham Gravel Pits southern side of lake - north west

Site 527 (approx beyond intervening vegetation)
 ←-----→

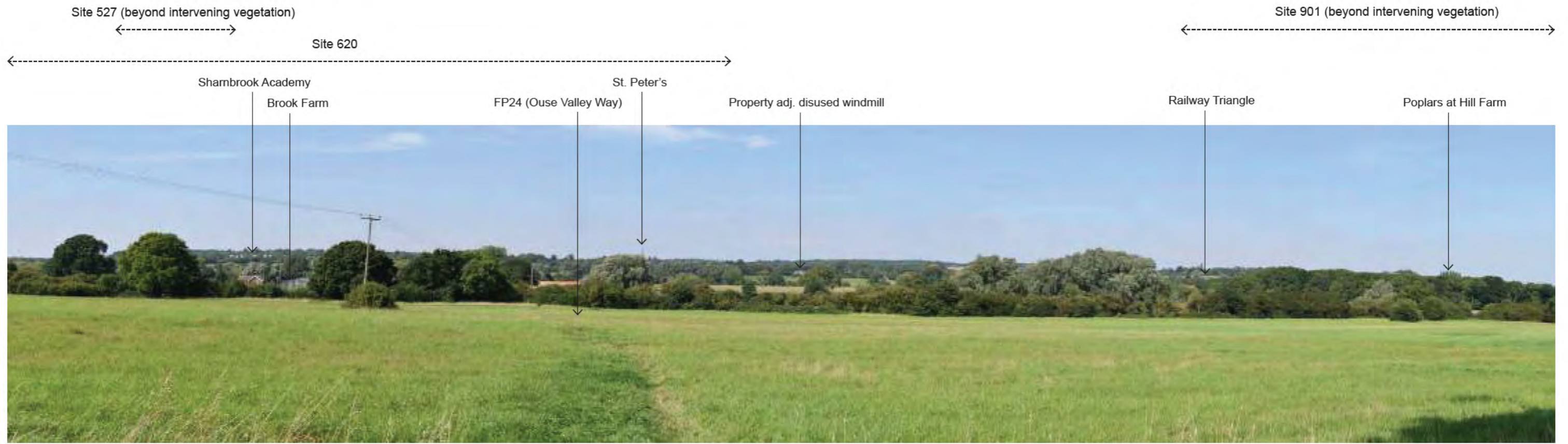


View 14: Felmersham Bridge over River Great Ouse - north east

Figure 13: Photographs of Representative View 13 & 14

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: .
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 15: Public Footpath FP22 (Ouse Valley Way) - north



View 16: Public Bridleway BW12 - north west

Figure 14: Photographs of Representative Views 15 & 16

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: .
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	



Site 901

Deadman's Spinney

Greenacres



View 17: Templars Way near junction with A6 - south

Site 901

Deadman's Spinney

Twinwood Business Park



View 18: Site 901 Templars Way at Field Gate - east

Figure 15: Photographs of Representative Views 17 & 18

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

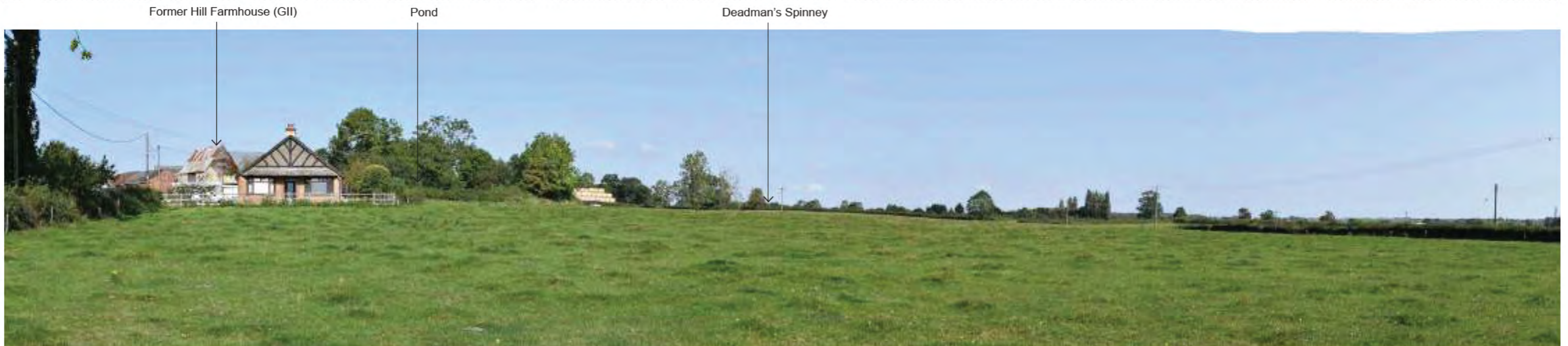


Site 901



View 19: Templars Way Railway Bridge - east

Site 901



View 20: Site 901 FP6 Hill Farm - north east

Figure 16: Photographs of Representative Views 19 & 20

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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	



Site 901

Avenue



View 21: Mill Road - east

Site 901

Templar's Way (glimpse)

Deadman's Spinney



View 22: Mill Road Village Gateway - north west

Figure 17: Photographs of Representative Views 21 & 22

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	



Site 901



View 23: Site 901 FP8 - west

Site 901



View 24: A6 Layby - west

Figure 18: Photographs of Representative View 23 & 24			
Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: .
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Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	



View 25: BW10 East of Bourne End

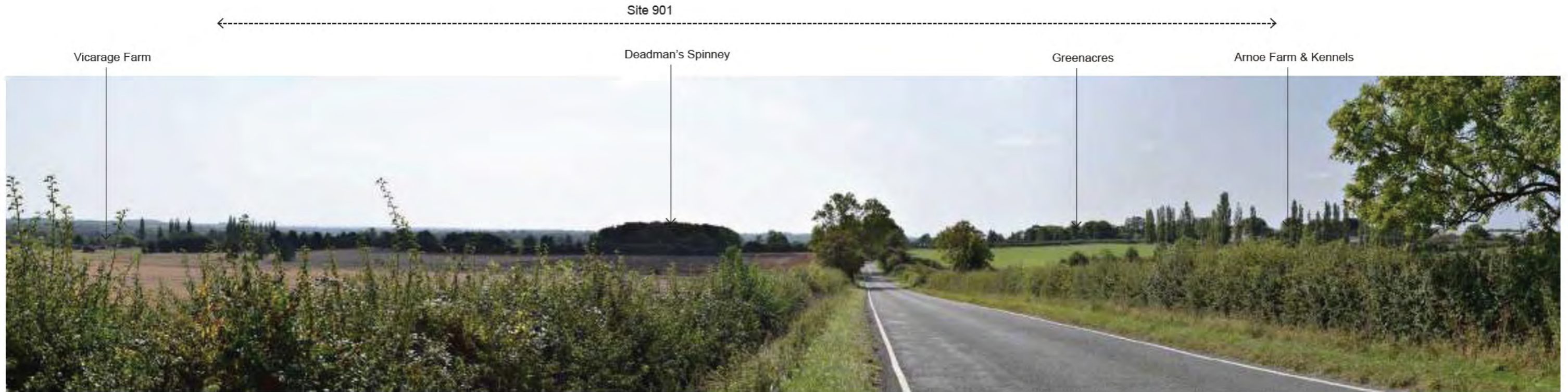


View 26: Bourne End Lane

Figure 18: Photographs of Representative Views 25 & 26

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Site: Land at Odell Road, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 27: Riseley Road approach A6 - south west



View 28: New Road, Milton Ernest - north

Figure 19: Photographs of Representative Views 27 & 28

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: .
Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 29: Public Footpath FP4 west of Hardwick Farm - north east



View 30: Public Bridleway BW3A near Pavenham Road through gap in hedgerow - north

Figure 20: Photographs of Representative Views 29 & 30

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Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	





View 31: Approach to Thurleigh Airfield Business Park - west



View 32: FP16 West of Wigney Wood - north west

Figure 21: Photographs of Representative Views 31 & 32

Drawn by: REB	Date: Oct 2020	Scale: NTS	Rev: -
Client: Bedfordia Developments The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust &		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
Site: Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire		Tel: 01268 711021 team@ses-eco.co.uk	

