



Reference: BE5229/7

Version: Final

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Issued: January 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The land which is subject of the development proposals set out in this Vision Statement is in the ownership of Bedfordshire Charitable Trust (BCT).

The land is being promoted on behalf of BCT by Bedfordia Property.

BCT's aims are to support those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability or in financial hardship or other disadvantage in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire

This Vision Statement seeks to articulate a vision for delivering the development strategy set out in the emerging Bedford Local Plan 2030 for development at Sharnbrook.

The emerging Local Plan identifies Sharnbrook as a strategic rural growth point in reflection of its role as a key service centre. The emerging Plan proposes the development of at least 500 dwellings at Sharnbrook with associated supporting infrastructure. The site selection process has been devolved to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and this will be prepared to comply with the Local Plan's requirements.

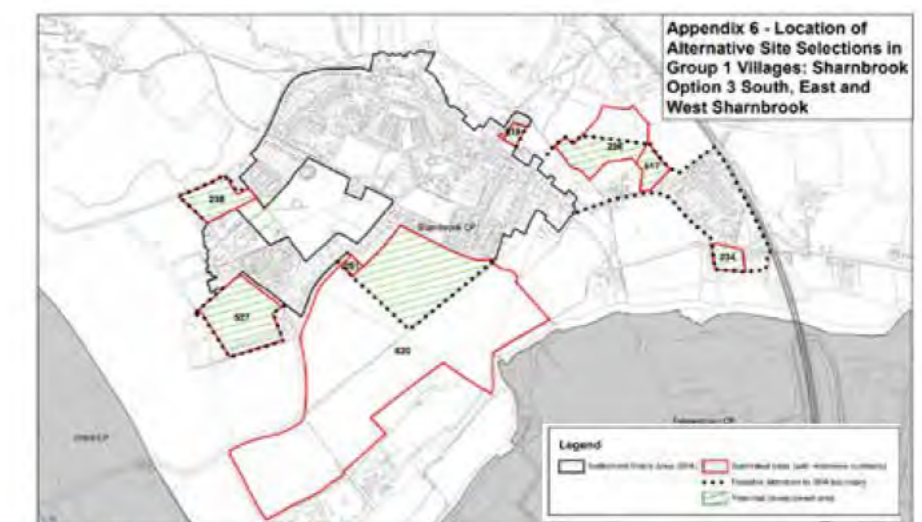
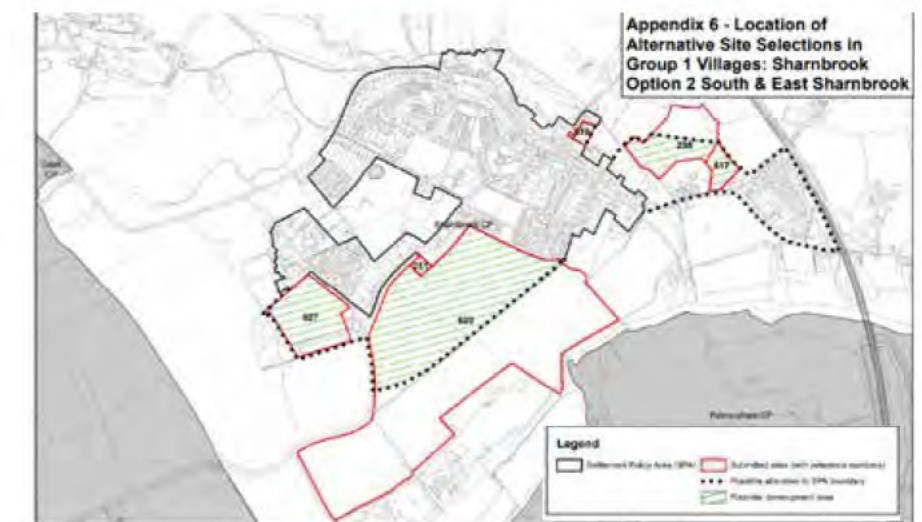
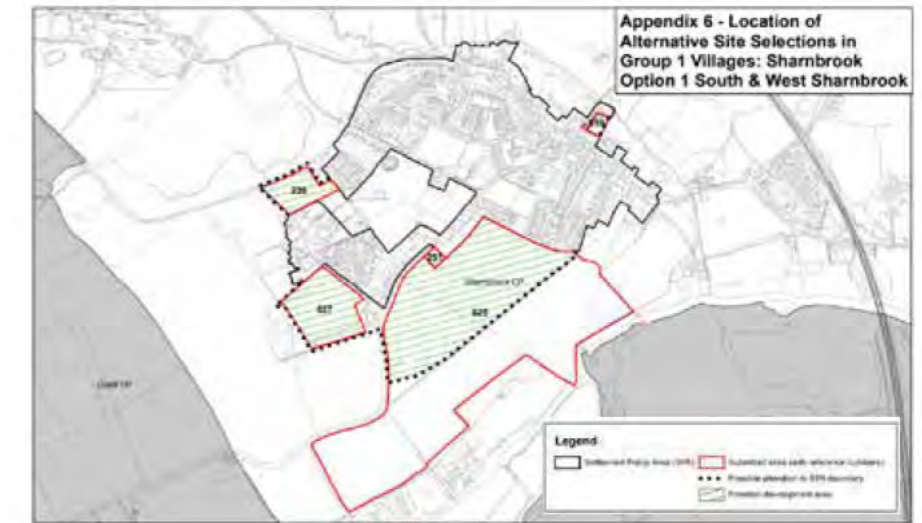
BCT's land, physically well related to the village centre, offers the potential to deliver sustainably the entire allocation of approximately 500 new homes with associated services and infrastructure. The land can also deliver a range of greenspaces including formal and informal open space and a riverside country park and extension to the nature reserve, new local retail and community facilities, provision of land for a new primary school, highway improvements and a revised road layout incorporating traffic calming and provision of land for a new school transport and pupil drop-off point.

An alternative smaller scale development option is also advanced, providing for approximately 100 dwellings with ancillary greenspace and with land for the school transport and pupil drop-off, if required.

THE VISION

The vision is to deliver a sustainable, attractive, mixed use residential development, which benefits from its proximity to key services and facilities in Sharnbrook and provides substantial benefits, including land for leisure, recreation and ecology purposes, land for a new primary school, retail and GP surgery opportunities and measures to relieve transport pressures associated with Sharnbrook Academy.

The development would fulfil the emerging Plan's requirements and the single land ownership guarantees its delivery, including the range of planning benefits it offers.



Bedford Borough Council preferred options



image source Google Earth

Site's aerial view

2. SITE CONTEXT

WIDER CONTEXT

The two land parcels proposed are identified as **Land to the East of Odell Road** and **Land at School Approach** respectively. Both parcels were promoted for development throughout preparation of the Bedford Local Plan 2030.

Together, the two land parcels would deliver a sustainable development as illustrated within the indicative Masterplan.

The potential of the parcels was brought to the attention of the Inspectors overseeing the examination of the emerging Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 for the purposes of a mixed use, residential-led development.

We have shown that together the parcels could provide for circa 500 dwellings with the ancillary supporting development and benefits set out above.

The land was recognised in the 'preferred options for potential development' following site assessment work undertaken by Bedford Borough Council and published for consultation in 2017. This was in principle carried through in the strategy of the examination drafts of the Plan and the land offers the potential to deliver the requirements for sustainable development in Sharnbrook.



image source Google Earth

Wider Context Plan



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2019

image source Google Earth

Wider Context Plan - showing urban areas and waterways

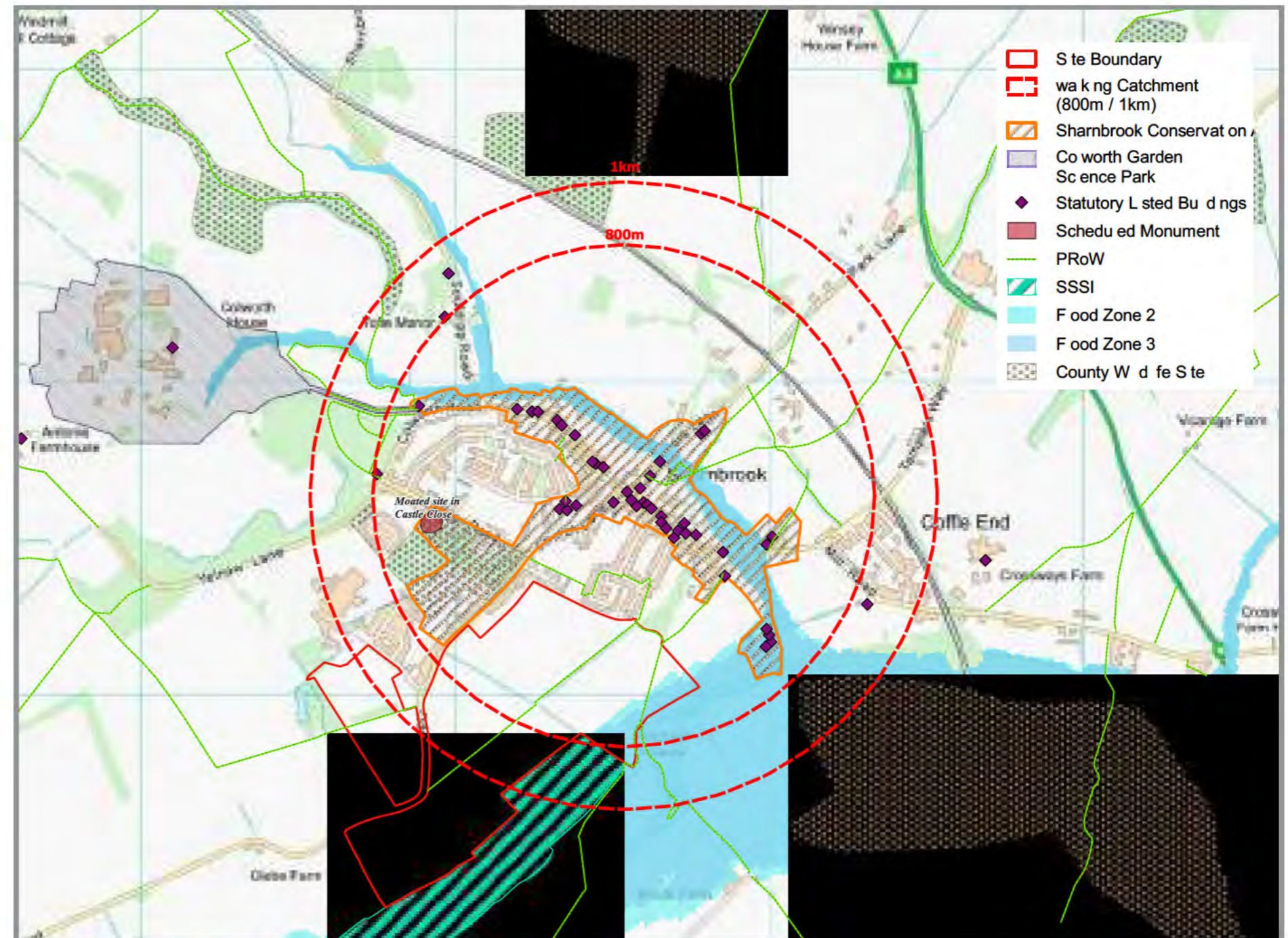
LOCAL CONTEXT AND CONNECTIVITY

A high level review of the surrounding highway network has been undertaken. The study has considered transport constraints, the accessibility of local facilities and vehicular permeability for the masterplan site. The review has demonstrated that the site is well connected to its immediate and wider contexts.

Local Context Constraints

At the local level, the wider site is contained by:

- Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest to the south-west;
- Open countryside; and
- The built form of Sharnbrook which encloses the land's northern and eastern edges.



Constraints Plan - Wider Context

Local Facilities

Many of the local facilities offered in Sharnbrook are situated within 10 minutes walk of the masterplan site. These include leisure, children’s play areas, allotments, green public open space, shops , pubs and schools.

Access to these facilities can be gained via the network of existing Public Rights of Way, as well as via Odell Road, leading on to Sharnbrook’s High Street.

Unlike other, less well-related options, which are divorced from the village core and facilities, both parcels within the masterplan site provide relatively easy access to the village core using continuous existing pedestrian footways, with additional opportunities for new footways and pedestrian connections to further improve connectivity.

A key asset of the BCT’s land is its proximity to the heart of Sharnbrook. The masterplan is supported by a more detailed assessment it’s sustainability and this generally reflects Bedford Borough Council’s findings, focusing recommendations on sites within or near existing settlement boundaries. This proximity is recognised as supporting key plan-making objectives for infrastructure delivery, promoting opportunities for leisure and recreation and meeting a range of housing needs including affordable housing and bungalows.

The delivery of sustainably located opportunities, incorporating measures to deliver new and upgraded community facilities, is essential to maintain and enhance Sharnbrook’s role as a Key Service Centre, providing as it does for the needs of a wider rural area.

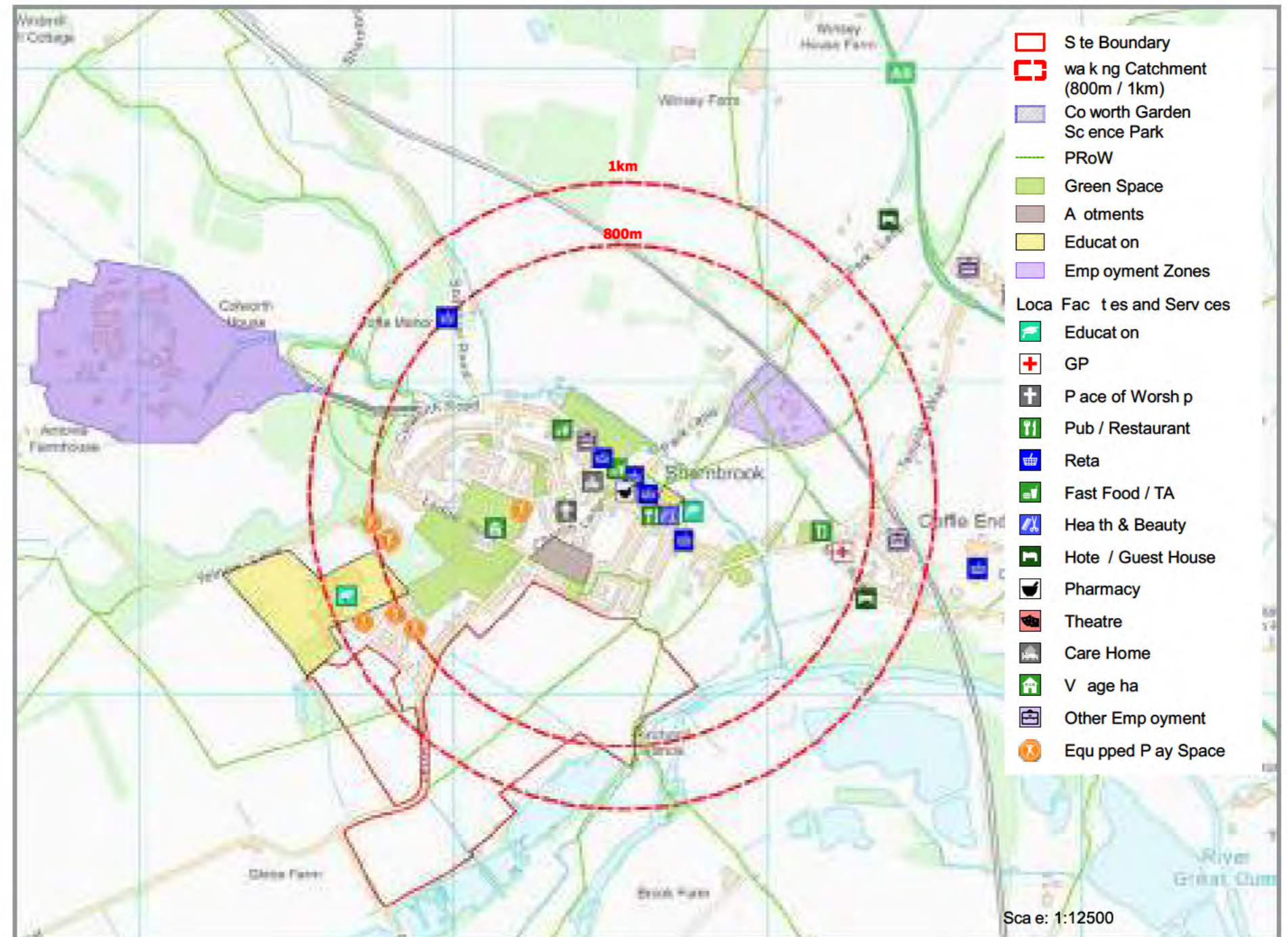
Compared to other locations in Bedford Borough, Sharnbrook benefits from generous provision of public open space, allotments and sports facilities. Its role in providing these helps to address deficits in the surrounding rural area. Closer assessment demonstrates that this provision is concentrated towards the west of the village and relates physically to key assets such as the High Street, Sharnbrook Academy and other recent development.

The masterplan site is well-located to these facilities and is also capable of delivering opportunities for open space and recreation in excess of local policy requirements. This site will be delivered in a manner that meets needs generated by the new development and can address shortfalls identified in the Borough Council’s own evidence for Parks, Outdoor Sports and Natural Play Areas alongside providing improvements to access to the wider countryside.

Opportunities to facilitate green links for walking and cycling within the development, alongside opportunities to open additional connections via engagement with Bedford Borough Council, will further complement and enhance the sustainability of this location.

Facility / Amenity	Distance from Site Frontage
Odell Road Bus Stops	50m/450m
Sharnbrook Academy School	200m
Sharnbrook Village Hall	400m
Co-op Convenience Store	600m
Public House	600m
Veterinary Clinic	600m
Sharnbrook Lower School	700m

Local Facilities Distances Chart



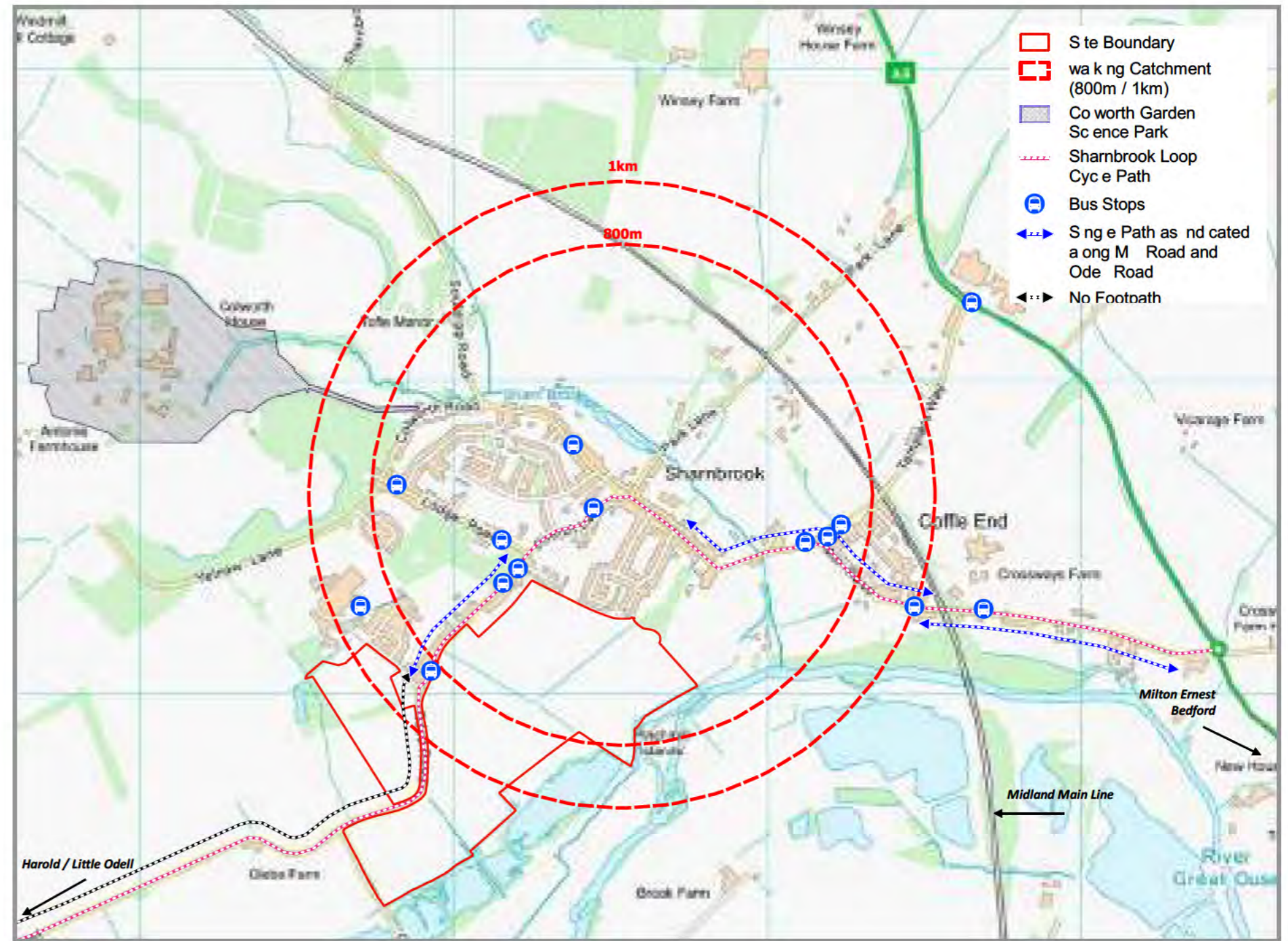
Local Facilities Plan

Transport Links

Located approximately 2km to the west of the A6, the masterplan site benefits from good vehicular links to major destinations such as Bedford, Rushden and Kettering.

Public transport in the area offers a regular bus service connecting with these destinations. The nearest bus stop is located on Odell Road, approximately 57m north of the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout.

Opportunities for cycling along Odell Road, connecting the A6 to the east and other settlements to the west, offer an additional mode of movement, contributing to the sustainability of the location of the Masterplan site.



Transport Links

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

SITE DESCRIPTION

The masterplan site lies immediately to the west/south-west of established areas of housing and comprises two land parcels which are outlined in red, both of which are in the ownership of the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust.

The smaller of the two land parcels extends to 9.36 hectares and lies to the west of School Approach, running parallel with an existing area of housing. This smaller land parcel is contained by the 6th Form building of Sharnbrook Academy and its associated car parking area to the north, and School Approach and Odell Road to the east. To the north, west and south the parcel is contained by areas of woodland and a tree belt.

A Public Right of Way (BW10) runs along the southern edge of the tree belt across the small parcel, providing links to an extensive network of Public Rights of Way, and the recreational route of The Ouse Valley Way.

The larger land parcel of 47.06 hectares lies to the south-east of Odell Road and consists of a number of arable fields and grassland, extending southward to the Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve and SSSI and towards the River Great Ouse. This provides an area of wetland and meadows created from restored gravel pits.

There has been engagement with Natural England and Bedford Borough Council, given the proximity to the SSSI and the potential relationship with new development. It has been concluded, that subject to appropriate mitigation the scheme can be sustainably delivered, as reflected in a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal..

A series of mature hedgerows divide the fields and the land is crossed from east to west by a Public Right of Way (FP 9). A short stretch of The Ouse Valley Way, an important recreational route in the area, passes through the south-eastern corner of this parcel.

SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs shown opposite illustrate key physical features within and around the two parcels of the Masterplan site.

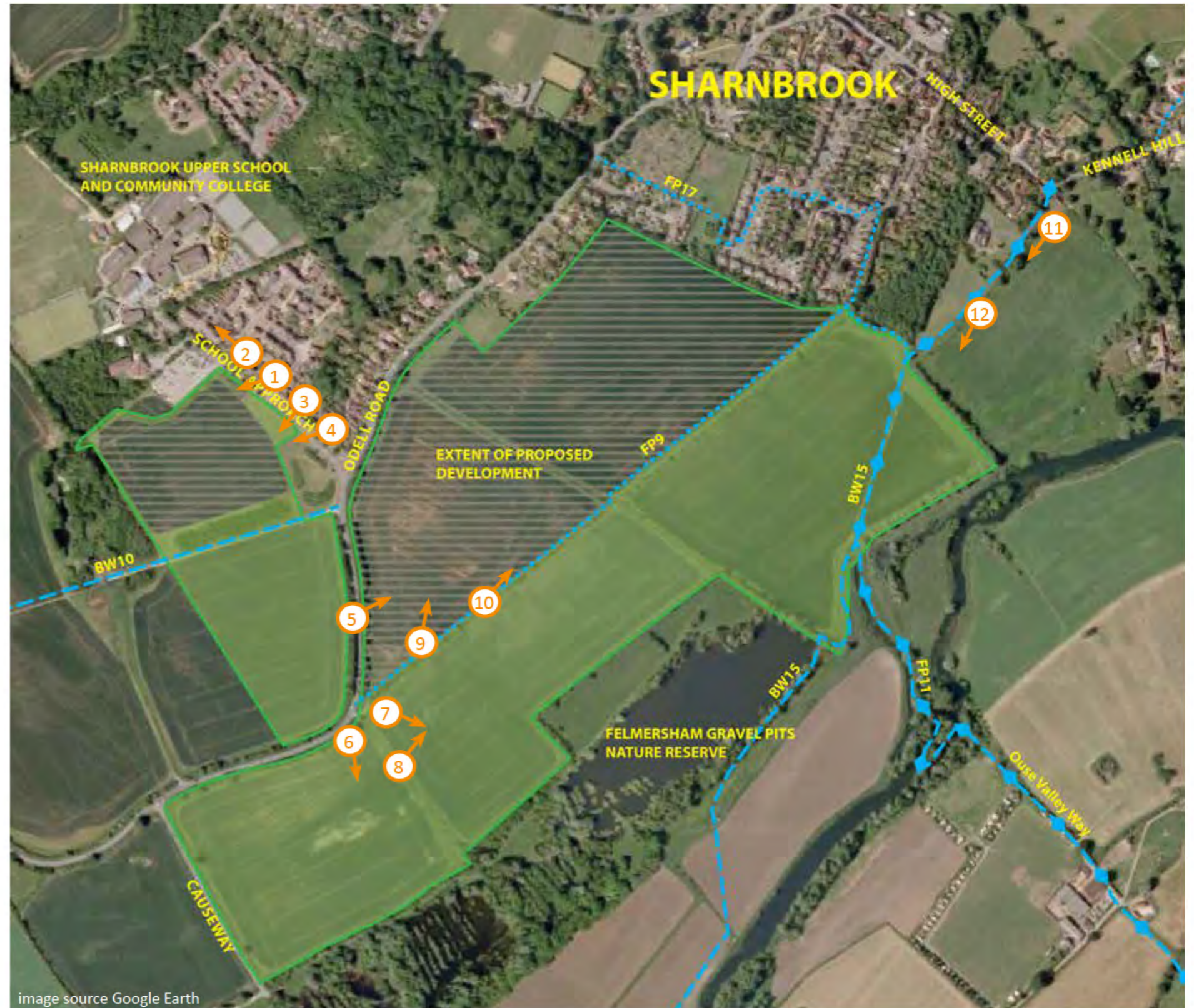


image source Google Earth
Key Plan for Photographs



View from the site's eastern edge towards north-west



View from the School Approach across the green open space, towards west



View from the Public Right of Way towards south-east, looking at the site's slope and the northern edge of Felmersham Gravel Pits Site SSSI



View from the Public Right of Way to the north-east, looking at Sharnbrook settlement edge and the spire of the Parish Church of St Peter



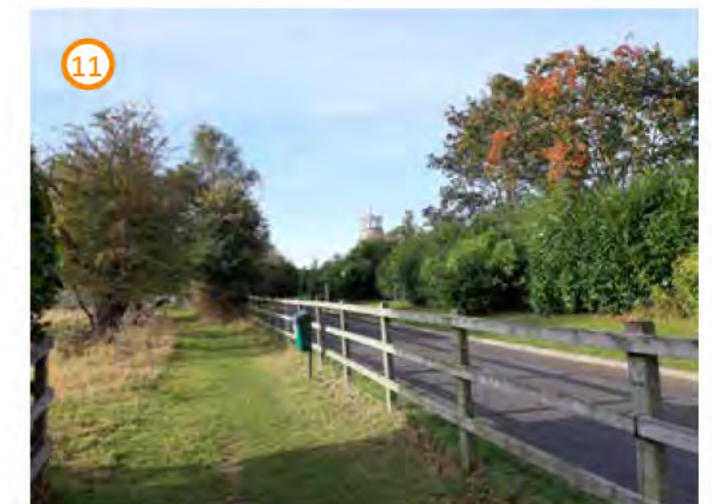
View along School Approach towards north



View from Odell Road towards east, with Sharnbrook built-up area in the background



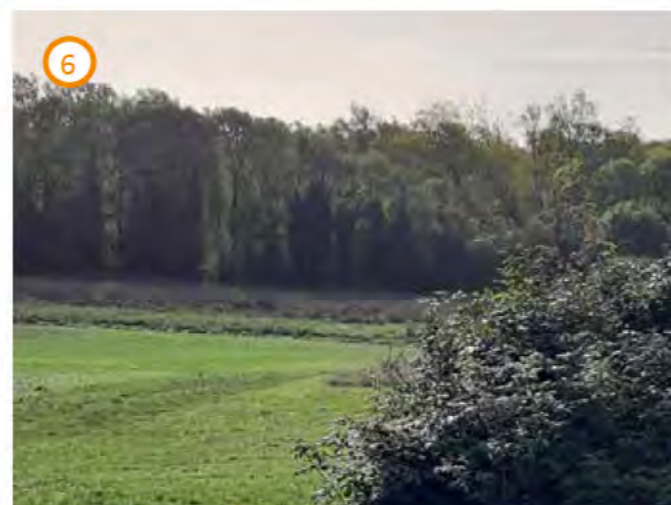
View eastwards along the hedgerow which defines the path of the Public Right of Way



View from Ouse Valley Way recreational route westward toward the site, with the disused windmill on the right



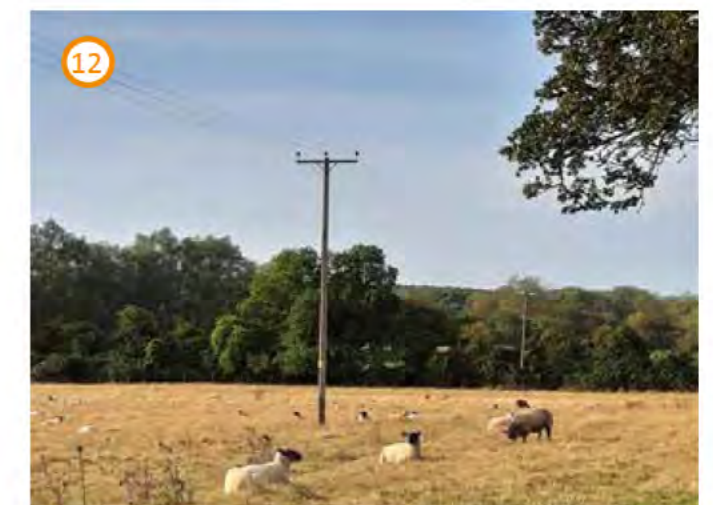
View from School Approach across the site towards west



View from the Public Right of Way towards south-west, looking at the northern edge of Felmersham Gravel Pits Site SSSI



View from the Public Right of Way to the north-east, towards the edge of Sharnbrook's built-up area



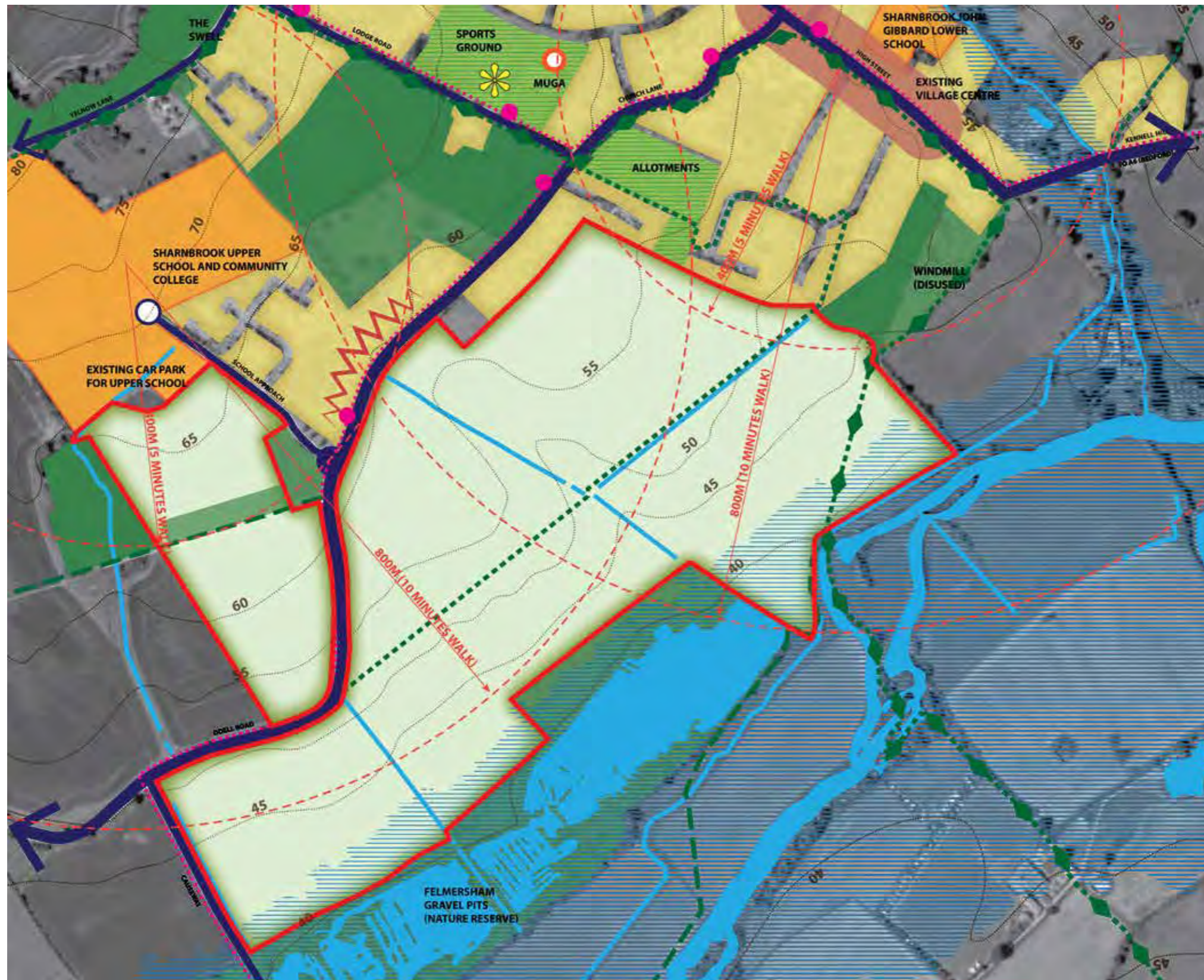
View from Ouse Valley Way recreational route to the south-west toward the site, with the site's structural planting in the background

4. SITE APPRAISALS

OPPORTUNITIES OF THE SITE LOCATION

The design concepts for the wider masterplan site consider the following opportunities:

- Close proximity to the centre of the village, its shops and other services and to existing community facilities and green space, such as the village hall, sports ground, allotments and high street;
- Opportunities for further biodiversity enhancement in the form of habitat creation on-site, e.g. wildlife ponds; and for further enhancement of visitor information and engagement, e.g. wardening, footpath way markers and information boards at key access points;
- Proximity to the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI and opportunities to enhance and extend the area of ecological interest and provide a wider setting for this together with a publicly accessible riverside park and other green space;
- Mitigate existing and future recreational pressure on the SSSI through delivery of new open space and green infrastructure alongside the implementation of active management to reduce conflict between users of the land, including enhancing the effectiveness of existing measures such as grazing cattle and improving ecological connectivity;
- Existing Public Rights of Way within and around the two parcels provide an opportunity for enhanced pedestrian connectivity in the area, and to facilities in Sharnbrook;
- Potential additional pedestrian link from the development eastwards towards the existing public open space and allotments off Pinchmill Way providing an opportunity to enhance the scheme's connectivity to existing amenities and facilities within Sharnbrook, including the allotments area, the village hall with the associated recreation grounds and Sharnbrook village centre;
- Provision of new community facilities, including a land for a new primary school, to serve both new and existing communities;
- Create an alternative main vehicular route to serve the new development and relieve the traffic pressures on the existing Odell Road near Sharnbrook Academy;
- Provide improved traffic management for school buses serving Sharnbrook Academy and arrangements for dedicated safe and convenient pupil drop-off;
- Utilise and enhance the existing bus routes and encourage use of sustainable modes of transport;
- Provide a range of housing to meet local needs, including affordable housing, bungalows for elderly residents, self-build and a range of family housing;
- Identify sustainably located land for a mixed-use local centre with opportunities for new convenience retail and GP Practice to assist traffic management in the village centre; and
- Promote a distinctive and positive image on arrival to Sharnbrook.



- site boundary
- existing footpath
- existing bridleway
- existing recreational route
- existing road/roundabout
- existing congestion/noise
- existing bus route / bus stop
- existing drainage ditch
- 45 topographic contour line
- extent of flood zones 2 and 3
- existing woodland
- existing green POS
- existing formal POS
- existing settlement
- existing school
- existing local centre / retail
- existing village hall
- existing equipped children's play area

Constraints & Opportunities Plan

5. ILLUSTRATIVE MASTER PLAN

DESIGN CONCEPT

The Masterplan for BCT's land is the culmination of a process involving preliminary technical work and 'options testing' in consultation with key stakeholders.

The main principle of the design concept is the delivery of a sustainable, integrated development form that links with the existing built form to benefit from existing facilities and provides additional leisure, educational, retail and care/medical facilities for new and existing residents, while providing meaningful alternatives to pressures on the highway network.

Key challenges in exploring design options included addressing current highways constraints in relation to Sharnbrook Academy, and the potential siting of a new primary school within the land East of Odell Road.

An additional key consideration is safeguarding and enhancing the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI, located along the southern boundary of the land East of Odell Road, by providing appropriate transition zones and ecological mitigation.

The design concept evolved to include two main alternatives for the purpose of public consultation and engagement with the Parish Council.

The first option (see Alternative 'A') consists of a larger site area, extending from the southern edge of Sharnbrook's built-up area. This indicative Masterplan encompasses both parcels of land previously described. The second option (see Alternative 'B') covers only the smaller land parcel - from the southern edge of Sharnbrook Academy up to Odell Road (referred to as 'Land off School Approach').

ALTERNATIVE 'A'

Utilising both parcels of land proposed will enable the delivery of circa 500 dwellings, land for a new primary school, formal leisure, sports and play facilities, an extensive green space network providing areas of public open space and a safe and convenient drop-off facility for Sharnbrook Academy.

Land is identified for a mixed-use local centre/community facility to support demand for local convenience retail and relocation of GP surgery facilities, if required.

The transport solutions proposed as part of the scheme play an important role in the design concept.

As part of the development of the larger parcel, it is proposed that a link road is provided through the Land East of Odell Road, which would divert non-school related traffic (through-traffic and that generated by the proposed development) away from the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout. This would allow through-traffic to bypass any school related traffic during peak periods. Providing such a road would minimise the impact at the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout and help ease existing congestion problems.

A dedicated drop-off facility is proposed within the small parcel, which would assist with segregating pedestrian and vehicular activity. This would relocate the majority of drop-off activity further south from Sharnbrook Academy, and ensure that the primary activity at the northern end of School Approach is pedestrian only with minimal vehicle activity.

Proposed footpaths provide support for the existing network of Public Rights of Way, enhancing the area's permeability and connecting the formal recreation zone at the south with the proposed mixed-use local centre, primary school and children's play area, via a series of interlinked green corridors.

An additional potential pedestrian link extends eastwards from the proposed link road to the site's eastern boundary, connecting the development with the existing public open space and the centre of Sharnbrook village further beyond. This link, however, is subject to further engagement with Bedford Borough Council.

The proposed drainage strategy for the scheme includes a series of attenuation basins at the south of the large land parcel, incorporated into the informal open spaces managed for ecology and recreation. The basins also serve as amenity features, as well as enhancing biodiversity. Detailed design of these features, their size and exact location, are subject to further surveys and specialist studies.

The Masterplan incorporates substantial opportunities for mitigation of any recreational and water quality impacts. New and existing residents will be encouraged to utilise the new high quality multi-functional green infrastructure. This will be supported through contributions to access management off-site by maintenance of the footpath and bridleway network and access points in the SSSI, alongside the use of visitor information through footpath way markers, information boards, as appropriate and advised by the SSSI managers.

Options for the potential location of the Primary School were discussed with stakeholders, including the Sharnbrook Academy Federation. The proposed location on land East of Odell Road accommodates best-practice guidelines including requirements for open play and landscaping.

This provides maximum flexibility alongside a sustainable location well-related to the new development and existing village residents. Opportunities for walking and cycling and access to the proposed drop-off facility would link to the proposed Primary School site.

An additional alternative was explored as part of the design development, where the proposed school is located in the small, western land parcel, adjacent to the existing Sharnbrook Academy. This was considered to provide less flexibility and would limit the opportunity for other benefits of the Masterplan, including additional parking for sixth-form students at Sharnbrook Academy, landscaping and the ability of the Academy to upgrade its own facilities in the future.



Illustrative Master Plan - Alternative 'A'

ALTERNATIVE 'B'

The Proposals in alternative 'B' are confined to the smaller land parcel located to the south of Sharnbrook Academy. It is consistent with the design proposals for this area in alternative 'A', including the provision of drop-off facilities for the existing school, but offers a residential-only scheme.

The scheme proposed under Alternative B would be capable of early delivery. This alternative also demonstrates the suitability for development at Land off School Approach and is served by the existing highways arrangement. This option was also previously recommended as part of preferred options identified by Bedford Borough Council.

Meeting part of the requirement for growth on Land at School Approach, as illustrated in 'Alternative B', would be a suitable, available and achievable option for development if the Steering Group opted to pursue a dispersed strategy for growth. This Vision Document recognises that this would represent a departure from previous statements by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to recognise the benefits of supporting options for larger-scale development.

The capacity for the development in this alternative is circa 100 dwellings with associated landscaping and an equipped children's play area.



Illustrative Master Plan - Alternative 'B'

6. CONCLUSIONS

This Vision Document demonstrates that a development of the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust's land at Sharnbrook, well-related to the settlements existing built-up area, would deliver a meaningful addition of amenities, community and educational facilities and opportunities for leisure and recreation to new and existing residents.

The proposals will provide significant betterment to the highways network. Subject to further engagement and detailed assessment, it is deemed that the land could tie into existing highway infrastructure and that safe and suitable access could be delivered.

Two principal design options were explored. The first option covers a larger area and incorporates two land parcels with a capacity of circa 500 dwellings, land for a primary school, land for a mixed-use local centre and extensive green amenity space as a riverside park, to be managed as an area for ecological mitigation and enhancement. An additional, 'reduced' scale option consists of the smaller land parcel alone, with a capacity for circa 100 dwellings and associated landscaping.

We look forward to further opportunities for public consultation and engagement with the Parish Council based on the two broad options proposed.



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