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# College Farm, Shortstown, Bedford: Baseline Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared on behalf of Gallagher Developments Group Ltd

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## **ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

Figure 1: Landscape and Visual Context Plan

Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 4: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 5: Opportunities and Constraints Plan / Development Principles Plan

Site Appraisal Photographs A-G

Site Context Photographs 1-11



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) have been commissioned by Gallagher Developments Group Ltd to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of land at College Farm to the west of Shortstown, Bedfordshire (the 'Site'), as shown on **Figure 1: Landscape and Visual Context Plan** and **Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan**.
- 1.2 The LVA assesses the Site and its surroundings in order to determine its suitability for potential residential development (the 'Proposed Development') and advises on landscape and visual considerations in order to successfully integrate the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape and views. The 'Study Area' refers to the area included on **Figure 1**.
- 1.3 The objectives of the landscape and visual appraisal are:
- To assess the landscape character of the Site and its context and the function of the Site within the wider landscape, particularly in relation to existing landscape designations and policies.
  - To appraise the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site.
  - To assess the potential of the Site and its landscape context to accommodate potential development in terms of landscape and visual opportunities and constraints.
  - Make recommendations for a suitable landscape strategy which assists with absorbing the potential development within the landscape and providing a network of green infrastructure.

### Methodology

- 1.4 The methodology employed in carrying out the LVA of the Proposed Development has been drawn from the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd Edition<sup>1</sup> (2013) also referred to as 'the GLVIA3'. The aim of these guidelines is to set high-standards for the scope and content of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and to establish certain principles that will help to achieve consistency, credibility, transparency and effectiveness throughout the assessment.
- 1.5 The GLVIA3 sets out the difference between Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The preparation of an LVA has the rigour of the LVIA process but looks to identify issues of possible harm that might arise from the

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

development proposal and offset them through change and modification of the proposals before a fix of the final design scheme, rather than assessing the impacts that will arise from them. In summary, this LVA has been used as a tool to inform the design process, rather than an assessment of a final proposal.

- 1.6 The assessment of landscape and visual effects, in common with any assessment of environmental effects, includes a combination of objective and subjective judgements. It is, therefore, important that a structured and consistent approach is adopted to ensure that the assessment undertaken is as objective as possible.
- 1.7 A landscape appraisal is the systematic description and analysis of the features within the landscape, such as landform, vegetation cover, settlement and transport patterns and land use which create a particular sense of place. A visual appraisal assesses visual receptors, which are the viewers of the landscape, and could include locations such as residential or business properties, public buildings, public open space and Public Rights of Way (PRoW).
- 1.8 A desktop assessment of the Study Area was undertaken, including an assessment of landscape character, landform, landscape features, historic evolution, policy and designations. This information was used as a basis against which to compare the findings of the Site assessment.
- 1.9 The Study Area has been confined to an area approximately 3km from the Site. This distance from the Site was chosen based on existing features such as landform and vegetation, settlement morphology and land use patterns. This is considered a sufficient area to establish the landscape and visual baseline and to allow the appraisal of the Site and its context.
- 1.10 A brief description of the existing land use of the Study Area is provided and includes reference to existing settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity, and an indication of key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors, which are then considered in the visual appraisal.
- 1.11 The Site has been considered in terms of the following:
  - i) Landscape Character
  - ii) i.e. landform, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement
  - iii) Visual Influence
  - iv) i.e. landform influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating potential for visual impacts
  - v) Landscape Value



- vi) i.e. national designations, local designations, tranquillity / remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations

1.12 The following illustrative material supports the landscape and visual appraisal:

- Figure 1: Landscape and Visual Context Plan
- Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan
- Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan
- Figure 4: Landscape Character Plan
- Figure 5: Opportunities and Constraints / Development Principles Plans
- Site Appraisal Photographs A-G
- Site Context Photographs 1-11

## 2.0 LANDSCAPE BASELINE

- 2.1 The Site is formed of nine irregular agricultural fields (F1-F9), equating to 67.7ha, adjacent to the northern, western and southern settlement edge of Shortstown, as shown on **Figure 1: Landscape and Visual Appraisal Plan** and **Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan**.

### Settlement and Settlement Pattern

- 2.2 The Site lies predominantly on the western and southern edge of the settlement of Shortstown. The small village of Cardington is situated 0.5km to the north-east of Shortstown, forming part of a series of small to medium villages spread regularly across the valley floor between the Greensand Ridge and the edge of Bedford. With the exception of Cardington, which is older in character, these settlements are heavily influenced by post-war residential development.
- 2.3 Shortstown is a modern settlement, dating from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century and was initially built to accommodate workers at the then airship yard. It was built to the south of historic development situated in Harrowden, now Old Harrowden Road. As such, the development west of Tinker's Hill and south of Old Harrowden Road is mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> Century. The oldest areas are those around the Crescent, Greycote and North Drive, together with the Shorts Buildings, which was the focal point of the original model village, the earliest buildings of which date from 1919 and which are red brick and neo-Georgian in style<sup>2</sup>. The buildings do not appear on the OS maps at the time due to the sensitive nature of the Cardington site during the war<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.4 Further development occurred in the south-west of Shortstown, around Shorts Avenue at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, including the recreation ground by High Road, shown as completed by 2009. At this time, large factory buildings were still present to the north of the Hangars and east of Tinkers Hill, these being demolished around 2003. More recent development has been completed to the east of Tinkers Hill and north of the Cardington Hangars, incorporating the old Shorts Building and creating a new loop road, bypassing the historic centre of the settlement.
- 2.5 Settlement on the Greensand Ridge to the south is smaller in scale, mainly comprising farmsteads and small clusters of houses.

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<sup>2</sup> The Development of Shortstown [online] accessed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Available at <http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Shortstown/TheDevelopmentOfShortstown.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Shortstown – an Airship Village [online] accessed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Available at <http://britishairshippeople.org.uk/shortstown-airship-village/4594544803>

- 2.6 The Grade II\* listed Cardington Airship Hangars are situated to the east/south-east of the Site, and these form significant features within views of the landscape and are important visual landmarks. One of the sheds is in use as a film studio.

### **Access and Rights of Way**

- 2.7 As shown on **Figure 1**, the main transport routes in the Study Area comprise the A421, extending east to west along the southern edge of Bedford and the A6 extending south, along the western part of the Study Area.
- 2.8 The disused Hitchin to Bedford branch of the Midland Railway extends through the eastern part of the Study Area, wrapping around the north of Shortstown before extending into Bedford. The disused Luton to Wymington branch of the same railway extends north to south through the western part of the Study Area, parallel with the B530.
- 2.9 As shown on **Figure 1**, there is a limited network of PRowS surrounding the Site with the only footpath connection into the north of the Site (PRow 1). The John Bunyan Trail long-distance walking route, which extends north-west to south-east through the nearby landscape, lies approximately 500m to the south-west of the Site. Bridleway 1 lies 214m north-east of the Site with a small section of Footpath 4 connecting Old Harrowden Road to Bridleway 1. In addition, walkers were observed using the track south from the south-western edge of Shortstown to Shocott Springs Wood in the south.

### **Designations**

- 2.10 As shown on **Figure 1**, the Site is not affected by any other statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. However, the Site is wholly covered by the non-statutory Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest scheme and Local Plan 2030 policy 36S: Forest of Marston Vale, which requires new development to contribute to the 30% woodland coverage set out in the policy.
- 2.11 Cardington Number 1 and 2 Sheds (RAF Cardington) are Grade II\* listed buildings located to the east/south-east within 400m of the Site at its nearest point. A cluster of Grade II listed buildings lie along Old Harrowden Road approximately 464m to the north-east of the Site. Bunyan's Birthplace (referring to John Bunyan, Puritan Preacher, 1628-1688) sits 300m north of field F1 and although not a heritage designation there is a cultural association with the area.

### **Topography and Hydrology**

- 2.12 The landform of the wider landscape, as shown on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan**, indicates that the Site is located in the low-lying land of Marston Vale, south of Bedford, sitting at an elevation of 35m AOD, with the land rising to the south towards the settlements of

Amphill and Clophill, which sit along the Greensand Ridge at an elevation of 110m AOD, approximately 4.0km south of the Site. To the north and west of Bedford, the topography is characterised by the River Great Ouse valley, which forms a narrow channel between the higher ground of more resistant mudstone. The ridgelines occupy an elevation of approximately 80m AOD with the valley floor around 30m AOD. The settlement of Shortstown sits on a localised prominence in the valley landscape at an elevation of 40m AOD.

- 2.13 The landform of the Site itself is broadly flat in the south at an elevation of 30m AOD with a slight rise in topography to over 40mAOD in the north of field F1. The landform then falls towards the A421 to an elevation of 35m AOD on the northern boundary.
- 2.14 There are several field drains extending between fields F2 and F3, leading to an attenuation basin located outside of the Site to the north of field F4. The Cople Brook extends along the southern edge of fields F3, F5 and F6, which extends along the southern edge of Shortstown and Cardington before joining Elstow Brook and then the River Great Ouse north of Willington.

### **Vegetation and Field Pattern**

- 2.15 The wider landscape surrounding the Site, to the south and east, comprises open agricultural fields interspersed by woodland blocks and delineated by hedgerows and trees. Further to the south of the Site the land rises to meet the Greensand Ridge, which is characterised by its well-wooded nature. The urban area of Bedford lies to the north of the Site and where vegetation is present it is more formally arranged in the form of street trees and public parks. The River Great Ouse, which cuts through the centre of Bedford is a well-vegetated green route through the urban area.
- 2.16 The Site itself comprises open arable fields bounded by mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The vegetation along the boundary with the A600 is scrubby with little tree cover allowing for open views into the Site. An area of recently planted woodland lies adjacent to the southern boundary of the Site forming part of the publicly accessible Forest of Marston Vale Shocott Spring site.

### **Site Appraisal**

- 2.17 Site visits was undertaken in May 2019 and February 2020. A series of **Site Appraisal Photographs (SAPs A-G)**, demonstrate the characteristics and features of the Site.
- 2.18 Fields F7, F8 and F9 lie immediately adjacent to the west of the High Road/A600 and are open arable fields with the RAF Cardington Sheds forming manmade elements with a vertical emphasis on the view from within the Site (SAP A). The boundary with the High Road/A600 is denuded with low level scrubby vegetation, drainage ditch and isolated trees allowing for

increased inter-visibility between the Site, High Road/A600 and the RAF Cardington Sheds further to the east.

- 2.19 From fields F2, F5 and F6, which lie adjacent to the southern built edge of Shortstown and the open grounds of Shortstown Village Hall, views across fields F4, F6 and F8 and F9 are largely open with more distant views to the south of the wooded Greensand Ridge, which forms a ridge of elevated land to the south of Bedford. An area of recently planted woodland is visible to the south and south-east of fields F4 and F6 (SAP B and C). RAF Cardington Sheds form manmade elements with a vertical emphasis on the view from within the Site.
- 2.20 Views north from the boundary between field F2 and F3 demonstrate the proximity of the built edge of Shortstown to the Site. Built form and closed board fencing boundary treatment act as strong urbanising influences lessening the perception of rural character in this part of the Site (SAP D). The landform of the Site rises from field F3 to the north of field F1, in line with the current northern built edge of Shortstown. Existing built form on the western edge of Shortstown also rises with the topography with properties sitting along a localised ridgeline at around 39m AOD (SAP E and G) and creates an unsympathetic transitional edge due to detracting boundary treatments. The lower lying areas of the Site (fields F3-9) are partially visible from the more elevated areas of field F1 and F2 filtered by gappy internal field boundary vegetation.
- 2.21 The landform in the northern area of field F1 begins to fall to the north beyond the northern extent of built form in Shortstown to meet the A421 transport corridor. Existing built form in Shortstown is visible along the localised ridgeline with uncharacteristic metal deer fencing wrapping around the north-western corner of Shortstown reinforcing the unsympathetic transitional edge as it exists presently (SAP F).

### 3.0 POLICY AND EVIDENCE BASE

3.1 Development Plan documents relevant to this baseline LVA comprise:

#### **National**

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019)<sup>4</sup>
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>5</sup>

#### **Local**

- Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 (January 2020)<sup>6</sup>
- Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) Saved Policies (Saved 2013)
- Bedford Borough Council Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (April 2008)<sup>7</sup>
- Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013)<sup>8</sup>

3.2 Relevant Evidence Base Documents:

- Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan<sup>9</sup>
- Landscape Sensitivity Study: Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (2017)<sup>10</sup>

#### **National**

*National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019*

3.3 The relevant policies in relation to the Site and the Proposed Development are summarised below.

3.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was first published in March 2012, was updated and published in July 2018 and most recently revised in February 2019. The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as "***meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs***". Development proposals must also be in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan and policies set out in the NPPF, including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Green Belt.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) [Planning Practice Guidance](#)

<sup>6</sup> Bedford Borough Council (January 2020) [Local Plan 2030](#)

<sup>7</sup> Bedford Borough Council (April 2008) [Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan](#)

<sup>8</sup> Bedford Borough Council (July 2013) [Allocations and Designations Local Plan](#)

<sup>9</sup> The Forest of Marston Vale Trust (2000) [The Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan](#)

<sup>10</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2018) [Landscape Sensitivity Study – Group 1 and Group 2 Villages, Bedford and Kempston Urban Edge](#)

- 3.5 The NPPF states that ***"the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"***, with Paragraph 8 going on to state that to achieve this the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as: ***"to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy"***.
- 3.6 Paragraph 38 relates to decision making and states: ***"Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible"***.
- 3.7 Under the heading of Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities, planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places through amongst other things the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, and layouts that encourage walking and cycling (para 91c). Under Open space and recreation, it states that "access to a network of high quality open spaces and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities".
- 3.8 Paragraph 98 refers to protecting and enhancing public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks.
- 3.9 Section 11 is concerned with making effective use of land, with Paragraph 117 stating: ***"Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions..."***.
- 3.10 Paragraph 118 states that planning policies and decisions should: ***"encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside; and recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production..."***.

3.11 Paragraphs 124-132 focus on achieving well-designed places and promote good design of the built environment. This approach is enshrined in Paragraph 127, which states:

***"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:***

- *Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.*
- *Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).*
- *Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.*
- *Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- *Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience".*

3.12 Section 15 of the NPPF relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 170 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by ***"protecting and enhancing valued landscapes"*** and ***"recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside"***.

3.13 Paragraph 171 states that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value where consistent with other policies in the NPPF; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

*Planning Practice Guidance*

3.14 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first published online in March 2014 and provides detailed guidance to support the NPPF. The PPG was last updated on 1st October 2019 and replaces the previous guidance on 'Design: Process and tools' with the National Design Guide, which sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.



3.15 Under the heading 'Planning for Well-Designed Places', Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001 of the PPG states that, as set out in paragraph 130 of the NPPF, permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Good design is set out in the National Design Guide under the following 10 characteristics:

- Context (enhances the surroundings).
- Identity (Attractive and distinctive).
- Built form (a coherent pattern of development).
- Movement (accessible and easy to move around).
- Nature (enhanced and optimised).
- Public Spaces (safe, social and inclusive).
- Uses (mixed and integrated).
- Homes and Buildings (Functional, healthy and sustainable).
- Resources (Efficient and resilient).
- Lifespan (made to last).

3.16 Further guidance is outlined within the 10 characteristics in the National Design Guide. Those of relevance to design and townscape/ landscape and visual matters include:

- C1: Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context.
- C2: Value heritage, local history and culture.
- I1: Respond to existing local character and identity.
- I2: Well-designed, high quality and attractive.
- I3: Create character and identity.
- B1: Compact form of development.
- B2: Appropriate building types and forms.
- B3: Destinations
- N1: Provide high quality, green open spaces with a variety of landscapes and activities, including play.
- N3: Support rich and varied biodiversity.
- P1: Create well-located, high quality and attractive public spaces.
- P2: Provide well-designed spaces that are safe.
- P3: Make sure public spaces support social interaction.
- L1: Well-managed and maintained.

3.17 The 'Landscape' and 'Green Infrastructure' sections of the PPG were updated in July 2019 with the following:

3.18 Under the heading of 'Green infrastructure', Paragraph 5 focuses on the way in which natural capital green infrastructure can add to communities including, *"...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes..."*. This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 6, which states:

***"Green infrastructure can help in:***

- *Achieving well-designed places;*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change; and*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment."*

3.19 Under the heading of Natural Environment, sub-heading Landscape, Paragraph 37 in the PPG supports the use of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to *"demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape"*. The PPG additionally makes reference to Natural England's guidance on undertaking landscape character assessment *"to complement Natural England's National Character Area Profiles"*.

### **Local Planning Policy**

3.20 The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 was adopted in January 2020. Although this supersedes many of the local planning policies, some still operate in tandem. These are set out later in this chapter. The following documents are explored further below:

- Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 (January 2020)<sup>11</sup>
- Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) Saved Policies (Saved 2013)
- Bedford Borough Council Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (April 2008)<sup>12</sup>
- Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013)<sup>13</sup>

*Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 (January 2020)*

3.21 The document sets out a vision in chapter 3, with the following points of relevance to this document:

- *Well-planned growth... will... include minimising impacts on biodiversity and creating a robust network of green infrastructure. (3.2)*
- *Good design will help to create safer and vibrant neighbourhoods... (3.3)*
- *The Forest of Marston Vale will continue to grow and mature, transforming the landscape and prospects of this part of the borough. (3.8)*

<sup>11</sup> Bedford Borough Council (January 2020) [Local Plan 2030](#)

<sup>12</sup> Bedford Borough Council (April 2008) [Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan](#)

<sup>13</sup> Bedford Borough Council (July 2013) [Allocations and Designations Local Plan](#)

- *The borough's countryside, its intrinsic character and beauty... will be recognised... Rural communities will embrace sensitive development... Valued local landscapes will be protected and enjoyed by all. (3.9)*

3.22 Chapter 4 sets out a number of objectives, of which the following are relevant:

- *Develop a strong and multifunctional urban and rural green infrastructure network through protecting, enhancing, extending and linking landscapes, woodland, biodiversity sites, heritage sites, green spaces and paths. (8)*
- *Support and create a high quality, inclusive and safe built environment which values local landscape and settlement character and which conserves and enhances the historic environment and is enjoyed by all. (9)*
- *Protect and enhance our natural resources including air, soil minerals and water to minimise the impacts of flooding, climate change and pollution. (10)*

3.23 The Local Plan 2030 superseded many of the previous policies set out in the documents identified later in this chapter. The relevant policies from the Local Plan are set out and summarised below:

- 2S: Healthy Communities – Development will be required to promote health and active living, including active space for children and adults and the encouragement of physically active lifestyles; and recognise the roll of allotments.
- 3S: Spatial Strategy – All new development will be required to safeguard the intrinsic character of the countryside, the environment and biodiversity.
- 28S: Place Making – Development will be required to promote local distinctiveness, to integrate well with and complement the character of the area, to contribute to the provision of green infrastructure, enhance the landscape, avoid adverse impacts of biodiversity and geodiversity assets, include appropriate landscaping and contribute to the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale.
- 29: Design Quality and Principles – All development should contribute positively to the area's character and quality; respect its context and the opportunities to enhance the character and quality of the area; and promote access and permeability by creating well connected welcoming spaces.
- 30: The Impact of Development – Design Impacts – Development should consider the relation to its context, including the contribution it makes to the landscape and townscape character and local distinctiveness. Planning permission will not be granted where proposals fail to improve the character and quality of an area.
- 35S: Green Infrastructure – The existing GI in the borough will be protected and enhanced and development will provide a net gain in GI, providing and high quality multi-functional GI network.

- 36S: Forest of Marston Vale – Development within the Forest of Marston Vale will be required to demonstrate how they will deliver 30% tree cover across the site and how the development reflects the relevant SPD relating to the Forest of Marston Vale. *NB: At the time of writing, no such SPD exists.*
- 37: Landscape Character – Development will protect and enhance the landscape features and visual qualities of the character areas identified in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, safeguard and enhance key views, protect the landscape setting and maintain distinct character of settlements and provide landscape mitigation where appropriate.
- 38: Landscaping in New Development – Where appropriate, landscaping shall be provided on site or, if more suitable, off-site. Existing landscape features shall be recorded and existing features of landscape or nature conservation value will be incorporated into the design scheme. The proposed design scheme will consider the character of the site, provide new tree planting, hedgerows and shrub planting with instances of canopy trees.
- 39: Retention of Trees – Developments should consider how to retain trees of high amenity and environmental value. All ancient woodland and veteran trees will need to be protected unless the benefits clearly outweigh the loss.
- 40: Hedgerows – Hedgerows will be retained on development sites unless there are overriding benefits to justify their removal. Gaps in hedgerows on site should be repaired.
- 43: Enhancing Biodiversity – Development proposals should provide a net increase in biodiversity on the site, through the enhancement of existing features, creating new features or linking existing habitats to create networks.
- 53@ Development Layout and Accessibility – Development will incorporate landscaping and open spaces, including suitable tree planting.
- 91: Access to the Countryside – Developments will safeguard existing public rights of way and improve the right of way network where possible.
- 93: Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) – new development will incorporate SuDS.

*Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) Saved Policies (Saved 2013)*

3.24 All of the policies relevant to this appraisal have been replaced in the adopted Local Plan

*Bedford Borough Council Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (April 2008)*

3.25 The Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan seeks to set out the current situation, the vision and a roadmap to achieving that vision for development up to 2021. The relevant policies in this document have been replaced by the Local Plan 2030.

*Site Allocations and Designations Plan (2013)*

- 3.26 The Site is situated within the area covered by Policy AD25: Forest of Marston Vale. This policy has been superseded by the Local Plan 2030.
- 3.27 Policy AD28: Provision of Open Space and Built Facilities in Association with New Development states that open space should be provided in accordance with the table on page 63, which requires 3.22ha per 1000 population, comprising 0.5ha parks and gardens, 0.5ha accessible natural green space, 0.25ha equipped / natural play areas, 0.5ha informal and amenity space, 1.12ha formal outdoor sports provision and 0.35ha of allotments.
- 3.28 Policy AD36: Pedestrian Routes states that the Council will require the protection, enhancement and promotion of pedestrian routes and facilities. Policy AD39 states the same for cycle routes.

**Evidence Base and Supplementary Planning Documents**

- 3.29 The relevant evidence base documents comprise:

- Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan<sup>14</sup>
- Landscape Sensitivity Study: Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (2017)<sup>15</sup>

*Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan*

- 3.30 The Forest of Marston Vale is part of the Forests for the Community programme, the term 'forest' being used in the historic sense to describe a mix of woods, heaths, farmland, wetland, ponds and streams, rather than simply areas of woodland. The aim of the Community Forests is to achieve major environmental improvements around towns and cities to create attractive areas, rich in wildlife, with provision for access, leisure and education.
- 3.31 The Forest of Marston Vale is a long-term concept over 40 years, currently being managed by the Marston Vale Trust, the aim being to increase tree cover within the area between Bedford and Milton Keynes from 3% in the early 1990s to 30%, to increase access to the countryside, promote awareness and enjoyment of the countryside, improve landscape and physical links between the urban areas and sites within the vale and to enhance the landscape, wildlife and recreational value of the Marston Vale.
- 3.32 The Forest Plan, extracts of which are included in **Appendix A.1**, identifies a number of 'Landscape Zones' within the vale on page 15, with Shortstown and the majority of the Site

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<sup>14</sup> The Forest of Marston Vale Trust (2000) The Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan

<sup>15</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2018) Landscape Sensitivity Study – Group 1 and Group 2 Villages, Bedford and Kempston Urban Edge

falling within the area identified as 'Urban Fringe'. The Urban Fringe is described on page 15 as being characterised by *"a raw and expanding urban edge, transport infrastructure and the riparian corridors of the Ouse and the Elstow Brook"*. The Plan states on page 17 that:

***"A substantial area of new planting needs to be developed along the southern edge of the bypass to create a buffer zone between the urban edge and the countryside beyond. This buffer also needs to be created around development areas such as Kempston / Wootton and Shortstown / Harrowden."***

3.33 The document goes on to state on page 18 that:

***"The riparian land to the south and east of Bedford contrasts well with the clay heartland of the Vale and it requires a different landscaping approach... The planting of large areas of new woodland may not be appropriate here."***

3.34 Under the heading of 'Woodland Creation and Planting' on page 21, the document states:

***"Significant areas of tree planting will be secured towards the 30% target, with the core Brickfields and urban fringe zones being targeted for the highest proportion of tree planting."***

3.35 As well as creating areas of tree cover, the Plan also seeks to increase the amount and quality of farmland, grassland and wetland and the creation of hedges, field margins, ponds and meadows, as set out on page 24. In addition, the existing rights of way network is to be protected, enhanced and increased.

*Landscape Sensitivity Study: Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (2017)*

3.36 Bedford Borough Council has produced a Landscape Sensitivity Study (LSS) in April 2017 which included reference to Shortstown under its list of 'Group 1 Villages'. This is discussed further in the context of landscape character. Extracts of the document are included in **Appendix A.1**.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 Landscape character assessment is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas. The description of each landscape character area is used as a basis for evaluation in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management and as a basis against which to assess the character of the Site. The different layers of character are used to identify areas of land which are not reflective of wider landscape character. The extent of published landscape character areas in the vicinity of the Site are illustrated on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan** and extracts are included within **Appendix A.1**.

### Published Landscape Character Assessments

#### *National Landscape Character*

4.2 The level ground in the north and north-west of the Study Area, including the Site, is situated within National Character Area (NCA) 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands<sup>16</sup> and the higher ground in the south and south-east of the Study Area are situated within NCA 90: Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge<sup>17</sup>. Extracts of NCA88 are included within Appendix A.1.

4.3 NCA 88 is described as a gently undulating landscape divided by broad shallow river valleys that wider as they approach the Fens in the east. Key characteristics of NCA 88 relevant to the Site and the Study Area comprise the following:

- *"Gently undulating, lowland plateau divided by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach the Fens NCA in the east..."*
- *The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly across the landscape...*
- *Brickfields of the Marston Vale and Peterborough area form distinctive post-industrial landscapes with man-made waterbodies and landfill sites...*
- *Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, particularly on higher ground to the northwest representing remnant ancient deer parks and Royal Hunting Forests.*
- *Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.*

<sup>16</sup> Natural England (2014) [NCA Profile 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands](#)

<sup>17</sup> Natural England (2013) [NCA Profile 90: Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge](#)

- *Wide variety of semi-natural habitats supporting a range of species... including ...ancient woodland, wetland sites ... traditional orchards and unimproved grassland ...*
- *...A number of historic parklands, designed landscapes and country houses ...combine with Bletchley Park, Second World War airfields, the Cardington Airship Hangars and brickfields to provide a strong sense of history and place.*
- *Diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone...*
- *Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel. Small villages are usually nucleated around a church or village green, while fen-edge villages are often in a linear form along roads.*
- *Major transport routes cross the area, including the M1, M11, A1, A6, A5 and A14 roads, the East Coast and Midlands mainline railways, and the Grand Union Canal.*
- *Recreational assets include Grafham Water, the Grand Union Canal, Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest, Chilterns AONB, woodland and wetland sites, an extensive rights-of-way network and two National Cycle Routes... "*

#### *Local Landscape Character*

- 4.4 The Study Area falls within both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire and so is covered by the Bedford Borough<sup>18</sup> and Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessments<sup>19</sup>. These two assessments have both been produced by LUC and use consistent Landscape Types and Character Areas that cross the district boundaries. Extracts are included in Appendix A.1.
- 4.5 The land between the greensand ridge and the southern edge of Bedford is situated within Landscape Type (LT) 5: Clay Vales. The higher ground to the south is situated within Landscape Type 6: Wooded Greensand Ridge.
- 4.6 The key characteristics of LT5 of relevance to the Site and Study Area comprise:
- *"A large-scale landscape with a low-lying, flat landform providing distant views.*
  - *Bordered by pronounced, elevated landscapes of the Greensand Ridge and the Chalk Escarpments that form prominent backdrops and offer a sense of containment.*
  - *A predominantly agricultural landscape characterised by large geometric field units with variable field boundaries including remnant hedgerows, scrubby margins and drainage channels.*
  - *Crossed by a number of tributaries of the Rivers Great Ouse, Ivel, Flit and Ousel.*
  - *Land use dominated by arable crop production but with significant areas of land divided up for horse paddocks...*

<sup>18</sup> LUC (2014) [Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment](#)

<sup>19</sup> LUC (2015) [Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment](#)



- *Large scale industrial features such as the line of chimney stacks (north of Wilstead), the Cardington airship sheds at Shortstown and large distribution warehouses south of Bedford.*
- *Main transport routes – including the M1, A6, A5, A1M and Midland Mainline Railway have an audible and visual presence in the landscape.*
- *Adjacent towns of Bedford bring urban fringe characteristics to the landscape.*
- *The Forest of Marston Vale stretching between Bedford, Ampthill and Milton Keynes - one of 12 Community Forests in England..."*

4.7 The Site is situated within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 5E: East Marston Clay Vale. This comprises the area between Bedford and the Greensand Ridge to the east of the A6. The key characteristics of LCA 5E of relevance to the Site comprise:

- *"A large scale, flat, open vale landscape ... Included as part of the Forest of Marston Vale.*
- *Tributaries of the River Great Ouse, including the Elstow Brook, cross the landscape in deep drainage channels...*
- *Expansive views across the vale to the Wooded Greensand Ridge (6b) that forms a prominent backdrop to the Vale and which provides some sense of containment.*
- *Formerly meadow pasture, land use is now predominantly defined by intensive arable cropping contained within medium to large arable fields. Some smaller fields given over to pasture and horse grazing remain.*
- *A regular parliamentary enclosure landscape - variable field and roadside boundaries characterised by short flailed, gappy hedges, with some large open fields where boundaries have been removed.*
- *Woodland is sparse across the character area, the most significant being relatively recent planting at Water End Wood and Cotton End.*
- *Coniferous shelterbelt plantings act as unsympathetic visual buffers to large industrial features e.g. the Cardington airship sheds at Shortstown and on the edges of settlement. The Cardington airship sheds are a prominent landmark heritage feature and widely visible across the vale...*
- *Large scale industrial features punctuate the flat vale landscape...*
- *The A6, A600 A603, A421 and various secondary roads e.g. Southill and Northill Road, cut through the landscape, having a strong visual and audible presence.*
- *The urban edge of Bedford...brings urban fringe characteristics to the landscape and nearby settlements of Shortstown.*
- *Transitional character in places e.g. redundant Cardington RAF base in process of regeneration to mixed used development.*
- *Generally small to medium scale, linear villages with varied settlement character. Locally distinctive influences in the*

*brick, for example Arleseey whites from the Gault Clay and Blunham Brick (yellow) from the Oxford Clay.*

- *Post-war and more recent development has occurred within and on the edge of villages and road corridors, resulting in a range of building styles and materials, as at ... Shortstown...*
- *Individual farmsteads and associated agricultural buildings occur throughout the landscape located along road corridors.*
- *The recreational route of the John Bunyan Trail cuts north-south through the landscape linking the urban edge of Bedford with the Mid Greensand Ridge."*

4.8 Under the heading of 'Key Positive Landscape Features / Strategic Sensitivities of the Landscape', the document cites *"the striking flat, open character, which can be disrupted by inappropriate bunding, earth mounding, tree screening or creation of domed landforms which appear as incongruous features within the vale context"*.

4.9 It is important to note the strong contrast identified between the flat open and generally unwooded landscape of the vale as compared to the elevated, steep and wooded landscape of the Greensand Ridge.

*Landscape Sensitivity Study: Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (2017)*

4.10 Bedford Borough Council also produced a Landscape Sensitivity Study (LSS) in April 2017 which included reference to Shortstown under its list of 'Group 1 Villages'. Shortstown is identified as being within the Clay Vales Character Area 5E: East Marston Clay Vale as above. It highlights similar characteristics to those highlighted above and identifies 'key positive features/ strategic sensitivity of the landscape surrounding the village' as:

- *"Remaining areas that create an open setting to the southern edge of Bedford.*
- *Historic field patterns with good survival of parliamentary enclosure landscape. Old enclosures on the lower slopes below the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge to the south preserve evidence of the medieval open field pattern.*
- *Clear views to and setting for the prominent 6B Mid Greensand Ridge and the contrast of the flat vale with this ridge landform and associated texture/vegetation/pattern.*
- *The Garden City influence at Shortstown.*
- *The Cardington Airship sheds on the edge of Shortstown, which are listed and a highly visible landmark feature, change the perception of landscape scale in this area.*
- *John Bunyan Trail connecting Bedford and the vale to the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge."*

4.11 Visual sensitivities are identified as including the Grade II\* listed Cardington airship sheds and the Shorts Building. The flat open landscape gives rise to the potential for large development to be highly visible.

### **Assessment of Landscape Character Arising from the Site Visit**

- 4.12 The Site is situated on a ridge of slightly higher ground within a large wide broadly flat valley floor, largely devoid of any large areas of woodland and with few hedgerow trees. Hedgerows in the valley floor are in poor condition and often gappy. The valley floor contrasts distinctly from the wooded Greensand Ridge to the south.
- 4.13 A large block of woodland has been planted to the west of Cotton End at Shocott Springs as part of the Forest of Marston Vale. Both the published landscape character assessment and the Forest of Marston Vale Plan assert that large areas of woodland planting are not suited to the more open valley landscape and the published landscape character assessments' states that there should be a strong contrast between the wooded Greensand Ridge and the more open valley bottom. Conversations with the Forest of Marston Vale Trust, however, have indicated that the intention is to create wholesale landscape character change to that of a wooded valley.
- 4.14 The valley floor is characterised by frequent small settlements, separated by small areas of open countryside. The older settlements, such as Cardington, are more vegetated around their edges and sit more sensitively with their surroundings. More modern developments, particularly those dating from the post-war period, have a less sensitive edge and are more obvious within the landscape. The Cardington Sheds form a notable, but not detracting, feature within the landscape and are an important visual landmark.
- 4.15 The Site itself comprises a series of arable fields crossed by a number of tracks and with few trees. It is open in character due to the scale of the fields. The northern, western and central areas of the Site (F1, F2, F3, F5 and F7) are very much in the context of the adjacent residential development in Shortstown, whereas the southernmost areas (F4, F6, F8 and F9) relate more to the woodland at Shocott Springs with F7-F9 heavily influenced by the proximity of the fast moving traffic on High Road.

### **Landscape Guidance from Published Landscape Character Assessments**

- 4.16 The published landscape character assessments include guidance for the future management and change of the landscapes within the Study Area. These provide a useful input into the future design and management of the Site proposals but also help to understand what is valued and to be preserved within each character area.

#### *National Landscape Character*

- 4.17 There are four Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) for NCA 88, of which the following are relevant:

- *"SEO 1: Maintain and manage ... landscape, while managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats..."*
- *SEO 2: ... enhance the quality, state and structure of the River Great Ouse, its valley and tributaries, habitats, waterbodies and flood plain by seeking to enhance their ecological, historical and recreational importance while taking into account their contribution to sense of place and regulating water flow, quality and availability.*
- *SEO 3: Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure ... linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people's health and wellbeing.*
- *SEO 4: Protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage and tranquillity of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA... by improving interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape."*

4.18 The document then sets out a series of 'landscape opportunities', of which the following are relevant:

- *"... Strengthen the mosaic of semi-natural habitats within the farmed landscape to benefit landscape character and habitat connectivity and support farmland biodiversity.*
- *Appropriately manage semi-natural habitats including woodland, grassland, hedgerows, field margins, road verges and green lanes to provide structural diversity and a variety of flowering plants, and improve habitat extent, quality and connectivity in the landscape.*
- *Encourage the reconnection of the rivers with their flood plains, seeking to link and extend existing habitats and restore or create new grasslands, fens, reedbeds and wet woodland for their contribution to riverine character, biodiversity and sense of place. Reinstate traditional management practices such as willow pollarding.*
- *Conserve ancient and veteran trees in river valleys, hedgerows, historic parklands and traditional orchards for their biodiversity and heritage value, planning for the provision of replacement stock and veteran trees in the future...*
- *Seek opportunities to enhance landscape character and biodiversity through the creation of new habitats and recreational and educational opportunities to increase people's understanding and enjoyment of local archaeology and geodiversity and its contribution to the landscape.*
- *Plan for and manage the impact of new development by ensuring that high-quality design secures biodiversity enhancements and access and green infrastructure provision which strengthen sense of place and landscape character.*

- *Conserve the character and pattern of the distinctive limestone villages of upper reaches of the River Great Ouse. Encourage new development that respects the distinctive character of the villages using traditional local building materials and limiting visual impact by ensuring it is sensitively designed and located...*
- *Support the work of the Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest to regenerate the area and restore the landscape using trees and woodland to provide social, economic and environmental benefits..."*

#### *Local Landscape Character*

4.19 The Bedford Landscape Character Assessment states that the overall strategy for LCA 5E is to renew and create features of the landscape but that the area ***"should continue to provide an open, agricultural setting to Bedford and contrast to the Greensand Ridge"***. The strategy refers to the ***"the renewal of features of this landscape including field boundaries, and small scale tree and woodland planting around villages, tributary streams, and farm buildings"*** to strengthen the pattern of the landscape. It goes on to state that the Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan should be referred to as the endorsed strategy for regeneration of the area.

4.20 Landscape management guidelines for LCA 5E include:

- ***"Renew field boundaries where these are gappy and apply a consistent management strategy to enhance the field and land cover pattern..."***
- ***Continue to create areas of woodland in the landscape to enhance the ecological and recreational resource.***
- ***Small scale planting around villages, particularly areas of new development, and around individual farm buildings is a key opportunity and will help integrate these features into the landscape. Seek to limit the use of coniferous shelterbelt planting that does not respond well to the character or landform of the vale...***
- ***Conserve the historic field pattern – intact areas of Parliamentary Enclosure and old enclosure fields below the Greensand Ridge (6b) to the south..."***

4.21 Development Guidelines for the LCA include:

- ***"Conserve the dispersed pattern of settlements - preventing linear expansion and the merger of villages..."***
- ***Prevent further urbanisation of the rural roads - and ensure that traffic management measures are sympathetic to the rural character.***
- ***Improve settlement edges where these form an unsympathetic relationship with the open countryside - small scale woodland planting is a key opportunity but should not obscure views to the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b), rather it should form part of a connected network which***

*complements and responds to topography and landscape structure of the ridge.*

- *Consider further opportunities for landscape enhancement along the rail and road corridors e.g. through planting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where appropriate, and to better integrate raw and exposed edges such as at Shortstown.*
- *Conserve locally distinctive influences such as the palette of bricks used in buildings...*
- *Conserve the clear views and visual relationship with the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b).*
- *Avoid any large scale, taller development of land at the base of the ridge to retain the dramatic visual contrast between the flat vale and steep slopes.*
- *Conserve and enhance access and connections from the urban area into the vale .... Avoid severance of existing routes. Consider opportunities to create further green infrastructure – the tributary valleys such as the Elstow Brook are a key opportunity. Refer to the Bedford GI Plan recommendations."*

*Landscape Sensitivity Study: Group 1 and Group 2 Villages (2017)*

4.22 Development guidelines for Shortstown include:

- *"Conserve the landscape setting of the Cardington airship sheds, maintaining an open setting.*
- *Conserve the dispersed pattern of villages - preventing linear expansion and the merger of villages.*
- *Conserve the unique, historic character of the 'garden city' vernacular of Shortstown.*
- *Improve settlement edges where these form an unsympathetic relationship with the open countryside - small scale woodland planting is a key opportunity but should not obscure views to the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge, rather it should form part of a connected network which complements and responds to topography and landscape structure of the ridge.*
- *Consider further opportunities for landscape enhancement along the rail and road corridors e.g. through planting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where appropriate, and to better integrate raw and exposed edges.*
- *Conserve locally distinctive influences such as the palette of bricks used in buildings."*

4.23 Landscape management guidelines include the following:

- *"Renew field boundaries where these are gappy and apply a consistent management strategy to enhance the field and land cover pattern.*
- *Continue to create areas of woodland in the landscape to enhance the ecological and recreational resource.*
- *Small scale planting around villages, particularly areas of new development, and around individual farm buildings is*

*a key opportunity and will help integrate these features into the landscape.*

- *Conserve the historic field pattern - intact areas of parliamentary enclosure and old enclosure fields below the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge to the south.*
- *Conserve the areas of existing woodland and apply an appropriate woodland management strategy to enhance their ecological value.*

### **Summary of Landscape Character Issues**

4.24 The apparent contrast between the guidelines of the published landscape character assessments and the aims of the Forest of Marston Vale, i.e. the former seeking a more open and less wooded character and the latter seeking to create a forest community, were addressed at a meeting with the Forest of Marston Vale Trust in February 2020. It was explained by representatives of the Trust that the published landscape character assessments represented a snapshot in time and took a retrospective view whereas the aim of the Trust was for wholesale landscape character change within the area. Although the Forest of Marston Vale plan identifies the Vale as being less appropriate for large areas of woodland than other areas of the Forest, the requirement remains to provide 30% of development sites as woodland in various forms.

## 5.0 VISUAL APPRAISAL

5.1 Site visits were undertaken in May 2019 and February 2020, which included visiting public viewpoints within the Study Area, to identify locations from where the Site and any Proposed Development might be visible. A series of **Site Context Photographs** (SCPs) (1-11) were taken to illustrate views towards the Site and are included with the illustrative material accompanying this report. It is not possible or practicable to visit every single potential viewpoint from where it might be possible to see the Site and, therefore, locations were chosen to be representative, building up a picture of the visual envelope or Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the Site and Proposed Development. Viewpoints were chosen depending on landform and vegetation and to build up a picture of the ZVI of the Site from a range of distances and directions. Viewpoints identified were focussed on public roads and PRoW, the users of the latter being more sensitive to changes in their environment.

### Visual Context

- 5.2 The land within the Study Area is generally level with gentle undulations, rising up to the Greensand Ridge to the south and Harrowden Ridge at Shortstown. There is little large-scale vegetation within the valley floor, with the majority of the vegetation cover being in the form of hedgerows with few trees or areas of woodland. These layers of hedgerows with trees combined to create a sense of dense low level vegetation, above which the hangars are seen. This results in generally more open views but with the ground plane and lower buildings obscured by layers of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- 5.3 The hangars form dominant landmarks in the area due to their scale, particularly when compared with the flat landscape of the Vale and are seen rising above the vegetation to their south and south-east.
- 5.4 The land in the south of the Study Area rises up to the Greensand Ridge, providing elevated viewpoints overlooking the valley floor. Views towards the Site from the higher ground are generally limited to locations from the roads and PRoW on the steep land on the scarp face. These routes are based upon historic drove roads and run perpendicular to the line of the ridge. The escarpment is well wooded and such blocks of woodland block certain views from the scarp slope. Views from the top of the escarpment are obscured by the curve in the landform and those from the bottom of the scarp slope are too low to provide overarching views.



## Visual Appraisal

- 5.5 Near distance partial views of fields F1, F2 and F3 are possible from the public open space adjacent to Hunter Close. The western built edge of Shortstown forms a prominent visual feature particularly properties that lie on the raised land to the north due to the absence of mature vegetation. Longer range views of the elevated wooded Greensand Ridge to the south-west are possible due to the broadly flat topography and limited intervening vegetation (**SCP 1**). The remaining parts of the Site are not visible from this location.
- 5.6 The north-south orientation of Greycote and built form along the road create linear framed views of the landscape to the south of Shortstown. Fields F6, F7 and F8 are partially visible beyond Shortstown Village Hall and the mature boundary vegetation. Longer range views of the elevated wooded Greensand Ridge to the south-west are possible due to the broadly flat topography and limited intervening vegetation (**SCP 2**). The remaining parts of the Site are not visible from this location.
- 5.7 The Site is not visible from the east and north of Shortstown due to intervening topography, built form and vegetation (**SCPs 3, 4, 6 and 7**). Similarly, the Site is not visible from further west of Shortstown owing to intervening topography and mature field boundary vegetation with the number of potential visual receptors much reduced due to absence of publicly accessible routes other than the John Bunyan Trail, which extends north-south through the vale.
- 5.8 The low lying south-eastern fields (F5-F9) are largely visible from the approach to Shortstown along the A600 due to the relative absence of substantial boundary vegetation. However, fields F1-F2 are obscured from views along the A600 due to intervening built form and mature vegetation within the south-west of Shortstown (**SCP 5**). The recent development to the north of the RAF Cardington Sheds is more visually prominent than the southern edge of Shortstown owing to its raised position in the landscape and less mature boundary vegetation.
- 5.9 Views of the Site from further south within the broadly level clay vale are largely filtered by intervening vegetation and lack of topographic variation (**SCPs 9 and 10**). Partial views of the rising land in fields F1 and F2 and the western built edge of Shortstown are available from within Shocott Spring where an access track extends north-south through the area and the Site, creating an open visual corridor (**SCP 8**).
- 5.10 There are relatively open views across the landscape from the John Bunyan Trail on rising land to the south along the Greensand Ridge, which demonstrates the settlement pattern of Shortstown occupying a localised ridge of elevated land (**SCP 11**). The Site is largely visible from this location, albeit at a distance of 3km, and is viewed in the context of built form within

Shortstown and Bedford to the north, which demonstrate a strong pattern of settlement within the vale concentrated near to major transport corridors e.g. A421 and the River Great Ouse.

- 5.11 The RAF Cardington Sheds form prominent visual features throughout the vale south of Bedford due to the relatively flat landscape and the height of the buildings.
- 5.12 In summary, from a visual perspective within the Site, there is inter-visibility between the southern fields due to denuded field boundaries and level topography. However, the northern fields are more visually and physically separate due to intervening built form. Generally, the Site is obscured in views from the north, east and west due to intervening vegetation, topographic variation and built form within Shortstown. Views of the Site from further south within the broadly level clay vale are largely filtered by intervening vegetation and lack of topographic variation. There are relatively open views across the landscape from the John Bunyan Trail on rising land to the south along the Greensand Ridge, which demonstrates the settlement pattern of Shortstown occupying a localised ridge of elevated land with the Site largely visible from this location, albeit at a distance of 3km. However, it is viewed in the context of built form within Shortstown and Bedford to the north, which demonstrate a strong pattern of settlement within the vale concentrated near to major transport corridors e.g. A421 and the River Great Ouse.

## 6.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS TO DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The primary development principles for the scheme are linked to the need to sensitively respond to the Site and its surroundings and to help mitigate against the key issues identified within the LCA. **Figure 5: Opportunities and Constraints Plan** shows how the scheme could integrate strategic Green Infrastructure and open space, development, positive green frontages and reinforcement and enhancement of existing vegetation to guide the scheme towards a robust landscape-led response.

6.2 It is recommended that the following development principles should be incorporated into the masterplan layout:

- Contribute to Forest of Marston Vale by delivering 30% woodland coverage across the Site, particularly along the southern boundary within field F4, F6, F8 and F9.
- Create lower density development around the edges of the proposed development to allow for positive green frontages, specifically along the southern, eastern and northern site boundaries and contribute a sense of place both in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings. Additionally, lower density development interspersed with tree planting should also be utilized in the field F1 where the landform is elevated and thus more prominent in views from the Greensand Ridge. Fields F7-F9 should act as the 'sense of arrival and departure' or 'Gateway' to and from Shortstown.
- Reflect the 'Garden City' concept of the original Shortstown settlement through provision of high quality public open space, communal areas and potential community allotment space.
- Reflect the scale, massing and development typology of Shortstown through the proposed masterplan.
- Set back development from the edges of the Site particularly near to High Road/A600 to create a positive green approach to Shortstown and respect the setting of the RAF Cardington Sheds.
- Protect and enhance existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees to the site and internal field boundaries.
- Create positive green entrance/gateway to Shortstown from the approach on the A600 utilizing native broad-leaf trees, hedgerows and strategic open space.
- Promote holistic biodiversity enhancement as part of provision of a robust surface water strategy including drainage swales with adjacent footpaths and proposed wetland planting species.
- Enhance the blue infrastructure route, which currently extends through the Site with the potential to link with the overall SuDS strategy.

- Seek opportunities to improve connectivity with the existing settlement of Shortstown as well as links to the wider countryside e.g. Shocott Spring.
- Provide a positive holistic landscape and biodiversity management regime to both existing and proposed landscape features including woodland, trees and hedgerows, open spaces and SUDS, leading to biodiversity enhancement and enhanced arboriculture condition and green/blue infrastructure.

## 7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The assessment of the landscape and visual baseline of the Site and Study Area has resulted in the identification of opportunities and constraints to future development, leading to development guidelines that should be incorporated within the emerging masterplan design.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

- 7.2 The local landscape of the valley is characterised by frequent small and medium sized villages, separated by stretches of countryside. Shortstown started as a model village and is strongly characterised by two-storey red brick houses. This has been continued into the more recent development north of the hangars.
- 7.3 The valley floor is open and contains little large-scale vegetation, in contrast to the wooded escarpment of the Greensand Ridge to the south. Hedgerows and hedgerow trees join visually to screen low level development, particularly when viewed from the Greensand Ridge to the south-east. The Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan seeks to achieve wholesale landscape change through the increase of tree cover within the area whilst not adversely impacting upon the contrast between the valley floor and the ridge.
- 7.4 The character of the Site is of large-scale arable fields with little vegetation and particularly influenced by the adjacent residential development in the west and central areas. New development should seek to reflect the garden city concept of Shortstown, reflect local materials and housing styles and seek to contribute positively to the aims of the Forest of Marston Vale.



## **ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

Figure 1: Landscape and Visual Context Plan

Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 4: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 5: Opportunities and Constraints Plan / Development Principles Plan

Site Appraisal Photographs A-H

Site Context Photographs 1-11





**APPENDICES**

Appendix A.1: Extracts from Relevant Evidence Base Documents



THE FOREST OF MARSTON VALE



FOREST PLAN  
2000

# FOREST OF MARSTON VALE

## A VISION FOR MARSTON VALE

### Mission Statement

The Forest of Marston Vale is working in partnership towards a long-term vision of a varied countryside within a woodland framework for the benefit of everyone.

### Introduction

The Forest of Marston Vale is a concept a long-term vision and the Forest Plan presents a framework for action over the next 40 years. Looking back over the progress since work began in 1995, it is clear that much can be improved in the short term, whilst some changes may take many years. However, the future of the Marston Vale should be developed with an understanding of its landscape, cultural and economic history.

### A Joint Initiative

The Forest of Marston Vale is a joint initiative of Bedfordshire County Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council, Bedford Borough Council, the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission.

### Delivering the Forest of Marston Vale

Since the establishment of Forest of Marston Vale, the initiative has been administered through Bedfordshire County Council with the Forest Team being employed by the authority. It was recognised that this would not be appropriate in the long term and alternative methods of managing the Community Forest and employing the Forest Team were investigated.

Research suggested that the most suitable approach would be to set up a limited company at the time when the nature of Countryside Agency funding would change, in 2005 - when the Team would need to be more self-sufficient.

However, when the bid to the Millennium Commission for the Millennium Country Park was successful, attention was focussed on the organisational structure required to take the project forward, through development and the subsequent running of the site. Advice at this time pointed to an arrangement where a charity would hold the land and develop

the site and a trading company would then run the centre and site.

Thus, in November 1997 the Marston Vale Trust - a company limited by guarantee with charitable status was formed. Marston Vale Trust has a board of nine Trustees who are drawn from partners and organisations within the Vale (current members will be listed in the Forest of Marston Vale's Annual Report). A trading company, Marston Vale Services Limited - wholly owned by the Trust - was formed in March 1998. This allowed for the development and running of the Millennium Country Park. It also presented the opportunity to realise the long-term organisational structure in a much shorter time scale than was originally intended.

Marston Vale Services Limited now has a contract with Bedfordshire County Council to deliver the objectives of the Forest of Marston Vale on behalf of the wider partnership. This company will also run the operations at the Millennium Country Park. The bringing together of these two initiatives offers a real opportunity for the future of the Community Forest. As well as providing a focal point for wider Forest activities, the Country Park should raise funds that will contribute to Forest work and help reduce the reliance on the Countryside Agency and other funding organisations.

*The old and the new.*



### THE FOREST PLAN

The Forest of Marston Vale Plan is a non-statutory document. The Plan presents an agreed framework and approaches to delivering the Community Forest. It explains the means of implementation and identifies key players in securing that action. There are other documents produced by the Forest Team that supplement the Plan such as tree planting and access strategies. Detailed annual business plans will be particularly important as they will define project targets and resource needs for a given year. These business plans will provide the detail that will achieve the aims and objectives of the Forest Plan.

Land use decisions will clearly be important for the future of the Forest and such decisions will be taken by the planning authorities, in the context of the planning framework set out in the statutory development plans. No proposals in the Forest Plan can override the policies contained in these statutory plans. However the Forest Plan should be:

- a material consideration used to inform the preparation of statutory development plans;
- a material consideration in determining planning applications for development within the Forest boundary;
- a tool to achieve Forest objectives through programmes of action and implementation;
- a tool to support and strengthen positive policies which enhance the countryside.

### PREPARATION OF THE REVISED PLAN

The Plan was prepared by the Forest Team on behalf of the partner organisations and after extensive consultation with as wide an audience as possible.

#### The consultation process consisted of:

- a community questionnaire circulated to over 62,500 homes in and around the Marston Vale;
- community 'focus groups';
- technical specialists and expert 'working groups';
- discussion papers circulated to a wide range of local and national organisations, local farmers and landowners, parish councils, schools, voluntary organisations and individuals living in the area;
- a Forest Plan Review Conference held in April 1999.

The review process culminated in a draft plan which was circulated to key partners, stakeholder organisations and was available for public inspection at local libraries throughout the area and in the Forest Office.

### STATUTORY DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN MARSTON VALE

Many other policies are important to the future of the Forest and of particular relevance are the statutory land use plans, prepared by the local planning authorities, which determine the development framework for the Marston Vale.

The regional context for Marston Vale is set by the Regional Planning Guidance for the Southeast (Department of the Environment 1994) which is being updated at the time of writing. This includes specific reference to community forests and their role in upgrading landscape and nature conservation interests and improving opportunities for leisure and recreation.

The Forest area is covered by one strategic plan, the Bedfordshire County Structure Plan (Bedfordshire County Council 1997) which looks forward to 2011.

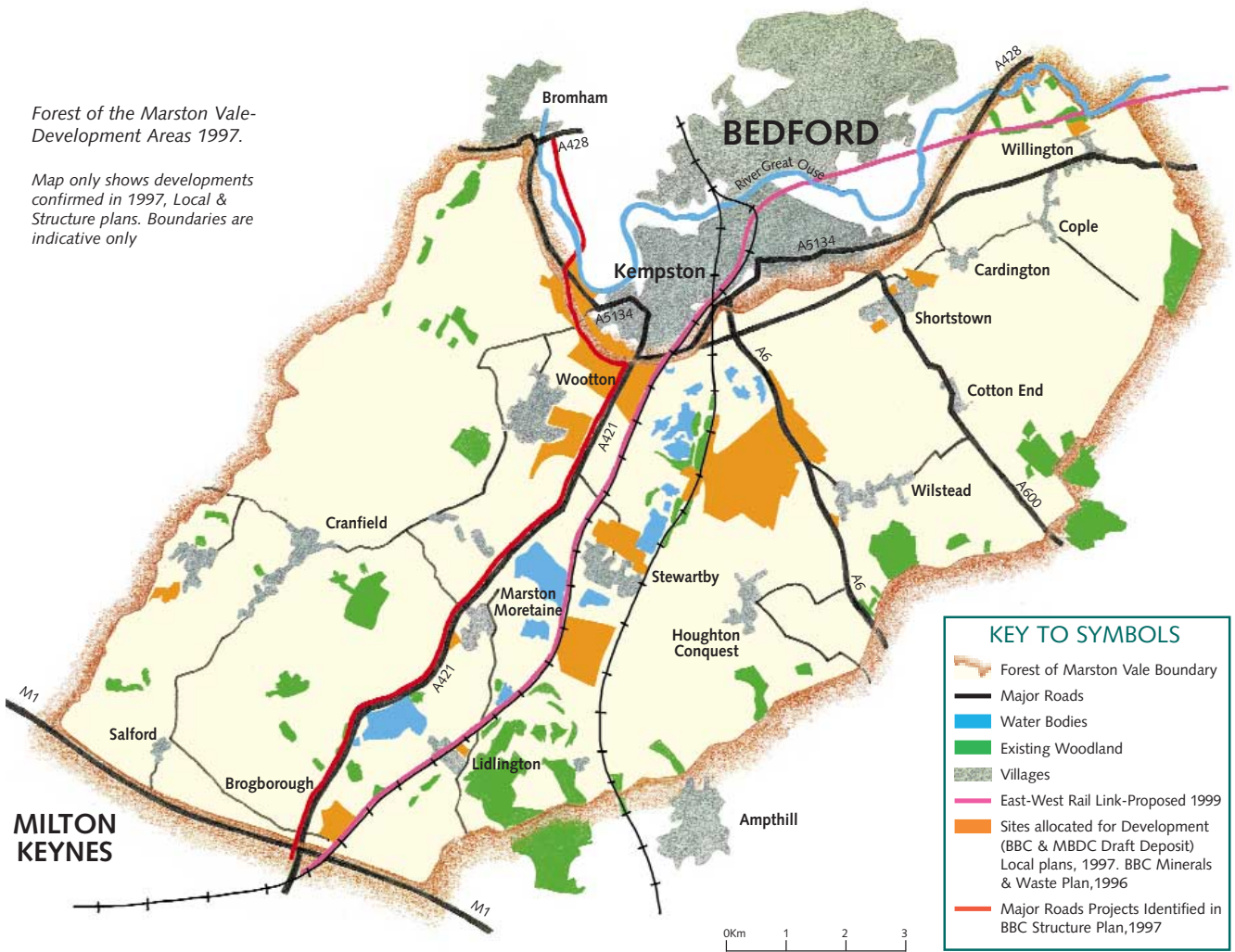
Within this context, Mid Bedfordshire District Council Local Plan (1993) and Bedford Borough Council Local Plan (1993) set out detailed land-use policies for their areas, these are currently in the final stages of review. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan (Bedfordshire County Council 1996) guides the future of minerals and waste disposal operations in the Forest area.

These plans contain policies addressing countryside issues, employment and housing development and are viewed as vital strategic tools that can help deliver the objectives of the Forest of Marston Vale. Both plans include policies supporting the Forest aims and objectives and which seek to gain meaningful benefits for the Forest through the planning system. The Forest Team will work with relevant committees, planners and developers to secure these benefits.

# FOREST OF MARSTON VALE

Forest of the Marston Vale-  
Development Areas 1997.

Map only shows developments  
confirmed in 1997, Local &  
Structure plans. Boundaries are  
indicative only



View of the Marston Vale.



# LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the landscape and cultural heritage issues in the Forest of Marston Vale. The first section assesses the whole Forest landscape and proposals for its improvement are put forward. More specific assessments and proposals are then outlined for four different zones of the Forest - the Clay Ridge, the Brickfields, the Urban Fringe, and the Greensand Ridge / Eastern Vale. Proposals are not exhaustive but indicate the priority areas of work. A section on cultural heritage and archaeology is at the end of the chapter.

## MARSTON VALE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

The Forest of Marston Vale is a clearly defined geographical area that covers the Vale itself and some of the low ridges to the west and east. It has a gently undulating topography and is predominantly an open and moderately intensively farmed arable landscape.

Farmland covers over 70% of the Community Forest and typically constitutes large arable fields bounded by open ditches or closely trimmed hedges that often have large gaps. The loss of elm trees from hedgerows had a significant impact on the Vale landscape during the 1960's and 1970's and currently ash and oak hedge trees are showing signs of stress or over maturity with dieback and defoliation. Pasture, pony paddocks and set aside land

offers some contrast to arable fields. Recent Forest projects such as the development of conservation field margins, improved hedgerow management and tree planting are helping to improve the agricultural landscape in places.

There are several areas of predominantly broadleaved woodland in the Vale and the Greensand Ridge and its slope are more heavily wooded. The relative isolation of many Vale woods makes them very important landscape features and the wooded ridge provides a contrast when viewed from the Vale floor. The new woods at Brogborough Hill and Wootton have now matured sufficiently to provide additional landscape features. The agricultural land to the west and east is distinguished by smaller copses and overgrown hedges or remnant hedges that contrast with the closely cut ones.

The effects of the brick making industry are still very apparent with the Stewartby works, empty and water filled pit sites and belts of screening poplars being the most visible features. The extent of the impact of the brick industry is most visible from the two Vale railways and the raised ground of the ridges. Another afteruse of the pits is landfilling and this has provided three significant domed landforms on the floor of the Vale. The most visible recent changes to the pit sites have been planting around some of the pit edges and the felling and restocking of some of the poplar belts.

The nineteen villages in the Vale are typically areas of housing constructed over the last forty years spreading out from the old village centres. Much of the new housing does not reflect the design and building materials traditionally used in this area. Recent village edge development is of stark appearance when compared to the surrounding countryside and there has been little or no continuity of layout or building design in recent times. Some villages such as Cardington and Stewartby have retained their original identities but development pressure will continue to cause concern for many communities in the Vale area. The Forest Team has been active in promoting village enhancement work and schemes such as those in Wilstead are now starting to mature and provide benefits to local people.

The Bedford urban fringe has changed dramatically over the last five years with the construction of the southern bypass and the infill development that has followed it. These changes are presenting a raw edge to the open countryside to the south, which includes virtually the last typical riparian pasture landscape associated with the Elstow Brook. The bypass and associated traffic increases have led to increased noise, and in the future this should be mitigated by extensive tree and shrub planting along the new road.

Other transport corridors have significant landscape impacts on the Community Forest area. There are a number of very busy

## LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

trunk roads with their associated lighting, garage services and signage. Two railways cut through the Vale and one of them is elevated in sections. There is also a network of other minor roads. There have been some transport corridor planting and hedge management projects over recent years that will have a mitigating effect on the traffic impacts.

### Forest wide proposals for landscape changes

- Landscaping tools such as the landscape character assessment and strategies from the local planning authorities will be used for guiding the landscaping work of the Forest Team. The Countryside Agency's Local Heritage Initiative will provide a valuable resource at a more local level.
- It is acknowledged that better quality agricultural land will continue to be used for farming and that small scale tree planting and hedgerow improvements will be most suitable in these areas.
- A diversity of habitat types is attractive and has wildlife and amenity benefits. Where appropriate, tree planting will be complemented by grassland, waterbodies, wetlands, scrub and hedges to create this diversity.
- Existing woodlands are to be targeted for expansion by planting or natural regeneration. The linking of woods will also help to create the mosaic of tree cover and other land use types that the Forest Plan is seeking to achieve.

- Improved hedgerow management will be encouraged throughout the Vale. This will include the planting of new hedges, planting of suitable hedgerow trees to replace elms and poor oak and ash; the development of conservation field margins; and the encouragement of less intense cutting regimes.
- The Forest Team will seek to secure meaningful on and off-site landscape gains from development schemes in the Community Forest. These should be appropriate to the scale and location of the development. This will be done by establishing good working relationships with planning officers and, where appropriate, developers and ensuring that Community Forest aims and objectives are fully understood.
- Transport corridors will be targeted for tree planting and other landscaping work. This will need to be a mix of tree belts, new woodland blocks, grassland, wildflowers and other features to create diverse and interesting aspects for road and rail users.

Longer views and points of interest should not be obscured.

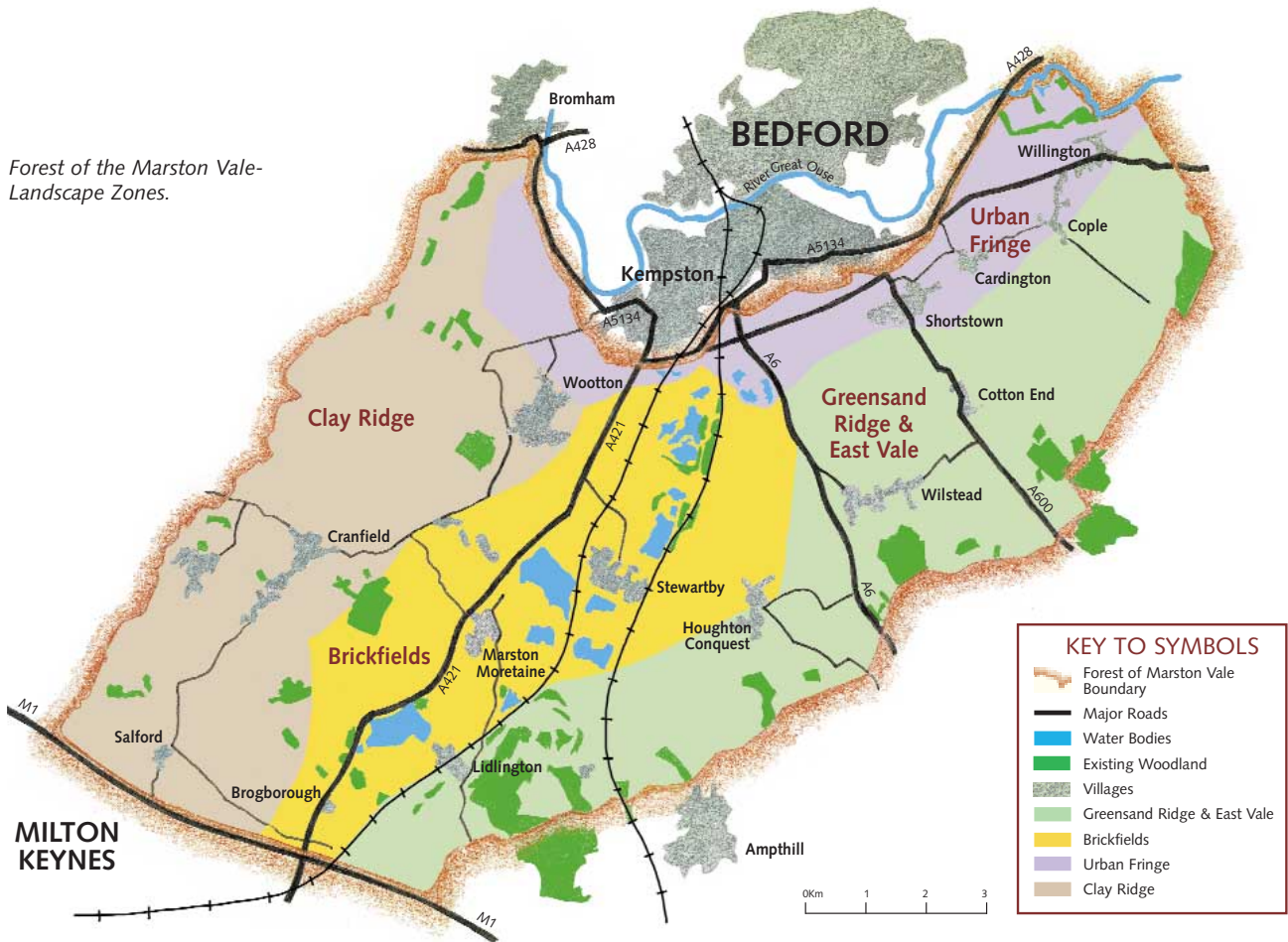
- Work will be done to secure new woodlands close to settlements. These will be planted as buffers and screens to newly developed edges and to provide recreational and amenity opportunities for local residents. Other new habitats such as grasslands will also be encouraged to provide landscape diversity and other benefits. Villages will require strong perimeter planting and networks of landscaping within the built areas. There needs to be a clear Forest identity in the core settlements and this will be developed by planting. Raw built edges resulting from housing and other development will need buffering and new woodlands should have recreation and amenity value. Views in and out of villages need to be retained and on an intimate landscape level, features such as bulb or wildflower areas and art works will add interest. The Forest team will work with local communities, Parish Councils and others in developing a 'Village Greening' programme.



*Old clay pits offer scope to the Community Forest*



Forest of the Marston Vale- Landscape Zones.



**LANDSCAPE ZONES**

The past work of the Forest Team has been guided by strategies and prescriptions set for tree planting in the different landscape zones in the Vale. However the value of this targeted approach has been considerably weakened by the difficulties in securing planting opportunities throughout the Forest. Factors such as land value, development potential and agricultural policies have been influential. This has meant that a more reactive approach has been needed to develop new woodland areas although the priorities set out in the first Plan have been followed where possible. For this reason the objectives and proposals for landscape zones are to be less prescriptive. To help address this issue a separate detailed woodland creation strategy has been produced by the Forest Team to provide a

framework of options and objectives that will improve the tree planting work within the Forest.

**The following sections refer to four key areas of the Forest:**

- the Clay Ridge and associated plateau area to the west of the Vale. This is an undulating rural area with the contrasting built up areas of Cranfield and the University at its centre. Farms have retained a significant part of the earlier field patterns in some areas but tree cover is largely restricted to spinneys and screen planting with the exception of a handful of old woodlands such as Holcot and Wootton Woods;
- the Brickfields in the core of the Vale. Land between the A421 and the A6 and stretching from the M1 to Kempston. This is the heart of the Forest of Marston Vale and is dominated by clay

pits and their varying afteruses, transport infrastructure and expanding village settlements;

- the Urban fringe wrapping around Kempston and Bedford. Characterised by a raw and expanding urban edge, transport infrastructure and the riparian corridors of the Ouse and the Elstow Brook. Gravel extraction is an important land use to the east of Bedford;
- the Greensand Ridge, its scarp and the arable land to the east of the Vale. The Ridge provides the most wooded area in the Community Forest and the east Vale is good agricultural land with much remaining evidence of estate management practices. It is quite open in nature, affording excellent views of the Cardington Hangars, and settlements located towards the Ouse.

The new domed landfill forms at Elstow, Stewartby and Brogborough are crucial elements of the Brickfields zone and will need particular attention.

Substantial tree cover will be a feature of these sites and this needs to be integrated by additional planting on the surrounding flat areas. Existing tree screens are an important element of the Vale landscape and will need reinforcing and adding to where necessary. Poplar belts are a screening feature around many of the pit sites and many of the trees are in poor health.

Woodland planting and other landscape work will play an important role in lessening the impact of transport corridors in the Brickfields. Routes such as the A421 and the elevated Bedford to London railway offer the first views of the Community Forest for many people coming into the area and it is important that the impressions gained are favourable. Substantial tree and shrub planting will encourage a sense of place but wider views need to be retained particularly where features such as lakes, the Greensand Ridge and church towers can be seen.

Farming is still important in this area and is characterised by large, open fields surrounded by ditches and over trimmed, sparse hedges. Opportunities for larger scale farm woods will be sought and farmers will be encouraged to introduce more sympathetic hedgerow management. Copses, spinneys,

ponds and a wider diversity of grassland could all help to improve the Brickfields landscape and will be encouraged.

The development of the new settlement at the Elstow Storage Depot will provide opportunities to secure significant woodland planting and to develop landscaping ideas for the internal areas of the settlement.

#### Proposals

- The Team will work with landowners to secure a higher proportion of woodland planting in this area than the more agriculturally productive land to either side of the Vale. All land types will need to be targeted to deliver the level of planting needed and landscape impacts of project work will need to be assessed from both the Vale floor and elevated positions on the ridges.
- Poplar belts and other existing tree belts will be managed to develop stronger and more natural screens for clay extraction and landfilling operations.
- The Team will work with the landfill operators and minerals and waste planning officers to ensure that the new landforms of Brogborough, L' field (at Stewartby) and Elstow landfill sites are assimilated into the surrounding landscape. A combination of tree planting and open spaces on the capped sites and strong elements of perimeter planting will be the most suitable method of meeting this objective. Important viewing

opportunities will be retained and new areas of grassland and wildflowers will add to the landscape diversity of these sites.

- The new settlement at Elstow Storage Depot will be a major feature in the future Community Forest and landscaping proposals will be developed in partnership with the developers, planners and other interested parties. These proposals will ensure that the impact of the settlement is minimised and that opportunities for on and off-site tree planting and other landscaping are maximised.

## URBAN FRINGE

### Assessment

This is the area where land uses are subject to more changes than any other in the Vale and it is also the interface between the Community Forest and its main population centre of Bedford. The southern bypass and subsequent development are impacts that could be repeated with the development of the proposed western relief road.

A substantial area of new planting needs to be developed along the southern edge of the bypass to create a buffer zone between the urban edge and the countryside beyond. This buffer also needs to be created around development areas such as Kempston / Wootton and Shortstown / Harrowden. As with other village edge woods there should be recreation and amenity benefits as well as landscape ones.

Gateways such as the A6 need to be enhanced by planting and other work to create attractive links into the wider Community Forest beyond. This work could be planned in conjunction with the improvement of road and rail corridors as a way of emphasising these links. Other roadside features such as balancing ponds and roundabouts can provide contrast to the planted sites and such opportunities will need to be identified and planned accordingly to contribute to the immediate landscape. If and when the western bypass is constructed opportunities for on and offsite planting must be maximised to blend it in with the relatively unspoilt farm and river corridor land nearby.

The riparian land to the south and east of Bedford contrasts well with the clay heartland of the Vale and it requires a different landscaping approach. The existing network of riverine grassland, scrub, pollards, shelter belts, small woods and wetland habitats needs to be maintained and strengthened. The planting of large areas of new woodland may not be appropriate here. In addition to improving the landscape either side of the A603, this mosaic of land uses will have particular ecological importance and act as an important link with Bedford through the river, cycleway and Priory Park.

Archaeological conservation is a key issue in this area and it is important that all landscape planning takes it into account or seeks to enhance the relevant



*Forest work on the southern edge of Bedford .*

features. Buildings of heritage value include the airship hangars, National Trust properties at Willington and the Moot Hall and Abbey at Elstow.

### Proposals

- Gateway sites will be identified and project ideas will be developed with highway authorities, landowners and planners to deliver well wooded sites that will act as transition zones between urban areas and the wider countryside.
- Opportunities for smaller scale planting and other landscaping work within the southern areas of Bedford and Kempston will be monitored and projects implemented where appropriate. Such planting will seek to link into the countryside to the south and west. In addition to local scale landscape improvements, such work will also provide a means of directly promoting the Forest of Marston Vale and its benefits to the nearest significant population centre.
- The rowing lake proposals at Willington will be supported and the Forest Team will work with the planners and developers to ensure that a valuable landscape mosaic of water, wetland, riparian grassland and woodland is created as part of the scheme.
- Significant woodland planting and other landscape benefits will be secured as a result of the proposed construction of the western relief road and the ensuing infill development. This is an attractive gently undulating area where well designed tree planting will be valuable in improving

longer aspects and as a method of buffering Wootton and individual properties in Kempston Rural.

### THE GREENSAND RIDGE AND EASTERN VALE.

#### Assessment

The Ridge and its scarp provides one of the most wooded areas of the Community Forest and is an important backdrop to the work planned for the core of the Vale. Opportunities should be sought to strengthen the existing woodlands, improve the hedgerow network and to add features such as copses on knolls. The diversity of features on the skyline and the slope will offer interesting longer views from the Vale floor and enhance the immediate area for those on the Ridge. Points of

topographical interest such as outcrops of greensand and small valleys should not be obscured by planting and areas of heritage value such as Houghton House, must be carefully considered if Forest projects are planned nearby.

The existing areas of scrub and sites that could be developed as acidic grassland could offer much to the diversity of the Ridge landscape and tree planting must not detract from this variety. For some sites, management will be required to maintain the diversity of habitats that generates such landscape interest.

The Vale floor between Houghton Conquest and Willington has a large open scale and is generally good, productive agricultural land. Larger areas of new woodland

may be inappropriate but landscape enhancement can be achieved by improving the hedgerow network, planting hedgerow trees to replace previous elm losses and planting smaller copses or tree belts. The extension of existing woods by regeneration or planting will be appropriate in this area.

Villages and infrastructure such as roads can be better assimilated into the landscape by the planting of more blocks of trees and the use of screening belts, but long distance views of the Greensand Ridge must not be obscured. Again, it is important that village woodlands have recreation and amenity value in addition to their landscape benefits. A common feature of the villages is clusters of pony paddocks at the village perimeter and they do offer scope for generating a more intimate landscape through the use of improved hedges and more hedge trees. Often these fields are ancient ridge and furrow sites, which should be retained as open grassland.

Farm buildings can be quite exposed in this open landscape and planting well designed screens or adjacent blocks of woodland will help to integrate them into the wider countryside. Older, more attractive buildings or features such as farm moats should not be obscured but enhanced by landscaping work where possible.



*Trees on the Greensand.*

## LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

### Proposals

- Different geology and landforms will offer landscape opportunities different from those of the clay Vale floor such as stands of copses. Where possible, the Team will identify these sites and put forward proposals for diversifying the landscape particularly on the Greensand Ridge. Links with features on the lower slopes and Vale floor such as Wilstead Wood, will be developed.
- The creation of other habitats will be an important feature of project work on the Ridge and the landscape value of habitats such as acidic grassland, will be assessed along with ecological and other benefits.
- The most productive farmland in the Forest is located in the east of the Vale and farm projects will be focussed on creating and managing hedgerows particularly in the more open arable areas and small scale planting that will benefit the open nature of the landscape.

### CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

#### Assessment

The heritage of the Community Forest is reflected in many features evident throughout the Vale. The village churches, Cardington hangars, brickworks and associated settlements, historic buildings at Elstow and old field patterns all provide evidence of how people worked and lived in this area over the centuries.

Archaeological investigations have

revealed evidence of human activity going back to Neolithic and Bronze Age times particularly along the Ouse corridor. Other features such as farm moats and ponds and woodland patterns also help to interpret historic land use.

Many of the above features are Scheduled Ancient Monuments or are of local importance and registered on county records. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are other designations that need to be taken into account when planning projects in the Forest.

Farm moat restoration and the archaeological work for the Millennium Country Park are examples of heritage related project work and advice is sought on many projects from relevant staff at Bedfordshire County Council.

#### Proposals

- The Forest Team will protect and, where appropriate, enhance

archaeological and historical sites, mitigating any adverse effects of planting through design and management strategies and investigation prior to project implementation. Officers at Bedfordshire County Council and English Heritage will be consulted as necessary and opportunities for partnership working will be pursued.

- The industrial heritage of the Brickfields is of great interest and efforts should be made to conserve features where appropriate or to plan planting and other work to reflect this heritage on other sites. Methods of interpreting the brick industry and its impacts should be investigated and implemented on sites open to the public.
- Where possible, the Team will promote the retention of the industrial and cultural heritage of the Vale and develop interpretation and education facilities at the Forest Centre.

*Cranfield Church reflects the history of the Vale area.*



# WOODLANDS AND COUNTRYSIDE

The areas of work outlined in this chapter are of central importance to the delivery of the Forest Plan. Tree planting, habitat creation, farm conservation work and the long term management of these features will be of major importance to the landscape and wildlife of the Community Forest. This work will also provide opportunities for recreation, enhance the quality of life for those living and working in the Community Forest and offer direct and indirect economic benefits to the Vale area.

Many of the Forest Plan objectives reflect those found in the Forestry Commission's 'England Forestry Strategy' and policies and strategies from the Countryside Agency, local authorities and other partner organisations such as English Nature (Natural Areas Strategy, 1996) have also been taken into consideration. Local Biodiversity Action Plans (Bedfordshire County Council, 2000) provide guidance on many issues relating to countryside management in the Forest.

## WOODLAND CREATION & TREE PLANTING

Tree planting is the core objective of the Community Forest with the new woodland providing a setting for a wide range of other activities.

Significant areas of tree planting will be secured towards the 30% target, with the core Brickfields and urban fringe zones being

targeted for the highest proportion of tree planting. Reduced tree cover will be sought on the land to the east and west.

A Woodland Creation Strategy (Forest of Marston Vale, 2000) has been produced which looks at the issues surrounding the Forest planting work. It describes a series of aims, objectives and action points that will improve the delivery of tree planting targets in the Community Forest. Further detail on the woodland creation proposals can be found in the Strategy.

All of the current methods for encouraging new planting will be utilised, ensuring that their potential benefits are realised (grants from the Forestry Commission and Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food). In addition, it is important that all Community Forests and national partners work to lobby government for changes in the relevant policies and in the level and nature of resources currently available. Contributing to the evolution of the Rural Development Regulation and the New Implementation Options is a good example of work that could have significant potential in delivering the Forest of Marston Vale.

It is important that larger scale projects are secured where multi-purpose forestry can be practised. Opportunities offered through the restoration of landfill and derelict sites and planning agreements offer the greatest future prospects for large scale woodland creation.



*Professional advice and grant aid is available for all tree planting.*

Creating larger woods is one of the key targets of the England Forestry Strategy.

The predominance of agriculture in the Vale means that significant farm woodland creation must be secured. Promotional efforts will highlight the various potential benefits of farm woodlands and reiterate the enhanced opportunities provided by the existence of the Community Forest.

Good woodland design and tree establishment practices will continue to be promoted, in accordance with the best practice guidance provided by the Forestry Commission and others. In this way, all new planting will have the potential to provide good quality timber and the many associated benefits to wildlife, landscape, shelter and sporting interests.

The long term viability of new woods will be promoted by ensuring appropriate management in the establishment period, including preparation and maintenance.

During the winters of 1992/3 and 1993/4, the Woodland Trust planted some 50 hectares of new woodland to create 'Reynold Wood'. This formed part of the 100 hectares of previous farmland and existing woodland, near Brogborough, bought with the help of the Countryside Commission, Bedfordshire County Council and Shanks & McEwan. Woodland management in the existing Holcot Wood and a meadow creation project were implemented to complement the new planting. The new woodland is now becoming a significant landscape feature and open access to the site has proved valuable to local people and for holding events such as the 'Mudstreak' cross country run.

**Woodland creation & tree planting will be achieved by:**

- implementing an annual programme of tree planting towards realising the long-term aim of 30% woodland cover in the Vale over a 40 year period. Joint working with landowners and organisations such as the Woodland Trust, local authorities and Forestry Commission will be promoted;
- promoting the Woodland Grant Scheme, Farm Woodland Premium Scheme and other

support mechanisms and exploring funding from the private sector by sponsorship including carbon sequestration. The Forest Team will contribute to any development of the New Implementation Options (single flexible grant, tendering scheme and land trading);

- promoting well designed new woodlands, as a resource, to deliver a wide range of landscape, economic, social and environmental benefits. Particular emphasis will be placed on securing larger woodlands (>20 ha) and those that meet defragmentation, urban fringe and access objectives in accordance with the England Forestry Strategy and DETR targets;
- encouraging the development of new national and regional policies and, where necessary, seeking funds to apply them to woodland creation in the Marston Vale;
- encouraging and supporting landowners to ensure that all new woodlands are successfully established and well maintained, and developing new services to assist with this, where appropriate;
- working with planning authorities to ensure that developments provide opportunities to secure large scale new woodland creation in appropriate areas;
- working with site owners and planning authorities to ensure that restoration schemes for derelict land and landfill sites meet Forest landscape, wildlife and recreation objectives;
- seeking opportunities to secure land for woodland creation. This could be through acquisition, leasing, management partnerships or other suitable mechanisms.

*6 year old wild cherry trees add to the landscape.*



Regenerating and safeguarding the heritage and ecological value of the few ancient semi-natural woodlands in the Marston Vale is an important objective. The Community Tree Project is proving successful in helping to achieve this objective and future support will be provided to ensure continued success.

Since 1996, the Community Tree Project has involved over 150 local volunteers and 10 local schools in three successful seed collecting seasons. In addition, these volunteers and schools help with growing the seed collected from our ancient trees and shrubs into new plants for use in the Forest. To date, an estimated 15,000 young plants have been produced from locally collected seed.

### The management of existing woodlands will be secured by:

- promoting the management of all established woodlands in the Marston Vale through advisory literature, site visits, educational work, and by providing advice to individuals;
- working with the Forestry Commission, existing site managers and others to promote the use of current 'best practice' in woodland management. This will include the continuation of the deer management group established in 1999;
- promoting in partnership with Bedfordshire County Council, Forestry Commission, Cranfield University and others, a wide range of suitable woodland demonstration sites both in and close to the Community Forest;

- supporting the development of a local network of producers and buyers that seeks to develop and co-ordinate local timber and woodland produce marketing;
- continuing to support the Community Tree Project in the Marston Vale.

### NON-WOODLAND HABITATS

As part of creating the varied and well-wooded countryside of the Community Forest, the creation and management of a range of habitats other than woodland, such as farmland, grassland, and wetland, is important.

Whole farm conservation plans will be encouraged as an effective tool in helping to enhance the landscape and wildlife value of the Vale's farmland. In addition, the best methods of integrating on-farm conservation work with productive farming will be promoted to help increase the creation or conservation of features such as hedges, field margins, ponds and meadows.

The Vale hedgerow network is an important landscape feature and has much wildlife value. Planting new hedgerows and managing existing ones will be encouraged using all available grants and other support mechanisms. Priority will be given to opportunities on farmland and alongside transport corridors where there will be the most landscape impact, and wherever possible, hedgerows will be used to link other habitats.

*Ash seedlings from the Community Tree Project.*





In 1999 six successful Countryside Stewardship Scheme applications were submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. All were 'whole farm' schemes and featured hedgerow management, the creation of conservation headlands, increased public access and pond restoration. The work included will add to the landscape and wildlife interest on those farms and benefit the wider Forest.

Grassland, wetlands and other habitats exist within the Marston Vale and there is a commitment to conserve and increase the areas of such habitats. Large-scale habitat creation initiatives such as the Marston Vale Millennium Country Park will provide valuable resources for wildlife as will an enhanced network of smaller habitats across the Forest.



*Grassland is a valuable habitat in the Forest of Marston Vale.*



*The Forest team can help to manage the hedgerow network in the Marston Vale.*

The Community Forest has one of only a few sites in the British Isles where field cow wheat can be found. The Forest Team has worked with English Nature and the local Wildlife Trust in long term monitoring and the investigation of potential future conservation of this protected species.

Where there are rare habitats or species, work will be done with the relevant partner organisations to protect and enhance them.

### Non-woodland habitats will be managed and created by:

- securing opportunities to maximise the ecological potential of the Marston Vale. This work will be done in conjunction with organisations such as the Wildlife Trust and English Nature and is to be guided by Biodiversity Action Plans where possible;
- liaise with partners to produce a Nature Conservation Strategy for the Community Forest. This will identify key areas of work;
- promoting on-farm conservation projects and good practice in the management of features

such as grassland, ponds, orchards and watercourses. Grant aid systems such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and other opportunities offered by the Rural Development Regulation will be used where appropriate as will partnership working with the local Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service (ADAS);

- using the Countryside Stewardship Scheme or other means to secure new hedgerow

planting and enhanced management. Networks of well-managed farmland and roadside hedges that link other habitats will be developed or strengthened;

- increasing and conserving areas of ecologically valuable grassland within the Community Forest, in partnership with the appropriate site owners and managers;
- promoting the appropriate management and increasing the amount of wetland habitats throughout the Marston Vale, including watercourses, ponds, lakes and any marsh areas.



*Farm ponds are valuable for wildlife.*

# ACCESS, RECREATION AND SPORT

This chapter considers the ways in which people can enjoy the developing facilities of the Community Forest. The first section looks at rights of way and other access issues and the second covers informal recreation. Finally opportunities for sport are considered.

## RIGHTS OF WAY

The rights of way network is crucial to many people's enjoyment of the countryside and its quality is fundamental to the accessibility of the Community Forest.

Some 240km of public footpath, bridleway and byway exist in the area, managed by one Community Paths Officer (CPO), based at the Forest Office. The CPO has a statutory role with regard to rights of way work in the Vale.

Although part of the Forest Team, the CPO is administratively part of the County Council's Rights of Way Group and benefits from county wide support and from that provided by the Definitive Map Team at County Hall. The CPO's area includes one whole extra parish and parts of four others in addition to the Community Forest area.

## WORKING TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

The existing rights of way network has potential to become a more important and widely used

recreational facility. With continued careful management and financial investment, the network will be made more accessible to more people. The majority of public paths cross private land, much of which is farmed commercially, so a close working relationship with the farming community and other landowners and managers is vital.

Effort will continue to be made to work with landowners to improve access. Provision of gates and other structures on rights of way is the responsibility of the land occupier. Such structures have often been of poor quality and are sometimes unnecessary. There is considerable opportunity to remove or improve structures on paths, thus allowing more people access, whilst maintaining integrity of stock fences and protecting occupiers from illegal use of paths.

**A 1997/8 rights of way survey revealed that 55% of paths were easy to use and 45% required works to bring them up to a suitable standard. By 1999/2000 a subsequent survey revealed figures of 72% and 28% respectively.**

The rights of way network varies in its accessibility across the area and through the year. Cropping and cultivation can cause disruption to cross-field paths and these problems remain significant in some areas during autumn and spring. Therefore, efforts will continue to ensure paths are

reinstated following cropping or cultivation.

### Access to the countryside will be improved by:

- managing the Marston Vale rights of way network within the framework of relevant legislation and policies;
- following the Bedfordshire County Council Rights of Way Group priority system of work in strategic parishes for proactive, core rights of way improvements;
- helping to provide high quality gates and other similar structures, especially in cases where accessibility to a path will be improved and access for people with disabilities will be enhanced. Regular advice will be sought from a range of path users, through the Forest of Marston Vale Access Forum and other bodies as appropriate;
- providing improved path surfaces where appropriate on promoted routes, especially on paths leading away from countryside sites and close to settlements;
- continuing to carry out cultivation and cropping campaigns, co-ordinated with the County's Rights of Way Group, to improve standards of paths across arable land;
- improving waymarking and signage on public rights of way and other non-statutory routes.



Bedfordshire County Council

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## Summary

The Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area (NCA) is a broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east. Within it, but distinct from it, is the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, a contrasting narrow and elevated outcrop of Greensand, with its associated habitats on acidic soils such as grassland, heathland and woodland. Views of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA and its large-scale arable farmland can be seen in most directions, from the elevated ground of the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge, Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, East Anglian Chalk and Chilterns NCAs.

The NCA contains the Forest of Marston Vale – one of 12 Community Forests in England – and to the south, around Luton, a small proportion of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). While predominantly an arable and commercially farmed landscape, a wide diversity of semi-natural habitats are also present within the NCA, including a number of internationally important and designated sites that support a range of species – some rare and scarce – and offer opportunities for people to have contact with the natural environment. The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly and gently across the landscape.

The Marston Vale and Peterborough areas have been subject to extensive clay extraction for brick making. Subsequent restoration has provided opportunities for recreation and biodiversity aided by new woodland planting and other green infrastructure initiatives. Extensive quarrying of sand and gravel within the river valleys has also left its mark with a series of restored and flooded waterbodies that benefit biodiversity and recreation.

The majority of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA is sparsely populated. Settlements are generally located along the river valleys and more recently along major road and rail corridors. A feeling of urbanisation is brought by the numerous large towns, including Milton Keynes, Bedford, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Peterborough, and major transport routes, including the M1, A1 and A14 and the Midlands and East Coast mainline railways.

Tranquillity within the NCA has declined, affected by visual intrusion, noise and light pollution from agriculture, settlement expansion and improvements in road infrastructure. Mineral extraction and landfill activities, particularly within the Marston Vale and around Peterborough, have affected local tranquillity. Many areas, however, retain a rural feel and there are numerous opportunities for nearby urban communities to enjoy quiet, informal recreation.

A sense of place and history provided by the area's rich geology and archaeology as well as historic features such as Stowe House, Wimpole Hall, Wrest Park, Bletchley Park, the Cardington Hangars, the Grand Union Canal and the post-industrial landscapes of the brickfields.

is

[Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce](#)

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Key ecosystem services include food provision, including unique genetic diversity found in local varieties of fruit; and the ability of the area's rivers and wetlands to provide water, regulate water quality and flow, as well as providing benefits for biodiversity and recreation. The NCA faces significant challenges around accommodating levels of future growth and managing water resources, both within the NCA and the impacts that this can have further downstream in other NCAs while, at the same time, protecting and enhancing its character and increased demand for leisure and recreation.



View of the Bedfordshire Claylands with Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge in the distance.

## Statements of Environmental Opportunities:

- **SEO 1:** Maintain and manage a sustainable and productive claylands arable landscape, while managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats to benefit biodiversity, improve soil and water quality, and ameliorate climate change by promoting good agricultural practice.
- **SEO 2:** Protect aquifers and enhance the quality, state and structure of the River Great Ouse, its valley and tributaries, habitats, waterbodies and flood plain by seeking to enhance their ecological, historical and recreational importance while taking into account their contribution to sense of place and regulating water flow, quality and availability.
- **SEO 3:** Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people's health and wellbeing.
- **SEO 4:** Protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage and tranquillity of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA, including its important geodiversity, archaeology, historic houses, parkland, and Second World War and industrial heritage, by improving interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape.

## Key characteristics

- Gently undulating, lowland plateau divided by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east.
- Underlying geology of Jurassic and Cretaceous clays overlain by more recent Quaternary glacial deposits of chalky boulder clay (till) and sand and gravel river terrace deposits within the river valleys. Lime-rich, loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage predominate, with better-drained soils in the river valleys.
- The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly across the landscape, and the River Nene and the Grand Union Canal are also features. Three aquifers underlie the NCA and a large manmade reservoir, Grafham Water, supplies water within and outside the NCA.
- Brickfields of the Marston Vale and Peterborough area form distinctive post-industrial landscapes with man-made waterbodies and landfill sites. Restoration of sand and gravel workings has left a series of flooded and restored waterbodies within the river valleys.
- Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, particularly on higher ground to the north-west representing remnant ancient deer parks and Royal Hunting Forests.
- Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.
- Wide variety of semi-natural habitats supporting a range of species – some notably rare and scarce – including sites designated for species associated with ancient woodland, wetland sites important for birds, great crested newt and species of stonewort, and traditional orchards and unimproved grassland supporting a rich diversity of wild flowers.
- Rich geological and archaeological history evident in fossils, medieval earthworks, deserted villages and Roman roads. A number of historic parklands, designed landscapes and country houses – including Stowe House and Park, Kimbolton Park, Croxton Park, Wimpole Hall and Wrest Park – combine with Bletchley Park, Second World War airfields, the Cardington Airship Hangars and brickfields to provide a strong sense of history and place.
- Diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone. Locally quarried limestone features in villages such as Lavendon, Harrold and Turvey on the upper stretches of the River Great Ouse.
- Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel. Small villages are usually nucleated around a church or village green, while fen-edge villages are often in a linear form along roads.
- Major transport routes cross the area, including the M1, M11, A1, A6, A5 and A14 roads, the East Coast and Midlands mainline railways, and the Grand Union Canal.
- Recreational assets include Grafham Water, the Grand Union Canal, Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest, Chilterns AONB, woodland and wetland sites, an extensive rights-of-way network and two National Cycle Routes. The cities of Cambridge and Peterborough and several of the historic market towns in the NCA are popular tourist destinations.



## Statements of Environmental Opportunity

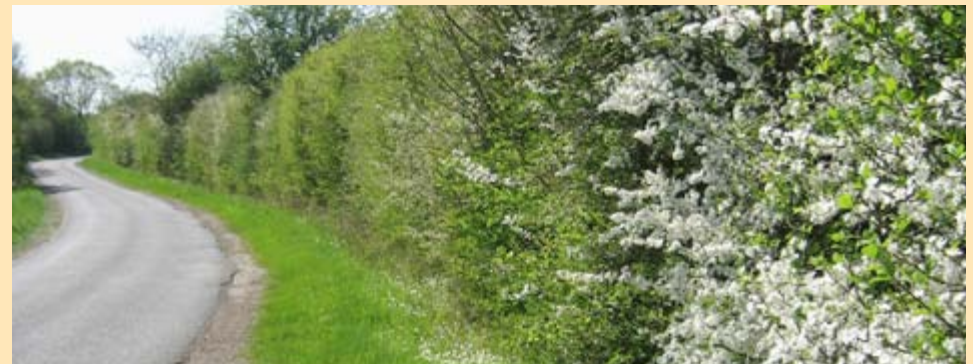
**SEO 1: Maintain and manage a sustainable and productive claylands arable landscape, while managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats to benefit biodiversity, improve soil and water quality, and ameliorate climate change by promoting good agricultural practice.**

**For example, by:**

- Managing the arable landscape to retain the value of food provision through employing sustainable farming practices.
- Working with local farmers, landowners and managers to promote best practice such as the appropriate management of hedgerows, reducing herbicide and pesticide use, buffering field margins and woodland edges, and retaining winter stubble to support farmland birds and pollinators.
- Promoting good soil management to avoid compaction and maintain good soil structure.
- Encouraging the conservation and management of existing woodlands and the replacing of introduced species with native species, as well as undertaking new tree and woodland planting to link existing sites in order to enhance biodiversity and recreational opportunities.
- Seeking opportunities to develop biomass production through active woodland management and promote and stimulate local markets for wood products, biomass and wood fuel to support sustainable timber production.
- Ensuring that populations of wild deer are managed to reduce damage caused to the natural regeneration of trees and woodland.
- Preparing and implementing plans to control or limit the spread of new pests or disease – for example, ash die-back.
- Extending where appropriate the semi-natural vegetation cover, especially on steeper slopes where the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area (NCA) meets the

Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, Chilterns, and East Anglian Chalk NCAs, to improve soil quality and reduce run-off and erosion.

- Enhancing and expanding the network of semi-natural habitats through targeted environmental enhancements, including ponds, hedgerows, hedgerow trees and species-rich grasslands (such as areas found along road verges, green lanes and field margins) to support biodiversity.
- Encouraging the appropriate management and expansion of traditional orchards, bringing them back into active management to conserve their genetic diversity, biodiversity value and cultural heritage; and promoting and encouraging local markets for locally grown orchard produce.



**Species-rich roadside verges and hedges.**

**SEO 2: Protect aquifers and enhance the quality, state and structure of the River Great Ouse, its valley and tributaries, habitats, waterbodies and flood plain by seeking to enhance their ecological, historical and recreational importance while taking into account their contribution to sense of place and regulating water flow, quality and availability.**

**For example, by:**

- Promoting and encouraging the sustainable use of local water resources by agricultural, commercial and domestic users to reduce the pressure on water resources in this NCA.
- Ensuring that water abstraction and poor water quality do not threaten important wetland habitats and archaeological features.
- Monitoring and managing water abstraction licences, with new applications for groundwater abstraction considered on a case-by-case basis to reduce the pressure on the aquifers.
- Incorporating and encouraging the use of water efficiency measures in new developments.
- Implementing catchment-wide water management plans to ensure a co-ordinated approach to reducing the impacts of pollution on water quality.
- Encouraging the use of sustainable drainage schemes, especially within urban areas to reduce run-off.
- Promoting and encouraging different remedies to improve water quality (for example, increasing on-farm water storage to reduce water abstraction levels, increasing flow rates and water levels in rivers, and continuing to make improvements to wastewater treatment works), to benefit aquatic biodiversity.
- Encouraging landowners and managers to increase and link areas of semi-natural habitat – such as flood plain grazing marsh, lowland meadow, ponds, fen and reedbed – to help slow water passage and filter out pollutants and support biodiversity.
- Working to reduce surface and groundwater pollution at a catchment scale by managing farmland under the principles established by the Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme.
- Expanding buffer strips along watercourses to help filter out sediments and pollution and provide benefits for landscape character and biodiversity.
- Working with landowners and managers to encourage the appropriate management of rivers, streams, waterbodies and riparian habitats to support biodiversity.
- Managing vegetation within the catchment to help to bind the soil, thus reducing the risk of erosion and slowing the passage of water.
- Seeking opportunities to extend and link areas of woodland, hedgerows, grassland and other semi-natural habitats to assist in absorbing water flow and provide benefits for biodiversity.
- Seeking opportunities to increase the capacity of the flood plain, conserve and extend riparian habitats to retain water, and bring benefit to the river environment.
- Promoting green infrastructure to help mitigate the impact of flooding.
- Encouraging the use of sustainable urban drainage systems such as permeable surfacing within urban areas to help reduce run-off.
- Controlling, monitoring and managing invasive non-native species to prevent or reduce damage to native species populations and habitats.

**SEO 3: Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Forest of Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people's health and wellbeing.**

**For example, by:**

- Supporting the creation and expansion of native woodlands, orchard, parkland, grasslands, and hedgerows to improve habitat connectivity within the landscape and provide increased benefits for biodiversity and recreation.
- Ensuring that areas of designated land remain in favourable condition, and improving their condition where possible.
- Promoting awareness of, and providing advice to landowners and managers on, managing habitats of biodiversity interest.
- Supporting initiatives that include well-planned green infrastructure that will increase people's access to and contact with the natural environment to benefit their health and wellbeing.
- Creating new woodland as appropriate on urban fringes to help screen and integrate new developments, and provide biodiversity and green infrastructure benefits.
- Managing recreational sites to accommodate visitor pressure and demand without conflict between different users, and without causing adverse effects on the natural environment.
- Maintaining, extending and promoting the use of the National Cycle Routes and the rights-of-way network.
- Conserving and managing traditional orchards, hedgerows, parkland, and ancient and veteran trees for the benefit of fauna (such as specialist invertebrates dependent on dead or decaying wood, pollinators and pest regulators).
- Protecting and conserving existing traditional orchards from inappropriate development and changes in land use.
- Retaining and enhancing the contrast in landscape character between the clay plateau and river valleys, aiming to maintain and enhance the balance between urban and rural landscapes.
- Preventing inappropriate development and promoting the use of local building stone to maintain the character of villages and historic buildings.
- Ensuring that any new developments incorporate well-designed green infrastructure, to include improved access and recreation opportunities for local communities and visitors.
- Supporting the work of the Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest to regenerate the area and repair the landscape, using trees and woodland to provide social, economic and environmental benefits.
- Supporting the work of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to conserve and enhance the landscape and special qualities of the AONB.
- Ensuring that geodiversity sites continue to be protected, monitored and managed.
- Ensuring that mineral extraction sites are restored to contribute to local landscape character and offer opportunities to enrich people's understanding of landscape, and enhance biodiversity, recreation and geodiversity.

**SEO 4: Protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage and tranquillity of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA, including its important geodiversity, archaeology, historic houses, parkland, and Second World War and industrial heritage, by improving interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape.**

**For example, by:**

- Promoting awareness and understanding of the area's rich geological heritage and the impact it has on the landscape, local distinctiveness and human activity – for example, in brick making.
- Ensuring that new development is in keeping with the local character of the area by using local stone in buildings to enhance sense of place and history.
- Promoting the restoration and good management of historic buildings and features, including those that are listed and 'at risk'.
- Using an understanding of the area's historic settlements and buildings to promote high-quality design in new development.
- Protecting, managing and promoting important archaeological features and landscapes such as ridge and furrow to increase people's understanding.
- Conserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of the brick-making industry, the Grand Union Canal and 20th-century military sites by promoting and improving access to increase awareness and understanding.
- Increasing tranquillity by conserving, managing and extending areas of semi-natural habitat, particularly woodlands and hedgerows, to benefit wildlife and people.
- Promoting existing sites that offer opportunities for people to enjoy the local landscape and providing improved interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's understanding of the natural and built environments.
- Offering high-quality interpretation at key sites, and providing improved interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's understanding and enjoyment of the key attributes of the area such as the history of brick making and jam making.
- Encouraging the restoration and sustainable management of historic parklands.
- Seeking opportunities to protect more tranquil parts of the area to reduce light and noise pollution and seeking opportunities to remove obtrusive features such as signage, lighting and poles.
- Working with local planning authorities to ensure that development is well designed to enhance landscape character and sense of place and to minimise the impacts of noise and light pollution.

## Landscape opportunities

- Support sustainable farming practices that promote food production, protect and improve soil quality, improve water quality and help to regulate water flow.
- Strengthen the mosaic of semi-natural habitats within the farmed landscape to benefit landscape character and habitat connectivity and support farmland biodiversity.
- Appropriately manage semi-natural habitats including woodland, grassland, hedgerows, field margins, road verges and green lanes to provide structural diversity and a variety of flowering plants, and improve habitat extent, quality and connectivity in the landscape.
- Encourage the reconnection of the rivers with their flood plains, seeking to link and extend existing habitats and restore or create new grasslands, fens, reedbeds and wet woodland for their contribution to riverine character, biodiversity and sense of place. Reinstatement practices such as willow pollarding.
- Conserve ancient and veteran trees in river valleys, hedgerows, historic parklands and traditional orchards for their biodiversity and heritage value, planning for the provision of replacement stock and veteran trees in the future.
- Appropriately manage mineral extraction activities to limit damage to archaeology, geodiversity and biodiversity interests.
- Seek opportunities to enhance landscape character and biodiversity through the creation of new habitats and recreational and educational opportunities to increase people's understanding and enjoyment of local archaeology and geodiversity and its contribution to the landscape.
- Plan for and manage the impact of new development by ensuring that high-quality design secures biodiversity enhancements and access and green infrastructure provision which strengthen sense of place and landscape character.
- Conserve the character and pattern of the distinctive limestone villages of upper reaches of the River Great Ouse. Encourage new development that respects the distinctive character of the villages using traditional local building materials and limiting visual impact by ensuring it is sensitively designed and located.
- Manage visitor access and recreational activities to ensure that demand can be accommodated without conflict between different users, local communities and the historic, built and natural environments.
- Protect the tranquillity of areas that remain undisturbed, for example around Grafham Water, north of Bedford, from intrusive communication and utility infrastructure, noisy recreational pursuits, air traffic and light pollution.
- Support the work of the Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest to regenerate the area and restore the landscape using trees and woodland to provide social, economic and environmental benefits.
- Support the work of the Chilterns AONB to conserve and enhance the landscape and special qualities of the AONB. Conserve and manage distinctive elements of the Chilterns landscape such as its woodlands, grasslands, streams and rural character to improve sense of place and tranquillity, particularly near to settlements.

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# **Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment**

Prepared by LUC  
May 2014

## 3 The Landscape Classification of Bedford Borough

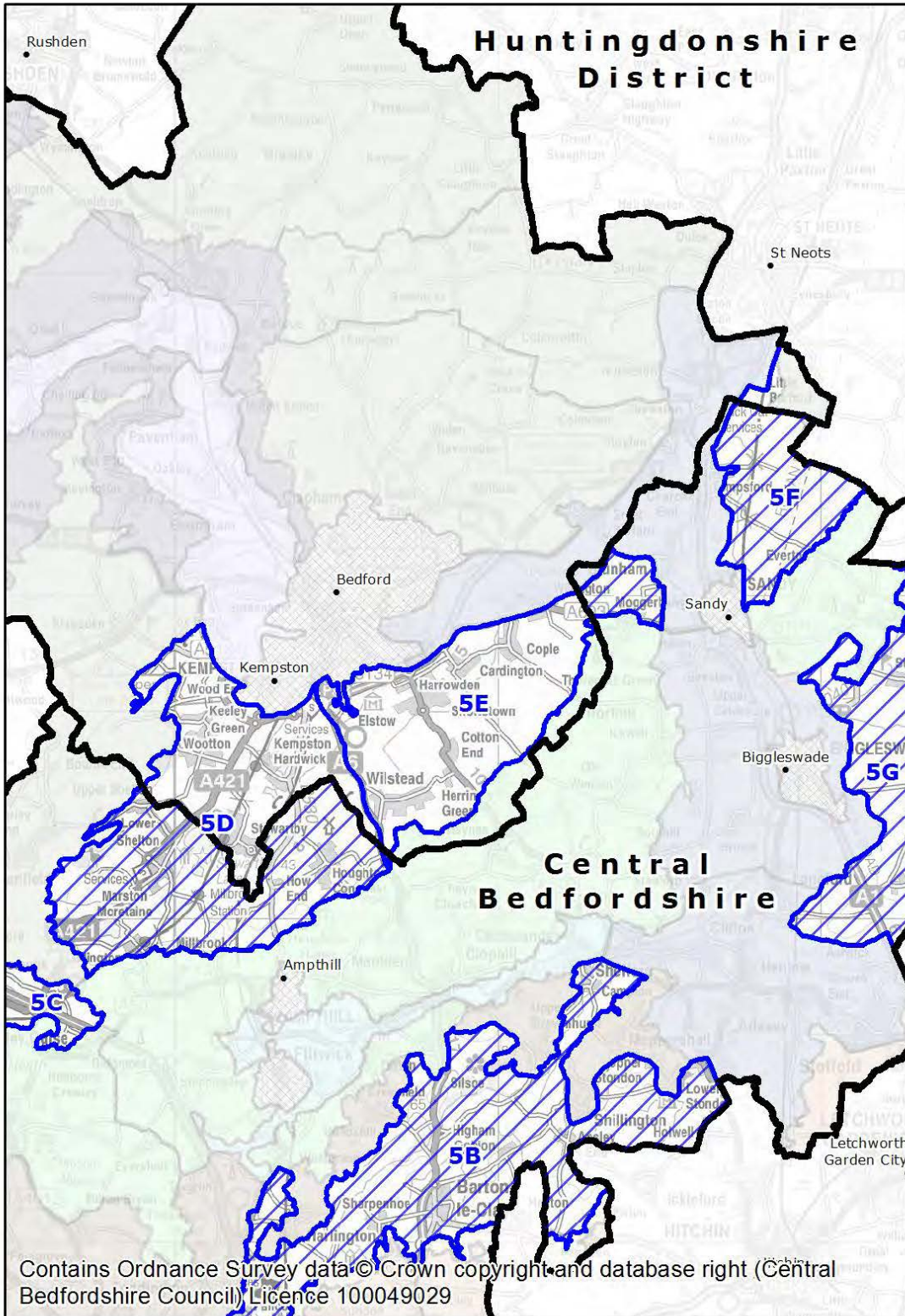
- 3.1 The physical and cultural influences described in the previous chapters have combined to create the unique and distinctive character of Bedford Borough. The area is characterised by a variety of landscapes represented by **six landscape types** (out of a total of 12 landscape types for the whole county from the Landscape Character Assessment of the ceremonial county of Bedfordshire). The numbering for the landscape types used in the countywide study has been retained to ensure uniformity but the type names have been simplified to reflect the shift in focus to a more detailed study at the borough level. Note that the consistent countywide study means that the types frequently cross into Central Bedfordshire and contain local character areas. For this reason the character areas in Bedford Borough are not always consecutively numbered (with areas also within Central Bedfordshire).

### Landscape Types within Bedford Borough

1. Clay Farmland
  2. Wooded Wolds
  3. Limestone Valleys
  4. Clay Valleys
  5. Clay Vales
  6. Wooded Greensand Ridge
- 3.2 Each of the generic landscape types has a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution. For this borough level study the landscape types are further sub-divided into component local **landscape character areas**. These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity.
- 3.3 The landscape classification for the borough is set out in **Table 3.1** (overleaf) and illustrated on **Figure 1**. **Figure 1** has been prepared on a Geographic Information System (GIS), with mapping undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000. It should however be noted that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape types and character areas. The boundaries illustrated therefore usually indicate transitions rather than marked changes on the ground.
- 3.4 **Table 3.1** shows the classification (at character area/1:25,000 scale level) for the whole of Bedfordshire with the landscape character areas within or partly within Bedford Borough indicated.



## 5 TYPE 5: CLAY VALES



Note: Hatched area indicates the part of the character area lying in Central Bedfordshire

# TYPE 5: CLAY VALES

## Key Characteristics

- A large-scale landscape with a low-lying, flat landform providing distant views.
- Bordered by pronounced, elevated landscapes of the *Greensand Ridge* and the *Chalk Escarpments* that form prominent backdrops and offer a sense of containment.
- A predominantly agricultural landscape characterised by large geometric field units with variable field boundaries including remnant hedgerows, scrubby margins and drainage channels.
- Crossed by a number of tributaries of the Rivers Great Ouse, Ivel, Flit and Ousel.
- Land use dominated by arable crop production but with significant areas of land divided up for horse paddocks.
- Active brick-workings have created large scale clay pits and sites restored through capping of workings and landraising such as at Stewartby.
- Large scale industrial features such as the line of chimney stacks (north of Wilstead), the Cardington airship sheds at Shortstown and large distribution warehouses south of Bedford.
- Main transport routes – including the M1, A6, A5, A1M and Midland Mainline Railway have an audible and visual presence in the landscape.
- Adjacent towns of Bedford bring urban fringe characteristics to the landscape.
- The Forest of Marston Vale stretching between Bedford, Ampthill and Milton Keynes - one of 12 Community Forests in England.
- Series of lakes formed through restoration of former clay pits to the south of Bedford around Kempston Hardwick.

## Landscape Character Areas

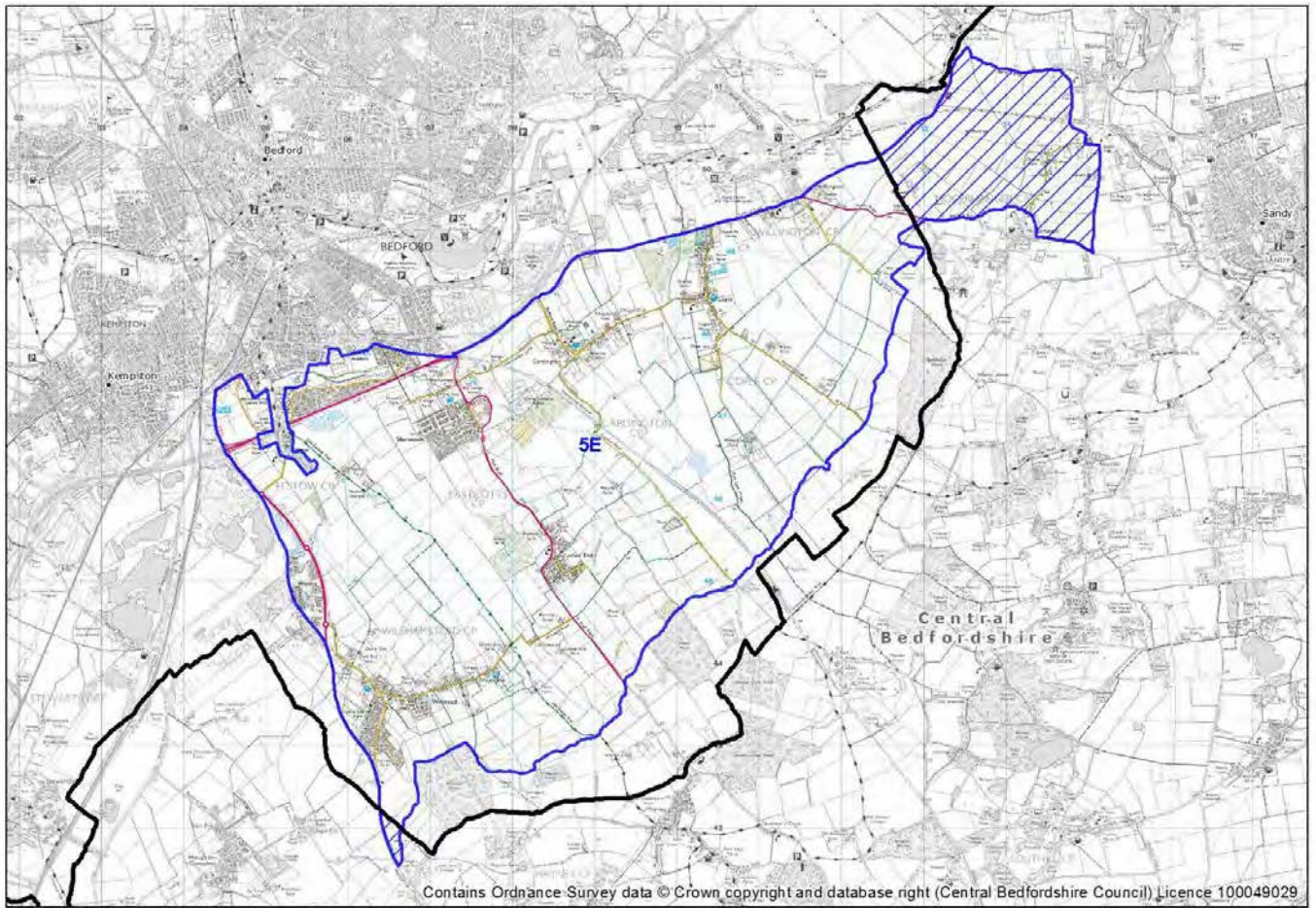
Landscape character areas within the Clay Vales landscape type in the Bedford Borough are:

5D North Marston Clay Vale

5E East Marston Clay Vale

5F Biggin Wood Clay Vale

## 5E East Marston Clay Vale



Note: Hatched area indicates the part of the character area lying in Central Bedfordshire

## 5E East Marston Clay Vale

### Location and boundaries

- 5E.1 The flat, open landscape of the **East Marston Clay Vale** lies to the south of Bedford. It is almost entirely within Bedford Borough, with a very small area north of the A603 included within Central Bedfordshire District - refer also to the companion LCA for Central Bedfordshire. At the southern boundary, the prominent, elevated landform of the **Mid Greensand Ridge** (6b) further emphasises the flat and open character. This area of the vale is distinctive, having a simple, unified character being largely dominated by arable land cover, with a lesser influence of mineral extraction sites, industrial units and large settled areas compared to the adjacent **North Marston Clay Vale** (5d) to the east. The boundary with area 5d follows the A6.

### Summary of landscape character: Key characteristics

- 5E.1.1 A large scale, flat, open vale landscape underlain by Oxford Clay. Included as part of the Forest of Marston Vale.
- 5E.1.2 Tributaries of the River Great Ouse, including the Elstow Brook, cross the landscape in deep drainage channels.
- 5E.1.3 **Historic landmarks such as small bridges e.g. Smeaton's Bridge at Cardington are important features.**
- 5E.1.4 Expansive views across the vale to the Wooded Greensand Ridge (6b) that forms a prominent backdrop to the Vale and which provides some sense of containment.
- 5E.1.5 Formerly meadow pasture, land use is now predominantly defined by intensive arable cropping contained within medium to large arable fields. Some smaller fields given over to pasture and horse grazing remain.
- 5E.1.6 A regular parliamentary enclosure landscape - variable field and roadside boundaries characterised by short flailed, gappy hedges, with some large open fields where boundaries have been removed.
- 5E.1.7 Woodland is sparse across the character area, the most significant being relatively recent planting at Water End Wood and Cotton End.
- 5E.1.8 Coniferous shelterbelt plantings act as unsympathetic visual buffers to large industrial features e.g. the Cardington airship sheds at Shortstown and on the edges of settlement. The Cardington airship sheds are a prominent landmark heritage feature and widely visible across the vale.
- 5E.1.9 Elstow Abbey is a significant landscape feature despite being constrained by modern development. The Abbey retains its relationship with the historic core of Elstow village.
- 5E.1.10 Large scale industrial features punctuate the flat vale landscape such as distribution warehouses south of Bedford, plus former and current mineral workings.
- 5E.1.11 The A6, A600 A603, A421 and various secondary roads e.g. Southill and Northill Road, cut through the landscape, having a strong visual and audible presence.
- 5E.1.12 The urban edge of Bedford, on the northern boundary, brings urban fringe characteristics to the landscape and nearby settlements of Shortstown.
- 5E.1.13 Transitional character in places e.g. redundant Cardington RAF base in process of regeneration to mixed used development.

- 5E.1.14 Generally small to medium scale, linear villages with varied settlement character. Locally distinctive influences in the brick, for example Arlesey whites from the Gault Clay and Blunham Brick (yellow) from the Oxford Clay.
- 5E.1.15 Post-war and more recent development has occurred within and on the edge of villages and road corridors, resulting in a range of building styles and materials, as at Wilstead, Wixams and Shortstown.
- 5E.1.16 Cardington village is notably picturesque and historic. Characterised by red brick, clay tiles and green paint, set around a village green with a striking village church.
- 5E.1.17 Small bridges and walkways provide access to village properties and farm entrances over deep tributary drainage channels at Cardington and Wilstead.
- 5E.1.18 Individual farmsteads and associated agricultural buildings occur throughout the landscape located along road corridors.
- 5E.1.19 The recreational route of the John Bunyan Trail cuts north-south through the landscape linking the urban edge of Bedford with the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b).

## Landscape character description

### Physical and natural landscape character

- 5E.2 This is a large scale, flat and open clay vale with expansive views to the contrasting elevated landscape of the Wooded Greensand Ridge - containing the vale and forming a prominent backdrop to the south and east.
- 5E.3 The vale is principally defined by intensive arable farming - contained within large open fields - forming an important open, agricultural setting to the southern, urban edge of Bedford. The influence of this urban area is evident in proximity to Bedford with large scale distribution warehouses and industrial estates characterising views to the town. The massive airship sheds on the edge of Shortstown - form a striking landmark feature, highly visible across the open plain. Characteristics such as coniferous shelterbelt planting, busy primary road corridors and new suburban housing estates forming an unsympathetic interface with the rural landscape are evident.
- 5E.4 Surviving characteristic features contributing to a distinct sense of place include small access bridges and walkways over deep drainage channels associated with the tributaries of the River Great Ouse. Woodland is sparse across the open vale but new woodland planting is being introduced as part of the Forest of Marston Vale Initiative.

### Biodiversity

- 5E.5 A low lying, mostly open landscape - this area is part of the floodplain of the Great Ouse. Arable farming is the predominant land use with some pasture associated with intervening tributary valleys and around settlements. The Elstow Brook is the main tributary of the Great Ouse - this is the principal feature of biodiversity interest in the area - and supports populations of otter. Farmland is intensively managed and woodland cover is sparse.



Ex RAF sheds to the south of Shortstown are prominent in the flat landscape

### Visual and perceptual character

- 5E.6 Expansive views are afforded across the vale to the Wooded Greensand Ridge (6b), which provides a prominent backdrop to the Vale landscape. Aspects of the historic landscape pattern still influence experiential landscape character, such as Elstow Abbey, although much of the perceptual character of the landscape has been altered by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century agricultural re-organisation and by development, including very prominent, large scale landmarks such as the Cardington Airship Sheds.

### Cultural pattern and historic character

- 5E.7 The wide Ouse valley to the east of Bedford saw extensive prehistoric and Roman occupation of the gravel terraces, beginning with a Neolithic interrupted ditch enclosure (scheduled) north-east of Cardington.
- 5E.8 Most of this area was occupied by common open fields in the medieval period. The belt of land along the lower slopes of the Greensand escarpment was subject to early private enclosure, which retains the layout of the furlongs (blocks of ridges) of the open fields. Elsewhere there is good survival of parliamentary enclosure fields and their associated farmsteads south-east of the main row of villages, extending towards the east into the northern part of Moggerhanger parish. To the north-west there has been significant boundary loss and reorganisation associated with new development and transport infrastructure on the southern edge of Bedford.
- 5E.9 A ridge of land elevated slightly above the rest of the valley provided a suitable site for Cardington airfield and its early 20<sup>th</sup> century airship hangars.
- 5E.10 Visible archaeological sites are not common in this area. Elstow Abbey to the north-west is still a significant landscape feature, in spite of being constrained by new housing to the north, the A6 bypass to its west and Bedford bypass to its south. Its complex comprises earthworks, the ruins of a post-dissolution mansion, the parish church (which was formed from the abbey nave) and detached tower, and it retains its relationship with the historic core of Elstow village.
- 5E.11 There are medieval settlement earthworks at Harrowden, a few moated sites (of which one at Cardington Manor Farm is a scheduled monument) and pockets of medieval ridge and furrow. The listed hangars at Cardington are a dramatic visual reminder of the importance of the area in aviation history.



Characteristic red brick houses at Cardington village



Shorts building forms part of the modern settlement at New Cardington

### Settlement pattern and built character

- 5E.12 Settlement is varied in character. The Whitbread Estate village at Cardington - focussed around a large green with a village church - is an important vernacular feature with its distinctive red brick, clay tiles and green paint. Locally distinctive influences in the brick, for example Arleseey whites from the Gault Clay and Blunham Brick (yellow) from the Oxford Clay are a further notable element of buildings within the Vale.
- 5E.13 Post-war and more recent development has occurred within and on the edge of villages, resulting in a range of building styles and materials, as at Wilstead. New Cardington and Wixams are recent residential developments arranged along the A6 and A600 roads respectively. New Cardington is developed as an extension to the the village of Shortstown, which was originally built to house workers associated with the Cardington sheds. The original Shorts houses are located west of the A600 facing the Shorts buildings. The layout is symmetrical and has a 'Garden City' character. Black tarred timber barns are a further feature of the vale.

## Evaluation

### Landscape Change

Past change	Potential future change
Coniferous shelterbelt screening	Settlement edge expansion
Restoration of mineral working sites	Industrial estate development
Urban fringe presence at Shortstown	Suburbanisation of smaller settlements in proximity to larger towns
Development of transport corridors	

### Key positive landscape features/strategic sensitivities of the landscape

- 5E.1.20 Remaining areas that create an open setting to the southern edge of Bedford.
- 5E.1.21 The striking flat, open character, which can be disrupted by inappropriate bunding, earth mounding, tree screening or creation of domed landforms which appear as incongruous features within the vale context.
- 5E.1.22 Historic field patterns with good survival of parliamentary enclosure landscape. Old enclosures on the lower slopes below the Greensand Ridge (6b) to the south preserve evidence of the medieval open field pattern.
- 5E.1.23 Clear views to, and setting for the prominent Greensand Ridge (6b) and the contrast of the flat vale with this ridge landform and associated texture/vegetation/pattern.
- 5E.1.24 Consistent village style at Cardington and Cople, including the Whitbread Estate village of Cardington characterised by red brick, clay tiles and green paint, set around a

village green with a striking village church and malting house. The Garden City influence at Shortstown.

- 5E.1.25 The Cardington Airship sheds on the edge of Shortstown, which are listed and a highly visible landmark feature, change the perception of landscape scale in this area.
- 5E.1.26 Green lanes form recreational routes including the John Bunyan trail from Elstow.
- 5E.1.27 Low density, dispersed settlement evoking a strong rural character.
- 5E.1.28 John Bunyan Trail connecting Bedford and the vale to the Greensand Ridge (6b).

#### Visual sensitivities

- 5E.1.29 The flat, open landscape with the potential for any large scale development to be highly visible.
- 5E.1.30 Clear views to Mid Greensand Ridge (6b), from across the area.

## Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the East Marston Clay Vale is to **renew/create** features of the landscape. The area should continue to provide an open, agricultural setting to Bedford and contrast to the Greensand Ridge. The aim should be to create a high quality urban edge to Bedford and enhance the entrances and gateway to the town. Renewal of features of this landscape including field boundaries, and small scale tree and woodland planting around villages, tributary streams, and farm buildings will strengthen the pattern of the landscape.

The Forest of Marston Vale Forest Plan should be referred to as the endorsed strategy for environmentally-led regeneration of this area.

#### Landscape management guidelines

- 5E.1.31 Renew field boundaries where these are gappy and apply a consistent management strategy to enhance the field and land cover pattern.
- 5E.1.32 Enhance the condition of roadside lay-bys and eroded grass verges flanking roads.
- 5E.1.33 Continue to create areas of woodland in the landscape to enhance the ecological and recreational resource.
- 5E.1.34 Small scale planting around villages, particularly areas of new development, and around individual farm buildings is a key opportunity and will help integrate these features into the landscape. Seek to limit the use of coniferous shelterbelt planting that does not respond well to the character or landform of the vale.
- 5E.1.35 Conserve areas of pasture which form links with the adjacent Clay Valleys (LCT 4).
- 5E.1.36 Conserve the historic field pattern – intact areas of Parliamentary Enclosure and old enclosure fields below the Greensand Ridge (6b) to the south.
- 5E.1.37 Conserve the tributaries of the River Great Ouse, such as the Elstow Brook and characteristic deep drainage channels that cross the vale.
- 5E.1.38 Restore areas of floodplain landscape (adjacent to the tributaries) with wet meadows, marshes and floodplain woodland - where appropriate (reversion of arable farmland may be an opportunity), to enhance ecological/Water Framework Directive status.
- 5E.1.39 Conserve the areas of existing woodland and apply an appropriate woodland management strategy to enhance their ecological value.
- 5E.1.40 Conserve the recreational links provided by the John Bunyan Trail which cuts north-south through the landscape linking the urban edge of Bedford with the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b).



## Development guidelines

- 5E.1.41 Conserve the landscape setting of Elstow Abbey and the Cardington Airship Hangars.
- 5E.1.42 Maintain an open setting in scale with the Cardington Sheds.
- 5E.1.43 Conserve the dispersed pattern of settlements - preventing linear expansion and the merger of villages e.g. Shortstown with Cardington and Wixams with Wilstead.
- 5E.1.44 **Conserve the unique, historic character of Cardington and the 'garden city' vernacular of Shortstown.**
- 5E.1.45 Prevent further urbanisation of the rural roads - and ensure that traffic management measures are sympathetic to the rural character.
- 5E.1.46 Improve settlement edges where these form an unsympathetic relationship with the open countryside - small scale woodland planting is a key opportunity but should not obscure views to the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b), rather it should form part of a connected network which complements and responds to topography and landscape structure of the ridge.
- 5E.1.47 Consider further opportunities for landscape enhancement along the rail and road corridors e.g. through planting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where appropriate, and to better integrate raw and exposed edges such as at Shortstown.
- 5E.1.48 Conserve locally distinctive influences such as the palette of bricks used in buildings.
- 5E.1.49 Development on the southern edge of Bedford should seek to create a high quality **urban edge and 'gateway' to the town.**
- 5E.1.50 Conserve the clear views and visual relationship with the Mid Greensand Ridge (6b). Avoid any large scale, taller development of land at the base of the ridge to retain the dramatic visual contrast between the flat vale and steep slopes.
- 5E.1.51 Conserve and enhance access and connections from the urban area into the vale e.g. the John Bunyan Trail. Avoid severance of existing routes. Consider opportunities to create further green infrastructure – the tributary valleys such as the Elstow Brook are a key opportunity. Refer to the Bedford GI Plan recommendations including: enhancing and integrating the Elstow Brook to link the wetlands in the brick pit area of the Marston Vale for flood alleviation, conserving the pastoral landscape, recreation and biodiversity, and for creating landscape scale GI and biodiversity connections into the adjacent Bedford River Valley Park initiative within the floor of the Ouse Valley.



# Local Plan 2030

Planning for the future

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY STUDY  
- GROUP 1 AND GROUP 2  
VILLAGES, BEDFORD &  
KEMPSTON URBAN EDGE  
SEPTEMBER 2018**



Your Borough: Planning for the future

## **A Introduction**

A.1 The Council is preparing a new local plan that will guide new development and land use in the period to 2030. About 640 sites have been submitted to the Council for consideration as potential development allocations following two 'call for sites' exercises (in 2014 and 2015), and the 'draft strategy' consultation in 2017. A site selection methodology has been drafted to help in choosing which sites should be included in the local plan. This paper explains how the Council intends to incorporate landscape considerations in the selection of development sites around the Group 1 and 2 villages and the urban edges of Bedford and Kempston.

## **B Landscape Character Assessment**

B.1 Landscape Character Assessment is a method of understanding what the landscape is like, how it came to be like that and how it may change in the future. Landscape Character Assessment describes and classifies the recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another. Character is what makes each part of the landscape distinct and gives each area its particular sense of place. The landscape character approach considers that all landscapes are valuable and seeks to protect their essential character. The purpose of Landscape Character Assessment is to help ensure that change does not undermine whatever is characteristic or valued about a particular place, and ensure that ways of improving the character of a place can be considered.

B.2 A Landscape Character Assessment of the borough was prepared in 2007 and updated in 2014 by Land Use Consultants Ltd<sup>1</sup>. The Landscape Character Assessment identifies six landscape types within the borough:

1. Clay Farmland
2. Wooded Wolds
3. Limestone Valleys
4. Clay Valleys
5. Clay Vales
6. Wooded Greensand Ridge.

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<sup>1</sup> Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, May 2014, Land Use Consultants Ltd


B.3 The landscape types are further sub-divided into component local landscape character areas, 13 in total (see Figure A below). These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type. Each character area has a distinct and recognisable local identity. For each local landscape character area a detailed description of the landscape character is given that identifies the key landscape features and visual sensitivities. In addition, guidelines for management and future development are produced as broad principles to manage and direct landscape change, for example in order to protect the highest quality and most sensitive landscapes from adverse change and to encourage positive change in weak or degraded landscapes.

## **C Landscape Sensitivity Assessment**












C.1 In order to take account of landscape considerations in the selection of development sites, further work has been undertaken based on the existing Landscape Character Assessment. This has resulted in a report for each village that highlights the key landscape and visual sensitivities. This information will be used as part of the site selection process to identify whether or not a potential site is consistent with the guidelines of the Landscape Character Assessment. This will help in choosing between sites and considering their effect on landscape sensitivities. It will also help in identifying mitigation measures that may be necessary to minimise the impact of development and enhance important landscape features.

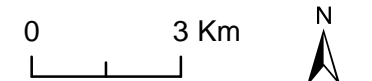
C.2 Reports and maps have been produced for the following groups of villages and urban edges. In some instances, the relevant section of the Bedford & Kempston Urban Edge (BKUE) has been incorporated into the Group 1 and 2 village reports and maps, and for these instances the titles of the reports and maps include annotation of the relevant BKUE; for example: Bromham & NW BKUE. 'Kempston' has been omitted from the title of urban edges, e.g. North East Bedford, where Kempston is not within the mapped area, hence references to NE BUE. (For cross reference purposes the right-hand column of the table below lists those mapped areas that overlap the featured map listed in the left-hand column, and this is further illustrated in **Figure B**):

**Figure A -  
Landscape  
Character Areas**

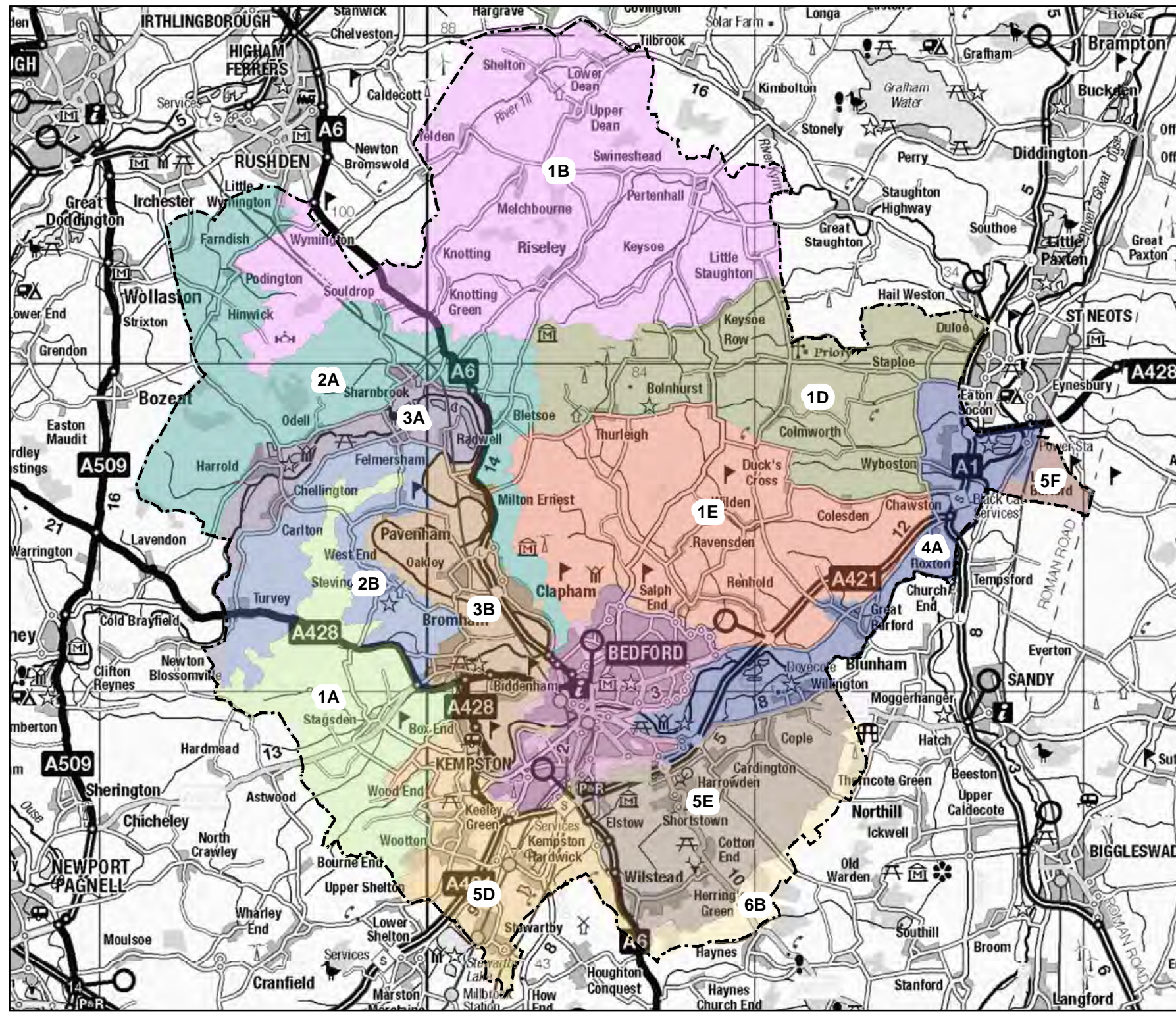
 Bedford Borough  
Boundary

**Landscape Character  
Area**

-  1A: Cranfield to Stagsden Clay Farmland
-  1B: Riseley Clay Farmland
-  1D: Thurleigh Clay Farmland
-  1E: Renhold Clay Farmland
-  2A: Hinwick Wooded Wolds
-  2B: Pavenham Wooded Wolds
-  3A: Harrold - Great Ouse Limestone Valleys
-  3B: Oakley - Great Ouse Limestone Valleys
-  4A: Great Ouse Clay Valley
-  5D: North Marston Clay Vale
-  5E: East Marston Clay Vale
-  5F: Biggin Wood Clay Vale
-  6B: Mid Greensand Ridge
-  Bedford/Kempston



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## 5 Shortstown and South East Bedford & Kempston Urban Edge

(see Figure 5 below, for map illustrating the following comments)

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
Type 5: Clay Vales	5E East Marston Clay Vale

The village of Shortstown, falls within the above landscape character area. The village lays on the slope leading to the flood plain of the River Great Ouse. Shortstown is well known for its listed airship sheds which are approximately 130 feet above sea-level and the Shorts Building (former RAF Administration Block) higher at nearly 140 feet (see photos below) which is widely visible across the skyline.

The South East Bedford and Kempston Urban Edge is largely defined by the A421 which follows the Urban Area Boundary. This section of the urban edge falls within the flat and expansive 5E East Marston Clay Vale landscape area. The village of Shortstown lies just due south of the urban edge.

### **Clay Vales: 5E East Marston Clay Vale**

#### *1. Summary of landscape character: Key characteristics*

- A large-scale, flat, open vale landscape underlain by Oxford Clay. Included as part of the Forest of Marston Vale.
- Tributaries of the River Great Ouse, including the Elstow Brook, cross the landscape in deep drainage channels.
- Expansive views across the vale to the Wooded 6B Mid Greensand Ridge that forms a prominent backdrop to the Vale and which provides some sense of containment.
- Woodland is sparse across the character area, the most significant being relatively recent planting at Cotton End.
- Coniferous shelterbelt plantings act as unsympathetic visual buffers to large industrial features e.g. the Cardington airship sheds at Shortstown and on the edges of settlement. The Cardington airship sheds are a prominent landmark heritage feature and widely visible across the vale.
- The A6, A600, A603, A421 and various secondary roads cut through the landscape, having a strong visual and audible presence.
- The urban edge of Bedford on the northern boundary brings urban fringe characteristics to the landscape.

- Post-war and more recent development has occurred within and on the edge of the settlement and road corridors, resulting in a range of building styles and materials.

## *2. Key positive landscape features/strategic sensitivities of the landscape surrounding the village and urban edge*

- Remaining areas that create an open setting to the southern edge of Bedford.
- Historic field patterns with good survival of parliamentary enclosure landscape. Old enclosures on the lower slopes below the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge to the south preserve evidence of the medieval open field pattern.
- Clear views to and setting for the prominent 6B Mid Greensand Ridge and the contrast of the flat vale with this ridge landform and associated texture/vegetation/pattern.
- The Garden City influence at Shortstown.
- The Cardington Airship sheds on the edge of Shortstown, which are listed and a highly visible landmark feature, change the perception of landscape scale in this area.
- John Bunyan Trail connecting Bedford and the vale to the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge.

## *3. Visual sensitivities*

The Grade II\* listed Cardington airship sheds on the edge of Shortstown are highly visible landmark features as is the Shorts Building (former RAF Administration Block) with its rich history dating back from the 1930s. Also evident is the flat, open landscape with the potential for any large scale development to be highly visible. Clear views to 6B Mid Greensand Ridge, from across the area.



Cardington airship sheds



Shorts Building in Shortstown.

#### *4. Landscape management guidelines*

- Renew field boundaries where these are gappy and apply a consistent management strategy to enhance the field and land cover pattern.
- Continue to create areas of woodland in the landscape to enhance the ecological and recreational resource.
- Small scale planting around villages, particularly areas of new development, and around individual farm buildings is a key opportunity and will help integrate these features into the landscape.
- Conserve the historic field pattern - intact areas of parliamentary enclosure and old enclosure fields below the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge to the south.
- Conserve the areas of existing woodland and apply an appropriate woodland management strategy to enhance their ecological value.
- Conserve the recreational links provided by the John Bunyan Trail which cuts north-south through the landscape linking the urban edge of Bedford with the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge.



## 5. *Development guidelines*

- Conserve the landscape setting of the Cardington airship sheds, maintaining an open setting.
- Conserve the dispersed pattern of villages - preventing linear expansion and the merger of villages.
- Conserve the unique, historic character of the 'garden city' vernacular of Shortstown.
- Improve settlement edges where these form an unsympathetic relationship with the open countryside - small scale woodland planting is a key opportunity but should not obscure views to the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge, rather it should form part of a connected network which complements and responds to topography and landscape structure of the ridge.
- Consider further opportunities for landscape enhancement along the rail and road corridors e.g. through planting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees where appropriate, and to better integrate raw and exposed edges.
- Conserve locally distinctive influences such as the palette of bricks used in buildings.
- Development on the southern edge of Bedford should seek to create a high quality urban edge and 'gateway' to the town.
- Conserve the clear views and visual relationship with the 6B Mid Greensand Ridge. Avoid any large scale, taller development of land at the base of the ridge to retain the dramatic visual contrast between the flat vale and steep slopes.

**Figure 5-  
Shortstown & SE  
BKUE Landscape  
Sensitivity Study**

-  Bedford Borough Boundary
-  Urban Area Boundary
-  Conservation area
-  Scheduled monument
-  Prominent road
-  Footpath & bridleway
-  Lake
-  Contour line
-  Rising slope direction
-  Church
-  Ancient woodland
-  Registered parks and gardens

**Landscape Character Area**

-  4A: Great Ouse Clay Valley
-  5D: North Marston Clay Vale
-  5E: East Marston Clay Vale
-  6B: Mid Greensand Ridge

**Key Visual Features** 

-  Airship Sheds (1) and Shorts Building (2)

0 0.65 Km 

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