



For and on behalf of
Bedfordia Property and the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust

**BEDFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040 –
DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY OPTIONS AND DRAFT POLICIES CONSULTATION**

**Land at School Approach and Land east of Odell Road, Sharnbrook ('Stoneyfields')
(ID: 918 / ID: 932)**

**Prepared by
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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF REPRESENTATIONS

- 1.1 These representations to the ‘Bedford Local Plan 2040 – Draft Plan Strategy Options and Draft Policies (Regulation 18) Consultation’ have been prepared by the DLP Planning Ltd (DLP) acting on behalf of the Bedfordshire Charitable Trust and Bedfordia Property.
- 1.2 Our clients’ interests in Land at Sharnbrook known as ‘Stoneyfields’ have been extensively promoted over several years, commencing in 2014 at the outset of preparation of the current Bedford Local Plan 2030 and subsequently as part of the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan. Details were re-submitted to the Council as part of the Summer 2020 Call for Sites Consultation.
- 1.3 The land includes Land South of Odell Road (Site A/ ID: 918) and Land at School Approach (Site B/ ID: 932) referenced accordingly within the Council’s emerging site assessment process. These sites have previously both been comprehensively analysed as part of the Borough Council’s ‘Site Assessments and Potential Options for Allocation’ Report (April 2017), where both were identified as suitable allocation options for Sharnbrook.
- 1.4 This Report addresses the Council’s consultation proposals and identifies that the Council’s Preferred Strategy Options if pursued will not provide the basis for a sound or legally compliant strategy. In order to satisfy the requirements for immediate review, including addressing the increase in housing need and the area’s wider priorities, a ‘hybrid’ strategy must be pursued to avoid an effective embargo on further ‘village-related’ outside of the A421 corridor.
- 1.5 Modifications are suggested to enable preparation of a version of the draft Local Plan 2040 that addresses the issues identified, ahead of further consultation and subsequent Submission and Examination.
- 1.6 This Report, which should be read alongside any supporting documents and appendices referred to, addresses our instructions to cover the following topics:
- **Section 2** provides a background to the Local Plan Review and its relationship to national policy and other material considerations
 - **Section 3** provides representations on the overarching Vision, Objectives and Strategy Options subject to consultation
 - **Section 4** summarises analysis of the Council’s draft Sustainability Appraisal

including inconsistencies with the testing of Preferred Options and the reasons to identify a 'hybrid' approach as an appropriate strategy to adopt

- **Section 5** summarises why the Council's proposed 'stepped approach' is incapable of satisfying national policy and guidance, having regard to local evidence of supply
- **Section 6** provides further relevant observations on the Council's Preferred Policy Option Proposals and emerging evidence base
- **Section 7** comprises our review of the Council's draft Site Assessment Proforma and a summary of our client's interests that support their selection for allocation as part of the strategy

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH NATIONAL POLICY AND OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Summary of Local Plan 2030 and Requirement for Immediate Review

2.1 The Bedford Local 2030 was adopted subject to the provisions of Policy 1 – ‘Reviewing the Local Plan 2030’. The Inspectors’ Report provides further clarification of the requirement for Modifications introducing the approach to this Policy and that it was considered essential for soundness.

2.2 Paragraph 1.1 of the Council’s Preferred Options Consultation Document affirms the significance of the ‘guillotine’ mechanism inserted within the review policy, which engages paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF2021 in the event that a new Plan is not submitted for Examination before January 2023. While the Borough Council is aware it cannot avoid the consequences for the statutory Development Plan of failing to adhere to these timescales the Preferred Options published for consultation must also address the reasons for first introducing Policy 1. Drawing from the Inspectors’ Report:

- Paragraph 17 emphasises the importance of considering longer-term requirements and thus together with other issues with the Plan a **need** for the review to be undertaken **as quickly as possible** with the three-year timeframe providing balance to allow work to be completed effectively
- Paragraphs 33-34 anticipate that the review will consider the balance between jobs and workers including any changes in the balance of net out-commuting and the implications of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc
- Paragraph 40 confirms that the Local Plan 2030’s housing requirement was determined as 970 dwellings per annum as a result of transitional arrangements for the Examination of Plans under the 2012 version of the Framework.
- Paragraph 113 confirms an expectation of two reviews before 2030 to address potential issues of non-delivery, maintain a buffer in supply and to ensure that the allocation/supply of housing is sufficient to meet the identified need, which is, itself, likely to change over time (as calculated by the government’s standard method).
- Paragraph 123 recognises that the continued existence of a five year supply of deliverable sites (within the provisions of the Local Plan 2030) is dependent on the progress with constrained capacity in the urban area and bringing forward allocations within Neighbourhood Plans quickly. The scope for early review is to allow for potential issues of non-delivery to be addressed and to consider the requirement for any additional housing site allocations in the light of evidence on housing need and realistic supply at that time.

2.3 Paragraph 18 of the Inspectors’ Report confirms that Policy 1 cannot set the parameters of the updated Local Plan. While there is a desire for alignment with the delivery of cross-boundary strategic priorities (including those related to the delivery of the Oxford-Cambridge

Arc) the requirement for review is a result of the deficiencies with the approach put forward by the Council in the Local Plan 2030.

- 2.4 The appointed Inspectors determined (in the context of the 2012 Framework) it would not be effective for the policies of the Local Plan 2030 to look beyond that date. The findings of soundness are predicated on the context of a very narrow remit of addressing the area's strategic priorities (and even then, only with the application of the three-year 'guillotine' following adoption).
- 2.5 It is not open to future Inspectors to reach the same conclusion. This emphasises the importance of the of the first paragraph of Policy 1 and the overriding objective of the aim of the review to secure levels of growth that accord with government policy. This establishes grounds for a Plan that must be fundamentally deliverable / developable over than Plan period and cannot further defer relevant decisions relating to options to meet the area's strategic priorities.
- 2.6 In not fully responding to the reasons and scope of requirements for the review and subsequent update of the Local Plan the Council risks rolling forward several of the same fundamental shortcomings in the Local Plan 2030. This is not only contrary to the objectives of sustainable development but in the context of the most recent policy and guidance simply fails to provide the basis for a sound Local Plan.

National Policy and Guidance

- 2.7 The most recent version of the National Planning Policy Framework was published in July 2021, following commencement of the Council's Preferred Options consultation. The changes were published in draft format in January 2021 (including those relevant to the Plan-making framework) and thus available for the Council to consider.
- 2.8 These representations highlight four important components of the 2021 Framework and the changes they necessitate for the scope of the Review, relative to the 2012 version of the Framework against which the current Local Plan 2030 was assessed. Other specific provisions of the Framework and NPPG are referred to in comments relating to detailed elements of the consultation proposal.
- 2.9 Firstly, Paragraph 22 of the NPPF2021 confirms that strategic policies should look ahead

over a minimum 15-year period from adoption and anticipate long-term requirements. This is a significant change from paragraph 157 of the 2012 Framework that specified that policies should be drawn up over an appropriate timeframe and only preferably a 15-year horizon.

- 2.10 Secondly, the second paragraph of NPPF2021 Paragraph 22 is a significant addition following the most recent revisions. This requires that policies should address a vision that looks further ahead (at least 30 years) where larger scale developments such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns form part of the strategy for the area. The transitional arrangements for these provisions at Annex 1 confirm their application to the preparation of all Plans except those that have already undergone consultation on the Submission version Plan. The Oxford-Cambridge Spatial Framework is also seeking to cover the period to 2050 (i.e., 30 years).
- 2.11 The Council's Preferred Options clearly anticipate reliance on these approaches to growth and the associated implications in terms of extended timescales for development. None of the Council's Preferred Options set out the proposed approach beyond a 20-year horizon. As a result, detailed policies for the scale and distribution of growth cannot be considered consistent with national policy without significantly extending their scope alongside provision for the other requirements of sustainable development.
- 2.12 Thirdly, the requirements of Policy 1 of the Local Plan 2030 accord with the circumstances outlined at Paragraph 33 of the NPPF2021 where a significant change in circumstances is identified as a result of the calculation of local housing need. Paragraph 61 of the NPPF2021 outlines that minimum annual local housing need should be calculated using the Government's Standard Method. This is translated into the requirements against which plans must be assessed for soundness in terms of ensuring they are positively prepared and seek to meet needs in full (see NPPF2021 paragraph 35 and footnote 21) alongside the consideration of unmet needs from neighbouring areas. NPPF2021 paragraph 31 also emphasises the importance of considering relevant market signals.
- 2.13 The NPPG provides further clarification that the Standard Method does not attempt to predict the impact that future Government policies, changing economic circumstances or other factors might have on demographic behaviour. Circumstances where it may be appropriate to plan for a higher housing need figure than the Standard Method indicates include any growth strategies for the area and strategic infrastructure improvements that are planned for

(ID: 2a-010-20201216).

- 2.14 The Council accepts that there are no exceptional local circumstances that justify deviating from the Standard Method, but the Preferred Options do not assess any alternative approach identifying a higher need than calculated by the Standard Method (that will typically be considered sound) (ID: 2a-015-20190220). The assessment of market signals should include expected changes in the labour market, engagement with stakeholders for economic development and changes that may affect the anticipated population and local housing stock (ID: 2a-027-20190220).
- 2.15 Finally, Paragraph 35 of the NPPF2021 confirms that the criteria for the assessment of soundness have changed since the 2012 Framework. In order to provide for a justified approach, the policies for the Plan must provide for ‘**an appropriate strategy**’ rather than the ‘most appropriate’ strategy when assessed against reasonable alternatives. Paragraph 32 of the NPPF2021 provides further detail on the basis for assessing the proposed strategy in terms of seeking net gains for sustainable development and ensuring that the Plan has addressed relevant economic, social, and environmental objectives.
- 2.16 In summary, there is no longer any support in national policy for the outcomes of the Local Plan 2030 Examination in terms of pursuing constraints to the Plan period and overall level of growth and deferring decisions on key components of approaches to meet strategic priorities for the area (particularly in terms of overall housing need (including affordable housing) and the delivery of social and community infrastructure (including health and education)).

Other Material Considerations (Notably Ox-Cam Arc Spatial Framework)

Emerging Oxford Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework

- 2.17 The proposed Oxford-Cambridge Spatial Framework will have the status of national policy and is intended to form a material consideration for plan-making alongside the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.18 The government is currently seeking view on priorities for the Framework as part of consultation on the document ‘Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc’ (until October

2021). The latest consultation proposals set out that it will aim to guide sustainable planning and investment decisions under four policy pillars:

- the environment;
- the economy;
- connectivity and infrastructure; and
- place-making.

2.19 The current consultation follows publication of an initial policy paper in February 2021 setting out the approach to developing the Framework. Paragraphs 2.10 and 2.11 of the policy paper set out in terms of the strategy for housing and planning in the Arc the role of the Framework will not be to make site allocations or to include detailed policies set elsewhere in national policy or better left to Local Plans (including for example, setting out the housing requirement). However, the policy paper emphasises the importance of meeting housing needs in full (including the delivery of affordable housing) and therefore relies on the calculation of minimum annual local housing need in accordance with the standard method as its starting point. Opportunities to increase levels of development above this minimum starting point are clearly anticipated as part of the Framework’s aspirations to support economic development and ensure a balance between the delivery of new jobs and homes (see paragraph 2.6).

2.20 Paragraph 3.8 of the policy paper sets out that the government expects:

“ local planning authorities to continue to develop local plans before the publication of the Spatial Framework. These changes will sit alongside wider planning reforms, and as we take forward our response to the ‘Planning for the Future’ consultation, we will outline transitional arrangements and the role of the Spatial Framework within any new system.”

2.21 The development of the Spatial Framework will be supported by two further public consultations: Towards a Spatial Framework (Spring 2022) and Draft Spatial Framework (Autumn 2022). It is the government’s intention to commence implementation of the Spatial Framework throughout 2023, meaning its policies are expected to be in place as a material consideration at the same point the Bedford Local Plan 2040 is undergoing Examination.

3.0 REPRESENTATIONS – DRAFT PLAN VISION, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY OPTIONS

Comments on the Proposed Approach and Supporting Evidence

3.1 The section of the representations provides observations on the soundness of the Council's overall approach towards preparation of the Local Plan 2040 and identification of the strategic priorities it is required to address. Comments specifically relate to Chapters 1 and 2 of the consultation document.

Paragraph 1.5 (proposed plan period)– Object

3.2 Definition of the proposed Plan period underpinning the Council's Preferred Options has been rendered inconsistent with national policy following publication of the 2021 version of the NPPF.

Reasoning

3.3 The larger-scale approaches to development (including new settlements) that the Council has identified as part of its Preferred Options accord with the circumstances that national policy identifies for considering a minimum 30-year horizon, to take account of longer timescales for development.

3.4 Paragraph 1.2 of the 'Creating a Vision for the Ox-Cam Arc' consultation document also confirms that the Spatial Framework will extend to 2050 and beyond. Preparation of the Bedford Local Plan 2040 should be undertaken consistently with this aim.

3.5 The proposed Plan period of 2020 to 2040, particularly when read in the context of the Council's Preferred Options resulting in a further delay to meeting development needs in full (until at least 2030) will generate a requirement for further, successive, reviews and is setting the plan up to fail.

Remedy

3.6 Bedford Borough Council should not wait for transitional arrangements upon introduction of the Framework to have to undertake yet another review that will need to consider the shortfall in meeting needs and addressing strategic priorities to 2030. Realistically, as a result of the scale and pattern of the Preferred Options proposed, delays to timescales for development are also likely to result in delays to meeting needs in full between 2030 and 2040.

- 3.7 Those parts of the Council's Preferred Options relying on larger-scale development should be profiled to look further ahead to 2050.
- 3.8 This reemphasises that in terms of the soundness requirements for preparation of the Local Plan 2040 the Council's proposed approach must also fully embrace those sustainable opportunities to meet the increased requirements for growth in the immediate term and enable this through the prioritisation of suitable and deliverable sites as part of a 'hybrid' strategy.

Paragraph 1.10 (alignment with the Spatial Framework) – Comment

- 3.9 The Council's Preferred Options published for consultation contend that they draw heavily on the 'pillars' of economic development and the natural environment from the emerging Spatial Framework. The representations identify that the Council's published consultation proposals fail to embrace the comprehensive approach to supporting sustainable development anticipated in the Spatial Framework. Paragraph 1.10 of the consultation document ignores altogether the place-making 'pillar' of the Framework while the Preferred Options as a whole are overly reliant on assumptions regarding improvements in strategic-level connectivity. This fails to embrace local opportunities for sustainable development.

Reasoning

- 3.10 It is surprising, and inconsistent with national policy and the emerging objectives of the Arc Spatial Framework, that the consultation proposals make no mention of the connectivity or place-making pillars of the Spatial Framework. Each should be considered of equal importance.
- 3.11 Specifically, paragraph 4.1 of the consultation document 'Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc places significant emphasis on reducing the need to travel. Connectivity is not just about strategic road/rail links - it means:

"improving communities' access to the services they need – like a good quality, sustainable water supply and broadband, schools, cycle lanes and healthcare, as part of a great approach to place-making."

- 3.12 Paragraph 4.4 also states the importance of recognising the needs of an ageing population in terms of service delivery. At Paragraph 4.5 the document goes on to explain:

“the policies of the Framework will be used to create a clear infrastructure plan giving communities access to the public services they need – including education and health”

- 3.13 The settlement hierarchy in Bedford Borough means that Rural Service Centres and Key Service Centres across the Authority have a key role in delivering these requirements for sustainable communities and serving a wider rural hinterland – both in terms of immediate needs and their role throughout the Plan period. The strategy in the Local Plan 2030 has deferred important decisions relating to these priorities both in terms of avoiding the reclassification of centres such as Oakley and in placing the requirement to allocate sites upon Neighbourhood Plans. Priorities have therefore not been addressed and in any event the current strategy has only sought to address a foreshortened period to 2030.

Remedy

- 3.14 The Council’s Preferred Options consultation proposals offer no scope to address these local requirements for place-making and connectivity as part of a comprehensive ‘hybrid’ strategy. This is as a result of identifying no requirement for additional village-related growth outside of the ‘east’ or ‘south’ transport corridor parishes. Opportunities for sustainable development in accordance with these requirements (and the objectives of the emerging Spatial Framework) must be embraced both in the period to 2030 (to address the immediate uplift in the need for growth) and across the entire Plan period to sustain the role and function of the Borough’s most sustainable settlements.

Paragraph 1.11 and Paragraphs 3.1 – 3.3 (Local Housing Need and Levels of Growth)– Comment

- 3.15 Paragraph 61 of the NPPF2021 confirms that minimum annual local housing need calculated in accordance with the Government’s Standard Method provides the starting point for assessment of the number of homes to be provided through Plan-making. Positive Plan-making should address those circumstances where it may be appropriate to make provision for a higher number of new homes than indicated by the result of the Standard Method (with a non-exhaustive list of potential reasons summarised in the Planning Practice Guidance at ID: 2a-010-20201216).
- 3.16 It is apparent from paragraphs 1.11 and 3.1 to 3.3 of the Council’s consultation proposals

that the Council has not considered potential reasons to plan for a higher housing number as part of the current process. Instead, it has only tested an arbitrary 10% uplift to the calculation of LHN within the draft Sustainability Appraisal process. This approach is contrary to material considerations (including the Council's own evidence base) that require more detailed assessment before selecting options for the submission draft Plan and setting the housing requirement in the Plan.

Reasoning

3.17 Paragraph 3.4 of the consultation document 'Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' refers to the importance of the role of the NPPF to deliver the economic pillar of objectives for the corridor. In principle this reflects use of the Standard Method as the expected starting point to identify housing needs within the Arc but further reflects observations in the initial consultation and the role of the PPG that may necessitate delivery of higher levels of housing, setting out considerations such as:

- *“developing an Economic Strategy, supported by strong economic evidence, to identify the policies, locations and investment needed to deliver the Arc’s potential for sustainable and green economic growth; and*
- *setting policies to make sure growth is felt by all communities and the Arc becomes a better place to live and work for all, such as by providing more housing in the right places, making sure people can move around by public transport and other infrastructure, and enhancing the Arc’s natural capital”*

3.18 The main implication of this component of the Arc Spatial Framework reflects circumstances where the calculation of local housing need will not result in sufficient workers in the right locations to achieve the full potential of sustainable patterns of economic development.

3.19 In relation to the Council's evidence base there appear to be significant issues with their assumptions for labour demand and labour supply techniques to forecast future changes in jobs and the requirement for additional workers.

3.20 In-particular, the Council's Employment Topic Paper:

- Does not use a range of economic forecasts (utilising only the East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM2019) baseline scenario only)
- Does not consider a past take-up scenario for jobs growth and delivery of employment floorspace
- It is likely to significantly over-estimate the number of jobs associated with the increased working-age population based on the LHN (the Council's employment land scenarios set out no assumptions on economic activity rates or commuting -

- the baseline EEFM assumptions are not dissimilar to LHN in terms of additional dwellings and persons required to meet the jobs forecast).
- It takes no account of engagement with the LEP or forecast Spatial Framework scenarios (that may result in a higher demand for labour)

Remedy

- 3.21 Failure to take account of these factors means that the Local Plan 2040 is more likely to result in conflict with the emerging priorities of the Arc Spatial Framework and it is recommended that a range of jobs-led scenarios are tested prior to determining the housing requirement for the Local Plan 2040 and selecting an appropriate strategy.

Paragraph 1.14 (Scope of the Plan) – Object

- 3.22 The Council's Preferred Option consultation proposals indicate that the purpose of updates to the Local Plan following the requirements of the Review policy (Policy 1) are to outline a development strategy to 2040 and meet national policy requirements for the delivery of growth. This fails to fully reflect the reasons for first introducing the requirement for immediate Review and in-particular the pattern and scale of housing growth necessary to achieve sound outcomes for Plan-making (particularly with regards paragraphs 20 and 74 of the NPPF2021).

Reasoning

- 3.23 As set out in the Spatial Framework consultation document (paragraph 5.5) the Arc demonstrates poor affordability where development has not kept pace with need. That is exactly the position in Bedford resulting from the approach adopted in the Local Plan 2030.
- 3.24 This means (at paragraph 5.7) it is an aim of the Framework to ensure that the Framework sets policies to enable ***housing needs to be met in full, including much-needed affordable housing***
- 3.25 This sits alongside strategic decisions where direction will be provided by the Framework e.g., implementation of East-West Rail, identification of Opportunity Areas and support for the delivery of previously developed land.
- 3.26 What this means in practice is that prioritizing opportunities to meet full development needs

is an important component of the place-making pillar as part of a joined-up approach providing for sustainable communities.

- 3.27 The Council's Preferred Options consultation proposals would sustain a very substantial shortfall against minimum annual local housing need until at least 2030. Due to only considering a horizon to 2040 and as a result of likely timescales for the characteristics of larger-scale development (including new settlements) it is furthermore highly likely a significant shortfall against full development needs will persist until 2040 and beyond.
- 3.28 The Council's proposed strategy offers no flexibility and choice to address the current and persistent failure to meet needs in full. Our assessment indicates that current levels of development are likely to become significantly constrained substantially before any of the longer-term solutions proposed as part of the Preferred Options achieve significant delivery. Realistic assumptions must also be made in relation to new larger-scale developments.

Paragraphs 1.47-1.48 (Neighbourhood Planning) – Object

- 3.29 The Council's consultation document considers the role for development allocations to be identified in Neighbourhood Plans (as a result of the strategy in the Local Plan 2030) in the context of updates to the development strategy explored via the Preferred Options.
- 3.30 These representations identify that the consultation fundamentally fails to assess the role and ability of Neighbourhood Plans in meeting the requirements for sustainable development (including housing delivery) in the period to 2030. The consultation proposals also provide no clarity on the impact of meeting additional requirements for growth in terms of whether the policies in 'made' Plans will remain in general conformity with the development strategy nor how further allocations might be provided for in an effective and positively prepared manner.

Reasoning

(i) Relationship with Delivery of the Area's Strategic Priorities

- 3.31 Paragraph 1.47 of the consultation proposals repeats the strategy outlined in Policy 4S of the adopted Local Plan. This does not confirm a realistic prospect that all 2,260 units will be delivered before 2030. There are outstanding objections to several of the emerging

Neighbourhood Plans at Key Service Centres (in particular at Great Barford and recently at Sharnbrook).

- 3.32 At paragraph 1.48 the Borough Council only provides vague indications of where further engagement might take place with parish councils to meet additional requirements for growth where a range of suitable sites are identified.
- 3.33 This paragraph is inconsistent with the intentions for a stepped trajectory and the NPPG for reviewing NDPs (which should encourage early review when strategic policies have changed). That is an inevitable consequence of the Development Plan in Bedford given its current failure to address levels of growth in accordance with the Standard Method. The Borough Council's own evidence indicates the strong likelihood of sites where early delivery can be prioritised. This does not demand that meeting increased requirements for growth should extend beyond 2030.
- 3.34 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF2021 reaffirms the role for Neighbourhood Plans in providing for non-strategic allocations. Paragraph 29 confirms this must be within the context of Neighbourhood Plans that do not promote less development than set out in adopted strategy policies (which in this case will be replaced in the Local Plan 2040). Paragraph 66 of the NPPF2021 outlines that strategic policies should set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations. This is an important distinction from the 2012 version of the Framework. However, the Council's testing of options for the Local Plan 2040 rolls forward a 'one-size fits all' distribution of potential levels of growth in Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres.
- 3.35 This fundamentally fails to accord with the current requirements of national policy and guidance and, importantly, has currently precluded the Council from considering 'hybrid' alternatives to the spatial strategy that would allow appropriate levels of sustainable development to be prioritised across the settlement hierarchy.

(ii) Identification of Housing Requirements for Designated Neighbourhood Areas

- 3.36 The Council's proposed approach is contrary to paragraphs 66 and 67 of the NPPF2021. Paragraph 66 sets out that strategic policies should also set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale

of development and any relevant allocations. The Council's suggestion of rolling forward the contribution from the scale and distribution of growth identified in Policy 4S of the LP2030 is not justified and not positively prepared.

3.37 This is an important component of national policy and guidance in terms of seeking to avoid conflict between existing and emerging Neighbourhood Plans and the strategic policies of the Development Plan. This should form part of positive discussions between qualifying bodies and the local planning authority, recognises the ability of Neighbourhood Plans to sustain and increase housing delivery. Any indicative requirement figure would take into consideration relevant policies such as an existing or emerging spatial strategy, alongside the characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan area and should minimise the risk of Neighbourhood Plan figures being superseded when new strategic policies are adopted (ID: 41-102-20190509).

3.38 The figures in Policy 4S of the LP2030 are a flawed basis for rolling forward potential requirements against which Neighbourhood Plans are prepared for the following reasons:

- The figures were determined arbitrarily, without reference to the OAN in place at the time or strategies for individual settlements;
- In any event the Council's OAN knowingly represented a significant shortfall against the government's policy for calculating housing need, culminating in this immediate review;
- The figures are applicable only in the context of a foreshortened plan period to 2030; and
- Figures are provided only for certain settlements, with no requirement indicated for levels of the settlement hierarchy below Rural Service Centres (despite these having been considered in earlier rounds of plan-making for the LP2030).

3.39 It follows that the process for calculation of any indicative requirement would therefore materially and significantly exceed the evidence base for the LP2030 and the figures in Policy 4S. By extension this means that any evidence produced by groups preparing Plans (for example assessments of local rural housing needs) whether relating to settlements listed in Policy 4S or not) would need to be considered in the context of the overall result of the Standard Method to 2040.

3.40 Any impacts upon the evidence based for emerging Neighbourhood Plans must be read alongside PPG ID: 41-084-20190509, which answers the question 'when will it be necessary to review and update a Neighbourhood Plan' and states in relation to the above issues:

“There is no requirement to review or update a Neighbourhood Plan. However, policies in a Neighbourhood Plan may become out of date, for example if they conflict with policies in a Local Plan covering the neighbourhood area that is adopted after the making of the Neighbourhood Plan. In such cases, the more recent Plan policy takes precedence.”

Remedy

- 3.41 The solution to issues identified in these representations necessitates the Council complying with the requirements of paragraphs 66 and 67 of the NPPF2021. In doing so, we consider that a ‘hybrid’ development strategy must remain supported throughout the Plan period, including recognition of the contribution that this would make towards the shortfall against local housing need for the period 2020 to 2030 i.e., through ‘top up allocations’.
- 3.42 Without prejudice to any specific conclusions from this work this would support inclusion of ‘village-related’ development as a component of future growth. There may be scope to alter the distribution of the housing requirement to Key Service Centres upwards or downwards from the arbitrary figure of 500 units adopted by the Council, depending on the capacity and other potential benefits for development in these settlements relative to their overall potential contribution to LHN.

Section 2 (Draft Vision) – Object

- 3.43 This section addresses two main themes. It firstly sets out the shortcomings of the Vision in terms of reflecting comprehensive opportunities for sustainable development across the Borough. Secondly, it addresses that while there are many positive aspects of outcomes sought under the vision these will not be addressed as part of the strategy due to the Council’s selected Preferred Options.

Reasoning

- 3.44 The draft Vision sets out:

“Well-planned growth supported by appropriate infrastructure and avoiding areas of high flood risk will enable the creation of strong, safe and resilient local communities in environments that facilitate healthy and independent living for all.”

- 3.45 This aspect of the Vision will not be achieved in the context of the Council’s Preferred Options omitting a significant number of the Borough’s KSCs and RSCs from the spatial strategy and do not seek to provide for the additional development required to secure balanced communities.

3.46 The Vision further states:

“Rural communities will embrace appropriate development, in many instances through the preparation of their own Neighbourhood Plans.”

3.47 This would imply a requirement for additional growth, which the preferred options exclude for a significant number of centres. The draft Vision feels to address that it is part of the role of the Local Plan review (and resulting updates) to address strategic priorities deferred as a consequence of the Local Plan 2030 (for example expansion of primary healthcare and secondary education). The Vision also fails to reflect that the proposed development strategy is not looking to provide for any additional growth in rural areas as part of an uplift to meet housing needs in full before 2030. This is a significant shortcoming of the strategy and overlooks suitable and deliverable sites that could be prioritised now to meet these increased needs alongside the delivery of other substantial benefits.

3.48 The Vision makes limited reference to specific benefits that the Local Plan 2040 will secure in relation to the natural environment, including Country Parks north of Brickhill and west of Bedford.

3.49 The Vision is artificially constrained as a result of the Council’s current position on Preferred Options. There is no reason that other sustainable developments cannot achieve complementary and significant advantages for Green Infrastructure provision (e.g., our client’s proposals to provide a Riverside Park as part of the development opportunity at Stoneyfields, Sharnbrook).

3.50 Theme 4 (Better Places) of the Council’s proposed Objectives for the Local Plan 2040 sets out:

“Provide appropriate amounts and types of housing to meet the needs of the borough’s urban and rural communities over the lifetime of the Plan making the housing stock more adaptable and resilient

Achieve a borough where everybody has appropriate access to high quality health and social care, as well as everyday essential services and community facilities where social and cultural wellbeing are supported, enabling all residents to lead healthy and independent lives.”

3.51 The principle of these objectives is supported but is reliant on flexibly supporting diverse opportunities for development across the settlement hierarchy. There are a substantial

number of centres where the level of development identified is insufficient to secure the opportunities identified.

4.0 PROPOSED APPROPRIATE STRATEGY ALTERNATIVE – A ‘HYBRID’ APPROACH

- 4.1 This section of our representations should be read alongside the standalone Review of the Council’s Draft Sustainability Appraisal (copy at Appendix 6). The conclusions of the review support the Modifications in this part of the representations. This section also reinforces our specific comments on the Council’s Preferred Strategy Options published in the main consultation document.
- 4.2 These representations propose an alternative ‘hybrid’ spatial strategy. This is consistent with the Council’s evidence base for the emerging Local Plan 2040; would overcome the soundness issues identified with the Council’s Preferred Options; and would comprise an appropriate strategy for the purposes of Paragraph 35(b) of the NPPF2021.
- 4.3 The ‘hybrid’ strategy recognises that there is no arbitrary distinction between ‘village-related’ growth and support for development in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridor parishes in terms of their capacity to contribute towards sustainable development. The benefits of ‘village-related’ development do not suddenly materialise only where Key Service Centre and Rural Service Centres are located in the A421 corridor and do not evaporate altogether outside of it.
- 4.4 The Council expressly recognised this in the evidence base for the current Development Plan. In the current Preferred Options, it has taken an inconsistent approach to assessing the effects of the ‘village-related’ development component by reaching different conclusions for exactly the same settlements (in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridors) when they are assessed as part of the Preferred Options as opposed to other strategy options (e.g., **Option 3c**).
- 4.5 The ‘hybrid’ option assigns the ‘village-related’ growth component only to those settlements outside of the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridors. Levels of development, for the purposes of an indicative distribution, have been retained at 500 units in Key Service Centres and 35 units in Rural Service Centres albeit these are arbitrary figures and should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Wixams has been excluded from the total for Key Service Centres (reflecting its inclusion in the locations for rail-based growth). The only exception, taking account of this, is an increase of 215 units in the distribution to Oakley based on our recommendation for it to be reclassified as a Key Service Centre and growth east of Station Road being specifically supported.

- 4.6 For the A421-based components of the strategy the total distribution to the 'east' corridor parishes are retained at the figure of 750 dwellings in the Council's Preferred **Option 2d**.
- 4.7 In terms of the 'hybrid' strategy this could accommodate greater flexibility in terms of large-scale strategic growth included in the strategy options. We have included the Council's minimum figures for inclusion of rail-based growth at Kempston Hardwick/Stewartby and New Settlements in either the A6 or A421 corridor, which is more likely to reflect realistic timescales for development.
- 4.8 Including both components would comfortably exceed the minimum 12,500 units required from additional allocations, with an appropriate buffer for flexibility and contingency (particularly in terms of the prospects for meeting increased needs before 2030). There is no reason higher quanta could not be included as part of an extended plan period. Equally, this could allow some settlements to be excluded from further village-related growth albeit we would not recommend this where Neighbourhood Plans being prepared have failed to address important strategic priorities (as at Oakley and Sharnbrook, for example).
- 4.9 The 'hybrid' strategy based on these components are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Illustrative Hybrid Strategy Option Including Village-Related Growth

	Component	Option 2d	% Of Total	Option 3c	% Of Total	Option 3 - Hybrid	% Of Total	Notes
	Within urban area	1500	12%	1500	12%	1500	11%	
	Adjoining urban area	1500	12%	1500	12%	1500	11%	
	Village related	0	0%	4280	35%	1890	14%	Excluding 'east' and 'south' corridor parishes and Wixams
A421-based	Growth focused on Kempston Hardwick, Stewartby & Wixams (Rail based growth)	5,500	44%	0	0%	3915	29%	Use of minimum figure from Option 2c
	Transport corridor south	750	6%	0	0%	1535	11%	
	Transport corridor east	750	6%	0	0%	750	6%	Retention of higher figure from Option 2d

	New settlements (A421 corridor)	2500	20%					
	New settlements (A6 corridor)	0	0%	4900	40%	2400	18%	Use of minimum New Settlement total (Colworth)
	Total	12500	100%	12180	100%	13490	100%	

4.10 We have utilised the ‘hybrid’ strategy to consider an assessment of effects in-line with the Council’s Sustainability Appraisal framework. When the ‘hybrid’ strategy is compared with the standalone findings for growth components and the Council’s Options **2d** and **3c**, as well as the ‘do nothing’ scenario, it is apparent that the potential benefits towards sustainable development are enhanced. This is as a result of recognising that the potential negative effects the Council assigns to village-related growth are incorrect and, in any event, inaccurate because it ignores the location of some Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres within the A421 corridor. It also recognises that some the benefits of what is in reality ‘village-related’ growth in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ transport corridors will be shared across settlements elsewhere in the hierarchy. The results are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Assessment of Effects – ‘Hybrid’ Strategy Option and Alternatives

SA Objective	Growth Component		Spatial Options			Do Nothing
	Village-Related Growth	A421-based Growth	Option 2d	Option 3c	Hybrid	
Objective 1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Major Negative	Negative	Negative
Objective 2	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 3	Major Negative	Positive	Uncertain	Negative	Uncertain	Major Negative
Objective 4	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain
Objective 5	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral
Objective 6	Major Negative	Major Negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Major Negative
Objective 7	Negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 8	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 9	Negative	Positive	Major Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative
Objective 10	Negative	Positive	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 11	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Objective 12	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative
Objective 13	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Positive	Uncertain

Objective 14	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Positive	Uncertain
Objective 15	Major Negative	Positive	Positive	Major Negative	Positive	Major Negative

5.0 REPRESENTATIONS – GROWTH AND SPATIAL STRATEGY OPTIONS

Comments on the Strategy Options and Supporting Evidence

- 5.1 The section of the representations provides observations on the soundness of the Council's overall approach towards preparation of the Local Plan 2040 and identification of the strategic priorities it is required to address. Comments specifically relate to Chapter 3 of the consultation document. Issues relating to the ability of the Council's approach to maintain a rolling five year supply of deliverable sites (including as part of its proposed use of a 'stepped trajectory') are dealt with separately in Section 6.

Preferred Options for Local Plan 2040 (pages 20-23) - Objection

- 5.2 The preferred options for development, as set out in the Draft Local Plan, focus the allocation of a minimum 12,500 units around the urban area of Bedford, the A421 and the A1 transport corridors. This approach is unsound (not effective, not justified, not positively prepared and not consistent with national policy) in creating an effective embargo on any further consideration of village-related growth outside of these areas as part of the Council's plan-making process to prepare strategic policies or to necessitate the review of Neighbourhood Plans that look forward only to 2030.

Reasoning

- 5.3 Whilst we are in support of parts of the Council's 'Preferred Options' 2a-2d, insofar that they recognise the potential for benefits from what is in-effect village-related growth at some Key Service Centres (KSC) and Rural Service Centres (RSC), we note the absence of any development being allocated to the northern parishes.
- 5.4 SC's and RSC's outside of the 'east' and 'south' corridors are capable of delivering development within the Plan period up to 2040 and addressing the significant increase in housing need that must now be planned for. The evidence bases for emerging Neighbourhood Plans and details of suitable sites being identified in the Call for Sites event that Bedford Borough Council undertook in the Summer of 2020 are illustrative of this fact.
- 5.5 With respect of the KSC of Sharnbrook, this is evident in the circumstances for the Neighbourhood Plan which the local planning authority and qualifying body (Sharnbrook Parish Council) intends to put in place (following issue of the Examiner's Report on 21 of July 2021). Sharnbrook as a settlement is identified in the adopted Development Plan as a KSC, meaning that it has a good provision of services and facilities to facilitate development. The

Neighbourhood Plan, covering only the period until 2030 in any event, does not provide for development that is immediately adjacent or well-related to the existing Settlement Policy Area boundary or that seeks to sustain and enhance the role of the settlement.

- 5.6 Furthermore, our client submitted substantial objections to the Neighbourhood Plan's proposed allocation at Hill Farm in terms of its sustainability and deliverability. The Hill Farm and NDP allocation proposals would result in the removal of the Primary School currently being provided in the SC of Sharnbrook itself (it would relocate to Hill Farm). Our client's Stoneyfields scheme could lead to the re-provision of facilities in a highly sustainable location, especially for existing Sharnbrook residents, amongst numerous benefits directly related to the village it serves.

Remedy

- 5.7 Therefore, we would ask that Bedford Borough Council addresses their proposed development strategy and seek to allocate development within the northern KSC and RSC, where there is both demand for development and the available sites to aid in the delivery of housing post 2030 or earlier. This could be achieved through allocating additional development to the northern parishes (as part of flexibility and contingency) or redistributing the minimum total of additional land to be allocated to address local housing need (and thus addresses barriers to delivery of large-scale strategic growth within the Preferred Options).

Paragraphs 3.10, 3.16 and 3.17 of the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040 – Objection

- 5.8 Bedfordia generally support the approach the Council has taken to the Spatial Strategy across the Authority area; recognising that housing and job growth can be accommodated through a hierarchy of urban and rural communities.
- 5.9 Paragraph 3.10 of the Local Plan 2040, highlights that, as part of last year's Issues and Options consultation, the Council outlined six distribution options which could form part of the strategy for growth. These were:
- Brown – Urban based growth
 - Yellow – A421 based growth
 - Pink – Rail based growth
 - Orange – East-West rail northern station growth
 - Grey – Dispersed growth
 - Red – new settlement-based growth

5.10 The responses to the issues and options consultation indicated that there was broad consensus favouring development focused on the existing urban areas and the A421 corridor, and possible new railway stations which might be delivered on the new East-West Rail Line. This does not, however, provide justification to preclude the potential benefits of dispersed growth altogether.

Reasoning

5.11 In conjunction with paragraphs 3.16 and 3.17 of the Local Plan 2040, an alternative ‘hybrid’ approach is required to provide for an appropriate strategy. This approach is consistent with the criterion informing the spatial strategy under Policy 3S of the LP2030, supporting proposals to deliver sustainable development and growth that enhances the vitality of the Borough’s urban and rural communities. This specifically expects contributions towards the objectives and policies of the Plan through (*inter alia*):

- (iii) Strategic residential development in key service centres in association with expanded education provision where necessary.
- (iv) Limited development in rural service centres in line with existing and potential capacity of infrastructure and services.
- (v) Delivering the majority of rural growth through Neighbourhood Plans.

5.12 On the basis of the Council’s Preferred Options the Plan’s strategic policies would not continue support for these components of a sustainable strategy beyond 2030. Moreover, there is an existing conflict arising from the approach to Policy 3S, where Neighbourhood Plans being prepared are likely to have addressed some but not all of an area’s priorities and only in the context of the significantly lower OAN adopted in the LP2030. The Council’s approach in the current Plan led to issues being deferred, rather than dealt with, meaning that the Preferred Options only seek to compound this problem.

5.13 The Council’s Preferred Options must therefore be reconsidered and adapted to coincide with ongoing support for those parts of the spatial strategy endorsed within Local Plan 2030 Policy 3S that the Council’s own evidence recognises as essential to securing contributions towards sustainable development.

5.14 The annual requirement in the adopted Local Plan 2030 is 970 dwellings per year. The minimum annual local housing need figure for the Local Plan 2040 represents a substantial

increase to the adopted Plan and will bring with it considerable challenges.

- 5.15 Policy 3S was also in reality a ‘hybrid’ approach. The Council recognised it was unable to make provision for even its own lower figure for objectively assessed needs without diversification of the spatial strategy. The reasons for this primarily relate to issues that are not new to this Plan-making process – namely the delivery of extant commitments on Town Centre sites. The incorporation of new large-scale strategic options, which the Council was unable to soundly introduce to the LP2030, adds to the number of locations where longer-term development timescales need to be considered but does not change the justification for a flexible approach already recognised as sustainable.
- 5.16 As such, Bedfordia query the ability of Bedford Borough Council to deliver some 1,275 new dwellings per annum, given the constraints Bedford faces and historic amount of growth that has been accommodated to the south of the town, without sustaining a flexible approach. Further growth should be directed KSCs, such as Sharnbrook, which demonstrate a good level of facilities and perform an important role in facilitating strategic residential development, considering the existing and potential capacity of infrastructure and services.

Remedy

- 5.17 As part of this approach the allocation of housing to any KSCs or RSCs needs to have regard to the overall levels of increased housing need, and where appropriate the quantum adjusted to reflect both settlement and site capacity.
- 5.18 In the case of Sharnbrook it remains appropriate to adopt a more comprehensive approach to strategic residential development that is well-related to the village, providing benefits that cannot be delivered through the allocation of a combination of smaller site options. The decision of the Neighbourhood Plan to pursue in-effect new freestanding development at Hill Farm (to be considered in the context of the wider settlement hierarchy) does not impinge on the reasons to continue to support the justification for Policy 3S at Sharnbrook itself.

Paragraphs 3.10 and Preferred Options 2a-2d: Component of Rail-Based Growth ‘Pink’ Growth Strategy Options) – Object

- 5.19 The opportunity for transformative change resulting from the delivery of East-West Rail within Bedford Borough is not disputed. However, the Council’s own evidence demonstrates that the level of rail-based growth at Kempston Hardwick/Stewartby and Wixams relied upon as part of its Preferred Options is unsound. National Planning Practice Guidance ID: 68-020-

20190722 states that a pragmatic approach should be taken when considering the intended phasing of sites, where the authority may need to provide a greater degree of certainty than those in years 11-15 or beyond. The PPG expands on this by stating that where longer-term sites are relied upon evidence must be available to demonstrate that they will come forward within the timescales envisaged and at a rate sufficient to meet needs over the Plan period (ID: 68-019-20190722).

5.20 While these sections of the PPG post-date the NPPF2012 it is the case that the Council has historically failed entirely in setting out realistic timeframes for the development of complex sites. These shortcomings have particularly affected Town Centre sites in the past, which the Council will now unsuccessfully rely upon to sustain completions against the housing requirement in the Local Plan 2030. We argued at the previous Local Plan Examination that such sites should be identified as developable no earlier than the 11-15 year period.

5.21 These issues with existing sites will be compounded in the Council's trajectory for the Local Plan 2040 (meaning that even its proposed 'stepped approach' against a requirement of 970dpa to 2030 will not be effective). These representations further demonstrate the lack of evidence to consider rail-based growth in the A421 corridor as developable any earlier than years 11-15 of the Plan period (if not beyond) thus rendering the Council's Preferred Options entirely unsound.

Reasoning

5.22 The Council's own Development Strategy Topic Paper identifies multiple risks to the rail-based component of growth in the A421 corridor, including:

- Delivery of new rail stations is proposed, but not yet confirmed.
- Lead in times for remediation of the Kempston Hardwick area and delivery of new rail stations mean that development in this part of the transport corridor will occur later in the plan period.
- Detailed analysis of context and density / storey heights to establish appropriate place making for the rail based growth at Kempston Hardwick and Stewartby has yet to be undertaken.
- The land at Kempston Hardwick is currently being promoted for employment development.

5.23 These points confirm that the Council's extremely wide range of potential quanta for the development of rail-based growth are not currently informed by evidence of site-specific opportunities assessed as suitable, available, or achievable. This means that there is no

justification whatsoever for the levels of development summarised at paragraph 3.12 of the Council's Topic Paper:

“Transport corridor – rail based growth: land within the parishes of Kempston Hardwick, Stewartby and Wixams. On the assumption that new rail stations will be delivered at Wixams and Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick, ambitious growth is assumed at both Wixams and Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick in the range of 1,500-3,000 dwellings at Wixams and 2,500-5,000 dwellings at Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick by 2040. Within the options two levels of development are tested: a lower option total figure of 5,500 dwellings (2,000 at Wixams and 3,500 at Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick) and a higher option of 7,500 dwellings (3,000 at Wixams and 4,500 at Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick)”

5.24 There is no evidence to indicate these totals as developable in the period to 2040. In the absence of site-specific testing the Council can have no grounds to suggest how constraints might be overcome, when infrastructure will be provided and whether the extremely high levels of development required to meet these totals over a very short period between sometime after 2030 and 2040 can be achieved.

5.25 The extent of this uncertainty is summarised in footnote 1 on pp.8 of the Development Strategy Topic Paper:

“East West Rail are currently consulting on two options for the Marston Vale Line; one which retains the current stations at Stewartby and Kempston Hardwick, and another that replaces them with a new station (tentatively named “Stewartby Hardwick”) at Broadmead Road. This component of growth is based on development around the new or existing stations in conjunction with development around the new station at Wixams. These stations could provide a focal point for higher density growth supported by the sustainable travel options offered by new and enhanced rail services.”

5.26 The consultation referred to recently closed in June 2021 and final decisions on the ‘Concept’ for stations on the Marston Vale line are awaited. For the avoidance of doubt, the expected timeframes set out in the most recent Consultation Document indicate that a Development Consent Order may be obtained by 2024 and construction on the rail works may commence in 2025. However, this does not provide a clear timetable for the delivery of individual projects and upgrades. Stage 05 (‘Construction’) is summarised as follows:

“Once we’ve complied with any initial conditions or requirements included in the Development Consent Order, the government will consider the full business case for the Project to make the final decision to proceed. Following further conversations with the public and stakeholders, can start to construct your new railway.”

5.27 The potential for residential development to occur in conjunction with the delivery of new

stations as intended by the Council is likely to require a substantially longer lead-in timeframe.

5.28 The Council has previously acknowledged that longer lead-in timeframes must be allowed for as part of redevelopment of the Stewartby Brickworks (Policy 25) Development Plan allocation as it exists in the LP2030. The Local Plan trajectory anticipates delivery of only (at most) 100 units in 2029/30 before the end of the current Plan Period. The scheme is in effect accepted as an 11-15 year developable site.

5.29 Application proposals under reference 18/03022/EIA (validated November 2018) benefit from an Officer recommendation to grant planning permission subject to S106 agreement. In practice, this does not alter any conclusions regarding the deliverability/developability of the site and likely timescales. Discussions surrounding the draft S106 obligation would be anticipated to be extensive. This is reflective of the constraints of the site and gaps in the evidence base for the LP2030, notably:

- Around 19ha of the site falls within Flood Risk Zone 2. Furthermore, a small proportion (around 1ha) is located within Flood Risk Zone 3a/3b.
- A requirement to confirm costs and timescales for the requisite link from the new development across the railway could be achieved (notwithstanding ongoing deliberations regarding East-West Rail). whilst Network Rail is identified as a key stakeholder for preparation of the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (December 2018) no project associated with the rail crossing is identified, costed, or phased over the course of the plan period.
- The Council's Local Plan Viability Assessment (BNP Paribas, November 2017 (paragraph 6.16)) notes the requirement for significant investigations to assess on-site constraints for this complex site, with a view to preparation of a development brief, all prior to detailed viability work taking place.

5.30 It is our experience from monitoring the delivery of the nearby Wellingborough East Urban Extension that the construction of crossings over rail lines can take significant periods of time and are unpredictable.

5.31 The Officer Report in relation to the current position on securing a policy-compliant (and CIL122-compliant) package of contributions towards the site's ability to enhance use of rail-based transport states:

“Policy 25 iv. Sets out a need for enhancements to the existing railway station environment including accessibility, provision of facilities and security. If the railway station stays in its current location the increased permeability of the site will improve

connections from the village to the station. The Railway Station however does not fall within the application site and is under review as part of the wider East West Rail scheme, details of which are not confirmed at this time.”

- 5.32 Given this uncertainty we would anticipate it is highly likely that a S106 obligation may not be entered into until these uncertainties are resolved or that otherwise it would be expected that this would be subject to future Deeds of Variation or revisions to the scheme resulting in delays to the delivery of housing.
- 5.33 The Council’s Preferred Options also identify a contribution of around 2,000-3,000 further units to be allocated at Wixams, to correspond with eventual delivery of a further new station as part of the wider scheme. These units will be additional to the remaining capacity identified in the Bedford Local Plan 2030 trajectory and units to be delivered as part of committed development in Central Bedfordshire’s Local Plan (which already includes a Southern Extension to the scheme).
- 5.34 The longstanding issues with delivery of the Wixams New Station are illustrative of the impacts upon rates of development likely to be experienced at Stewartby/Kempston Hardwick. Evidence presented at LP2030 Examination demonstrated that the build-out rate of Wixams within Bedford Borough has been 96 dwellings per annum over the 10-year period to 2018. Development has since commenced in Central Bedfordshire, increasing the overall build-rate but corresponding with a reduction of activity in Bedford Borough.
- 5.35 Delivery of the Station has been delayed by over 11 years with the project still not expected to commence construction until 2023 at the earliest. Commissioning of a detailed design scheme for the proposed station was able to progress earlier in 2021 contingent on the basis of consultation on the proposed northern alignment of East-West Rail.
- 5.36 While any final decision is awaited on the outcome of the Bedford-Cambridge phase of East-West Rail there remains a risk that the time-limited period for funding available from the lead developers of the Wixams scheme will expire and result in the project not being delivered (or requiring additional monies to address the shortfall in project costs).
- 5.37 In the context of the above delays and uncertainty and in the absence of a clear timeframe for delivery of the station the Council’s Preferred Options present no site-specific evidence of how the additional capacity at Wixams could be achieved over the Plan period and at an appropriate build-out rate (in addition to the delivery of extant commitments).

- 5.38 The characteristics of any potential increase in allocations at Wixams also represents an issue of cross-boundary strategic importance, given that the scheme is being delivered across local planning authority boundaries and the requirement for partial review of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015 to 2035. This could lead to any potential for additional development being required to address the unmet needs of neighbouring authorities (or affecting the administrative boundaries within which the most appropriate land should be identified).

Remedy

- 5.39 These representations demonstrate that the rail-based growth component of the Council's Preferred Strategy Options requires substantial further refinement and site-specific testing. This is likely to substantiate a significant reduction in assumptions regarding the potential for development within the plan period, which can be effectively mitigated through pursuing a 'hybrid' strategy for development in sustainable locations across the Borough.

Paragraphs 3.12 and Table 1 (Evidence Base) AECOM Transport Model: Highways Strategy – Object

- 5.40 The Council's Preferred Options Consultation Document (paragraph 3.12) indicates that four main spatial scenarios have been subject to highways testing as part of the assessment of Strategy Options. The Council relies upon the summary of findings from the AECOM Transport Model to support its conclusions on the individual options set out in the Development Strategy Topic Paper.
- 5.41 For **Option 3c** the Topic Paper indicates highways constraints as a reason to reject this strategy option based on its inclusion of 'village-related' growth and thus representing a more dispersed approach. The conclusions state:

“Given the highway constraints on the A6 north of Bedford (including both new settlements KSCs and RSCs), the need to allow villages already planning development to assimilate that growth, the more dispersed nature of the distribution of growth and the loss of focus on EWR, these options do not perform as strongly.”

- 5.42 The Council's claims regarding the level of impact generated by any level of development at Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres are **not justified**. The Council primarily

relies on evidence of other components comprising part of these strategy options (particularly 'New Settlements' on the A6) as generating a significant element the highways impact on the highways network.

- 5.43 The assumed impact arising from village-related growth specifically results from the first stage of testing undertaken in the AECOM Transport Model. Paragraph 1.2.2 of the Summary Report explains that this was only considered as part of testing of four general development scenarios, relating to the 'grey' (dispersed) option providing no focus upon strategic growth locations within the corridor:

“this scenario includes all sites identified as part of the Local Plan 2040 call for sites consultation with the size of the proposed developments scaled uniformly to ensure that the overall growth in the borough is considered to be in the likely range of the new Local Plan housing and employment targets.”

- 5.44 This approach to testing bears very little relationship with the Council's subsequent testing of strategy options where the opportunity to focus some growth on the urban area and A421 corridor is not disputed. Levels of growth required to be tested under the 'dispersed' scenario are materially higher than the relatively limited proportion of 'village-related' growth in Option 3c not otherwise associated with 'east' and 'south' corridor parishes. Moreover, the AECOM testing of the 'dispersed' scenario has the same flaws as the Council's testing of 'village-related' growth in the strategy options by opting for a 'uniform' or 'one-size fits all' approach to levels of development at individual settlements. This overlooks where site-specific or settlement-specific justification for site selection could reduce impact on the highway network.
- 5.45 Upon beginning the process for identifying strategy options the Council has acknowledged the need for subsequent Transport Modelling. This is set out at paragraph 1.4.1 of the AECOM Summary Paper and includes additional testing of 'New Settlement' options on the A6.
- 5.46 Our client has instructed Transport Consultants SDD to undertake a 'Review of "Bedford Borough Transport Model', including the specific assessment of impact of New Settlements on the A6. A copy is enclosed at Appendix 7.
- 5.47 The findings of the Review confirm:

- Beyond levels of committed growth to 2030 in the ‘reference case’ the AECOM scenarios are based upon different levels of growth at Twinwoods and Colworth only, and whether each / both sites are brought forward.
- No sensitivity testing has been undertaken whereby the two new settlements at Colworth and Twinwoods do not come forward, and instead housing growth development at other existing villages across Bedford Borough.
- There is no justification provided within the report as to why the focus of assessment has been focused on the development at Colworth / Twinwoods only, as opposed to assessing potential levels of ‘village-related’ growth in accordance with **Option 3c** north of Bedford from a highways capacity perspective
- No assessment is provided of the dumbbell roundabouts off the A6 in the vicinity of Oakley, nor the junctions with Highfield Road further north along the A6
- There is not specific testing of impacts and changes to the network resulting from the deferral of site allocations to Neighbourhood Plans – specifically the need for a new roundabout on the A6 required as part of the proposed Hill Farm development.

5.48 It follows from the above that the Council’s conclusions for strategy options in the Development Strategy Topic Paper and reasons for the selection of Preferred Options at Paragraph 3.12 of the Consultation Document are **not justified** and **not consistent with national policy**.

5.49 The Council has not only failed to justify that the impact of Option 3c on the highway network would be severe but failed to begin preparation of Transport Modelling that would in any way allow it to test a ‘hybrid’ approach to development in providing for an appropriate strategy. The requirement for further testing is significant in terms of ensuring further site-specific and settlement-specific testing of options maximises the potential to achieve benefits for the highway network in accordance with paragraph 110 of the NPPF2021, for example:

- Assessing the opportunities to relieve congestion at Station Road, Oakley associated with Lincroft Academy through provision of a new dedicated access together with supporting sustainably located residential development within easy walking distance of Primary and Secondary education in the village
- Promoting growth adjacent and well-related to the Sharnbrook Settlement Policy Area, facilitating opportunities for the delivery of new and accessible services and facilities (including a Primary School) within walking distance from existing residents of the village in order to sustain and enhance its role.

5.50 This section of our representations (and supporting information at Appendix 6) confirms the requirement to undertake further detailed testing of a ‘hybrid’ strategy option including an accurate assessment of potential impacts on the highway network.

6.0 DELIVERY ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSED STEPPED TRAJECTORY

Paragraphs 3.4 – 3.5 (Spatial Strategy – Proposed Stepped Trajectory) – Object

- 6.1 This section of the representations should be read alongside the separate Delivery Assessment included at **Appendix 5**. This addresses the ability of the Council approach to maintain a rolling five year supply of deliverable sites (including as part of its proposed use of a ‘stepped trajectory and upon proposed adoption of the Local Plan 2040). The Delivery Assessment also illustrates that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites based on its own published position (at a base date of 1 April 2019) or when this is rolled forward to 1 April 2021.
- 6.2 In summary, the Council’s proposed approach to managing the delivery of housing over the Plan period is unsound. The Council indicates a proposed 20-year Plan period (2020 to 2040) for the Local Plan Review. The Local Plan Review must meet minimum annual local housing need calculated in accordance with the standard method. Planning Practice Guidance ID: 68-031-20190722 answers the question ‘how can past shortfalls in housing completions against planned requirements be addressed’? and states:
- “Where the Standard Method for assessing local housing need is used as the starting point in forming the planned requirement for housing, Step 2 of the Standard Method factors in past under-delivery as part of the affordability ratio, so there is no requirement to specifically address under-delivery separately when establishing the minimum annual local housing need figure. Under-delivery may need to be considered where the Plan being prepared is part way through its proposed Plan period, and delivery falls below the housing requirement level set out in the emerging relevant strategic policies for housing.”*
- 6.3 Based on the emerging proposals the performance of delivery in the period 2020 to 2023 will be relevant to assessing the soundness of the Local Plan 2040. Performance for this period will therefore be substantially informed by the Council’s current evidence of deliverable supply against the Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory (and extant consents).
- 6.4 The Council’s Preferred Options consultation proposals also indicate that it is likely to rely on a ‘stepped trajectory’ for the Plan period to 2030 (retaining an annual requirement of 970 dwellings per annum). The Preferred Options principally rely on large-scale strategic sites with limited prospects for delivery within five years from adoption (2023 to 2028). The Council’s supply for this period will therefore also substantially be informed by the Local Plan 2030 trajectory (and characteristics of sites identified in Neighbourhood Plans).

- 6.5 The evidence for sites identified in the Local Plan 2030 trajectory, as of 1 April 2021, reviewed in the separate Delivery Assessment, demonstrates that these do not achieve an early prioritisation of housing delivery. This reflects issues raised throughout the Local Plan 2030 Examination relating to constraints to viability and availability of the sites identified, particularly within the Town Centre.
- 6.6 Regarding Town Centre sites identified in the Local Plan 2030 and the associated longstanding delays to development there is no mention of a Development Corporation in either the Council's consultation document or consultation on a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Spatial Framework. The Council has previously indicated that this may be the route to unlocking sites and overcoming barriers to development for which there is currently no clear solution.
- 6.7 In these circumstances the Council's proposals to pursue a stepped trajectory are contrary to national policy and guidance. PPG ID: 68-021-20190722 answers the question 'when is a stepped requirement appropriate for plan-making'? and sets out:

*“A stepped housing requirement may be appropriate **where there is to be a significant change in the level of housing requirement between emerging and previous policies** and / or where strategic sites will have a phased delivery or are likely to be delivered later in the plan period. Strategic policy-makers will need to identify the stepped requirement in strategic housing policy, and to set out evidence to support this approach, **and not seek to unnecessarily delay meeting identified development needs. Stepped requirements will need to ensure that planned housing requirements are met fully within the plan period.** In reviewing and revising policies, strategic policy-makers should ensure there is not continued delay in meeting identified development needs.*

Where there is evidence to support a prioritisation of sites, local authorities may wish to identify priority sites which can be delivered earlier in the plan period, such as those on brownfield land and where there is supporting infrastructure in place e.g., transport hubs. These sites will provide additional flexibility and more certainty that authorities will be able to demonstrate a sufficient supply of deliverable sites against the housing requirement. (SPRU emphasis)

- 6.8 There are four key issues to highlight with the Council's proposed use of a stepped trajectory:
- The change in housing requirement cannot be considered significant. The Council was fully aware of these circumstances when the Local Plan 2030 was adopted with the requirement for early review. Planning for a difference in the annual requirement of around 305 dwellings per annum (LHN of 1275 vs OAN of 970) is a relatively modest change in the context of a recently adopted Local Plan that should maintain a minimum rolling supply against the OAN figure
 - The Local Plan 2030 unnecessarily sought to delay meeting needs in accordance with

the government's latest policy. Pursuing a stepped trajectory simply perpetuates that problem

- The current Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory provides for no flexibility or certainty (particularly given issues with Neighbourhood Plans and Town Centre sites). The Council's Preferred Options provide no resolution to this.
- The use of a stepped trajectory will not ensure needs are met in full. There will be a substantial shortfall against the stepped requirement of 970dpa to 2030 (based on the latest information regarding supply). A reliance on large-scale strategic sites beyond 2030, for which there is a poor record of success in the borough in terms of timescales and rates of delivery, does not provide a reasonable prospect of development in accordance with PPG ID: 68-019-20190722)

6.9 Those issues relating to the current Local Plan 2030 mean that there is no prospect whatsoever that extant commitments and allocations alone would allow the Council to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites based on the calculation of minimum annual local housing need upon adoption of the Local Plan 2030.

6.10 Our analysis demonstrates that the Council's proposed approach to rely on a stepped trajectory is also flawed. This will not achieve a five year supply of deliverable sites upon adoption of the Local Plan 2040 without significant support to prioritise the early delivery of additional sites.

7.0 RESPONSE TO SITE ASSESSMENT PRO-FORMA (CALL FOR SITES ID 932 AND 918)

Introduction to the Site and Proposals

- 7.1 Together, the sites represent an area of circa 52 ha, 47 ha of which lies to the east of Odell Road (Site A) with the remaining 5 ha off School Approach (Site B), both on the south-western side of Sharnbrook.



Figure 1: Wider Context – Land at School Approach and Land south of Odell Road, Sharnbrook (Source: Google Maps)

- 7.2 Both sites maintain a strong relationship with the village and are well related to the existing built-up area. Taken together they can provide a full range of housing types and tenures and substantial community infrastructure including provision of land for a new one or two form entry primary school. The indicative site masterplan (Figure 2 below) illustrates how the sites could be developed to include around 20ha of multifunctional open space/riverside parkland, enhancing the recreation, open space, and green infrastructure provision in the village.

- 7.3 The sites currently comprise arable fields and are identified as Grade 3 ‘Good to Moderate’ Agricultural Land.
- 7.4 Odell Road forms the western extent of Site A, lying behind the established residential dwellings to the east and north. To the south and south-east, the site is bound by a series of lakes and water courses within the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI, with the River Great Ouse beyond. Site B is bounded by residential development to the east, beyond School Approach, with Sharnbrook Academy to the north, and agricultural land to the south/ west. Adjacent to the site’s southern boundary is an access track that leads onto Odell Road, adjacent to Site A.
- 7.5 Access to the sites is to be achieved from Odell Road (Site A) and School Approach (Site B) respectively, both of which are adopted highways, facilitating direct connections to the principle thoroughfares of Sharnbrook.
- 7.6 There are no listed buildings within the immediate vicinity of the sites, nor are they within a Conservation Area (the northern boundary of Site A partially adjoins). Both sites include a portion of land subject to land designation, with sites A and B including a small area of land identified as ‘Village Open Space / View’ under Policy AD40 of the Site Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013). The potential impact on this designation was considered as part of a Comparative Landscape Assessment undertaken on behalf of our client, illustrating that the Stoneyfields site compares favourably to the proposed allocation at Hill Farm (see Appendix 4).
- 7.7 Neither site falls within any Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Local Nature Reserve, or Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Site A adjoins). The sites themselves are also unconstrained in terms of ecology.
- 7.8 Site B remains unconstrained by flooding, with only the eastern margin of Site A lying in Flood Zone 2 / 3. This is however proposed to be retained as open space / green infrastructure and would therefore not impact on the development capacity of the site.
- 7.9 These sites are therefore considered to be relatively unconstrained and well related to the existing built-up area making them suitable development allocations, contributing towards the growth needs of Sharnbrook and the wider authority area whilst providing substantial community infrastructure.

Services and Facilities

- 7.10 The settlement of Sharnbrook provides a good range of local services and facilities and includes a post office, convenience store, a pharmacy, restaurants, cafes, public houses, and Sharnbrook Upper School, hence its designation as a Key Service Centre.
- 7.11 Sharnbrook is also served by several bus routes, including bus route 50 (Bedford/Kettering) and bus route 25/26 (Bedford-Rushden) with the nearest rail links provided at Bedford.

Proposed Development Scheme - Stoneyfields

- 7.12 An indicative Masterplan (see Figure 2 below) illustrates how the sites could be developed for the land known as 'Stoneyfields'.



Figure 2 – Indicative Masterplan (Source: Bedfordia Property Strategic Vision and Indicative Masterplan document)

- 7.13 Stoneyfields presents significant development opportunities, not only to accommodate between 450-500 dwellings but also by facilitating the development of multifunctional countryside parkland, enhancing the recreation, open space, and green infrastructure provision in the village. The creation of this area, adjacent to the River Ouse Corridor, not only optimises the use of land within Flood Zones 2 / 3, but also serves to enhance the village and the open countryside beyond. This riverside park would additionally introduce a series of new footpath connections, linking to those currently within the area and providing greater linkages for existing residents to the open countryside.
- 7.14 The proximity of the Stoneyfields site to the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI has been considered throughout its promotion. Previous site assessment undertaken by Bedford Borough Council has indicated scope for mitigation, subject to investigations. Our client has undertaken engagement with Natural England as part of its Discretionary Advice process. A scheme of works for the necessary hydrological, drainage and water quality investigations is to be agreed.
- 7.15 The Concept Masterplan has been informed by ongoing engagement with Natural England. The latest correspondence (14/10/2020) further highlights no showstopper constraints to development in this location. Here Natural England again welcome the provision of a Country Park, stating this “acts as a physical buffer between the SSSI and the proposed development, and conforms to Natural England’s NE265 Nature Nearby Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance”. A copy of this correspondence has previously been provided to Officers at the Council.
- 7.16 Initial transport assessments dictate that a suitable and safe vehicular access to the development area could be delivered in principle. This would be achieved as part of provision of a new distributor road within Site A, enabling a traffic calming and an improvement on the existing highways arrangement on Odell Road. The proposed arrangement provides significant potential to improve existing pressure on the highway network associated with Sharnbrook Academy and the School Approach roundabout. The indicative Masterplan also includes provision of a drop-off facility for Sharnbrook Academy in order to relieve existing pressure associated with car parking and access to buses via School Approach.

- 7.17 A Review of the Sharnbrook Transport Study Review (SDD Consultants) (prepared to support representations to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and illustrate the comparative advantages of the site in terms of access to services and facilities in the village) is included at Appendix 3.
- 7.18 This site provides a unique opportunity to create a unified educational campus with the potential for a new one or two form entry primary school supporting the educational needs of the community and enhancing the continuity of educational facilities within the Sharnbrook catchment area.
- 7.19 The Masterplan dedicates land for provision of a local centre including the potential for relocation of the existing GP facility and new convenience retail floorspace. The facilities would be well-related to the site and the existing village for access by non-car modes for current and future residents. Additional retail floorspace would assist in potentially reducing pressure on the High Street in a sustainable location.
- 7.20 In conclusion, development of Land at Stoneyfields could contribute towards the needs for development identified in the Bedford Local Plan 2040 in one comprehensively planned site, accommodating a mixture of dwelling types in addition to providing a new primary school and other community benefits. Both sites have a strong relationship to the existing built form of the village, immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of Sharnbrook. As such, it is considered that the development of these sites appears a logical extension to the village, continuing the established settlement form in a southerly direction and rounding off development with a new strong and defensible boundary.
- 7.21 Both sites A and B are within the control of one party, are available now and can be brought forward without any need for agreement with other parties. This means development can be phased to link with the delivery of essential infrastructure, e.g., education provision, open space etc.
- 7.22 In the context of the points discussed above, the sites are unconstrained in terms of deliverability and therefore could come forward in a timely manner. They would deliver a well-designed and spacious scheme, incorporating a mix of sizes and tenures as well as extra care/care accommodation for the elderly and the potential for a new single form primary school, all of which are required with the village.

Land at School Approach

7.23 Land at School Approach has been included in these representations as a potential smaller scale opportunity to address risks of non-delivery or delays associated with the proposed allocation of Hill Farm or to provide a more limited contribution towards future needs in the Local Plan 2040 from the KSC at Sharnbrook. A boundary plan showing the site in the context of Sharnbrook is available below.



Figure 3: School Approach Site Location Plan

- 7.24 This site has previously been submitted to the Council as part of their Call for Sites and was suggested as a proposed 'Reserve Site' as part of representations to the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan.
- 7.25 Land west of School Drive was also comprehensively analysed as part of the Borough Council's 'Site Assessments and Potential Options for Allocation' Report (April 2017), where it was identified as part of a suitable allocation option for Sharnbrook. Details of the site were resubmitted as part of the 'Call for Sites' exercise undertaken to inform the Review of the Bedford Local Plan 2030.
- 7.26 The Site Assessment exercise undertaken by AECOM to support preparation of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan identified the site as considered suitable for between 60 to 74 dwellings and considered deliverable within the next 5 years.
- 7.27 The site as recognised is unconstrained and well connected to the existing settlement and is available, suitable, and achievable within the first five years of the plan period.

Summary of Specific Evidence

- 7.28 Copies of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken for the site and the response from Natural England’s Discretionary Advice Service have previously been provided to the Council.
- 7.29 Additional information is provided relating to our client’s work to promote the site as part of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan, which was produced to illustrate the benefits of the site in comparison to objections of the proposed allocation at Hill Farm. A copy of our client’s Vision Document for the Stoneyfields site is also provided at Appendix 8.
- 7.30 The following plans and documents are appended:

Appendix	Drawing / Document Ref.	Description
Appendix 1	BE5229-6-D01	Location Plan
Appendix 2	5229-SK02	Stoneyfields Indicative Masterplan
Appendix 3	BE5229-16PD	Sharnbrook Transport Study Review (SDD Consultants)
Appendix 4	SES 17005-LS02	Sharnbrook NP Comparative Landscape Assessment
Appendix 8	N/A	Stoneyfields Vision Document

Response to Borough Council's Site Assessment Pro-Forma and Neighbourhood Plan Assessment

7.31 These sites were submitted as part of Summer 2020 Call for Sites event.

Site Assessment Criteria (Site ID 932) – Object

7.32 The resulting assessments do not provide a robust justification for the approach taken to site selection and supporting growth. The assessments do not provide a criteria-based assessment of relevant factors (including suitability, availability, and achievability).

Reasoning

7.33 The site assessment found that the site has potential to cause highway and congestion issues, however, initial transport assessments dictate that a suitable and safe vehicular access to the development area could be delivered in principle. This would be achieved as part of provision of a new distributor road within Site A, enabling a traffic calming and an improvement on the existing highways arrangement on Odell Road. The proposed arrangement provides significant potential to improve existing pressure on the highway network associated with Sharnbrook Academy and the School Approach roundabout. The indicative Masterplan also includes provision of a drop-off facility for Sharnbrook Academy in order to relieve existing pressure associated with car parking and access to buses via School Approach.

7.34 Furthermore, the site assessment has noted a '*high risk allocation*' with regard to Natural England Risks Opportunities, however, our client has undertaken various engagement with Natural England as part of its Discretionary Advice process and, as a result, a scheme of works for the necessary hydrological, drainage and water quality investigations is to be agreed. Moreover, the Concept Masterplan has been informed by ongoing engagement with Natural England.

7.35 In relation to the potential presence of protected species on site our client confirms that a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been undertaken. A copy has previously been provided to Officers at the Council. This comprises a desk study, Phase 1 Habitat Survey, and an assessment of the potential of site features to support bats, together with an assessment of impacts at Stoneyfields. This report indicates positive findings in terms of the suitability of the site for development, subject to further survey requirements that will be

undertaken and reported during relevant seasonal periods, taking full account of the existing biodiversity evidence base. The report identifies that the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI is a predominantly aquatic habitat and that associated requirements can be acceptably accommodated as part of the Masterplan process.

- 7.36 In the absence of mitigation, the development may be considered to give rise to *minor adverse* impacts on habitats for reptiles and breeding birds. The PEA further notes mitigation has been proposed including careful lighting design for nocturnal wildlife and removal of vegetation outside the nesting bird season. This mitigation would reduce the impacts of the development proposals upon the habitats and species present, to give rise to an overall Neutral to Minor Beneficial impact.
- 7.37 The Report also notes that *“A number of ecological enhancements have been proposed, which would improve the quality of the site for native flora and fauna, including habitat piles, hedgehog tunnels, otter holts, bat boxes, bird boxes and native planting. Delivery of these enhancements would lead to an overall Moderate to Major Beneficial impact.”* Delivery of the Riverside Park would be associated with further specific ecological benefits in terms of attenuation, addressing increased recreational pressure and mitigating construction impacts through separation from the main development areas within the site.
- 7.38 Any noise impacts from Santa Pod would be capable of appropriate mitigation. However, our client notes that the Stoneyfields site falls outside of the contours for areas most likely to be impacted by the raceway and sits on lower-lying land south of the existing built settlement. In contrast, the Council’s assessment for the Hill Farm site (ID: 814) (which does acknowledge noise impacts from the A6 and rail line) makes no reference to Santa Pod despite the site’s proximity and higher elevation.

Suggested Alternative Site Assessment Finding

- 7.39 Given the findings of the assessment, the allocated appears to be suitable for development, ensuring that the appropriate tests are conducted in terms of highways, ecology (including hydrology), noise, and archaeology.

Site Assessment Criteria (Site ID 918) - Objection

Reasoning

- 7.40 Firstly, the site assessment noted that the agricultural land classification of the site is not known or it not clear whether it is classified as grade 3a or 3b. However, the site in isolation would provide for smaller-scale development well-related to existing built development, where the impact on the supply of best of most versatile agricultural land should not be seen as significant in the context of overall development needs.
- 7.41 Similarly, to site ID 932, the site assessment found that the site has potential to cause highway and congestion issues, however, initial transport assessments dictate that a suitable and safe vehicular access to the development area could be delivered in principle. This would likewise be achieved as part of provision of a new distributor road within Site A, enabling a traffic calming and an improvement on the existing highways arrangement on Odell Road. The proposed arrangement provides significant potential to improve existing pressure on the highway network associated with Sharnbrook Academy and the School Approach roundabout. The indicative Masterplan also includes provision of a drop-off facility for Sharnbrook Academy in order to relieve existing pressure associated with car parking and access to buses via School Approach.
- 7.42 Any noise impacts from Santa Pod would be capable of appropriate mitigation. However, our client notes that the Stoneyfields site falls outside of the contours for areas most likely to be impacted by the raceway and sits on lower-lying land than the majority of the built settlement.
- 7.43 In relation to the potential presence of protected species on site our client confirms that a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been undertaken. This report indicates positive findings in terms of the suitability of the site for development, subject to further survey requirements that will be undertaken and reported during relevant seasonal periods, taking full account of the existing biodiversity evidence base. This takes account of the distance between the School Approach site and the predominantly aquatic habitat within the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI, significantly reducing the potential impacts upon protected species.
- 7.44 The site assessment pro-forma findings (which are identical across most site options) take no account of the significant distance between the site and any designated heritage asset (including Sharnbrook Conservation Area) with the land located immediately west of recent

new-build development.

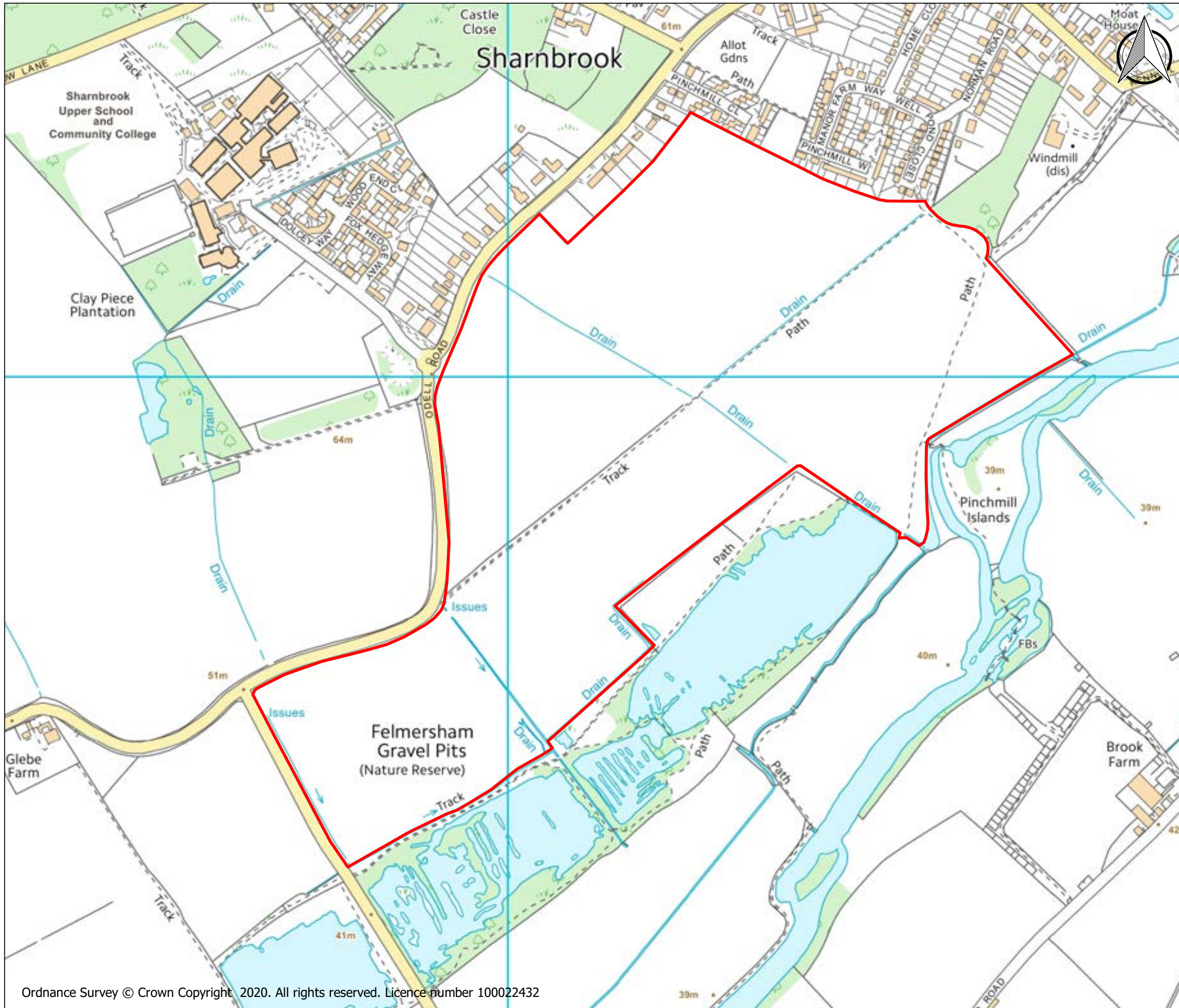
Suggested Alternative Site Assessment Finding

- 7.45 Given the findings of the assessment, the allocated appears to be suitable for development, ensuring that the appropriate tests are conducted in terms of highways, ecology, noise, and archaeology.



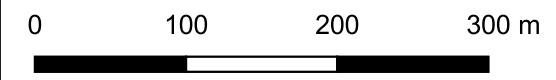
BE5229/6P – Stoneyfields, Sharnbrook
Bedfordia Property and Bedfordshire Charitable Trust
Bedford Local Plan 2040 Representation
September 2021

**Appendix 1 Location Plans (Land at School Approach and Land east of Odell Road,
Sharnbrook (ID: 918 / ID: 932))**



 Site Boundary

Scale: 1:5000



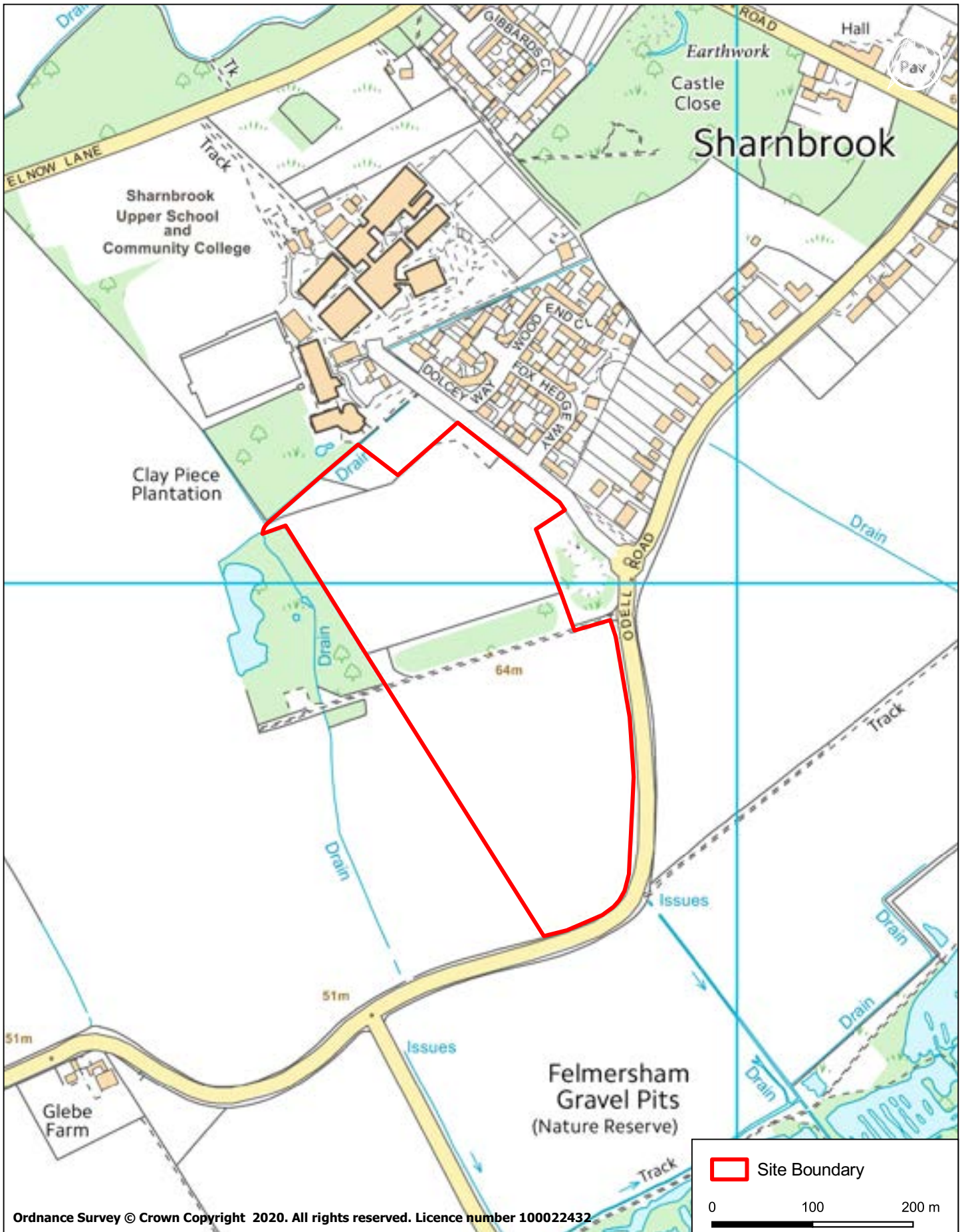
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PROJECT
 BBC Local Plan 2030 Review

DRAWING TITLE
 Odell Road, Sharnbrook
 Location Plan

Date	13.08.2020	OS Ref:	Drawn By
Scale	1:5000 @ A3	Drawing No:	PMG
Job No:	BE5542	Rev:	CS



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	SCALE 1:5000 @ A4	DRWG NO. SHA 01	Checked CS		
PROJECT BBC Local Plan 2030 Review	JOB NO. BE5542	REV.	Offices also at: Bristol, Cardiff, East Midlands, Leeds, London, Milton Keynes, Rugby and Sheffield		
	DRWG TITLE School Approach, Sharnbrook Location Plan				



BE5229/6P – Stoneyfields, Sharnbrook
Bedfordia Property and Bedfordshire Charitable Trust
Bedford Local Plan 2040 Representation
September 2021

Appendix 2 Indicative Stoneyfields Masterplan (Site ID: 918 / 932)



- KEY:**
- SITE BOUNDARY
 - EXISTING PROW
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLE LINK
 - EXISTING DRAINAGE DITCH
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED PRIMARY ROAD
 - EXISTING ROAD TO BE DOWNGRADED
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED DIVERTED THROUGH-TRAFFIC ROAD
 - NORTHERN EDGE OF FLOOD ZONES 2 AND 3
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED STRUCTURAL PLANTING
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED RECREATION ZONE
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED ATTENUATION BASIN
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED NATURAL / EQUIPPED CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED 2FE SCHOOL
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED SCHOOL DROP-OFF FACILITY
 - INDICATIVE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL AREA

Project
Land South-West of Sharnbrook

Client
Bedfordia

Drawing Title
Illustrative Masterplan (V2)

Job No. BE5229/7	Date 04.12.2019	Revision
Drawing No. 5229(7)-SK05	Scale 1:2,000 @ A1	D

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Appendix 3 Review of the Sharnbrook Transport Study (SDD Consultants)

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-16PD

Re: Sharnbrook Transport Study – Technical Note Review
Date: September 2020
Subject: Review of Sharnbrook Parish Council ‘Sharnbrook Transport Study’ (Origin, January 2020)
Client: Bedfordia Group Ltd

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Technical Note (Note) has been prepared by DLP Planning’s Sustainable Development and Delivery (SDD) team on behalf of Bedfordia Group Ltd in order to provide a review of the “Sharnbrook Transport Study” (January 2020) which was prepared by Origin on behalf of Sharnbrook Parish Council.

1.2 The background to and purpose of the “Sharnbrook Transport Study” is stated as being as follows:

“The Parish Council is currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which is being developed alongside the Bedford Borough Council Draft Local Plan, which proposes 500 homes in the village.

“A total of 30 sites have come forward for potential development in the village. AECOM have been appointed by the Parish Council to undertake site assessment work for these 30 sites but have requested that a transport study is conducted in order to inform the transport element of the site assessments.”

Transport Study that assesses the transport impact of 500 dwellings on Sharnbrook village.”

1.3 The “Sharnbrook Transport Study” (see **Appendix A**) provides an overview of the sustainability credentials of each site put forward, and the traffic impact of the dwellings for each site. Whilst a total of 30 sites were identified in the draft Local Plan, a number of sites were subsequently excluded by Bedford Borough Council. Furthermore, for the purpose of assessment, the “Sharnbrook Transport Study” also groups several sites in similar locations together.

1.4 This technical review seeks to review the evidence base and approach / methodologies adopted to establish if a fair and unbiased approach to the site appraisals has been undertaken. The review will focus specifically on the comparison between the Hill Farm site for 500 dwellings (site reference 901 Hill Farm) and the Sharnbrook sites (site reference 620 Land east of Odell Road and 527 Land at School Approach). In particular this technical note provides a review of the following key issues:

- The assessment criteria and subsequent assessment of the sustainability credentials of each site;
- The suitability of trip generation figures used and any assumptions made.
- The methodology utilised to review the capacity of off-site junctions, and associated

impact of each development to ensure their accuracy. This will include a review of the traffic survey data and associated modelling works undertaken.

- A high level review of whether any mitigation measures proposed to support a particular site are indeed feasible.

2.0 Review of Sustainability Assessment

2.1 The Transport Study prepared by Origin reviews each of the key sites against a set list of criteria, to then provide a red / amber / green score to each of the sites. Such criteria includes:

- Walking distance of facilities;
- Availability of pedestrian links;
- Distance to frequent bus service; and
- Effect of additional vehicle trips on Sharnbrook Village.

2.2 As outlined earlier, our review has focused upon the assessment of “Site 901 – Hill Farm”, “Site 620 – Land East of Odell Road” and “Site 527 – Land at School Approach”.

2.3 Within the Origin Transport Study, it is accepted that Bus Service 50 is the only service through the village at present, and that providing additional new services / rerouting of current services is not typically favourable to bus operators due to costs involved and timetable reviews. However having reviewed the scoring matrix at Table 4 of the report, it is noted that “Site 901 – Hill Farm” has been allocated a “*most sustainable*” score in relation to “*distance to nearest public transport*”. Appendix E of the report provides a more detailed review of the scoring system, and that the score relates to the assumption that “*bus services will be diverted in to the site.*” No other site is stated to be able to facilitate this which is an unreasonable assumption on behalf of Origin.

2.4 The above therefore represents a contradiction within the assessment. The Transport Study accepts that the sites should not be reliant upon provision of a new / diverted bus service, however “Site 901 – Hill Farm” is wholly dependent upon a bus service being diverted through the site. Should the local bus operator (Stagecoach) not be willing to divert the current service, this would mean that the nearest bus stop would be circa 750 metres from the centre of the site.

2.5 Conversely “Site 620 – Land East of Odell Road” lies approximately 350 metres from the existing bus stops along Odell Road, and therefore the bus operator would be required to make no diversion in order to serve this site.

2.6 In terms of pedestrian accessibility, “Site 901 – Hill Farm” is provided with a score of “*most sustainable*”. This relates to connections and distance to local facilities. In terms of walking distance, facilities such as the existing pharmacy within Sharnbrook lie approximately 1.5 kilometres away. The route makes use of a footway along the western side of Templars Way, but as highlighted in the Origin text, this is less than 1 metre in width in places, with no streetlighting provided. The majority of the route also has no natural surveillance, as is not overlooked by existing residential properties. It is therefore deemed that the option for sustainable travel towards existing facilities within Sharnbrook is extremely limited. Whilst the proposals for “Site 901 – Hill Farm” allow for a retail element, this self-containment approach would not encourage sustainable connections to existing local businesses, and would instead create car-based journeys to the centre of Sharnbrook. In addition, a number of other larger potential allocation sites, including Site 620 – Land East of Odell Road could be considered to be of an appropriate size to provide

an 'allowance' for a retail element. However, this allowance has not been made for any other sites apart from site 901 and as such the report does not represent a fair and unbiased assessment.

- 2.7 Conversely, "Site 620- Land East of Odell Road" is provided with a score of "*reasonably sustainable*" in relation to distance to facilities and "*sustainable*" in relation to connections. Given the centre of the site is approximately 550 metres walking distance to the centre of Sharnbrook and its existing facilities. There is existing footway provision for future residents of Site Reference 620 "Land off Odell Road", which are well lit and conducive to walking.
- 2.8 Based on the information set out above we would dispute the high scoring of site 901 and the low scoring of site 620 in terms of sustainability.

3.0 Highway Assessment Methodology

- 3.1 In the first instance, it is important to note that when assessing the impact of the proposed sites on the highway network from a capacity perspective, only 5 different options have been assessed. Where sites are located within relatively close proximity to each other, they have been assessed together as a single scenario. "Site 901 – Hill Farm" is the only site that has been assessed from a stand alone perspective, and is referred to within the report as Modelling Option 1. This alone indicates at an inherent bias.
- 3.2 In terms of our two parcels of land (site reference 620 and 527), these have been assessed in separate scenarios – alongside other promoted sites as follows:

Modelling Scenario 3 includes: Land east of Odell Road – 400 dwellings (site ref 620)

- Prospect Place – 6 dwellings (site ref 251)
- Land at Yelow Lane – 65 dwellings (site ref 238)
- Land at Lodge Road – 40 dwellings (site ref 516)

Modelling Scenario 4 includes: Land at School Approach (site ref 527)

- Site references 231, 616, 232, 234, 242, 247, 249, 250, 712, 811, 244, 410, 615, 237

- 3.3 The above shows how neither of our sites (site ref 620 and 527) have been assessed on their own merit, as per site reference "901 Hill Farm".
- 3.4 Furthermore, Table 4 of the Transport Study report also incorrectly references Land at School Approach (site ref 527) as comprising 30 dwellings plus a care home. Similarly, neither Site Ref 527 nor Site Ref 620 make reference to the provision of a primary school. Therefore any subsequent capacity assessments would be deemed invalid, as they do not assess the correct proposed site composition for the proposed sites. This is particularly key in terms of the provision of a Primary School as site reference "901 Hill Farm" benefits significantly in terms of its sustainability score from providing such a facility on site.
- 3.5 It is also noted that whilst the report makes reference to site "901 Hill Farm" having direct access onto the A6, no detail is provided in terms of the form of this access or indicative location. There is no detail in relation to whether a new roundabout would be created on the A6, and no capacity assessments undertaken regarding the suitability of such an access. Noting Local Highway Authorities' widespread reluctance towards creating new access points directly onto 'A' roads, an assessment should have been undertaken regarding the access strategy to serve this site. This would include whether an access on the A6 is indeed likely to be viable or suitable from a geometric

/ capacity perspective. This would have a fundamental bearing on the delivery of this site, and has been overlooked completely within the report.

4.0 Trip Generation Calculations and Assumptions

- 4.1 The Transport Study states that the trip generation used to inform the capacity testing exercise, has been calculated using the TRICS National Trip Rate Database. This is industry standard software, and is deemed to be the correct approach. The analysis is based upon comparing trip generation figures at sites of similar characteristics, and applying these to the proposed scale of development. However as part of the assessment undertaken within the Transport Study, a single set of trip rates have been applied to all the option sites. This makes no allowance of whether the site is urban or rural in nature, proximity to local facilities or options available to travel by sustainable modes. As part of any future planning submission, SDD consider that this approach would not be deemed valid. Each site should be assessed on its own merit in terms of its potential to generate car borne trips.
- 4.2 Further to the above, the standard approach to trip rates has been applied to all the option sites, regardless of proximity to local school facilities. Whilst it is noted that site “901 – Hill Farm” would allow for a primary school, the site would still be 2.6 kilometres from the nearest secondary school (Sharnbrook Academy). Given approximately 25% of traffic in the UK during the AM peak period comprises parents taking children to school, it is deemed that the approach taken within the Transport Study is too simplistic. No allowance has been made for the fact that sites 620 and 527 (land at Odell Road and School Approach) are within walking distance of Sharnbrook Academy, and would hence result in removal of such school related vehicle trips on the surrounding highway network. In addition site 620 could also accommodate a potential primary school which has not been taken in to account. Typically, where a development site lies within walking distance of both a primary school and secondary school (as is the case for sites 620 land at Odell Road and 527 land at School Approach), we would anticipate circa a 30 to 40% internalisation factor (trips internal to the immediate area) to be applied to these sites. Hence the peak period trip generation figures would be significantly reduced compared to those presented within the Transport Study.
- 4.3 The above issue is deemed to be a key factor when going on to assess the development traffic distribution patterns, and impact at key junctions.

5.0 Traffic Distribution Assumptions

- 5.1 The traffic distribution put forward in the Transport Study is based on assessment of 2011 Census ‘Location of Usual Residence and Place of Work’ dataset. This is industry standard best practice. However, a simplistic distribution exercise has then been undertaken and applied to all the option sites. By way of example for all traffic heading southbound from Site 620 Land at Odell Road, this has been routed through Sharnbrook village and then along Mill Lane towards the A6. However a high level Google Journey Planner exercise has indicated that in reality, the preferred route for A6 southbound traffic is Causeway / Radwell Road. A further alternative option is provided by Google via Pavenham Road which again, does not require traffic to route through Sharnbrook village. The simplified and incorrect distribution used in the Transport Study means that a disproportionate amount of traffic associated with Sites 620 and 527 has incorrectly been assigned through Sharnbrook village associated which has a direct negative impact on the operation of key

junctions.

- 5.2 As outlined previously, the above takes no account of trips during the peak hour period which occur other than journeys to work. In addition the assessment does not consider the potential number of 'linked trips' whereby parents would drive / divert to drop their children off at school, as part of their usual route to work. Therefore, whilst the Transport Study states that only 3.9% of trips generated by the option sites would travel along Odell Road / through Sharnbrook village (circa only 7 trips during the AM peak period), this makes no allowance for trips to Sharnbrook Academy, generated by future residents of site 901 – Hill Farm. The assessment makes a significant underestimation of the impact of traffic generated by Site 901 - Hill Farm, in particular upon junctions through Sharnbrook Village and the route towards Sharnbrook Academy.
- 5.3 In addition to the above, having reviewed Appendix G of the Transport Study, it is apparent that no allowance has been made for the use of an internal spine road link through Site 620 Land at Odell Road. As part of our proposals, this link road would seek to transfer all through-traffic along Odell Road – away from the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout. Based upon Origins own data provided within the Transport Study, this amounts to up to 365 two-way vehicle movements through the roundabout during the peak period. This traffic has incorrectly been distributed through the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout, instead of via the proposed link road through Site 620. This clearly has a bearing on subsequent capacity assessments undertaken as part of the latter stages of the Transport Study.

6.0 Junction Modelling Results

- 6.1 The junction capacity modelling has been undertaken using the PICADY and ARCADY within the JUNCITONS modelling software programme. This is industry standard best practice. The below review is based on a comparative exercise of the impact of Option 1 as set out in the Transport Study report (Site 901 – Hill Farm) and Option 3 (which includes Site 620 Odell Road alongside three other smaller sites). Option 4 includes Site 527 (Land at School Approach) yet as outlined earlier, models the impact of this site alongside 14 other sites. The assessment also incorrectly models this site as being 30 dwellings plus a care home.
- 6.2 In addition, the traffic distribution utilised in the traffic modelling does not provide an accurate representation of vehicle movements to and from sites 620 and 527 and as such, the capacity testing results and any conclusions drawn are considered to be flawed from the very outset.

High Street / Church Lane

- 6.3 In terms of capacity impact through the village, Table 8 of the Transport Study shows that Option 1 (Site 901 – Hill Farm) would result in queues of up to 2 vehicles during the peak period during the 2030 Future Year scenario at the High Street / Church Lane junction. However, Option 3 (which includes Site 620 – Land at Odell Road) would result in queues of up to 19 vehicles. As outlined earlier, this assessment makes no allowance of school trips to Sharnbrook Academy generated by residents of Site 902 – Hill Farm. Indeed future residents of this site could potentially make 2 journeys (east and westbound through the village) during the AM peak, as they drop their children off at school before returning to their journey to work back towards the A6.

Odell Road / School Approach roundabout

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-16PD

- 6.4 In terms of the impact assessment at this junction, the modelling has assumed that Site 620 (Land at Odell) would join the network via a fourth arm to the roundabout. This modelling assumption is incorrect. Furthermore, the capacity assessment has made no allowance for the internal link road lining either side of the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout, which would effectively remove all through traffic at this location.
- 6.5 The modelling results show that Option 1 (Site 901 – Hill Farm) would have a negligible impact at this location. However, it is concluded in the report that Option 3 which includes Site 620 – Land at Odell Road, would give rise to queue length of up to 69 vehicles in the AM peak period.
- 6.6 As set out the results of the modelling of this junction are based on incorrect traffic generation and distribution calculations and incorrect modelling of the form of the junction associated with site 620. The assessment is also based upon a simplistic traffic distribution exercise associated with Site 901 – Hill Farm, and is actually deemed to severely underestimate the level of traffic generated by this site at this particular junction.
- 6.7 Notwithstanding this, it is worth noting that the modelling results show the junction to operate over capacity during the baseline 2030 scenario (i.e with no option sites being developed and simply background traffic growth). This capacity issue is related to a “*peak within a peak*” (i.e 15 minutes) related to school start / end times, as opposed to typical peak hour activity which is commonly spread over a longer period of time. This therefore shows that even without the Site 620 – Land at Odell Road coming forward, mitigation would already be required at the School Approach roundabout, given the junction would experience queues of up to 51 vehicles. Therefore whilst the Origin Transport Study shows that Site 620 – Land at Odell Road would increase queues by 13 vehicles, it would not be the trigger for the junction exceeding capacity.
- 6.8 As part of any subsequent planning application associated with Site 620 – Land at Odell Road or 527 – Land at School Approach, detailed capacity assessments would be required at this roundabout. However given the adjacent land ownership, we would be in a position to be able to offer up land to deliver highway improvements at this location (unlike other site option promoters). Our proposed sites could actually aid to deliver a betterment compared to the existing situation for both existing local and future residents alike.

A6 / Mill Road / Thurleigh roundabout

- 6.9 The Transport Study recognises that there are existing capacity issues at this roundabout, with queues noted as being up to 10 vehicles long in the 2019 baseline scenario, and 114 vehicles long in the 2030 baseline scenario. The report also goes on to also accept that Option 1 (Site 901 – Hill Farm) would result in queues of up to 277 vehicles occurring at this junction. This is compared to Option 3 (which includes Site 602 – Land at Odell Road) which would give rise to queue lengths of 151 vehicles. The report concedes that queues would significantly increase from the baseline scenario if no mitigation is implemented.
- 6.10 Any capacity assessments undertaken at this location must however be treated with caution, based upon the simplistic traffic distribution assessment as outlined previously within this Technical Note. The assignment of traffic from Site 602 Land at Odell Road is deemed to be an overestimation, with other route choices not accounted for.
- 6.11 Whilst an indicative mitigation scheme is provided for the A6 / Souldrop junction to mitigate impact at this location, no mitigation has been put forward for the A6 / Mill Road / Thurleigh roundabout.

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-16PD

Given no assessment has been undertaken regarding the feasibility of such mitigation at this location, and whether sufficient land is available to deliver improvements, there is no commitment that such works could be implemented.

7.0 Summary

7.1 This technical note has been prepared on behalf of Bedfordia Group (Ltd) to provide a review of the Transport Study prepared by Origin (January 2020). This review has identified that there are several concerns regarding the assessment undertaken as follows:

- Site 901 – Hill Farm is wholly dependent on a new bus service running through the site or diversion of Stagecoach 50. However, it is accepted within the report that this is costly and often not viewed favourably by bus operators. No certainty is provided that this would be delivered and the potential for other sites to divert a bus service has not been attributed to other sites.
- Site 901 – Hill Farm is reliant upon being self-contained and offers no commitment to encourage or improve pedestrian links to the existing facilities within Sharnbrook. Current pedestrian connections are poor and up to 1.5 kilometres walking distance. No other sites have been allocated a provision to be more self contained.
- Site 901 – Hill Farm is the only site which has been assessed (from a capacity perspective) as a stand alone option. Site 620 (Land at Odell Road) and 527 (Land at School Approach) have been grouped with other local sites as part of a cumulative impact exercise.
- No assessment has been undertaken of the proposed access point along the A6 to serve Site 901 – Hill Farm. The report has made no assessment from a geometric, land availability or capacity perspective, as to whether this would be viable.
- Site 527 – Land at School Approach has incorrectly been assessed as a 30-dwelling development with a care home on the site.
- A standard TRICS based trip rate has been applied to all the option sites, irrespective of whether they are urban or rural in nature. No allowance made for whether there are opportunities to travel by sustainable modes.
- No allowance made for the proximity of Site 527 and 620 to Sharnbrook Academy and potential primary school. This would result in reduction of school-based car journeys during peak periods at these sites, and an element of internalisation.
- No site-specific traffic distribution exercise has been undertaken. A simplistic approach has been undertaken for northbound and southbound traffic – applied to all site options. This makes no allowance for the route choices available for future residents of site 620 and 527, compared to site 901 - Hill Farm. This therefore assigns a disproportionate level of traffic associated with sites 620 and 527 through the village of Sharnbrook towards the A6. In turn, the impact of sites 620 and 527 at key junctions along the A6 have potentially been incorrectly assessed also.
- No assessment of car-based school trips to Sharnbrook Academy by residents of Site 901-Hill Farm has been made. Only commuting trips have been assessed.

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-16PD

- No assessment of the internal link road to be provided through Site 620 for through traffic. Therefore, incorrect impact assessment at the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout has been undertaken for all scenarios.
- Incorrect modelling of Odell Road / School Approach has been undertaken as it has been assumed site 620 would create a fourth arm to the existing roundabout to allow access to the site.
- Given the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout has been shown to already experience capacity issues, our site has the benefit of being able to offer adjacent land to accommodate any mitigation required at the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout. This would offer betterment to both existing local and future residents.

**Appendix 4 Sharnbrook NP Comparative Landscape Assessment Relating to the
Stoneyfields Masterplan and Hill Farm Proposals (SES, October 2020)**



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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Comparative Landscape and Visual Assessment Sharnbrook Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan

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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:</p> <p>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:</p> <p>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:</p> <p>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)

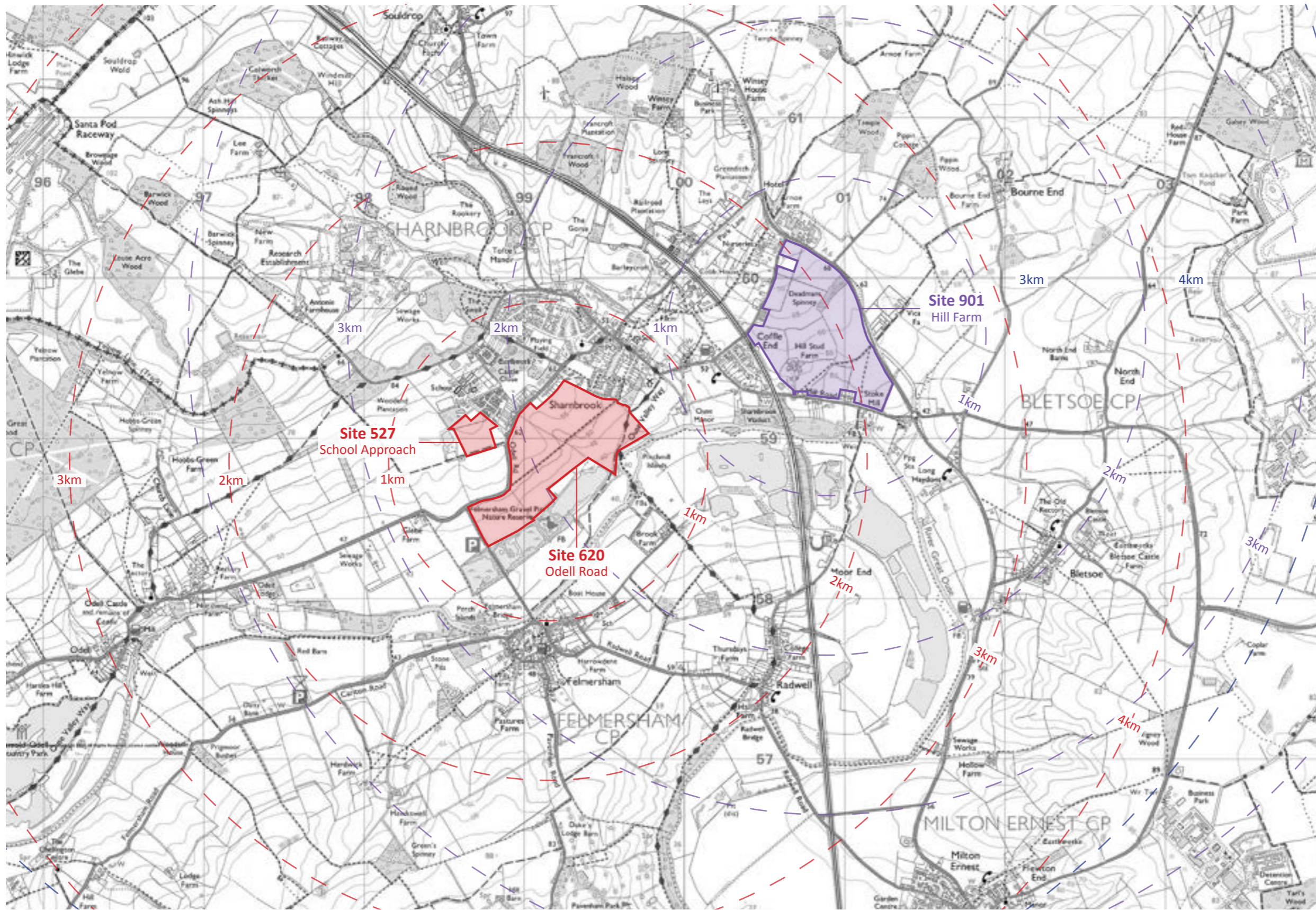
- 8.20 The findings of the Site Assessment report are not supported by the landscape and visual assessment undertaken.

- 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)

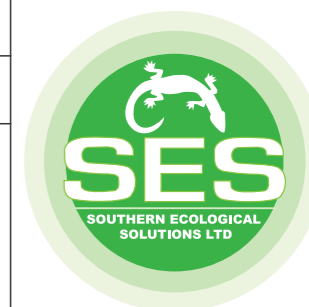
Note:
Distances are shown approximately from the centre of each site

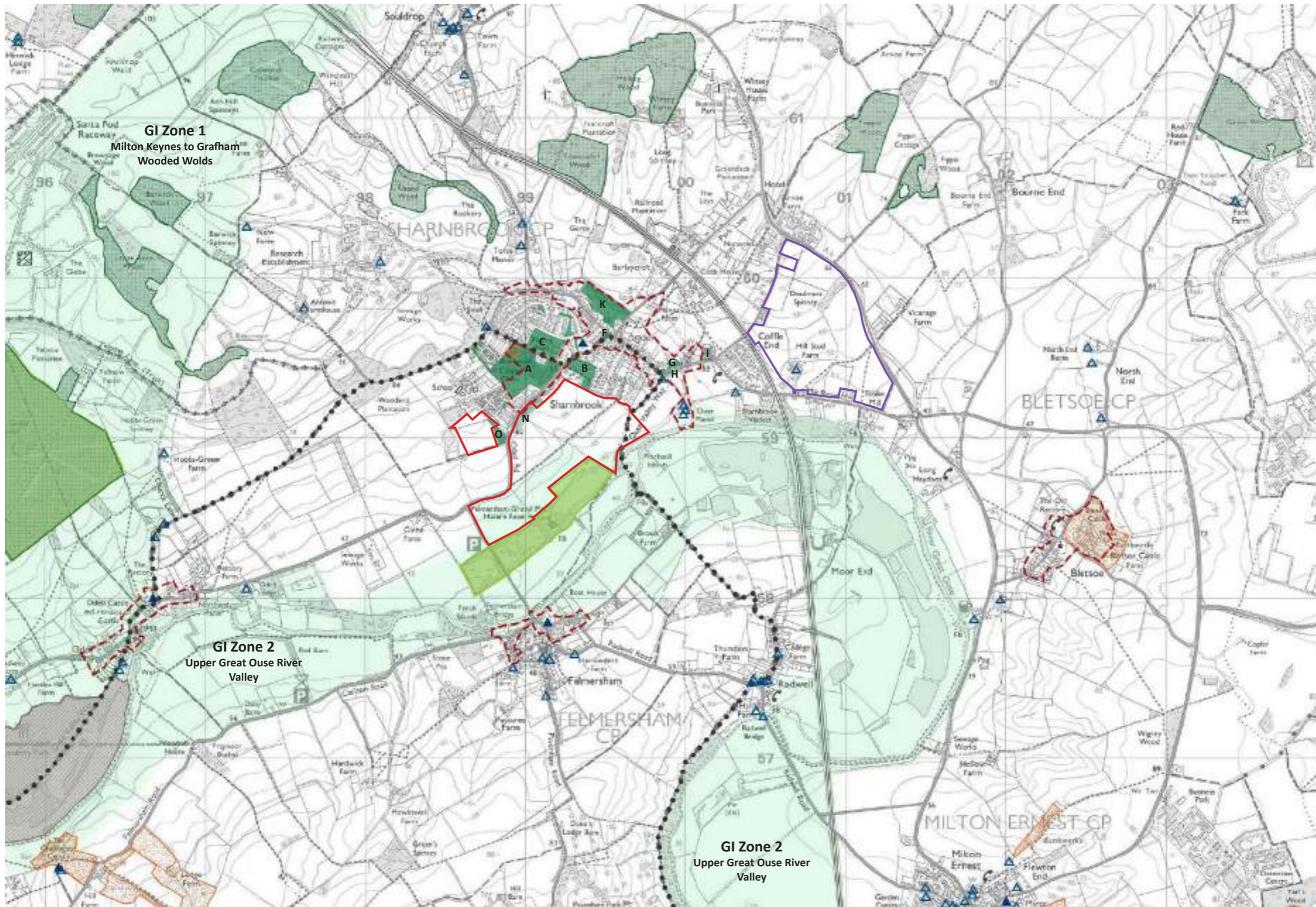
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Figure 1: Sites Location

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








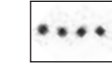






KEY

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

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

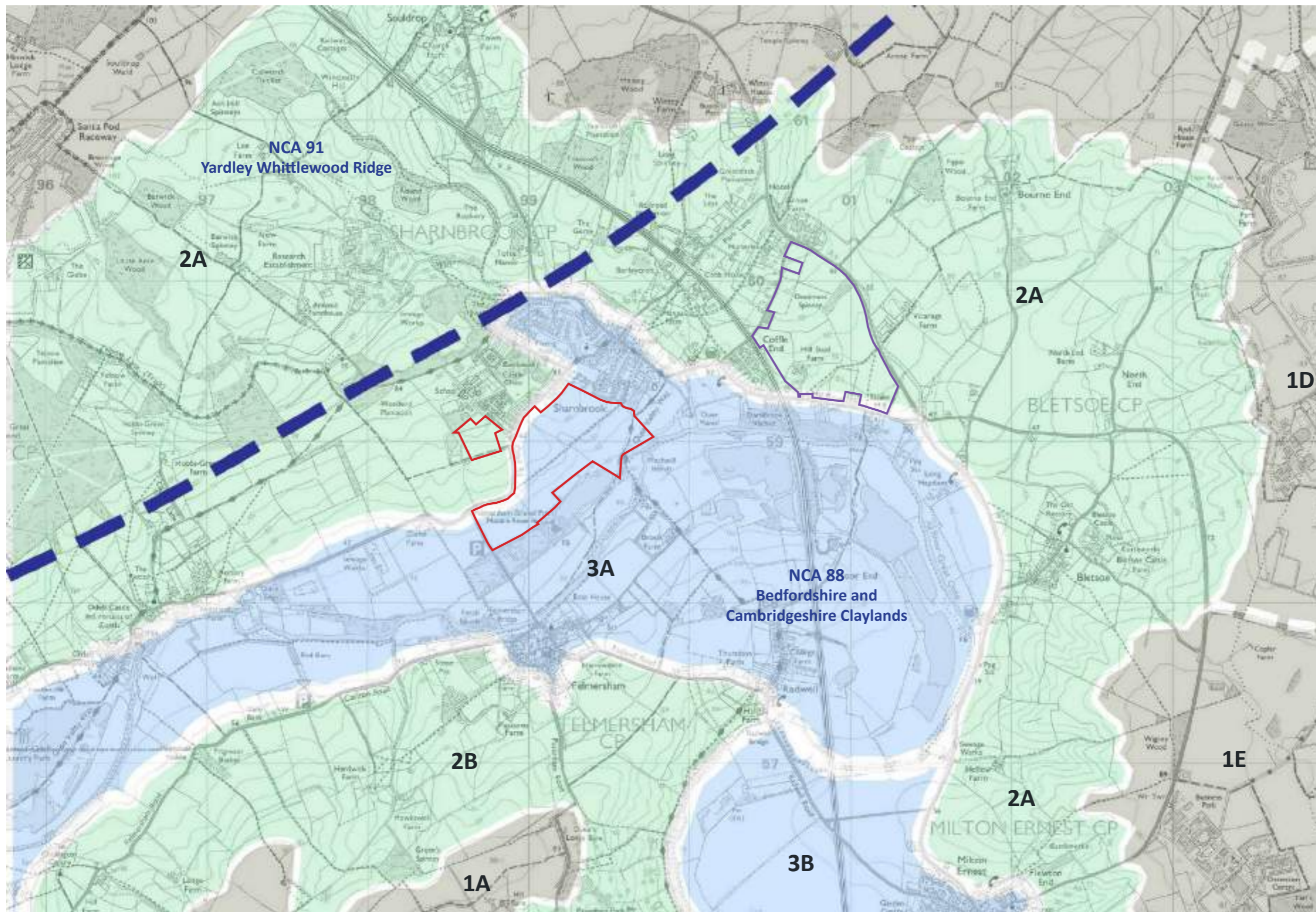
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Figure 2: Environmental Designations & Policy Areas

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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: Harold – Great Ouse Limestone Valley
- 3B: Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley

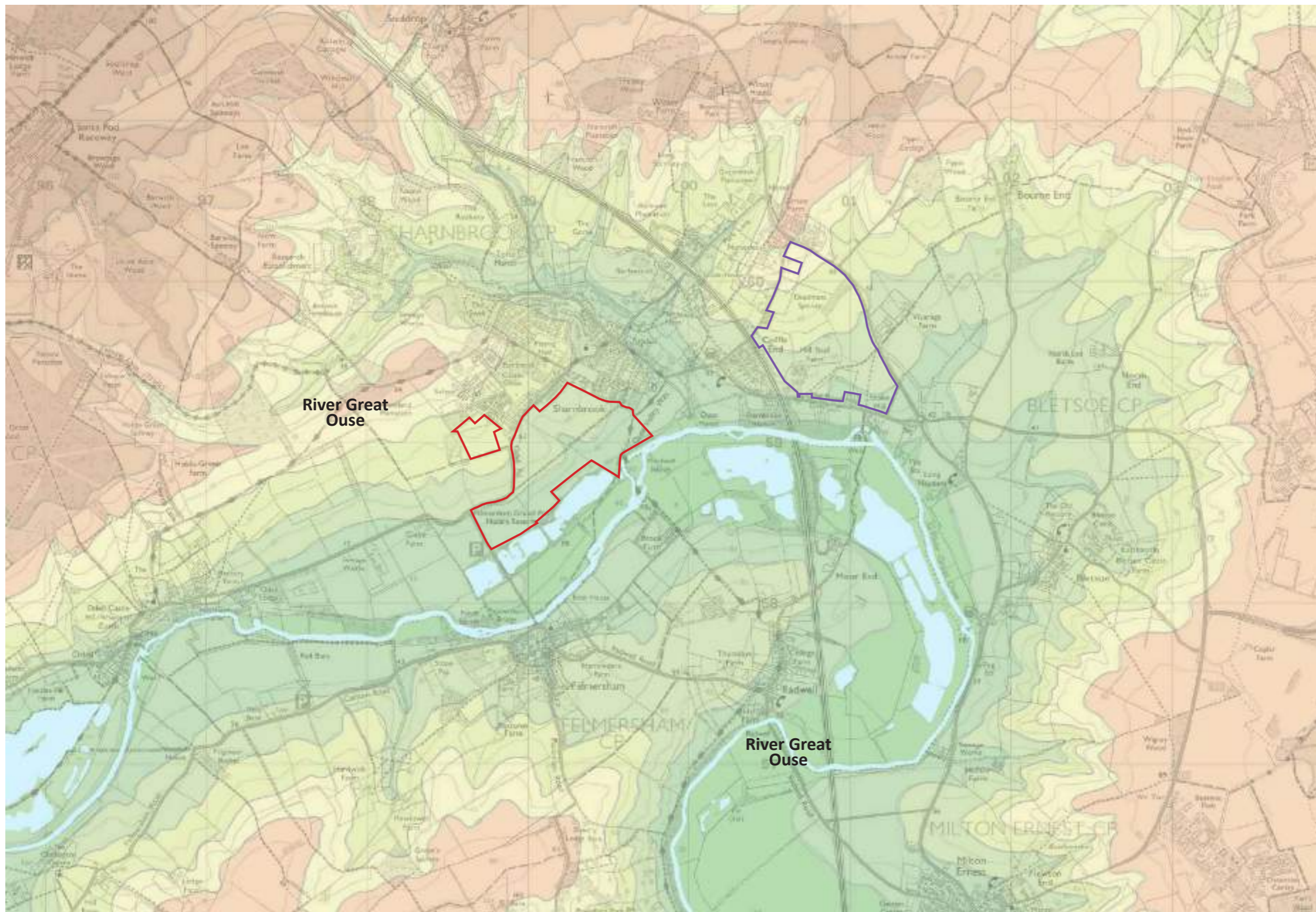
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Figure 3: Landscape Character Areas

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

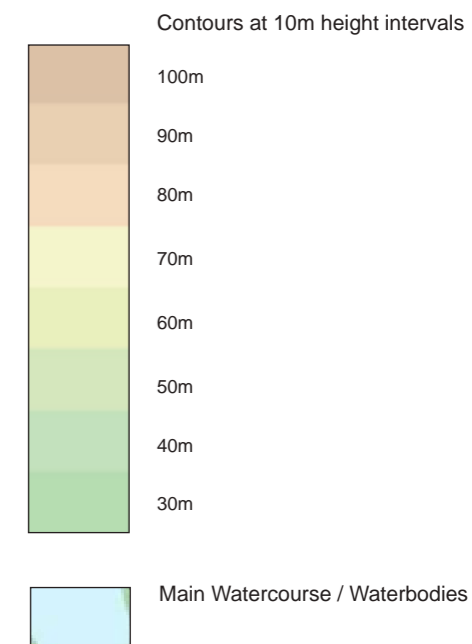




KEY

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

Topography



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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




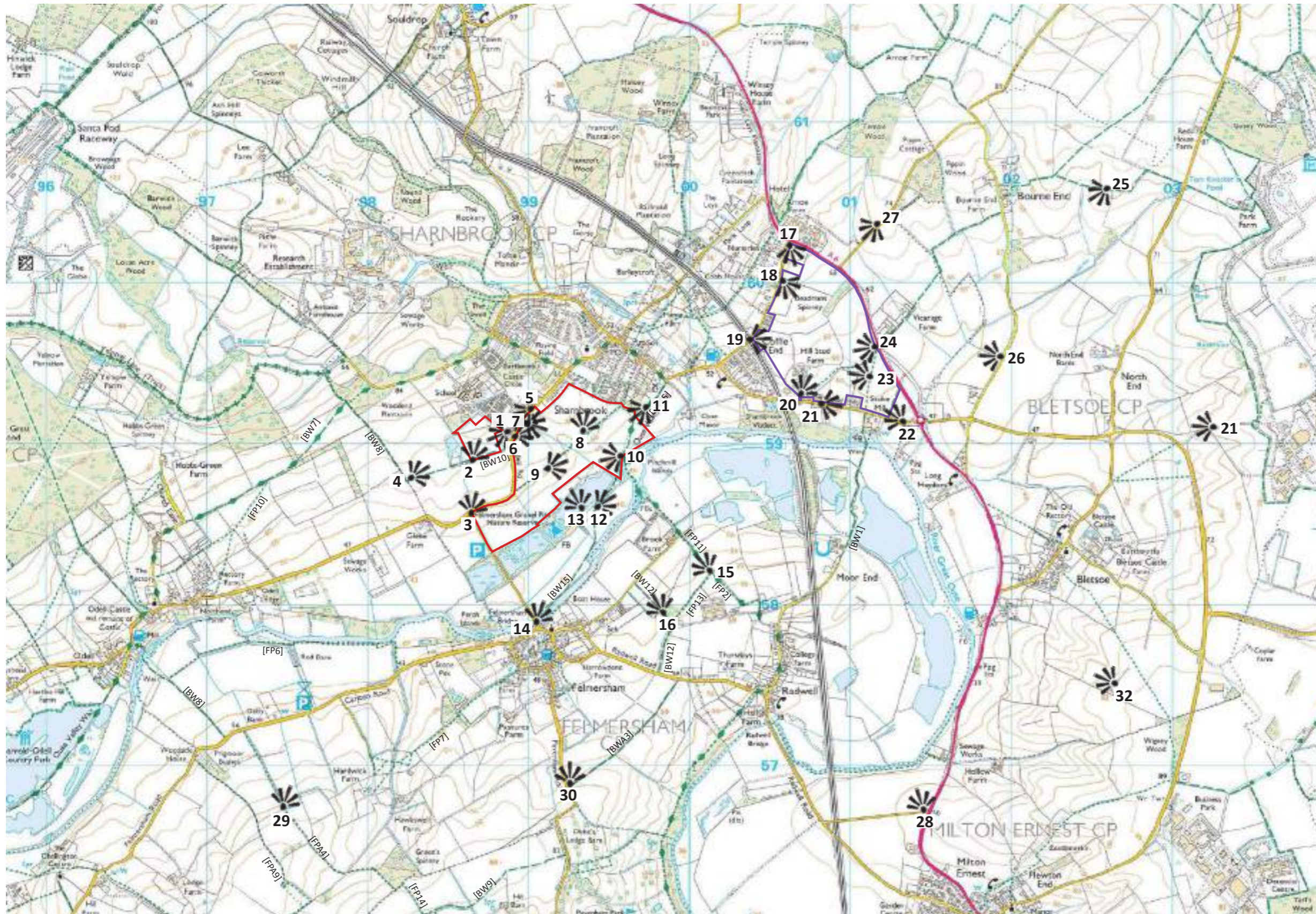
-  Topography / Slope
-  Important Landscape Features
(refer to plant notes)
-  Public Rights of Way
Refer to plan for reference number
BW: Bridleway
FP: Footpath




Figure 5: Site Analysis

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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)

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

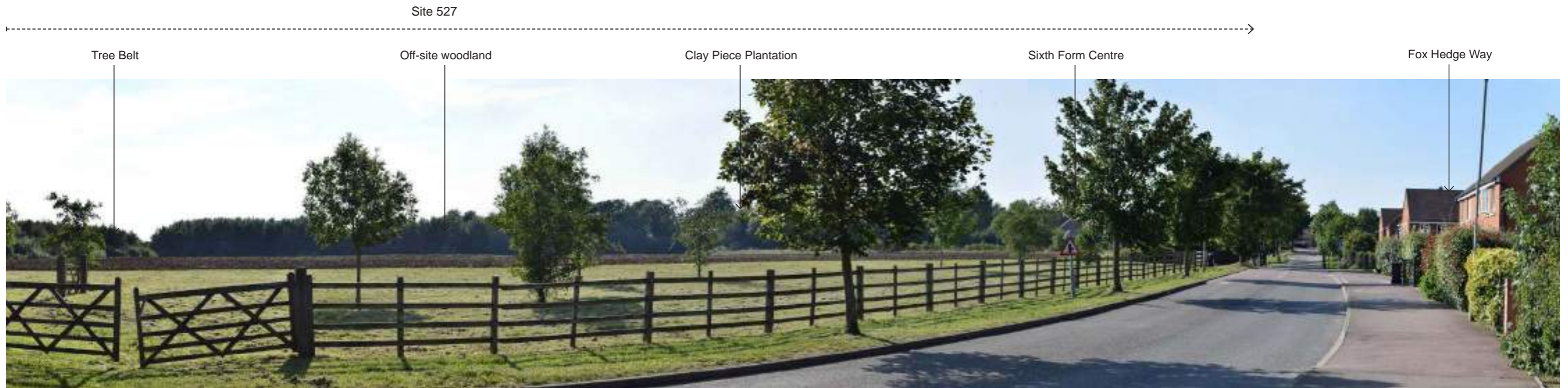
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Figure 6: Location of Representative Views

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





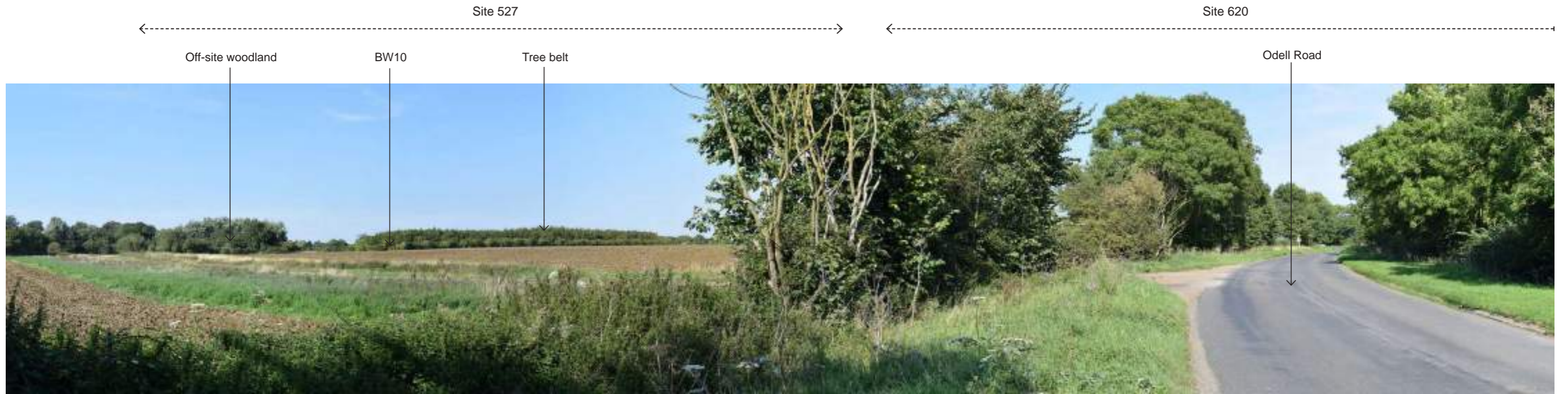
View 1: School Approach adjacent to Site 527 - north west (foreground is Village Open Space)



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			
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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

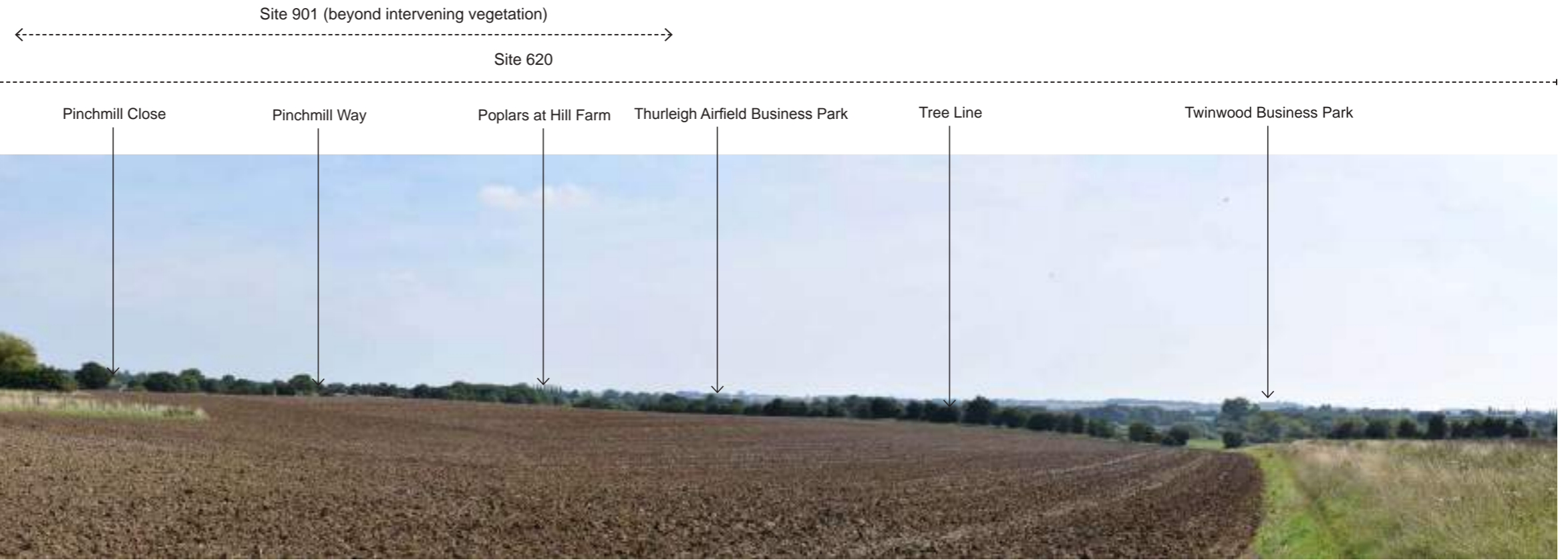


View 6: Odell Road - north east

Figure 9: Photographs of Representative Views 5 & 6

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





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



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

Figure 10: Photographs of Representative Views 7 & 8			
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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			
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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



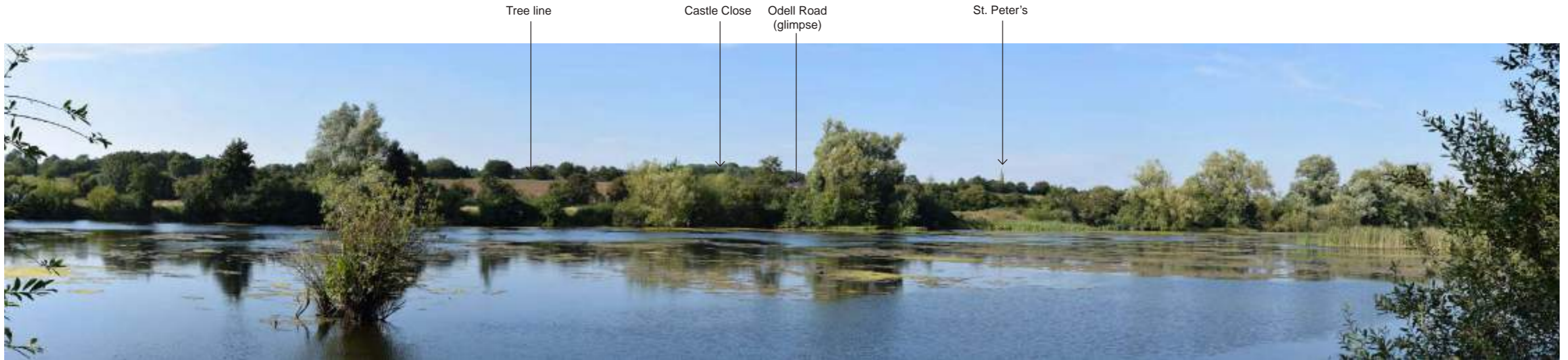
View 12: Public Bridleway BW15 south of Felmersham Gravel Pits - east

Figure 12: Photographs of Representative Views 11 & 12

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

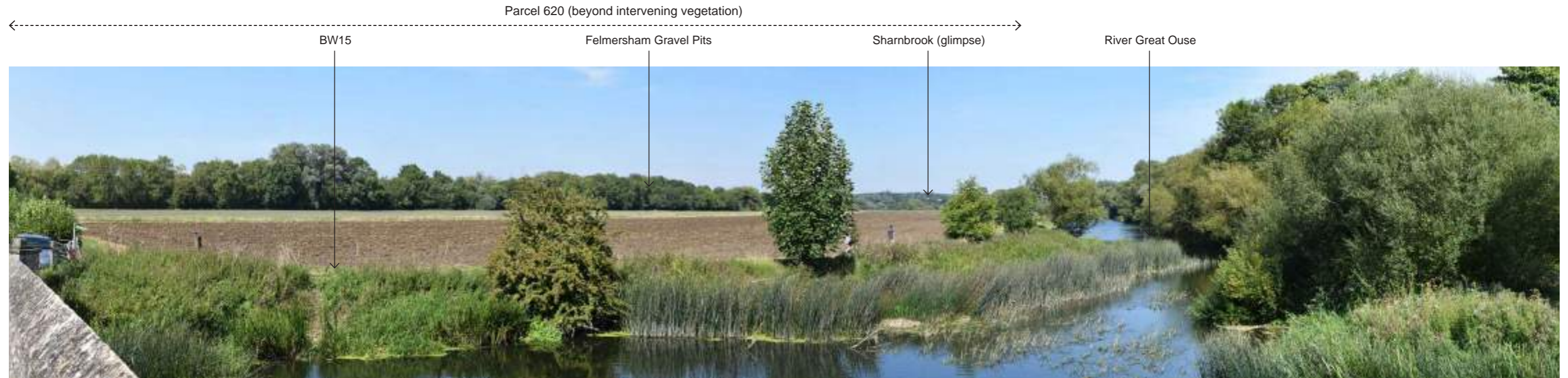


Site 620 (Green Infrastructure in Foreground)



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

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

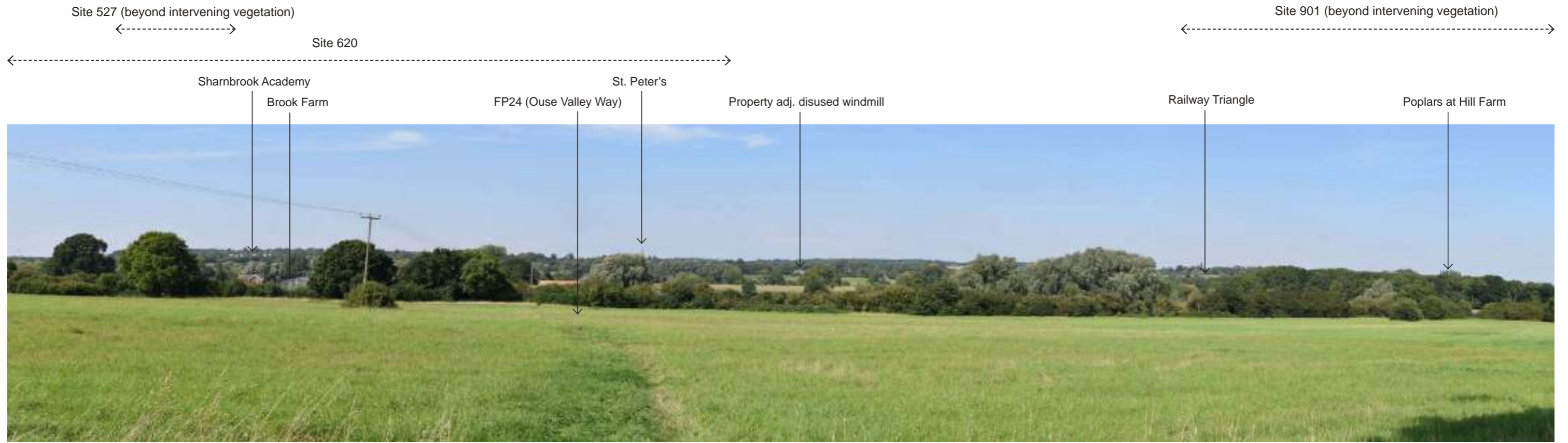


View 14: Felmersham Bridge over River Great Ouse - north east

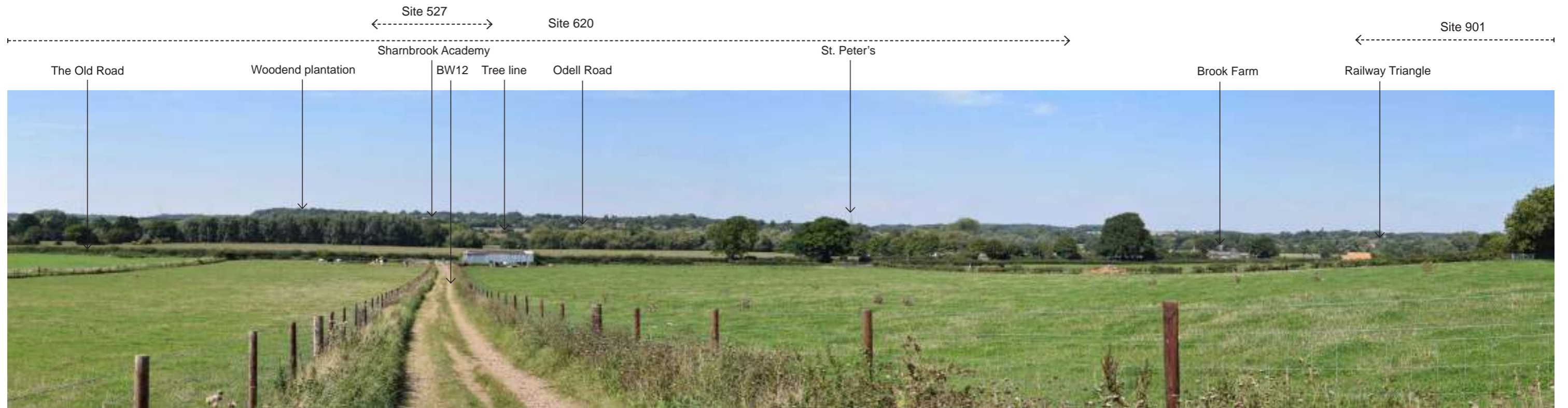
Figure 13: Photographs of Representative View 13 & 14

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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

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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

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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



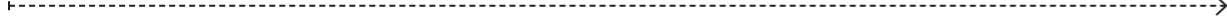
View 20: Site 901 FP6 Hill Farm - north east

Figure 16: Photographs of Representative Views 19 & 20

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

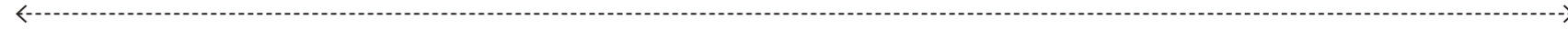


Avenue



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

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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

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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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Client: The Bedfordshire Charitable Trust & Bedfordia Developments Ltd		SES Strategic Southern Ecological Solutions Sudbury Stables Sudbury Road Downham, Essex CM11 1LB	
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

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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 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

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 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

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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	





BE5229/6P – Stoneyfields, Sharnbrook
Bedfordia Property and Bedfordshire Charitable Trust
Bedford Local Plan 2040 Representation
September 2021

Appendix 5 Bedford Local Plan 2030 Delivery Assessment



For and on behalf of
Various Clients

Bedford Local Plan 2030 Delivery Assessment

District Wide

**Prepared by
Strategic Planning Research Unit
DLP Planning Ltd**

September 2021



Prepared by:	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Date: September 2021	Office: Bedford

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CONTENTS	PAGE
1.0 Introduction and Purpose	4
2.0 Review of the Council’s Published Position	5
3.0 Indicative Up-To-Date Supply Position at 1 April 2021.....	8
4.0 Indicative Supply at 1 April 2023	16

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report reviews the housing land supply position of Bedford Borough Council and presents a high-level delivery assessment to 2030 against the Council's likely ability to sustain completion of 970dpa to 2030, emphasising gaps in the evidence base for the Local Plan 2030 and emerging Local Plan in terms of Infrastructure and Viability (notably Town Centre sites and delays to Neighbourhood Plan preparation).
- 1.2 This is to reinforce the need for flexibility irrespective of whether a stepped trajectory is adopted in the Local Plan Review. The Report concludes that there is no prospect of the Council's Preferred Options being regarded as sound without supporting the substantial prioritisation of sites for early delivery. This can only realistically be achieved under a 'hybrid' strategy supporting further growth at Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres alongside unlocking constraints to the delivery of schemes in the urban area.

2.0 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S PUBLISHED POSITION

- 2.1 The Council's most up-to-date housing land supply position is set out in the Five Year Supply of Deliverable Housing Sites, which is an update to the May 2019 report (5YSDHS 2019). This has a base date of April 2019.
- 2.2 As such this position statement is now two years out of date. At the present time, however, the Council would have to either rely on this supply as presenting the "baseline" or accept that they cannot demonstrate a five year land supply in accordance with paragraph 73 of the Framework. This of course would trigger the "tilted balance" in Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework.
- 2.3 Within the 5YSDHS it states that the Council has 5.75 years of deliverable supply with the inclusion of oversupply. Without an adjustment for oversupply, the deliverable supply of housing is 4.51 years. Using the same approach to adjust for oversupply (annualised over the remaining plan period) as endorsed in the Local Plan Inspectors' Report the published position provides for only 5.00 years' deliverable supply.
- 2.4 This is summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Bedford Borough Council May 2019 Deliverable Supply Report: Oversupply Scenarios

		Actual - Excluding Oversupply	Local Plan Inspectors' Method	Oversupply - Published
	Objectively Assessed Needs (15 years)	14,550	14,550	14,550
A	Annual Requirement	970	970	970
Ai	5 Year Requirement	4850	4850	4850
	completions in 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19	4928	4928	4928
B	Shortfall/Oversupply in Plan Period	-1048	-1048	-1048
Bi	Annual Requirement Adjusted for Oversupply	970	874.72727	760.4
	Delivery Forecast for the 5 year period			
C	Total 5 Year Dwelling Forecast	4593	4593	4593
D	5% buffer (Bi x 5) * 0.05	243	219	190
E	Five year target (5 year requirement plus 5% buffer) (Bi x 5) * 1.05	5093	4592	3992
F	Annual Target E divided by 5	1019	918	798
G	Number of years supply (deliverable supply divided by annual target) C divided by F	4.51	5.00	5.76

- 2.5 The Council's ability to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites is substantially compromised fewer than two years since the adoption of the Local Plan 2030. In Appeals since the Plan was adopted the Council has acknowledged that it can only maintain a supply of deliverable sites sufficient to meet a five-year requirement that is calculated on a different basis to that set out by the Local Plan Inspectors.
- 2.6 In the most recent Appeal Decisions in the Borough Inspectors have accepted the numerous scenarios would result in a deficit against the five-year requirement (see PINS Refs: 3243154) and 3259981) while other Inspectors have recognised the uncertainty and emphasised that the five-year requirement is a minimum and it would be desirable to increase supply (PINS Ref: 3263447).
- 2.7 The deterioration in the Council's position is reinforced through concessions in its own evidence, including that presented at the Renhold Appeal (PINS Ref: 3256134). The Council has acknowledged slower-than-anticipated delivery of strategic sites on Land North of Bromham Road and at Eastcotts (RAF Cardington) removing 238 units from the published supply position ($4593 - 238 = 4355$).
- 2.8 In the more recent Appeal Decision on Land off Bedford Road, Willington (PINS Ref: 3259981) the Inspector took into account the Appellant's 'worst case' scenario of 4,191 units' deliverable supply. This resulted from further deductions to the Council's published position, including the removal of 128 units at Melbourne House, Bedford, together with adjustments already accepted by the Council ($4355 - 128 = 4227$; the remaining deductions were agreed in a Statement of Common Ground not publicly available).
- 2.9 Table 2 below summarises the implications of these subsequent findings on the Council's published position. This takes no account of any further assessment of deliverability from within the Council's published position and does not include the reduction of 36 units from the Willington Decision where these are not separately identified within the supply.

Table 2. Bedford Borough Council Housing Land Supply Taking Account of Alterations to Deliverable Supply Agreed in Recent Appeals

		Actual - Excluding Oversupply	Local Plan Inspectors' Method	Oversupply - Published
	Objectively Assessed Needs (15 years)	14,550	14,550	14,550
A	Annual Requirement	970	970	970
Ai	5 Year Requirement	4850	4850	4850
	completions in 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19	4928	4928	4928
B	Shortfall/Oversupply in Plan Period	-1048	-1048	-1048
Bi	Annual Requirement Adjusted for Oversupply	970	874.72727	760.4
	Delivery Forecast for the 5 year period			
C	Total 5 Year Dwelling Forecast	4227	4227	4227
D	5% buffer (Bi x 5) * 0.05	243	219	190
E	Five year target (5 year requirement plus 5% buffer) (Bi x 5) * 1.05	5093	4592	3992
F	Annual Target E divided by 5	1018.5	918.46364	798
G	Number of years supply (deliverable supply divided by annual target) C divided by F	4.15	4.60	5.30
	Surplus / Deficit vs Fife Year Requirement	-866	-365	235

2.10 Under the oversupply scenario against which the Local Plan was assessed and found sound (annualised over the remaining plan period) the Council already demonstrates a deficit of -365 units against the five-year requirement. With oversupply excluded entirely a supply only slightly in excess of four years can be identified (deficit of -866 units).

3.0 INDICATIVE UP-TO-DATE SUPPLY POSITION AT 1 APRIL 2021

- 3.1 In this section we have undertaken an assessment to illustrate as far as possible the Council's up-to-date supply position (base date April 2021) based on the following:
- a) Completions recorded for 2019 – 2020 as part of the Housing Delivery Test HDT for Bedford (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-delivery-test-2020-measurement>) this shows completions of 1,026 for the period 2019 to 2020.
 - b) Completions recorded for the 4 quarters of the period 2020 – 2021 as recorded by the Government in Live Table 253a (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-delivery-test-2020-measurement>). It is of note that while these results will need to go through a “reconciliation process” they nevertheless provide an indication for completions in the last year. This suggests a level of completions of 970 dwellings.
 - c) Two additional years of windfall at the rate calculated in the 5YSDHS 2019 of 85 dwellings a year from 2024/25 onwards.
- 3.2 Like the 2019 baseline this calculation provides an estimate of what the Council may claim as a supply taking a relatively relaxed approach to the need for evidence and a figure based on a more critical approach to the assessment of evidence of delivery.
- 3.3 Where the Council has previously agreed concessions to the published position (as summarised in Section 2 above) these deductions have been retained in our analysis on 1 April 2021. Where relevant sites remain considered deliverable, we have applied the Council's own revised figures for accepted build rates for years 2024/25 onwards.
- 3.4 On the basis of our assessment, we have removed 389 dwellings from the Council's supply from sites identified in the published May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report.

Table 3. Estimated 2019-2026 supply from sites identified in the 2019 5YSDHS

Address	Area	Council deliverable supply 2019/20 – 2025/26	SPRU deliverable supply 2019/20 – 2025/26	SPRU Adjustment	SPRU Commentary
Eastcotts, Land r/o sheds (eastern land parcel)	Bedford	225	162	-63	Reduction based on application of revised build rates of 36dpa per parcel conceded in the Renhold Appeal
Eastcotts, south eastern land parcel	Bedford	162	162	-20	Reduction based on application of revised build rates of 36dpa per parcel conceded in the Renhold Appeal
Biddenham, Land north of Bromham Road	Bedford	638	460	-178	Reduction based on agreed delay to submission of further applications for approval of Reserved Matters pursuant to Outline (affecting the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024). 80dpa build rate assumption retained 2024/25 and 2025/26
Bedford Melbourne House, 3 Kingsway	Bedford	128	0	-128	Site no longer regarded as deliverable further to the findings of the Willington Appeal Decision.
Sum		1153	784	-389	

- 3.5 The analysis does not take account of any new planning permissions on major sites granted after 1 April 2019 or otherwise already included in the Council's May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report.
- 3.6 From 1 April 2021 onwards the Council's own evidence for the ability to continue to demonstrate a supply of deliverable sites in excess of the minimum five-year requirement relies heavily on capacity identified within or to be allocated in the current Local Plan 2030. For the additional years 2024/25 and 2025/26 the May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report identifies only around 800 units' forecast supply on sites with existing consent. In contrast, sites dependent on the current Local Plan are forecast to provide 1,252 units.
- 3.7 To prepare an estimate of the Council's position at 1 April 2021 we have also reviewed the evidence that the Council presented during the Examination of the current Local Plan 2030 ('Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 Housing Trajectory May 2019 Update to SD 36'). In total, sites not included in the 1 April 2019 assessment of 'deliverable' supply were forecast to deliver 2,651 units in the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026. It follows that any delays to the deliverability of these components of supply will have a critical effect on the Council's ability to maintain a rolling surplus against the annual requirement of 970dpa in the adopted Local Plan (notwithstanding that it falls substantially short of local housing need).
- 3.8 For the whole period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2026 the reliance on Local Plan 2030 sites can be shown as follows:

Table 4. Breakdown of Local Plan Trajectory and May 2019 Deliverable Sites: 2019 to 2026

	May 2019 Deliverable Sites	Examination Document Local Trajectory Sites	SD36 Plan	Total
1 April 2019 to 31 March 2026 - Units	5390 ¹		2651	8041 ²
% of Total	67.0%		33.0%	

- 3.9 This section therefore undertakes a review of the status of sites identified in the Local Plan 2030 trajectory and whether they can each be treated as deliverable at 1 April 2021.
- 3.10 The following table sets out our assessment of the sites included in the Council’s five-year forecast of deliverable supply based on the Local Plan trajectory.
- 3.11 The ‘SPRU adjustment’ column identifies how many dwellings we have removed from the Council’s forecasted supply based on a lack of clear evidence that these sites will deliver within the next five years.
- 3.12 The final column sets out our commentary for why these sites have been removed from the Council’s supply.
- 3.13 On the basis of our assessment, we have removed 2,154 dwellings from the Council’s supply.

¹ Reduced to 5001 units based on deduction of -389 units from the May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report recorded in recent Appeal Decisions

² Reduced to 7652 units based on deduction of -389 units from the May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report recorded in recent Appeal Decisions; Local Plan Trajectory sites comprise 35% of forecast supply once deductions are applied

Table 5. Estimated 2019-2026 Supply from Sites Identified in the Local Plan Trajectory

Address	Area	Council deliverable supply 2019/20 – 2025/26	SPRU deliverable supply 2019/20 – 2025/26	SPRU Adjustment	SPRU Commentary
Duck Mill Lane / Bedesman Lane	Bedford	20	0	-20	No planning applications submitted or approved on site. This is a site in flood zone 2 and there is no evidence that a sequential test has been carried out. As such, this site fails the sequential test. As such the “exception test” cannot be applied and as such its allocation is contrary to the Framework. Unlikely to deliver the 20 dwellings within the 5 years.
Greyfriars	Bedford	200	105	-95	Outline application submitted for part of site area (former police HQ) with resolution to permit subject to S106. Site is allocated so has potential to deliver within the 5 years.
Ford End Road	Bedford	430	0	-430	No application submitted or approved. This is a large complex site with a number of different public and private sector ownerships and has been proposed for regeneration over many years. The site also falls within flood zones 1, 2 & 3 and to date no work has been undertaken to establish either the developable area or the mitigation works required to bring forward residential development on the site, or to safeguard ground water sources during decontamination. The site is also heavily contaminated. Therefore, unlikely to deliver any dwellings within 5 years.
Borough Hall	Bedford	130	0	-130	No application submitted or approved. It is noted that the site was proposed by One Public Estate who are not a developer, and we understand that the site remains in multiple ownerships. This site lies partially within Flood zones 2 & 3 (1.02ha in Flood zone 3a, 0.41ha in Flood zone 3b and 3.91ha in Flood zone 2 according to Sequential Test Note of September 2018) and there is no evidence that the Council have undertaken a Sequential Test to rule out any sequentially preferable sites. Therefore, unlikely to deliver any dwellings within the 5 years.
South of the River	Bedford	221	0	-221	No application submitted under 'land south of the river', This is a substantial tract of land currently owned by a range of public and private bodies. It includes a mix of active uses such as the current Danfoss employment site and is potentially heavily contaminated as well as physically constrained. Unlikely to deliver any dwellings within the 5 years

Insert Job Number
Insert Site Name

Gold Lane, Biddenham	Bedford	160	119	-41	Discharge of conditions relating to 18/00140/MAO have been submitted and approved with most recent submitted in June 2021. Reserved Matters approval for 119 dwellings (Phase 1 only) under 21/00236/MAR with clear evidence considered to be available for this part of the site only.
329 Bedford Road, Kempston	Bedford	5	0	-5	No application submitted or approved. Unlikely to deliver any dwellings within the 5 years.
Mowbray Road	Bedford	124	0	-124	No application submitted or approved. Unlikely to deliver any dwellings within the 5 years.
Lodge Hill	Bedford	84	0	-84	No application submitted or approved. Unlikely to deliver any dwellings within the 5 years.
Land r/o Bromham Road	Bedford	27	0	-27	19/01394/MAO approved for up to 60 dwellings. No evidence of firm progress with site investigations, Discharge of Conditions, or submission of reserved matters. Clear evidence of a realistic prospect of homes being delivered within 5 years has not been demonstrated therefore site removed from supply.
Graze Hill	Bedford	100	165	+65	Outline application for 165 dwellings approved on 6th November 2020 (19/00593/MAO) with most recent RM application submitted in June 2021. Firm progress considered to provide a realistic prospect of completions within the five-year period.
N/A	Bromham	350	250	-100	'Made' Neighbourhood Plan. Assumptions for development based on application of typical lead-in and build out rates (Lichfields, Start to Finish Second Edition) applied to Outline Application proposals on allocated land under 19/01904/MAO (validated September 2019 – pending determination) plus 80 units with Reserved Matters pending determination (under 20/02520/MAR pursuant to 17/0242/MAO) on a separate allocation within the Plan.
N/A	Clapham	260	70	-190	Submission version Clapham neighbourhood plan provided to Bedford Borough Council pending dates for consultation. Assumptions for development based on application of typical lead-in and build out rates (Lichfields, Start to Finish Second Edition) (up to 499 units) applied to Outline Application ref: 21/00332/EIA on land proposed for allocation within the draft Plan. The landowners of the proposed allocation have worked cooperatively throughout the course of site promotion during the Neighbourhood Plan process, with this work supporting a single application for the land proposed to meet the housing requirement under

Insert Job Number
Insert Site Name

					the emerging NP.
N/A	Great Barford	170	0	-170	Great Barford Neighbourhood Plan is in examination and is relying on 1 strategic site of 500 units, subject to substantial outstanding objections. The proposed site does not fall within part (a) or (b) of the definition of deliverable under the Framework so should be removed from the supply and lacks any clear evidence to support conclusions of its deliverability.
N/A	Sharnbrook	170	0	-170	Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan is in examination and is relying on 1 site of 500 units. This will not be delivered in the 5 years so should be removed from the supply. The proposed site does not fall within part (a) or (b) of the definition of deliverable under the Framework so should be removed from the supply and lacks any clear evidence to support conclusions of its deliverability.
N/A	Rural Service Centres	200	108	-92	<p>Progress with Neighbourhood Plans in Rural Service Centres reviewed as follows. A pragmatic approach has been taken to assessing deliverability taking account of the characteristics and scale of identified sites.</p> <p>18 dwellings have been approved on the Causeway allocation in Carlton in July 2017 (17/01961/MAF) with the most recent discharge of condition approved in oct 2019 (17/01961/MAF). The Harrold Neighbourhood Plan is undergoing Examination with a Council response on the 22nd of July. No site allocations are therefore deliverable and should therefore be removed from the supply. DLP are preparing a pre-app for 25 dwelling site in Milton Ernest. Will be delivered in the 5 years so should be included in the supply. Oakley Neighbourhood plan is made. DLP has undertaken a request for pre-application advice on Land East of Station Road, which should be delivered within the 5 years so should be kept in the supply. DLP is preparing a request for pre-application advice for 25 dwellings on a site allocation in the Turvey Neighbourhood Plan (Turvey). The site is likely to deliver the dwellings within the 5 year period so should be kept in the supply. Willington Neighbourhood Plan hasn't been adopted, is going through examination with a Council response on the 22nd of July. No site allocations are therefore deliverable and should therefore be removed from the supply.</p>
	SUM	2651	817	-1834	

- 3.14 Our analysis removes a total of -2,543 units from the Council's total forecast supply from the Local Plan 2030 trajectory. Of this total, the removal of -389 dwellings is derived from sites already published in the May 2019 Deliverable Sites Report and not delivering as anticipated.
- 3.15 Table 6 below shows this position excluding any adjustment for oversupply. The significant reduction required to the assessment of supply from the Local Plan 2030 trajectory results in a substantial deficit of over 1500 units against the annualised requirement of 970dpa. The Council is therefore only likely to be able to demonstrate around 3.44 years' supply at 1 April 2019.

Table 6. Bedford Borough Council Housing Land Supply Rolled Forward to 1 April 2021 (Excluding Oversupply)

Summary Tables for 1st April 2021	Excluding Oversupply	
	Starting with BBC 2019 Supply	Starting with SPRU 2019 Supply
Annual Requirement	970	970
Requirement 2015 to 2021	5,820	5,820
Completions 2015 to 2019 (5YSDHS 2019)	4,928	4,928
Completions 2019- 2020 (HDT)	1,026	1,026
Completions 2020 – 2021 (Live table 253a)	970	970
Total completions	6,924	6,924
Total Shortfall / over supply	1,104	1,104
Annual Additional to address shortfall within 5 years	-122.6666667	-122.6666667
Total Annual	847	847
Annual Requirement plus 5% buffer	890	890
5 year requirement	4,449	4,449
BBC Estimated Total Supply at 2021	8,041	5,818
SPRU changes to supply (Table 5 Local Plan Trajectory)		-1,834
SPRU changes to supply (Table 3 May 2019 Deliverable Sites)		-389
Estimated Total Supply at 2021 including windfalls including roll forward projected completions from unfinished sites and windfall at 85 dpa	8,041	5,498
Minus Completions 2019 - 2020	-1,026	-1,026
Minus Completions 2020 - 2021	-970	-970
Supply as at 1st April 2021	6,045	3,822
Years Supply	6.79	4.30
Surplus/Shortfall	1,597	-627

- 3.16 Table 6 demonstrates that where an adjustment for oversupply is applied as set out in the Inspectors' Report for the Bedford Local Plan 2030 a five year supply of deliverable sites can also not be demonstrated. The Council is able to demonstrate around 4.30 years' supply – a deficit of around 627 dwellings against the adjusted five-year requirement.

**Table 7. Bedford Borough Council Housing Land Supply Rolled Forward to 1 April 2021
 (Annualised Oversupply spread of remaining plan period)**

With LP oversupply adjustment

Summary Tables for 1st April 2021	Starting with BBC 2019 Supply	Starting with SPRU 2019 Supply
Annual Requirement	970	970
Requirement 2015 to 2021	5,820	5,820
Completions 2015 to 2019 (5YSDHS 2019)	4,928	4,928
Completions 2019- 2020 (HDT)	1,026	1,026
Completions 2020 – 2021 (Live table 253a)	970	970
Total completions	6,924	6,924
Total Shortfall / over supply	1,104	1,104
Annualised Oversupply Adjustment (remaining 9 years)	-122.7	-122.7
Total Annual	847	847
Annual Requirement plus 5% buffer	890	890
5 year requirement	4,449	4,449
BBC Estimated Total Supply at 2021	8,041	
SPRU changes to supply (table 5 Local Plan Trajectory)		-2,154
SPRU changes to supply (table 3 May 2019 Deliverable Sites)		-389
Estimated Total Supply at 2021 including windfalls including roll forward projected completions from unfinished sites and windfall at 85 dpa	8,041	5,498
Minus Completions 2019 - 2020	-1,026	-1,026
Minus Completions 2020 - 2021	-970	-970
Supply as at 1st April 2021	6,045	3,502
Years Supply	6.79	3.94
Surplus/Shortfall	1,597	-947

4.0 INDICATIVE SUPPLY AT 1 APRIL 2023

- 4.1 The Council indicates a proposed 20-year plan period (2020 to 2040) for the Local Plan Review. The Local Plan Review must meet minimum annual local housing need calculated in accordance with the standard method. Planning Practice Guidance ID: 68-031-20190722 answers the question ‘how can past shortfalls in housing completions against planned requirements be addressed’? and states:

“Where the standard method for assessing local housing need is used as the starting point in forming the planned requirement for housing, Step 2 of the Standard Method factors in past under-delivery as part of the affordability ratio, so there is no requirement to specifically address under-delivery separately when establishing the minimum annual local housing need figure. Under-delivery may need to be considered where the plan being prepared is part way through its proposed plan period, and delivery falls below the housing requirement level set out in the emerging relevant strategic policies for housing.”

- 4.2 Based on the emerging proposals the performance of delivery in the period 2020 to 2023 will be relevant to assessing the soundness of the Local Plan 2040. Performance for this period will therefore be substantially informed by the Council’s current evidence of deliverable supply against the Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory (and extant consents).
- 4.3 The Council’s Preferred Options consultation proposals also indicate that it is likely to rely on a ‘stepped trajectory’ for the plan period to 2030 (retaining an annual requirement of 970 dwellings per annum). The Preferred Options principally rely on large-scale strategic sites with limited prospects for delivery within five years from adoption (2023 to 2028). The Council’s supply for this period will therefore also substantially be informed by the Local Plan 2030 trajectory (and characteristics of sites identified in Neighbourhood Plans).
- 4.4 The evidence for sites identified in the Local Plan 2030 trajectory, as at 1 April 2021, reviewed in this Report, demonstrates that these do not achieve an early prioritisation of housing delivery. This reflects issues raised throughout the Local Plan 2030 Examination relating to constraints to viability and availability of the sites identified, particularly within the Town Centre.
- 4.5 In these circumstances the Council’s proposals to pursue a stepped trajectory are contrary to national policy and guidance. PPG ID: 68-021-20190722 answers the question ‘when is a stepped requirement appropriate for plan-making’? and sets out:

*“A stepped housing requirement may be appropriate **where there is to be a significant change in the level of housing requirement between emerging and previous policies and / or where strategic sites will have a phased delivery or are likely to be delivered later in the plan period. Strategic policy-makers will need to identify the stepped requirement in strategic housing policy, and to set out evidence to support this approach, and not seek to unnecessarily delay meeting identified development needs. Stepped requirements will need to ensure that planned housing requirements are met fully within the plan period. In reviewing and revising policies, strategic policy-makers should ensure there is not continued delay in meeting identified development needs.***

Where there is evidence to support a prioritisation of sites, local authorities may wish to identify priority sites which can be delivered earlier in the plan period, such as those on brownfield land and where there is supporting infrastructure in place e.g., transport hubs. These sites will provide additional flexibility and more certainty that authorities will be able to demonstrate a sufficient supply of deliverable sites against the housing requirement.” (SPRU emphasis)

- 4.6 We make four points:

- The change in housing requirement cannot be considered significant. The Council was fully aware of these circumstances when the Local Plan 2030 was adopted with the requirement for early review. Planning for a difference in the annual requirement of around 305 dwellings per annum (LHN of 1275 vs OAN of 970) is a relatively modest change in the context of a recently adopted Local Plan that should maintain a minimum rolling supply against the OAN figure
- The Local Plan 2030 unnecessarily sought to delay meeting needs in accordance with the Government's latest policy. Pursuing a stepped trajectory simply perpetuates that problem
- The current Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory provides for no flexibility or certainty (particularly given issues with Neighbourhood Plans and Town Centre sites). The Council's Preferred Options provide no resolution to this.
- The use of a stepped trajectory will not ensure needs are met in full. There will be a substantial shortfall against the stepped requirement of 970dpa to 2030 (based on the latest information regarding supply). A reliance on large-scale strategic sites beyond 2030, for which there is a poor record of success in the Borough in terms of timescales and rates of delivery, does not provide a reasonable prospect of development in accordance with PPG ID: 68-019-20190722)

4.7 This section of the Report undertakes an initial assessment of the Council's ability to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites on 1 April 2023 upon adoption of the Local Plan 2040 taking account of the circumstances above. The following assumptions are applied:

- a) The difference between the Council's latest forecast completions for 2019/20 and completions recorded in the Housing Delivery test ($1330 - 1026 = 304$) are included in the forecasted supply 2020-2028 to ensure that these are not lost
- b) The Council's evidence for forecast completions 2020 to 2028 is based on the Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory, less the difference of -389 units resulting from recent appeals (7953 dwellings)
- c) Forecast completions for the period 2020 to 2023 are compared with the calculation of LHN (1275) and the Council's proposed stepped requirement (970) to assess the likely surplus or shortfall at adoption of the Local Plan 2040
- d) SPRU's revised assessment of supply is rolled forward to include two additional years' forecast delivery (2026/27 and 2027/28) on sites that can be considered deliverable (based on current evidence) plus two additional years' windfall supply at 85 dwellings per annum.
- e) SPRU's adjustments are applied separately to the respective periods 2020 to 2023 (to assess surplus/shortfall upon adoption of the Local Plan 2040) and 2023 to 2028 (for the calculation of five year supply on adoption). SPRU's total adjustments are -3,212 dwellings, which are additional to sites deducted as a result of recent Appeals.

4.8 For the purposes of comparison, the Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory for the period 2020 to 2028 (notwithstanding that 2019/20 completions did not perform as intended) provides for 8,352 dwellings.

4.9 Table 8 below shows the outcomes of this approach against the calculation of minimum annual local housing need of 1275 dwellings per annum. The Council's own trajectory results in a shortfall of -216 dwellings on 1 April 2023, rising to -958 dwellings with SPRU's adjustments, which would need to be made up within five years of adoption.

Table 8. Bedford Borough Council Forecast Housing Land Supply Based on Local Housing Need and Local Plan 2030 Housing Trajectory on 1 April 2023

Minimum Annual LHN

Summary Tables for 1st April 2023	Starting with BBC 2019 Supply	Starting with SPRU 2019 Supply
Performance 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023		
Annual Requirement	1275	1275
Requirement 2020-2023	3,825	3,825
Completions 2020-2023 (5YSDHS 2019)	3,305	
SPRU Changes to 2020-2023 supply		-742
Completions 2020-2023 (SPRU)		2,563
Completions - Residual vs 2019/20 forecast	304	304
Total completions	3,609	2,867
Total Shortfall / over supply	-216	-958
Annual Additional to address shortfall within 5 years	43.2	191.6
5YLS Calculation at 1 April 2023		
Total Annual Requirement 1 April 2023	1,318	1,467
5% buffer	1,384	1,540
5 year requirement	6,921	7,700
BBC Estimated Total Supply at 2023	4,648	2,770
SPRU changes to 2023-2028 supply		-1,878
Supply as at 1st April 2023	4,648	2,770
Years Supply	3.358	1.79
Surplus/Shortfall	-2,273	-4,930

- 4.10 Using the Council's own Local Plan 2030 housing trajectory there would be only 3.36 years' deliverable supply against local housing need on 1 April 2023 – a deficit of 2,273 units. This is the minimum deficit that the Council's Preferred Options should be seeking to address, which result from issues with the sources of supply it relies upon in the Local Plan 2030.
- 4.11 Applying an up-to-date assessment of deliverability to the Council's evidence for supply illustrates a desperate situation when compared against the Government's Standard Method: only 1.79 years' supply and a deficit of over -4,930 units. This reflects an utter failure to meet housing need and address the strategic priorities for the Plan Area as part of the outcomes of plan-making under the Local Plan 2030.
- 4.12 Our analysis demonstrates that the Council's proposed approach to rely on a stepped trajectory is also flawed. This will not achieve a five year supply of deliverable sites upon adoption of the Local Plan 2040 without significant support to prioritise the early delivery of additional sites. On the Council's own evidence there would be a deficit of -445 units using the stepped approach.
- 4.13 Using SPRU's up-to-date assessment of deliverability even the stepped trajectory would achieve only 2.70 years' supply (a deficit of 2,323 units against the lower stepped requirement).

Table 9. Bedford Borough Council Forecast Housing Land Supply Based on Proposed Stepped Requirement and Local Plan 2030 Housing Trajectory on 1 April 2023

Stepped

Summary Tables for 1st April 2023	Starting with BBC 2019 Supply	Starting with SPRU 2019 Supply
Annual Requirement	970	970
Requirement 2020-2023	2,910	2,910
Completions 2020-2023 (5YSDHS 2019)	3,305	
SPRU Changes to 2020-2023 supply		-742
Completions 2020-2023 (SPRU)		2,563
Completions - Residual vs 2019/20 forecast	304	304
Total completions	3,609	2,867
Total Shortfall / over supply	699	-43
Annual Additional to address shortfall within 5 years	0	8.6
5YLS Calculation at 1 April 2023		
Total Annual Requirement 1 April 2023	970	979
5% buffer	1,019	1,028
5 year requirement	5,093	5,093
BBC Estimated Total Supply at 2023	4,648	2,770
SPRU changes to 2023-2028 supply		-1,878
Supply as at 1st April 2023	4,648	2,770
Years Supply	4.56	2.70
Surplus/Shortfall	-445	-2,323



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Appendix 6 Review of Draft Sustainability Appraisal Findings obo Bedfordia Property



dynamic development solutions™

For and on behalf of
Bedfordia Property

**BEDFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040 –
Review of Draft Sustainability Appraisal Findings**

Various Sites

**Prepared by
DLP Planning Ltd
Bedford**

September 2021



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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF REPORT

1.1 This Report has been prepared on behalf of Bedfordia Property and should be read alongside site-specific representations submitted as part of the current consultation:

- **Land at School Approach and Land east of Odell Road, Sharnbrook** (ID: 918 / ID: 932) – provision for up to 500 dwellings as part of comprehensive Masterplan Proposals incorporating new Green Infrastructure and community facilities
- **Land East of Station Road, Oakley** (Site ID: 832 / 839) – provision of c.250 dwellings together with substantial benefits to community facilities and highways infrastructure
- **Land at Marsh Lane/Rushden Road, Milton Ernest** (Site ID: 910) – relating to land proposed for allocation within the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, identifying opportunities to contribute towards additional needs for development
- **Land at Green End, Kempston** (Site ID: 1247) – located within the ‘south’ corridor parishes to provide growth well-related to the urban area including scope to make provision for specialist accommodation for older people
- **Land at Rushden Road, Milton Ernest** (Site ID: 852) – supporting the intensification and enhancement of existing commercial floorspace
- **Land at Highfield Road, Oakley** (Site ID: 1000) – providing opportunities for economic development and jobs growth adjacent existing employment provision
- **Land at Radwell Lakes, Moor Lane, Radwell** (Site ID: 703) – for the purposes of tourism, leisure, and recreation to support a prosperous rural economy
- **Land off Memorial Lane, Felmersham** (Site ID: 827) – supporting growth of between 10-30 dwellings over the plan period at this defined settlement
- **Land at Town Farm, Stocking Lane, Souldrop** (Site ID: 1245) – supporting growth of c.10 dwellings over the plan period at this defined settlement through the re-use or redevelopment of existing agricultural buildings and hardstandings
- **Manor Farm, Knotting** (Site ID: 633) – supporting the re-use or redevelopment of redundant agricultural buildings

1.2 This Report undertakes an assessment of the Council’s current evidence in terms of the assessment of reasonable alternatives in the Council’s Draft Sustainability Report (May 2021), prepared to inform the Draft Plan Strategy Options Consultation.

1.3 This Report provides a summary of national policy and guidance together with best practice and sets out an overview of the draft Sustainability Appraisal. The Report considers the Council’s SA Scoping exercise and identification of reasonable alternatives and undertakes review of the assessment findings regarding the effects of different strategy options, taking account of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework prepared to inform this exercise.

1.4 In summary, this Report identifies that the Sustainability Appraisal does not assess individual site options and thus provides no standalone basis to support the selection or rejection of

potential locations for growth or the Preferred Strategy options, without appropriate modification.

1.5 In-particular, the Council's rejection of **Option 3c** (including village-related growth) is not justified. While some aspects of those Preferred Options that focus on development in the A421 corridor with growth in 'east' and south parishes are supported, with reservations, the following observations are key:

- positive effects should be increased for relevant SA objectives (community infrastructure, housing delivery etc.) where the early delivery of sites and community benefits can be achieved
- the assessment of individual sites at the next consultation stage must accurately reflect the positive effects associated with particular development benefits e.g., new green infrastructure provision at Sharnbrook

1.6 The conclusions of the Report provide alternative assessment findings for a '**hybrid**' scenario that would contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development through village-related development outside of the A421 corridor, delivering a greater overall balance of net gains in accordance with national policy and guidance.

1.7 Our client's combined opportunities summarised in Paragraph 1.1 above are individually and collectively consistent with the '**hybrid**' approach endorsed on their behalf. Each should thus be subject to further detailed testing as part of strategy options and for the purposes of site selection.

2.0 NATIONAL POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 2.1 Paragraph 32 of the NPPF2021 refers to the importance of the Sustainability Appraisal undertaken throughout preparation of the Local Plan. Opportunities for net gains across the social, environmental, and economic domains of sustainable development should be sought and significant adverse impacts avoided where possible or otherwise subject to mitigation or compensatory measures.
- 2.2 In relation to the tests of soundness, at paragraph 35 of the NPPF2021, Local Plans will be justified where they provide for an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence.
- 2.3 Planning Practice Guidance provides further detail on the Sustainability Appraisal process and the legal requirements that must be satisfied. In particular, PPG ID: 11-001-20190722 describes the process as:

*“an opportunity to **consider ways by which the plan can contribute to improvements in environmental, social and economic conditions**, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the plan might otherwise have. By doing so, it can help make sure that the proposals in the plan are appropriate given the reasonable alternatives. **It can be used to test the evidence underpinning the plan and help to demonstrate how the tests of soundness have been met. Sustainability appraisal should be applied as an iterative process informing the development of the plan.**”*

- 2.4 The PPG (Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 11-018- 20140306), requires all reasonable alternatives to be assessed against the same baseline environmental, economic, and social characteristics (following paragraph 32 of the NPPF2021). Furthermore, it makes it clear that reasonable alternatives must be assessed to the same level of detail.
- 2.5 In recognising the iterative nature of the Sustainability Appraisal process PPG ID: 11-021-20140306 anticipates changes throughout the plan-making process. Modifications to the Sustainability Appraisal should be considered where appropriate and proportionate to the level of changes being made. A change is likely to be significant if it substantially alters the plan and/ or is likely to give rise to significant effects.
- 2.6 In undertaking the Sustainability Appraisal process the relevant stages are summarised at PPG ID: 11-013-20140306. Stage B, which reflects developing and refining alternatives during preparation of the Plan (at Regulation 18 Stage – the Council’s current stage) must

consider a wide range of alternatives, approaches to mitigation and potential measures for monitoring.

2.7 The approach to undertaking Stage B, at different stages of Plan preparation, is critical to justifying the selected strategy.

2.8 This has been considered through the Courts in *Heard v Broadland* [2012] EWHC 344 (Admin). In particular, see paragraphs 53 to 73, where the approach to the process of SA and alternatives are considered. In summary Ouseley J in paragraph 73 states:

“...the aim of the directive, which may affect which alternatives it is reasonable to select, is more obviously met by, and it is best interpreted as requiring, an equal examination of the alternatives which it is reasonable to select for examination alongside whatever, even at the outset, may be the preferred option. It is part of the purpose of this process to test whether what may start out as preferred should still end up as preferred after a fair and public analysis of what the authority regards as reasonable alternatives...”

2.9 This approach to fully developing and assessing alternatives is necessary to demonstrate compliance with good practice guidance¹ that remains relevant to undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal. When identifying and assessing discrete options it is necessary to have regard to a hierarchy of alternatives that allow different effects to be considered.

2.10 This allows consideration of alternatives to **need/demand**, the **mode/process** of achieving the strategy, **locations** for change and predicting how the **phasing/implementation** may impact on the Sustainability Appraisal’s objectives. The strategy within the adopted Local Plan 2030 was not subject to a robust assessment of alternatives in terms of the level of development and how this should be provided for to meet a greater proportion of needs over a longer plan period.

2.11 The Council’s testing of strategy options as part of this consultation has been subject to similar arbitrary constraints in seeking to reject flexibility in the approach towards village-related growth that would provide additional flexibility and delivery of a greater proportion of increased needs in the period to 2030.

2.12 The Courts have further emphasised that reasons for selecting the preferred land use allocations and the rejection of alternatives must be given and inform the justification for the

¹ A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, ODPM (2005)

Council's site selection process. In *Save Historic Newmarket v. Forest Heath DC* [2011] (J.P.L. 1233), where the primary ground of challenge was that the Core Strategy and accompanying SA/SEA Environmental Report did not explain which reasonable alternatives to the proposed policies [or sites] had been considered and why they had been rejected. Collins J considered the requirement to consider alternatives in the context of an iterative Plan making process (various drafts consulted upon, sifting the options, then final draft consulted upon, examined, and adopted) and held that:

- (i) *For there to be compliance with Article 5 of the SEA Directive, the public must be presented with an accurate picture of the reasonable alternatives to the proposed policies and why they were not considered to be the best option.*

The Council's draft Sustainability Appraisal does not deal at all with the assessment of alternative sites and only sets out conclusions on broad 'component of growth' and spatial strategy options that are likely to preclude the selection of specific site options that sit outside of the preferred strategy; and

- (ii) *In an iterative plan-making process, it is not necessarily inconsistent with the SEA Directive for alternatives to the proposed policies to be ruled out prior to the publication of the final draft plan, but if that does happen the environmental report accompanying the draft plan must refer to, summarise or repeat the reasons that were given for rejecting the alternatives at the time when they were ruled out and those reasons must still remain valid.*

The reasons given by the Council to reject broad 'component of growth options' (including village-related growth) preclude the objective assessment of individual site options and will not substantiate (and are thus inadequate) reasons to reject individual site options in subsequent iterations of the Sustainability Appraisal.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF THE DRAFT SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL REPORT

(a) Overall Approach

- 3.1 Paragraph 1.12 of the Draft SA Report confirms that the assessment supporting the Council's 'Preferred Strategy Options' consultation considers only broad spatial options as alternatives for the distribution of growth and the total number of dwellings in broad locations.
- 3.2 More detailed location options will only be considered once the Local Plan is finalised. The implications of this are that the Council has used only part of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework, at Appendix 1, as applicable to strategy/policy options. The summary of the Scoping stage of the SA at Paragraph 3.8 reveals important issues that can only sustainably be addressed by a broad strategy and positive assessment of individual site options (e.g., needs for affordable and older persons' housing).
- 3.3 We do, however, consider that some issues have been understated or their potential role in maintaining sustainable patterns of development overlooked (e.g., unmet requirements for infrastructure improvements in Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres and the benefits associated with employment, leisure, green infrastructure, and tourism uses in rural areas). The SA Framework for sites provides the basis to assess specific opportunities to address these issues in the way the SA Framework for strategy options does not. Supporting the expansion of school places at Oakley is one relevant example.
- 3.4 These elements of sustainable development are more closely reflected in the draft Local Plan objectives (summarised at Paragraph 5.2 of the draft SA) than is considered through the more limited SA Framework for strategy options.
- 3.5 In identifying Preferred Options ahead of applying the SA Framework for individual sites the Council is inherently taking a general approach to considering the net effects for sustainable development.
- 3.6 By taking a 'one-size fits all' approach to the levels of growth assessed as part of the general approach (particularly in terms of village-related growth) the Council is seeking to set out conclusions on Preferred Options that would allow it to exclude certain components from the strategy, however significant their potential benefits to the Plan as a whole or at the individual settlement level. This is fundamentally contrary to the legal requirements for an iterative Sustainability Appraisal process and cannot satisfy the soundness tests for a strategy that is

appropriate or positively prepared.

- 3.7 These representations on the Council's Sustainability Appraisal, when read in the context of issues with the emerging Plan as a whole, demonstrate that the Council's current position is inconsistent, and that further testing of 'hybrid' strategy options cannot be ignored even with recognition of the role of the A421-based corridor over the Plan period.

(b) Options for the Amount of Growth

- 3.8 The draft SA at paragraph 7.2 addressed the requirement for the Local Plan 2040 to meet minimum annual local housing needs and provide land for in the region of 12,500 additional units to be allocated. In order to comprise genuine reasonable alternatives, it is necessary that all 12,500 units are deliverable over the Plan period. This issue is not addressed in the approach to the Sustainability Appraisal and considering strategy options.
- 3.9 The SA should also recognise that of this total at least 3,050 units are required to meet the current shortfall in need over the period 2020 to 2030, notwithstanding separate issues with delivery of sites identified in the current Local Plan 2030 or Neighbourhood Plans.
- 3.10 Any option providing only 12,500 units that do not demonstrate they are able to provide that total between 2020 and 2040 are not reasonable alternatives or an appropriate strategy. This is a significant risk in all of the Preferred Options identified by the Council. None provide for more than 12,500 dwellings. These shortcomings are exacerbated given their substantial reliance on rail-related infrastructure investment at Stewartby/Kempston Hardwick and/or the delivery of New Settlements.
- 3.11 The Council has only tested alternatives to the level of residential development based on a 10% uplift to minimum annual local housing need indicated by the Standard Method (resulting in the need to allocate land for 15,060 homes (or just +2,560 vs. the minimum required). In our experience this level of uplift does not represent an approach genuinely seeking to provide for higher levels of need and, in reality, is within the middle of the range that the Plan should seek to provide for flexibility and contingency (particularly given the reliance on strategic sites and failure to consider a 30-year Plan period).

(c) Options for Components/Strategy for Distribution of Growth

- 3.12 The Council's approach to test components of growth ahead of strategy options (summarised

at Paragraph 7.8 of the draft SA) but without conclusions following individual site and settlement-level assessments fundamentally undermines the exercise of testing reasonable alternatives. The assessment does not represent a realistic or robust measure for how these components perform in principle.

3.13 The 'village-related growth' component treats all settlements in the same manner as part of a general approach. The assessment of the A421 transport corridor component is even more problematic as while only one set of appraisal findings for this component are included at Appendix 3 of the SA it in fact comprises a number of separate elements which are not distinguished within the assessment, namely:

- Transport corridor – growth focused on Wixams, Stewartby and Kempston Hardwick.
- Transport corridor – south (the parishes of Wootton, Kempston Rural, Elstow, Wilstead, Shortstown, Cotton End).
- Transport corridor – east (the parishes of Cardington, Cople, Willington, Great Barford, Roxton, Wyboston and Little Barford).
- Transport corridor – growth focused on new settlements in the A421 corridor (Wyboston and/or Little Barford).

3.14 It is plain that the A421-based corridor is a 'hybrid' of locational characteristics that can all support contributions towards sustainable development. What the Council's assessment does not do, however, is distinguish what proportion or specific findings for significant effects for growth in the A421-corridor result from the ability to provide for development in those parishes listed within its geography (and which cover settlements that the Council already accepts as important in the hierarchy). Without the opportunity to support growth in these locations, which is in-effect and by definition village-related growth, the significant effects of development related only to rail-based investment and new settlements would be different.

3.15 It is impossible to separately identify the reasons within the SA that would specifically provide reasons to select or reject higher levels of growth in the A421 corridor as part of strategy options because of the specific benefits from development in the relevant parishes. There are, however, indications that this is important based on the findings against relevant SA objectives in Appendix 3, for example:

Objective 2 (biodiversity): potential for habitat creation or enhancement dependent on development opportunities;

Objective 8 (landscape/townscape): The nature of this effect will to some extent depend on the quality of new buildings, however the scale of any village extensions may affect the sense of place.

Objective 13 (community services and facilities): Although it is likely that growth in villages will include some community services and facilities, this will largely depend on the amount of development.

- 3.16 It is therefore relevant to the Council's own assessment findings that the contribution towards sustainable development from the A421 corridor are dependent on supporting the role and function of existing centres. The exact nature of positive effects will be site-specific but logically will be greatest where the capacity for growth exists and specific benefits can be provided.
- 3.17 In effect the Council is ignoring the evidence of its own settlement hierarchy and existing patterns of development at Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres that contribute to the sustainability of growth in the A421 corridor. While the prospect of future investment and further improved transport links complement these opportunities, the reality is that the existing characteristics of settlements within the corridor have been shaped by their existing connections and how this contributes to their role and function.
- 3.18 There are at least three major implications of this:
- Inclusion of the 'east' and 'south' transport corridor parishes within the A421-corridor component by definition reduces the component of growth assessed as 'village-related' elsewhere in the borough (and would also, by definition, reduce the Council's perception of negative effects associated with that component)
 - The potential positive effects ascribed to village extensions in the east and south corridor parishes are not limited only to Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres within the corridor. Similar benefits can be secured at other centres, which are acknowledged to be amongst the most sustainable locations in the borough and where growth, if supported, would nonetheless comprise a relatively minor proportion of the overall strategy.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL CHECKLIST

- 4.1 Previous best practice guidance also provides a 'Quality Assurance Checklist' for the Sustainability Appraisal process which remains useful to understand the iterative nature of Plan-making. 41 elements are identified, which correspond to the stages of the flowchart and relationship with Plan preparation now summarised in the PPG.
- 4.2 These representations do not seek to apply the full checklist to the current Draft Sustainability Appraisal, given that it is incomplete. We reserve the right to comment again on all areas of the checklist upon production of the Pre-Submission draft Plan and Sustainability Appraisal
- 4.3 However, those components of the checklist specifically relating to Scoping, assessing Baseline Conditions and the Prediction and Evaluation of likely effects are especially relevant to the current stage of the Preferred Options published for consultation. We note specific concerns with the following checklist items where the SA has not met the requirements of the checklist item and further work must be undertaken to meet the required standards:

Table 1: Review of Sustainability Appraisal Checklist - Relevant Issues

Issue	Comments
Scoping	
<p>8. Technical, procedural, and other difficulties encountered are discussed; assumptions and uncertainties are made explicit.</p>	<p>Not all technical, procedural, and other difficulties are discussed. Assumptions and uncertainties are not made explicit.</p> <p>There are key pieces of evidence missing in relation to the assessment of the different levels of development being proposed for different locations.</p> <p>This particularly affects the Council's justification for a proposed stepped trajectory; the lack of infrastructure and viability evidence to support the A421-based growth (rail investment at Kempston Hardwick/Stewartby) and New Settlement components of growth; and the ability to meet minimum local housing needs in full over the Plan period under approach to identifying preferred options.</p>
<p>9. Reasons are given for eliminating issues from further consideration.</p>	<p>No reasons are given with regard to the failure to consider 'hybrid' strategy options incorporating more or all components of growth, including some village-related growth.</p> <p>No reasons are given why a flexible approach towards levels of growth at individual settlements could not be adopted when testing components of growth and strategy</p>

	<p>options. The Council has provided no reasons to reject identifying levels of growth in each component of a 'hybrid' option determined by the requirements and site-specific opportunities within individual settlements.</p>
<p>10. Realistic alternatives are considered for key issues, and the reasons for choosing them are documented.</p>	<p>The draft Sustainability Appraisal has undertaken no detailed assessment of site-specific reasonable alternatives and their potential contribution towards sustainability objectives.</p> <p>Reasonable alternative sites are required to undergo the same level of analysis as the preferred option in order to establish the most suitable option.</p> <p>In providing reasons to reject broad components of growth and strategy options, tested on a 'one-size fits all' approach to levels of development in individual settlements, the Council is precluding the objective assessment of site options to contribute towards the SAs key issues and objectives.</p>
<p>12. The sustainability effects (both adverse and beneficial) of each alternative are identified and compared.</p>	<p>No testing has been undertaken to reflect the potential sustainability effects of a 'hybrid' strategy. The approach in the draft Sustainability Appraisal also precludes the ability to test the effects of alternatives to a stepped trajectory and potentially (subject to the evidence base for strategic locations for growth) either provide flexibility and contingency to levels of growth or provide a genuine alternative that would ensure</p>

	minimum local housing needs <i>are</i> met within the plan period.
13. Inconsistencies between the alternatives and other relevant plans, programmes or policies are identified and explained.	<p>The draft Sustainability Appraisal makes no reference to the emerging Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework. Specifically, it makes no reference to the requirement in national policy to consider a plan period to 2050. The draft Sustainability Appraisal lacks the necessary evidence to support assumptions for delivery to 2040.</p> <p>Further inconsistencies relate to the Council’s evidence base and Sustainability Appraisal for the Local Plan 2030. The Council has previously identified that options to meet the Local Plan 2030’s housing requirement over the period to 2035 providing for higher growth in villages would be “just as sustainable” as the new village option that was selected in January 2018 (see Jan 2018 SA Option 8, 19 and 33). The Council has provided no adequate alternative reasons to reject village-related growth in the emerging Preferred Options.</p>
14. Reasons are given for selection or elimination of alternatives.	No reasons are given for the rejection of a ‘hybrid’ strategy and no reasons are given to reject the ‘village-related’ component of growth. The Council will be unable to substantiate or repeat these reasons (and specifically their absence) when undertaking the detailed appraisal of sites that is still required.

Baseline Information	
<p>15. Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and their likely evolution without the plan are described.</p>	<p>Relevant sustainability issues are informed by the Council's July 2020 Scoping Report. However, this will require review upon completion of key parts of the evidence base (including Settlement Hierarchy Study and Open Space Study). There is no reference to the issues and opportunities created by made/emerging Neighbourhood Plans and likely deficits in local community infrastructure and services over the extended Plan period to 2040.</p>
<p>16. Characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected are described, including areas wider than the physical boundary of the plan area where it is likely to be affected by the plan where practicable.</p>	<p>The draft Sustainability Appraisal report makes no reference to the Duty to Cooperate or the characteristics of committed and emerging proposals in neighbouring areas (notably Huntingdonshire and Central Bedfordshire). The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035 itself requires early review together with proposing significant growth at Marston Vale. This is likely to have effects when assessing strategic-scale alternatives at Kempston Hardwick, Stewartby and New Settlements at Wyboston and/or Little Barford in terms of potential cumulative impacts and barriers to phasing/implementation.</p>
<p>17. Difficulties such as deficiencies in information or methods are explained.</p>	<p>As previously mentioned, there are key pieces of information missing to justify the outputs of the assessment of options and the level of development at various locations.</p>

Prediction and Evaluation of Likely Significant Effects	
<p>18. Likely significant social, environmental, and economic effects are identified, including those listed in the SEA Directive (biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climate factors, material assets, cultural heritage, and landscape), as relevant.</p>	<p>The likely significant environment effects of reasonable alternative options have not been correctly or accurately assessed.</p> <p>No site options have yet been assessed in the SA process. The Council has relied on a general, 'one-size fits all' approach to assessing components of growth that does not consider the potential for the difference in effects between individual settlements. The Council has not, for example, differentiated the different elements of A421-based growth in assessing this component (i.e., rail-based growth vs settlement-level growth in the east/south corridor parishes).</p> <p>The conclusions on significant effects for each component of growth and strategy option are derived using a different (and narrower) set of indicators in the SA Framework (Appendix 1) than is proposed for assessing individual sites. This is an inconsistent approach and the full testing of effects for individual site options will not support the reasons given to select/reject entire components of growth in the preferred strategy options.</p>
<p>19. Both positive and negative effects are considered, and where practicable,</p>	<p>While positive and negative effects are given for strategy options and components of growth there is no indication on the duration of these or potential barriers to</p>

<p>the duration of effects (short, medium, or long-term) is addressed.</p>	<p>phasing/implementation. This also reflects the absence of individual site assessment and the lack of consideration of detailed mitigation options at this stage.</p> <p>An objective approach to undertaking this element of the SA cannot be provided using a 'one-size fits all' approach to levels of development in each component of growth and at individual settlements. Variation in these factors as part of a 'hybrid' strategy has scope to maximise the contribution towards sustainable development and limit any adverse effects to short-term/minor in nature, given the proportionally limited levels of village-related growth that would support an appropriate strategy.</p>
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5.0 CRITICISM OF THE 'DO-NOTHING' APPROACH

5.1 Paragraphs 1.8 and 1.11 of the draft Sustainability Appraisal indicate that the Council has tested 'do nothing' approaches for the amount and distribution of growth. The Council identifies mainly negative effects with these approaches. In terms of the assessment findings at paragraph 8.7 the Council states there would be no positive effects associated with a 'do nothing' scenario in providing for the amount of growth, citing a lack of economic growth and additional housing as well as increased in-commuting (findings set out at Appendix 4). The Council contradicts this conclusion regarding the assessment findings for a 'do nothing' scenario for components of growth and strategy options.

5.2 At paragraphs 8.14 and 8.15 the appraisal states that growth to meet identified needs (i.e., minimum annual local housing need in accordance with the standard method) is assumed to occur in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework's presumption in favour of development. The Council nonetheless identifies mainly negative effects (set out at Appendix 6) associated with the expectation of a more dispersed pattern of development.

5.3 The principal reasons why this inconsistency has arisen, and is incorrect in terms of understanding the consequences for development as part of the Council's testing of other strategy options are as follows:

- **Housing is likely to be dispersed in rural locations, although not necessarily in or adjoining villages.** This is incorrect as the presumption only applies to sustainable development and dispersed rural locations, including those away from villages, will not meet this test.
- **The Council itself recognises that the amount of development coming forward is likely to be similar to that if there were a local plan (resulting from calculation of minimum annual local housing need using the standard method for the purposes of decision-taking).** The Council has failed to reflect, however, that plan-making should consider where higher levels of growth may be appropriate as part of its strategy options.
- **The development would be on an uncoordinated and piecemeal basis.** This is incorrect as there are as yet no infrastructure or service delivery plans that are linked to any of the Preferred Options. Further development in Key and Rural Service Centres would be expected to respond to any relevant infrastructure requirements, once known, including those elements not addressed in Neighbourhood Plans currently or recently prepared.
- **Infrastructure provision and any community benefits arising from development would not be coordinated.** This is incorrect as infrastructure provision can be planned by the relevant providers and there is no policy in the current or emerging plan that actually coordinates community benefits.

- **Development of brownfield land is unlikely to occur unless the site is particularly well located or does not require remediation.** This makes the case that unviable poorly located brown field sites will not be developed. If sites are poorly located the question is, should they be developed? If they are unviable then even an allocation will not alter this and bring them forward.
- **This also assumes that there will be the delivery of sites:** In terms of the Preferred strategy options for the Local Plan 2040 the difference between any benefits associated with plan-led approaches is likely to be moderated (or reversed) by their long-term development timescales, reliance on a stepped trajectory and potential barriers to delivery whereas ‘do minimum’ scenarios would offer genuine opportunities to meet the uplift in needs that is required now.

5.4 Looking specifically at Objective 12 (housing) the major negative effects identified in Appendix 4 relate to a lack of development. However, at Appendix 6 only minor negative effects are identified and these rely on unsubstantiated conclusions that a more dispersed pattern of growth would provide for an inadequate housing mix and compromise the delivery of affordable housing and specialist housing for older people.

5.5 In reality the exact opposite is likely in terms of development outcomes. Development in the Borough’s most sustainable settlements (outside of Bedford) is more likely to secure policy-compliant levels of affordable housing contributions. This is different to known and likely viability constraints and Town Centre sites and within large-scale strategic growth locations where the delivery of affordable housing is suppressed. Likewise, the conclusion of negative effects for specialist housing for older people is not justified. The Council has not set out any policy position on overall levels of need or whether these could be provided within the preferred strategy options (likely necessitating a ‘general’ policy approach to encourage provision on larger sites).

5.6 The Appendix 6 findings for other objectives are inconsistent although generally recognise the potential benefits for a proportionate scale of growth in rural areas, as part of a ‘do nothing’ approach. These include:

- **Objective 13 (Community Services and Facilities) (Uncertain):** if development is in the form of village extensions, this option may help support existing village community facilities. This is consistent with the assessment findings for the village-related component of growth (Appendix 4) and strategy options including village-related growth (Appendix 5 – including **Option 3c**).
- **Objective 7 (Encourage and Support Physical Activity) (Negative):** *“Dispersed growth is unlikely to encourage travel by non-car modes and increase travel to the*

urban area” – we disagree with this conclusion as once again appropriate extensions could also delivery improvements to open space and recreation and provide good access to day-to-day services and facilities. For option findings including village-related growth (including **Option 3c**) the finding for the same objective is ‘Uncertain’

- **Objective 5 (Economic Growth) (Neutral):** Business development is likely to locate near to existing businesses and areas with good accessibility – we agree with this conclusion as some growth at Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres would enhance local employment opportunities. However, for the village-related growth component the Appraisal findings show negative effects, which is inconsistent.
- **Objective 2 (Biodiversity) (Negative):** ‘Do nothing’ appraisal findings note minor adverse impacts should be capable of mitigation and could lead to the creation or enhancement of habitats. The appraisal finding for the ‘do nothing’ scenario is the same as for all spatial options tested in Appendix 5 (all shown potential negative effects) and the village-related component of growth. The appraisal fails to reflect that only appropriate greenfield sites, primarily in Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres, are likely to offer site-specific opportunities to enhance natural assets through the provision of additional land or mitigation measures.
- **Objective 1 (Air Quality) (Negative):** Effects associated with increased number of journeys and private car movements. A lower magnitude of negative effects is identified for the ‘do nothing’ scenario than for the strategy options including village-related growth in Appendix 5 (including **Option 3c**) identifying major negative effects. This is inconsistent given that the ‘do nothing’ scenario anticipates more dispersed growth. The village-related component itself (in Appendix 4) also only identifies some negative effects. The conclusions regarding testing of strategy options therefore fail to reflect that village-related growth will typically be related in areas away from existing poor air quality and with good access to day-to-day facilities. The conclusions relating to the adverse effects of strategy options including village-related growth are inconsistent with the SA Framework for sites (Appendix 1) that recognises that the accessibility of services will reduce any harmful effects.
- **Objective 15 (Sustainable Travel) (Major Negative):** The ‘do nothing’ appraisal findings are the same as the Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 conclusions on harmful effects associated with village-related growth and strategy options that include this component. The Council suggests this aspect of ‘do nothing’ strategy options perform no worse than the reasons it has given to exclude any element of village-related growth from its preferred options. We disagree. The ‘do nothing’ scenario is distinct from strategy options to provide for appropriate levels of growth in Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres to sustain and enhance their role and use of existing facilities (which are specifically recognised in the SA Framework for individual sites). The Council identifies positive effects for all elements of the A421-based component of growth and some negative effects for New Settlements as part of the appraisal findings for this objective. This fails to reflect the uncertainty that any benefits are likely to be long-term and subject to constraints regarding phasing, viability and achieving a population density sufficient to support new services and facilities and uptake of public transport options.

5.7 In reality, the negative effects associated with failing to provide for opportunities that

contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development are likely to be more severe as part of the Council's Preferred Options (which exclude village-related growth outside of transport corridor parishes) than its own testing of a 'do nothing' strategy. This would enable a more flexible distribution of growth, in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, allowing site-specific benefits of development to be realised.

- 5.8 The Council's Preferred Options, which effectively put an embargo on further growth in the majority of Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres, act contrary to the interests of sustainable development over the Plan period to 2040 and beyond. The negative consequences of this are magnified where Neighbourhood Plans have provided for some growth under the requirements of the Local Plan 2030 but have fundamentally failed to address local priorities for matters including community, social and green infrastructure and enhancing existing facilities and job opportunities, where appropriate.

6.0 FAILURE TO PROVIDE ROBUST REASONS TO REJECT VILLAGE-RELATED GROWTH WITHIN STRATEGY OPTIONS

- 6.1 The Sustainability Appraisal provides inaccurate and insufficient reasons to reject strategy options providing for village-related growth, particularly **Option 3c**. The summary table of the findings for components of growth at pp.66 of Appendix 3 suggests major negative effects against certain objectives including objective 3 (climate change) and objective 15 (sustainable travel) for any growth in Key Service Centres or Rural Service Centres. In this part of the assessment the Council does not appear to distinguish settlements relative to their relationship with A421-based growth (i.e., 'east' and 'south' corridor parishes).
- 6.2 We fundamentally disagree with the Council's assessment of the village-related growth component, given that during preparation of the current Local Plan higher levels of growth (up to 5,100 units 2015 to 2035) at the Borough's most sustainable centres was considered just as sustainable as New Settlement options. We also consider that testing of this component is undermined by a 'one-size fits all' approach to assessing settlements within the hierarchy with no attempt to distinguish effects based on varying levels of growth at individual settlements (or including some and excluding others).
- 6.3 In testing strategy/spatial options (Table at pp.111-112 of Appendix 5) the Council has taken a more proportionate approach to distinguishing potential effects. There are in-fact only significant differences between **Option 3c** (providing support for village-related growth amongst other components) and the Council's Preferred Options 2a-2d in relation to Objectives 1, 3 and 15 (air quality, climate change and sustainable transport). The lack of distinction in effects across other objectives reflects the absence of any detailed site testing at this stage and reflects the uncertainty of positive effects within the other components of growth.
- 6.4 The testing of strategy options has regard to the scale and relative proportion of growth in each component. It is therefore appropriate that, as per the findings of Objective 3 for example, the potential negative effects for climate change related to a proportion of village-related growth have been moderated downwards from the findings for this specific component. This reflects the relatively minor contribution to the overall strategy and the opportunity for net gains across other parts of this objective (e.g., improving access to day-to-day services, renewable energy generation and energy-efficient design).

- 6.5 It is, however, fundamentally inconsistent that the **Major Negative** effects associated with Objectives 1 (air quality) and 15 (sustainable travel) have not been moderated in a similar way. Major adverse impacts on air quality are **only** identified for Options 3a-3c and Option 6. The Council is indicating that Option 3c will perform **worse** than the ‘do-nothing’ scenario. This is despite no individual component of growth in Appendix 3 being associated with major adverse effects for **Objective 1** (air quality) and despite the fact that as part of strategy options, and managing the relative proportions of growth, the process of site selection will lead to the inclusion of sites and locations with the least impacts.
- 6.6 Likewise for **Objective 15** (sustainable travel) there is no justification to state that **Options 3b, 3c and Option 6** would be associated with major negative effects and to rely on these limited reasons to reject village-related growth as a component of the strategy.
- 6.7 The Council’s position is further undermined by the fact that it relies on indicating the specific percentage of ‘village-related’ growth in testing each strategy option (35% in the case of **Option 3c**) when concluding on the extent of adverse effects. There are three principal issues with this:
- The 35% total quoted is not ‘fixed’ – this could be changed by altering the specific expected levels of growth at individual settlements upwards or downwards, or by excluding some altogether some settlements where the most significant impacts may be associated; and
 - The 35% total is based on the expected contribution from the village-related component of growth **at all Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres including those in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridors** – the Council’s own evidence indicates different effects associated with those locations aligned to A421-based growth. This means that the proportionate scale of growth (and thus adverse impacts, if any) outside of these corridors is materially lower than the total quoted by the Council in its assessment; and
 - The 35% (or any altered figure) is also associated with a dimension of potential positive effects within the strategy options. This will not be realised or contribute to the overall net effects for sustainable development if village-related growth is excluded altogether (as per the Council’s Preferred Options).
- 6.8 To summarise, there can be no support for the Council’s conclusions in the draft Sustainability Appraisal that a ‘hybrid’ approach providing the basis for further testing of village-related growth would not provide the basis for an appropriate strategy. It is essential that a hybrid approach is tested before, for example, concluding the requirement for a stepped trajectory and delaying meeting increased housing needs until beyond 2030.

7.0 PROPOSED APPROPRIATE STRATEGY ALTERNATIVE – A ‘HYBRID’ APPROACH

- 7.1 These representations propose an alternative ‘hybrid’ spatial strategy. This is consistent with the Council’s evidence base for the emerging Local Plan 2040; would overcome the soundness issues identified with the Council’s Preferred Options; and would comprise an appropriate strategy for the purposes of Paragraph 35(b) of the NPPF2021.
- 7.2 The ‘hybrid’ strategy recognises that there is no arbitrary distinction between ‘village-related’ growth and support for development in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridor parishes in terms of their capacity to contribute towards sustainable development. The benefits of ‘village-related’ development do not suddenly materialise only where Key Service Centre and Rural Service Centres are located in the A421 corridor and do not evaporate altogether outside of it.
- 7.3 The Council expressly recognise this in the evidence base for the current Development Plan. In the current Preferred Options, it has taken an inconsistent approach to assessing the effects of the ‘village-related’ development component by reaching different conclusions for exactly the same settlements (in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridors) when they are assessed as part of the Preferred Options as opposed to other strategy options (e.g., **Option 3c**).
- 7.4 The ‘hybrid’ option assigns the ‘village-related’ growth component only to those settlements outside of the ‘east’ and ‘south’ corridors. Levels of development, for the purposes of an indicative distribution, have been retained at 500 units in Key Service Centres and 35 units in Rural Service Centres albeit these are arbitrary figures and should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Wixams has been excluded from the total for Key Service Centres (reflecting its inclusion in the locations for rail-based growth). The only exception, taking account of this, is an increase of 215 units in the distribution to Oakley based on our recommendation for it to be reclassified as a Key Service Centre and growth east of Station Road being specifically supported.
- 7.5 For the A421-based components of the strategy the total distribution to the ‘east’ corridor parishes are retained at the figure of 750 dwellings in the Council’s Preferred **Option 2d**.
- 7.6 In terms of the ‘hybrid’ strategy this could accommodate greater flexibility in terms of large-scale strategic growth included in the strategy options. We have included the Council’s minimum figures for inclusion of rail-based growth at Kempston Hardwick/Stewartby and

New Settlements in either the A6 or A421 corridor, which is more likely to reflect realistic timescales for development.

7.7 Including both components would comfortably exceed the minimum 12,500 units required from additional allocations, with an appropriate buffer for flexibility and contingency (particularly in terms of the prospects for meeting increased needs before 2030). There is no reason higher quanta could not be included as part of an extended plan period. Equally, this could allow some settlements to be excluded from further village-related growth albeit we would not recommend this where Neighbourhood Plans being prepared have failed to address important strategic priorities (as at Oakley and Sharnbrook, for example).

7.8 The 'hybrid' strategy based on these components are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Illustrative Hybrid Strategy Option Including Village-Related Growth

	Component	Option 2d	% Of Total	Option 3c	% Of Total	Option 3 - Hybrid	% Of Total	Notes
	Within urban area	1500	12%	1500	12%	1500	11%	
	Adjoining urban area	1500	12%	1500	12%	1500	11%	
	Village related	0	0%	4280	35%	1890	14%	Excluding 'east' and 'south' corridor parishes and Wixams
A421-based	Growth focused on Kempston Hardwick, Stewartby & Wixams (Rail based growth)	5,500	44%	0	0%	3915	29%	Use of minimum figure from Option 2c
	Transport corridor south	750	6%	0	0%	1535	11%	
	Transport corridor east	750	6%	0	0%	750	6%	Retention of higher figure from Option 2d
	New settlements (A421 corridor)	2500	20%					
	New settlements (A6 corridor)	0	0%	4900	40%	2400	18%	Use of minimum New Settlement total (Colworth)
	Total	12500	100%	12180	100%	13490	100%	

7.9 We have utilised the ‘hybrid’ strategy to consider an assessment of effects in-line with the Council’s Sustainability Appraisal framework. When the ‘hybrid’ strategy is compared with the standalone findings for growth components and the Council’s Options **2d** and **3c**, as well as the ‘do nothing’ scenario, it is apparent that the potential benefits towards sustainable development are enhanced. This is as a result of recognising that the potential negative effects the Council assigns to village-related growth are incorrect and, in any event, inaccurate because it ignores the location of some Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres within the A421 corridor.

7.10 It also recognises that some the benefits of what is in reality ‘village-related’ growth in the ‘east’ and ‘south’ transport corridors will be shared across settlements elsewhere in the hierarchy. The results are summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Assessment of Effects – ‘Hybrid’ Strategy Option and Alternatives

SA Objective	Growth Component		Spatial Options			Do Nothing
	Village-Related Growth	A421-based Growth	Option 2d	Option 3c	Hybrid	
Objective 1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Major Negative	Negative	Negative
Objective 2	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 3	Major Negative	Positive	Uncertain	Negative	Uncertain	Major Negative
Objective 4	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain
Objective 5	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral
Objective 6	Major Negative	Major Negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Major Negative
Objective 7	Negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 8	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 9	Negative	Positive	Major Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative
Objective 10	Negative	Positive	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative
Objective 11	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Objective 12	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative
Objective 13	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Positive	Uncertain
Objective 14	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain	Positive	Uncertain
Objective 15	Major Negative	Positive	Positive	Major Negative	Positive	Major Negative

7.11 These findings reinforce the essential requirement for the Council to update its Preferred

Options to reflect a hybrid strategy in order to provide a sound basis for preparation of the Local Plan 2040.



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**Appendix 7 Review of the AECOM “Bedford Borough Transport Model” – SDD
Consultants**

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-18PD

Re: Bedford Borough Transport Model – Technical Note Review
Date: August 2021
Subject: Review of “Bedford Borough Transport Model” report (AECOM, April 2021)
Client: Bedfordia Developments Ltd

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Technical Note (Note) has been prepared by DLP Planning’s Sustainable Development and Delivery (SDD) team on behalf of Bedfordia Developments Ltd in order to provide a review of the Bedford Borough Council Transport Model report ‘New Settlements and the A6’ (April 2021) which was prepared by AECOM on behalf of Bedford Borough Council.

1.2 The purpose of the transport model and subsequent report is stated as being as follows:

“to develop a multi-modal transport model (the Bedford Borough Transport Model, or BBTM) covering the borough and areas adjacent to the borough in neighbouring authorities. This model has been developed to assess the forecast impacts of growth set out in spatial scenarios for the new Local Plan for growth through to 2040 and to assess potential mitigation transport schemes to assist in delivering this growth.”

As part of the development of the new Local Plan for Bedford Borough, potential new settlements to the north of Bedford along the A6 corridor have been identified, namely the proposed developments at Twinwoods (to the south-east of Milton Ernest) and Colworth (to the north-west of Sharnbrook). This technical note details the modelling methodology and forecast results of an initial transport assessment of the proposed developments.

As part of this assessment, an initial set of mitigation measures defined by Bedford Borough Council has been assessed and these have been supplemented with further, additional proposed mitigation measures developed by AECOM. These additional proposed mitigation measures have considered the forecast locations of delay and congestion within the highway network and have considered only schemes which could be ‘deliverable’ in the context of the proposed development.”

1.3 This technical review focuses upon whether any assessment has been made of a scenario whereby growth is dispersed across Bedford at existing villages, or whether the focus is upon solely the creation of new settlements. The key issues reviewed are as follows:

- How constrained does the AECOM transport model state the existing highway network is, and how accurate is their assessment?
- In terms of village-related growth in North Beds the Local Plan Options indicate an additional 500 units at Sharnbrook/Bromham/Clapham and 35 at Oakley and Milton Ernest (over and above current NDP requirements). Has the AECOM study looked at

TECHNICAL NOTE: JOB REF BE5229-18PD

any flexibility in those numbers, or any potential growth in jobs or demand for community facilities (specifically expansion at Lincroft Academy in Oakley)?

- The Transport Model report assesses potential New Settlements at Twinwoods and Colworth. However, does it look at different levels of village-related growth including and excluding these?
- Does the report mention at all the proposed competing “Site 901 - Hill Farm” site and the associated new access roundabout proposed off the A6? What impact would this have on AECOM assumptions should this junction have been omitted from assessment?

- 1.4 For reference, **Figure 1** shows the location of the “Site 901- Hill Farm” site and the applicants land at “Site Ref 620” and “Site Ref 527” adjacent to the A6. Whilst Figure 1 is not included with the AECOM report, it demonstrates the proximity of the sites to the A6 in order to determine whether an assessment has been made of these sites.

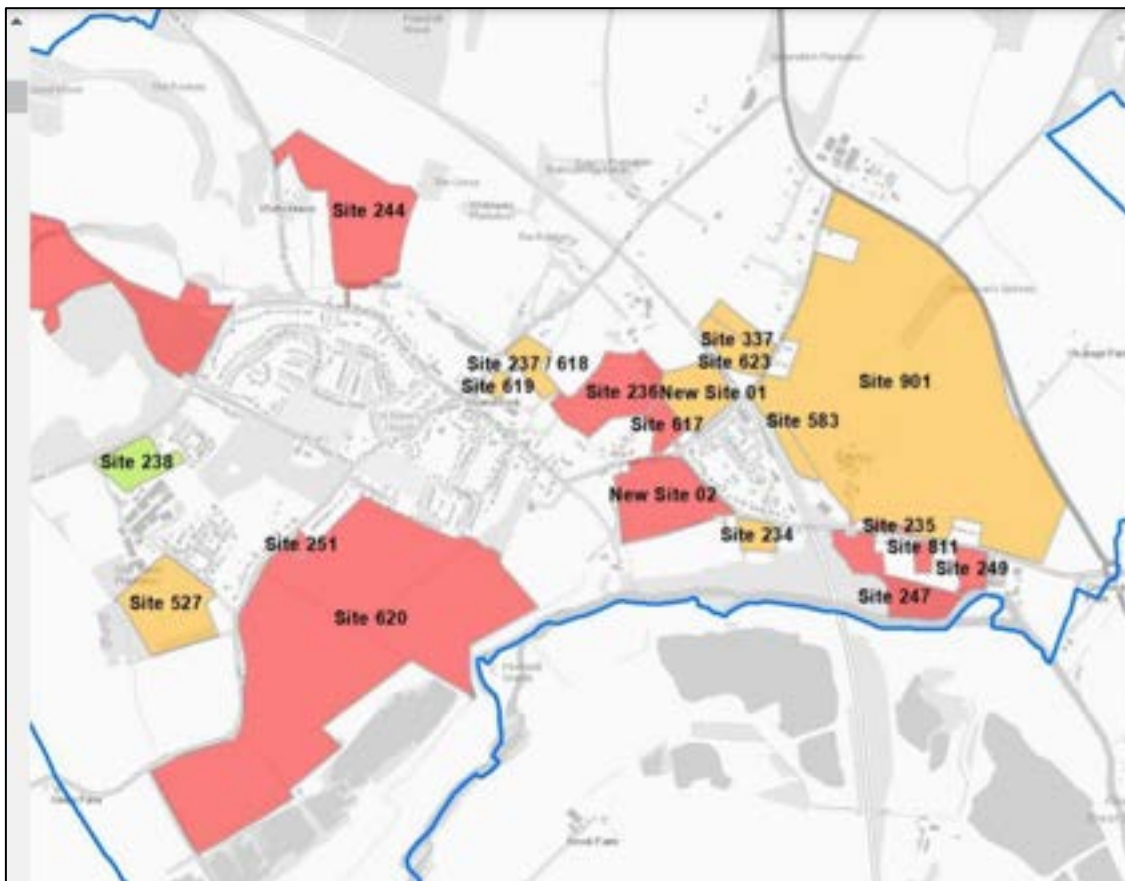


Figure 1: Site 901 – Hill Farm Location Plan

2.0 Review of Existing Highway Network

- 2.1 Within the AECOM report, the ‘reference case’ is classed as being the baseline for assessment. However this ‘reference case’ year is actually 2030. This ‘reference case’ represents the scenario whereby there is no further growth beyond that identified in the current / adopted Local Plan 2030.

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- 2.2 The growth in housing and employment within Bedford Borough is based upon committed developments and growth as set out in the adopted Local Plan 2030.
- 2.3 Paragraph 2.2.1 of the AECOM reports states that:
- “Further details on the underlying assumptions and outturn changes in land-use from the 2018 base year model for the reference case can be found in Section 2 of ‘BBTM Draft Local Plan Assessment Report.’”*
- 2.4 Therefore, throughout the report, the baseline / ‘reference case’ referred to is always 2030, and no information is provided on the “current” highway conditions.
- 2.5 In addition to the above, the ‘2030 reference case’ makes assumptions regarding the changes to transport infrastructure from 2018. The list of transport improvement schemes was provided by Bedford Borough Council, with assumptions for transport schemes outside of the borough sourced from assumptions provided by Highways England and through consultation with neighbouring authorities.
- 2.6 A summary of the highway infrastructure schemes (22 schemes) which are included within the baseline ‘2030 reference case’ are provided. However, none of these highway improvement schemes are within the vicinity of Sharnbrook or the A6 to the east of Sharnbrook.
- 2.7 The baseline ‘reference case’ is therefore based upon the 22 highway infrastructure schemes being implemented. However, no confirmation is provided regarding the sources of funding for such schemes, and whether this could preclude their delivery. The delivery of these works as a baseline assessment cannot be guaranteed – in particular where they may also be reliant on the acquisition of third-party land.
- 2.8 Should the above highway improvement schemes not be delivered, the reassignment of traffic could impact upon congestion at key locations across the highway network. Therefore, should any schemes aimed at relieving congestion not be delivered, the future assessment of the operation of the highway network assessed in the 2030 ‘reference case’ could be skewed.
- 2.9 Notwithstanding the above, Table 3.9 of the AECOM report provides a summary of the forecast average junction delay at key junctions across Bedford Borough. for both 2018 and 2030 ‘reference case’ scenarios. In relation the highway network in the vicinity of Sharnbrook, junction delay data is provided at the following key junctions:
- A6 / Mill Road (Sharnbrook) A6 (N)
 - A6 / Mill Road (Sharnbrook) Thurleigh Road
 - A6 / Mill Road (Sharnbrook) A6 (S)
 - A6 / Mill Road (Sharnbrook) Mill Road
 - A6 / Souldrop Lane
- 2.10 At the above locations, the maximum delay is 6 seconds in the 2018 scenario and 7 seconds in the 2030 reference case AM peak hour scenarios and this occurs at the A6 / Mill Road (A6 north) roundabout junction.
- 2.11 In relation to Volume-Capacity ratios at the above locations, Tabel 3.13 shows the maximum capacity of the junctions reaches 50% during the peak period. Once again this occurs at the A6 / Mill Road roundabout.

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- 2.12 No assessment is provided of the dumbbell roundabouts off the A6 in the vicinity of Oakley, nor the junctions with Highfield Road further north along the A6. Whilst these do not comprise at-grade junctions directly along the A6, they do represent the points at which any future traffic growth within Oakley would access the A6. Ordinarily, it would be expected that an assessment at the junction where the on-slip / off-slip meets the A6 would be undertaken. There is no explanation as to why these junctions in the vicinity of Oakley have not been assessed, or whether this is because BBC do not envisage capacity issues at these locations. As part of any future development in the vicinity of Oakley, detailed capacity assessments of these junctions adjacent to the A6 would be required to determine whether more localised highway mitigation improvements are indeed required.
- 2.13 In the wider context, the greatest delay is experienced at the A6 Clapham Road / Manton Lane junction to the immediate northwest of Bedford. However Table 2.2 sets out that the proposed infrastructure mitigation is due to be complete at this location in 2021 which seeks to improve the operation of this junction.

3.0 Village-Related Growth

- 3.1 As part of the AECOM study, it is stated at Paragraph 2.2.2 that the 2030 'Reference Case' represents:

"The scenario where there is no further growth beyond that identified in the current, adopted Local Plan 2030. Development scenarios being considered as part of the new Local Plan 2040 and key individual developments, such as the proposed Twinwoods and Colworth developments, are added to this reference case."

- 3.2 Within Bedford Borough, the growth in housing and employment is based upon committed developments and growth set out in the Local Plan 2030. Population forecasts are derived using the forecast housing data, information on observed base year average household sizes, and the forecast change in average household sizes set out in the Department for Transport's TEMPro v7.3 forecasts.
- 3.3 However no detail is provided as to whether an assessment has been made of solely village related growth occurring (i.e development at Sharnbrook, Milton Ernest and Oakley), and whether any sensitivity testing has been undertaken of different levels of growth occurring at villages across Bedford.
- 3.4 In addition to the 2030 'reference case' scenario as set out above, additional forecast scenarios have been assessed for year 2040 and 2050. These scenarios are based upon different levels of growth at Twinwoods and Colworth only, and whether each / both sites are brought forward.
- 3.5 However, no sensitivity testing has been undertaken whereby the two new settlements at Colworth and Twinwoods do not come forward, and instead housing growth development at other existing villages across Bedford Borough.
- 3.6 The focus of the AECOM report is on assessing the forecast impacts of proposed development along the A6 corridor to the north of Bedford – namely the proposed schemes at Twinwoods and Colworth. The future year assessments at 2040 and 2050 assume that either Colworth or Twinwoods would come forward. There is no option assessed whereby a dispersed pattern of smaller housing schemes are provided across the borough instead of the large settlement options.

4.0 Assessment of Local Plan site ref “901 – Hill Farm”

4.1 Within the AECOM report, no specific reference is made to the site at Hill Farm, nor its associated proposed access via a new roundabout onto the A6. **Figure 2** shows the location of residential developments between 2018 and 2040 that form part of the ‘reference case’ assumptions by AECOM. No development site is shown between the railway line and the A6 to the east of Sharnbrook (i.e where Site 901 Hill Farm is proposed).

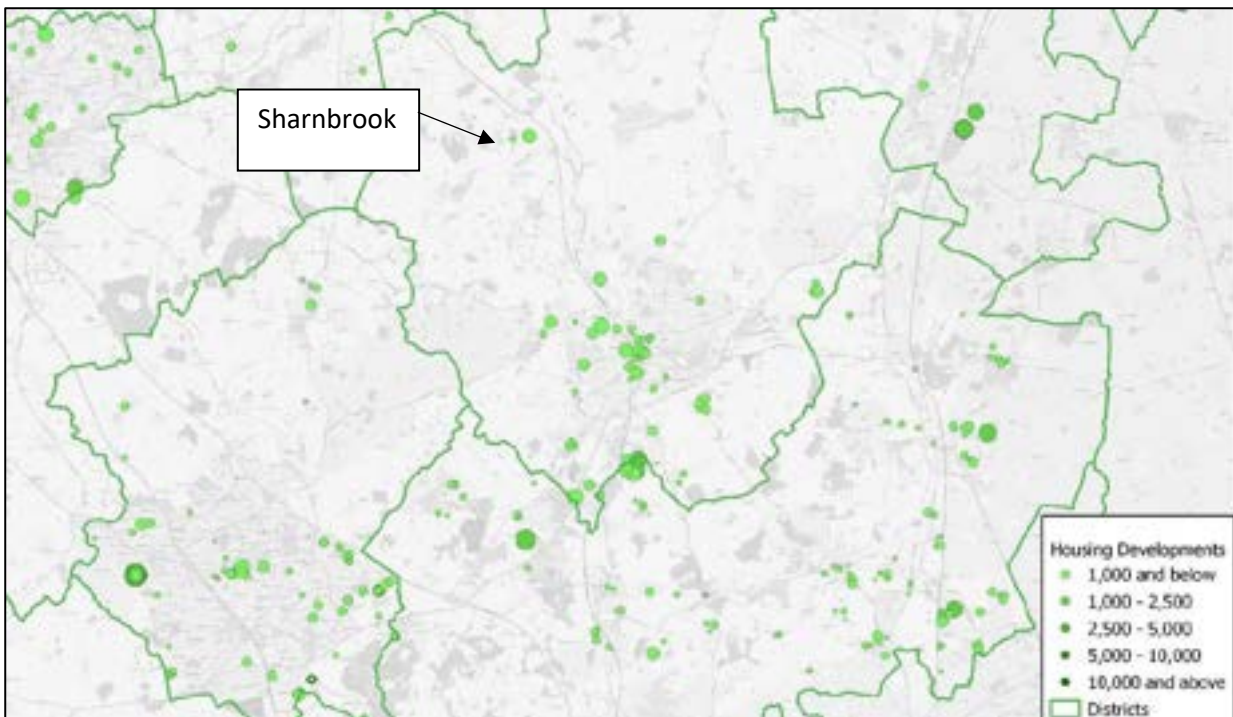


Figure 2: AECOM Reference Case residential developments (2018 – 2040)

- 4.2 In terms of new access points onto the A6, traffic has only been loaded onto the network at the proposed access points associated with the Twinwoods and Colworth developments. No assessment has been made for new traffic being loaded onto the network via a new access onto the A6 associated with the Hill Farm site. Indeed no assessment has been undertaken of only the Hill Farm / associated site access onto the A6 coming forward, excluding the two new settlements.
- 4.3 Therefore, whilst the AECOM Transport Study does take account of growth set out in the Local Plan and committed developments, no specific reference is made of the impact of the “Site 901-Hill Farm” site. The cumulative impact of traffic along the A6 corridor has been assessed in terms of junction capacity and delay, however this is not attributed to this particular site and it is not possible to assess the impact that traffic associated with Site 901 could have on the operation of the surrounding road network.
- 4.4 Whilst the AECOM traffic model excludes any sensitivity testing relating to the impact of the new roundabout, this is understandable given the early stages of assessment. The impact of the site access new roundabout on to the A6 would ordinarily be assessed on a site specific basis as part

of capacity assessments undertaken to inform the planning application for the Hill Farm Site. This would allow for an assessment of impact upon capacity on the more localised road network. However, at this stage, it is unlikely that the introduction of a new roundabout onto the A6 would have a significant bearing on the result of the AECOM traffic model which is undertaken at a 'high level'.

- 4.5 At this stage SDD's view is that it is unlikely that the new junction would result in traffic diversions or traffic being reassigned to different routes. Given its distance from existing junctions along the A6, it is unlikely that any queuing would block back to adjacent junctions.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 The focus of the AECOM report is solely upon the assessment of growth within Bedford being provided in the form of a new settlement at "either" Colworth or Twinwoods, or both coming forward. There appears to have been no assessment has been made of the ability of the local highway network to accommodate a more dispersed pattern of growth across local villages as opposed to being solely at Colworth / Twinwoods.
- 5.2 The highway improvement schemes assessed are implemented to mitigate the impact of development at the two new settlements. There appears to be no assessment of whether mitigation measures are required on a more local level, to facilitate a more dispersed pattern of housing growth across the borough.
- 5.3 There is no justification provided within the report as to why the focus of assessment has been focused on the development at Colworth / Twinwoods only, or whether further work has been undertaken to determine that this is the preferred approach to housing delivery (as opposed to a dispersed approach) across the borough from a highways capacity perspective.



BE5229/6P – Stoneyfields, Sharnbrook
Bedfordia Property and Bedfordshire Charitable Trust
Bedford Local Plan 2040 Representation
September 2021

Appendix 8 Stoneyfields Vision Document



Reference: BE5229/7

Version: Final

Prepared by: BE1 Ltd / DLP

Checked by: [REDACTED]

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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.

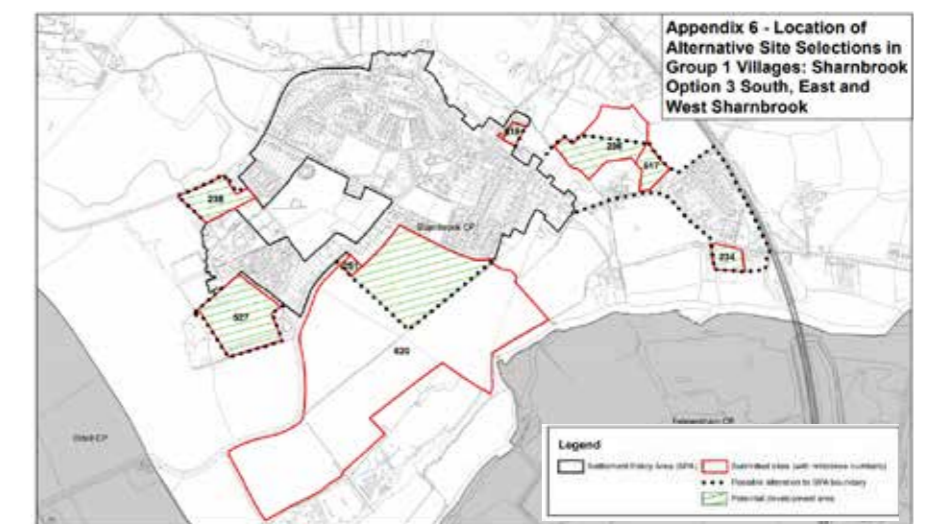
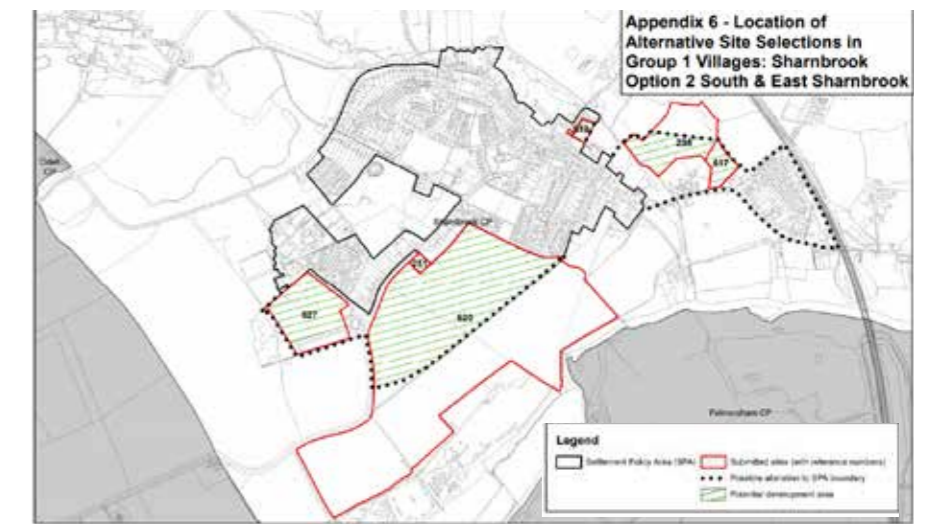
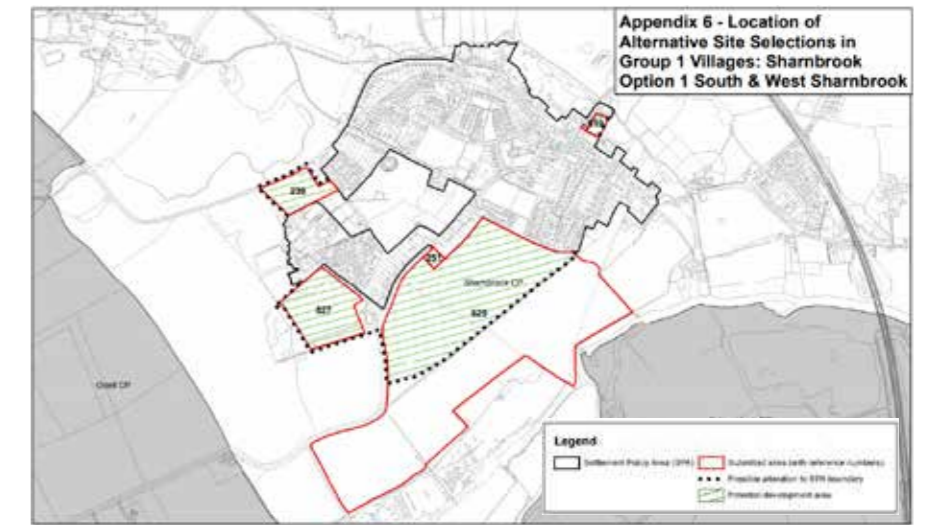
BCT's land, physically well related to the village centre, offers the potential to deliver sustainably the entire allocation of approximately 500 new homes with associated services and infrastructure. The land can also deliver a range of greenspaces including formal and informal open space and a riverside 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



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Wider Context Plan - showing urban areas and waterways

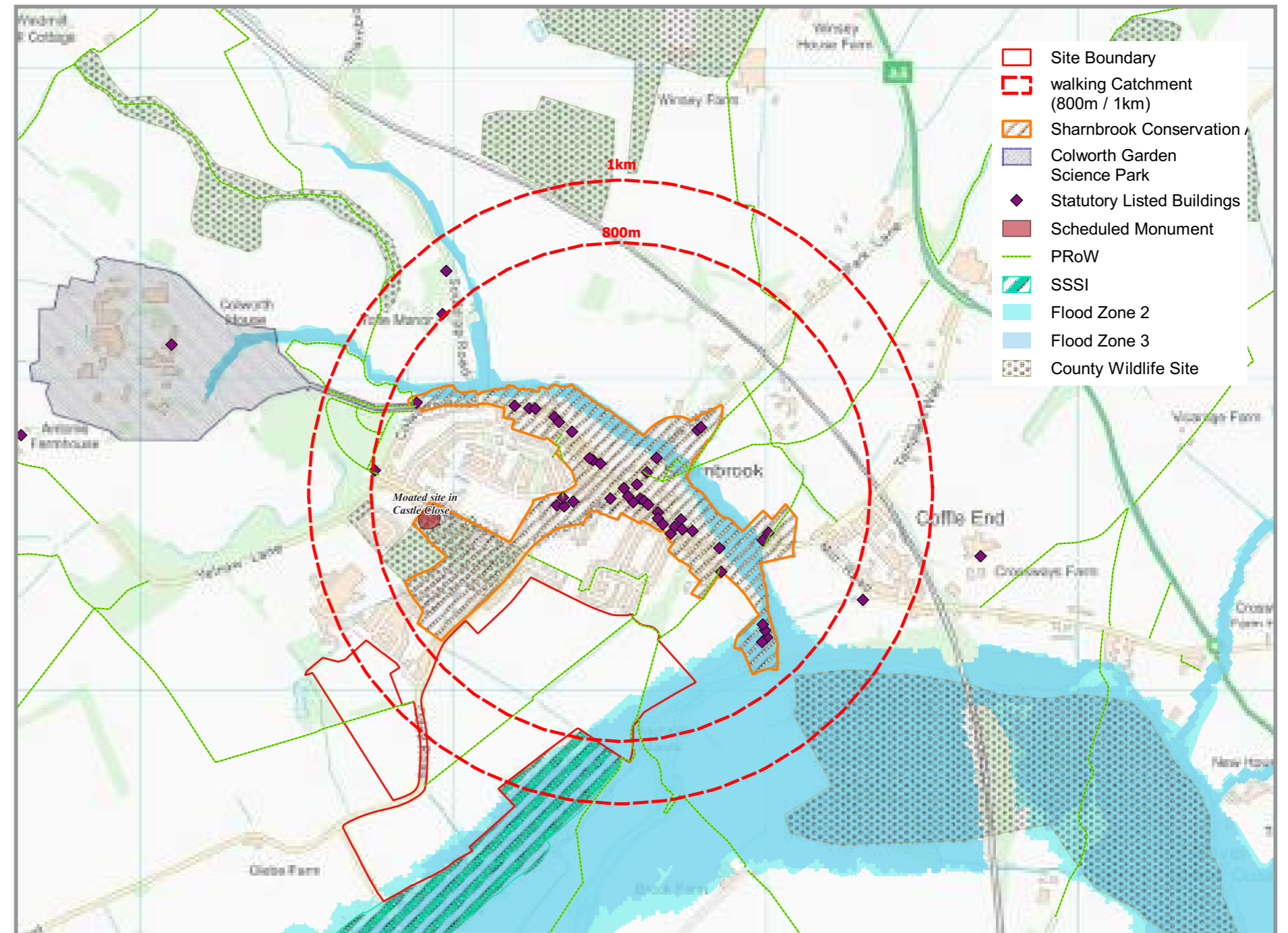
LOCAL CONTEXT AND CONNECTIVITY

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.

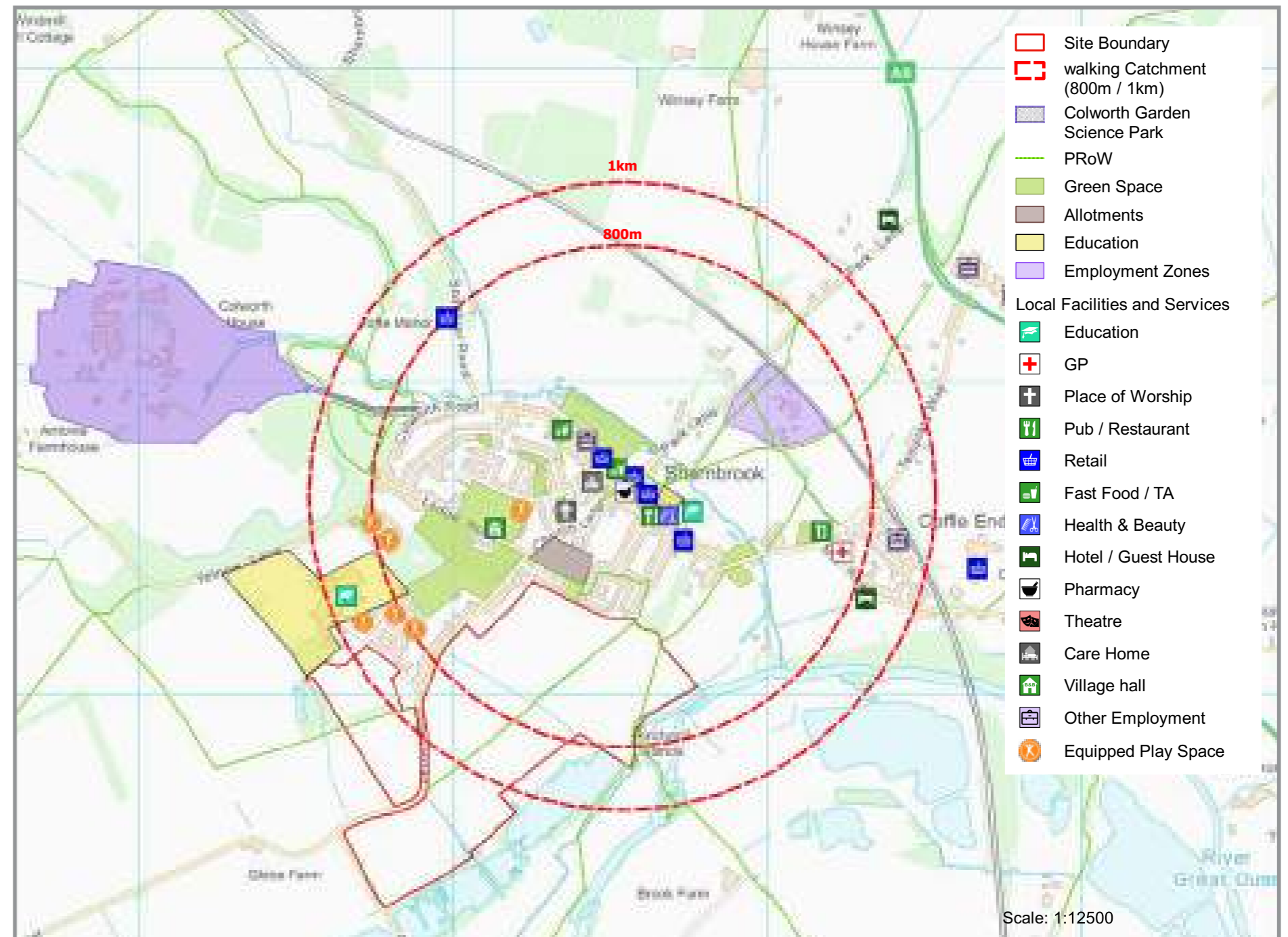
Compared to other locations in Bedford Borough, Sharnbrook benefits from generous provision of public open space, allotments and sports facilities. Its role in providing these helps to address deficits in the surrounding rural area. Closer assessment demonstrates that this provision is concentrated towards 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



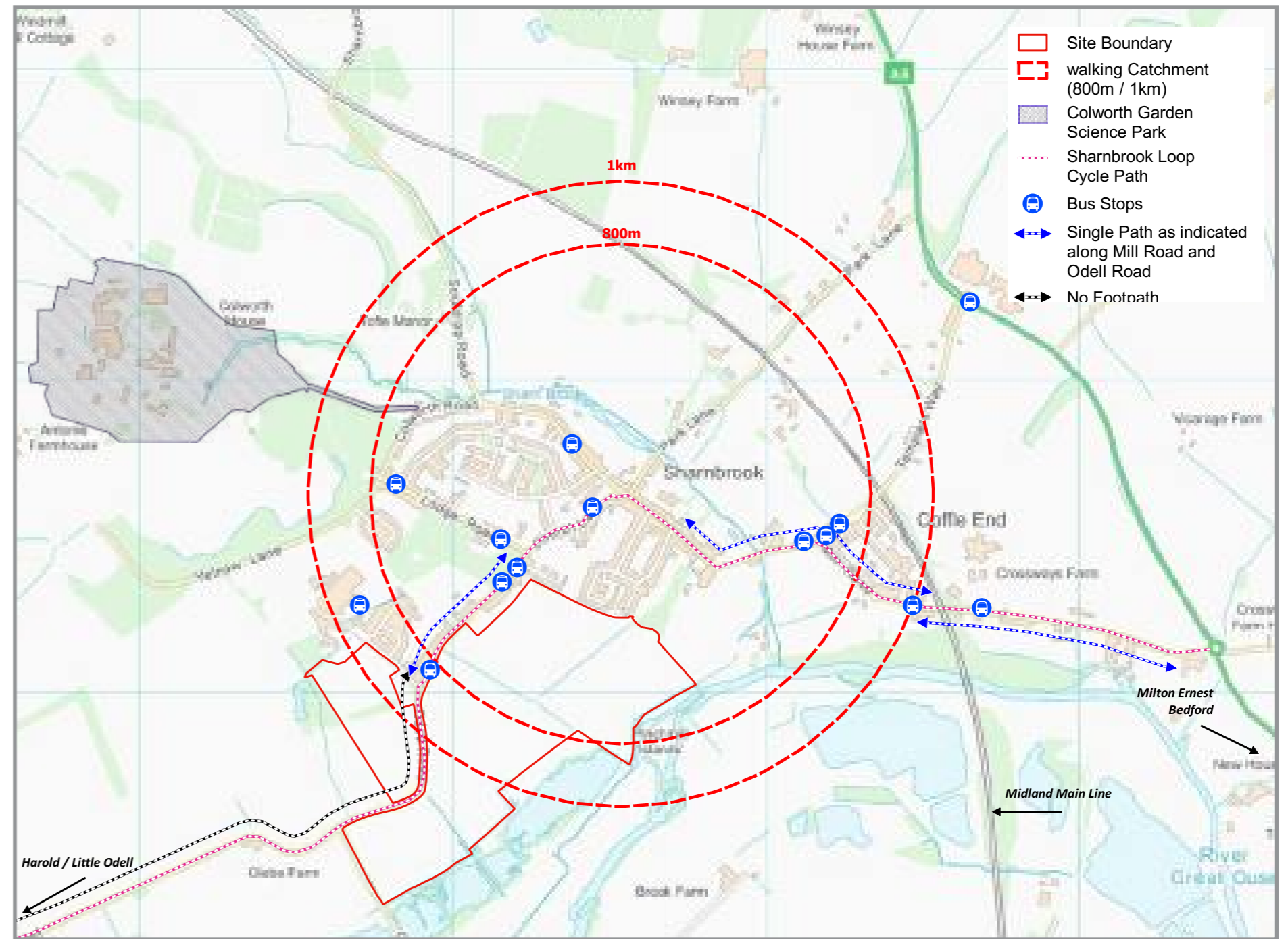
Local Facilities Plan

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.

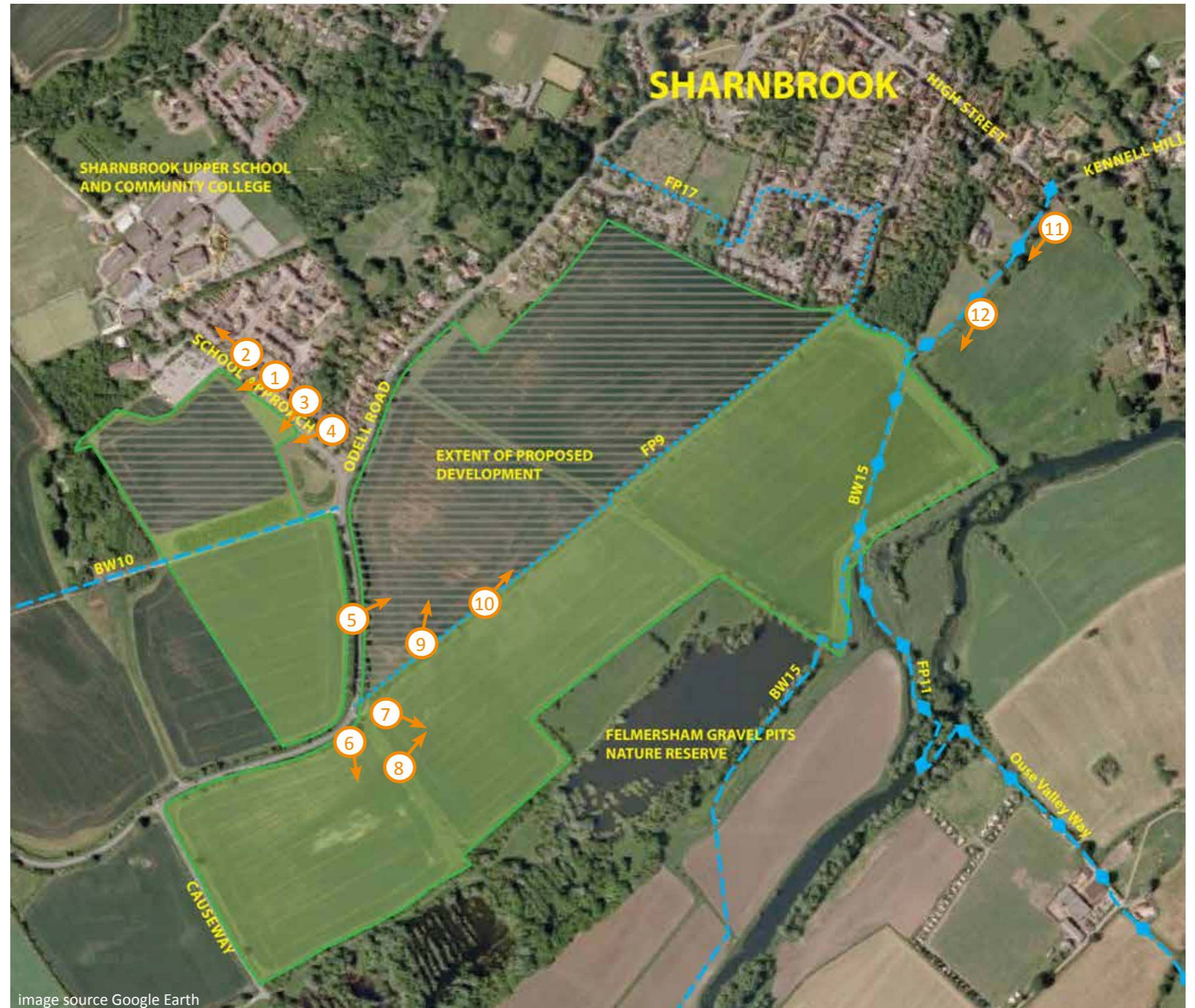


image source Google Earth
Key Plan for Photographs



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



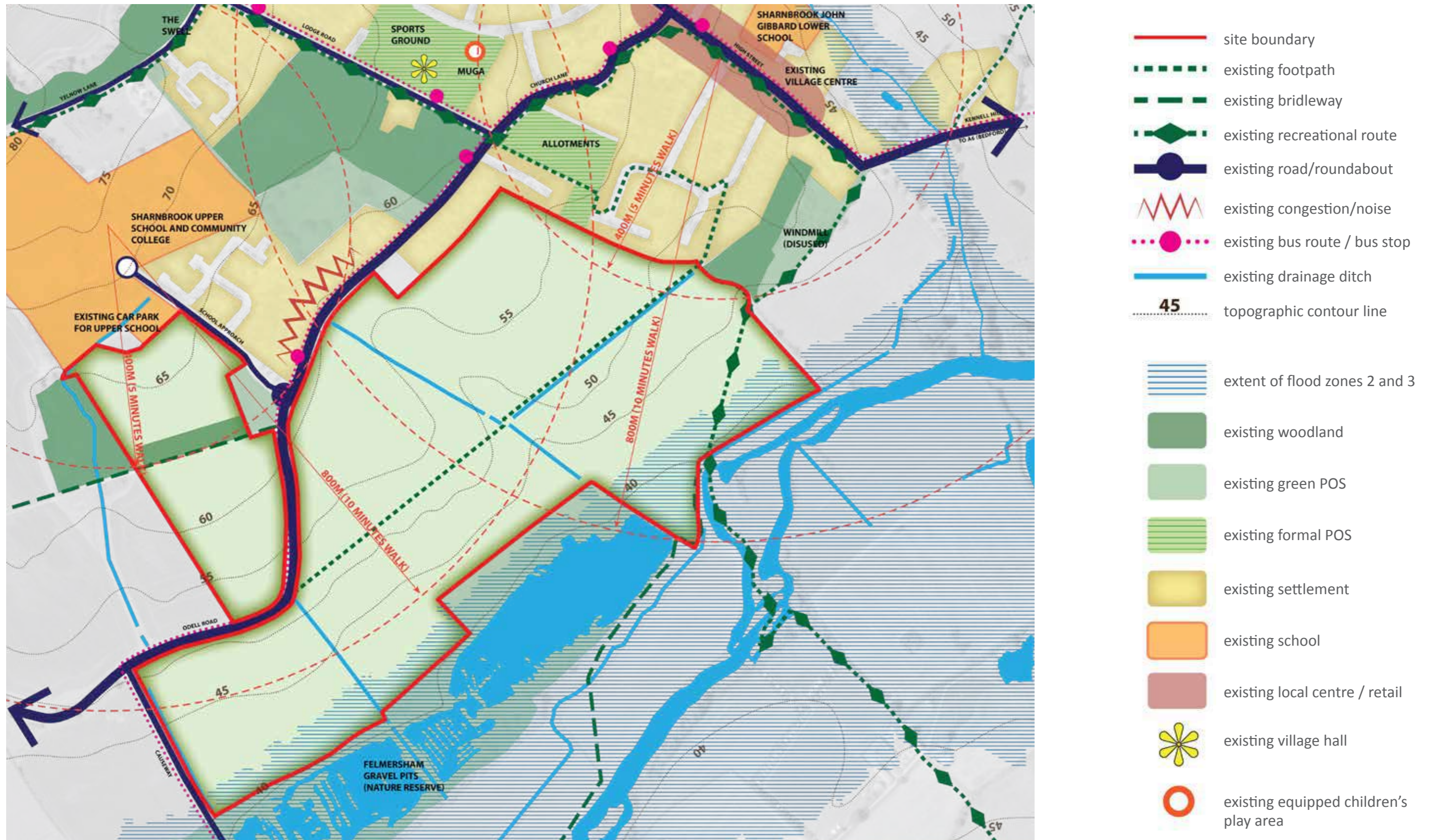
View from Ouse Valley Way recreational route to the south-west toward the site, with the site's structural planting in the background

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.



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.

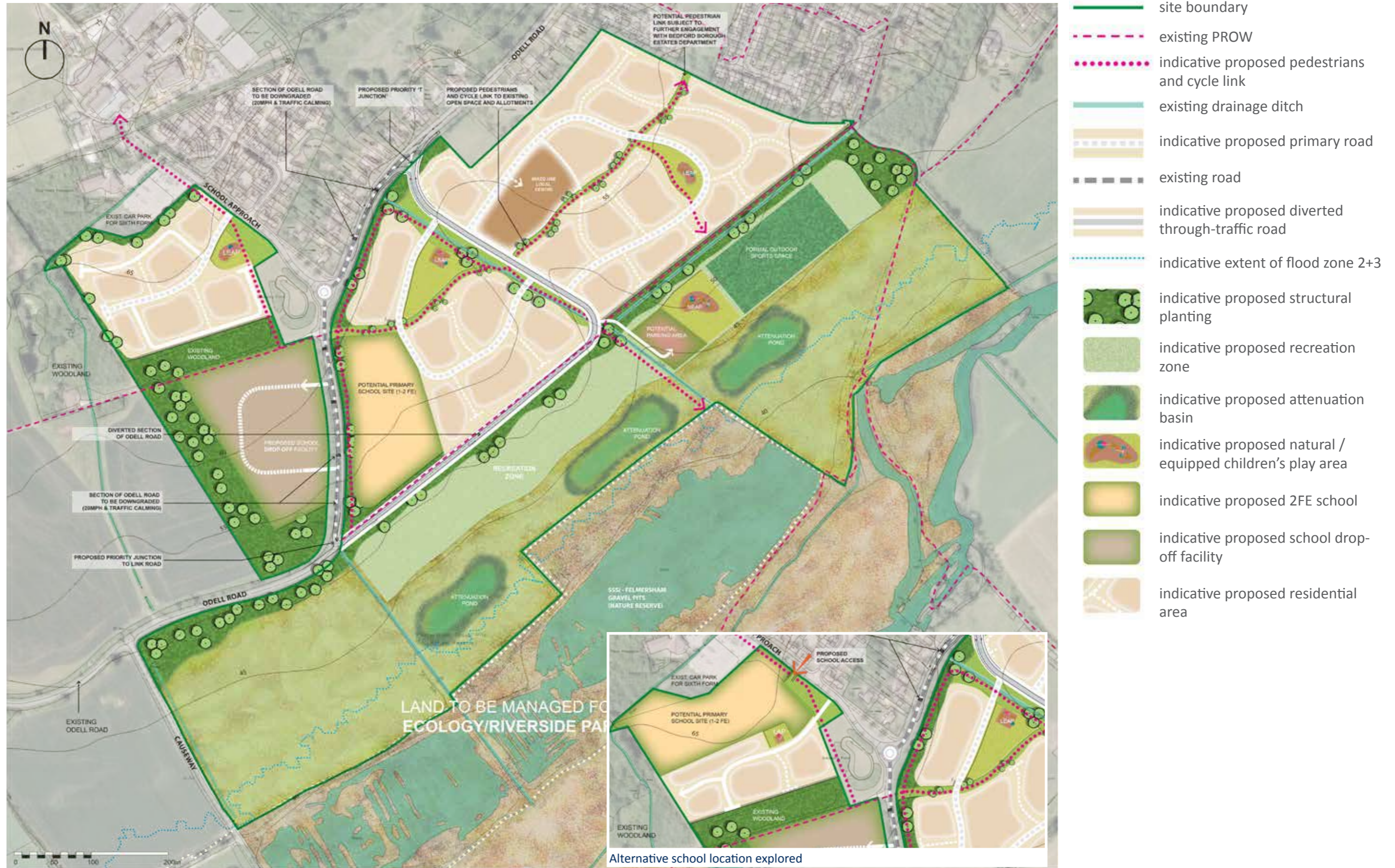
The proposed drainage strategy for the scheme includes a series of attenuation basins at the south of the large land parcel, incorporated into the informal open spaces managed for ecology and recreation. The basins also serve as amenity features, as well as enhancing biodiversity. Detailed design of 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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