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**TO EACH MEMBER OF THE  
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

03 May 2012

Dear Councillor

**SPECIAL SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
Wednesday 16 May 2012**

Further to the Agenda and papers for the above meeting, previously circulated, please find attached the following appendix, which was listed to follow:-

8. Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

To consider the draft Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire. The Committee is asked to consider the draft strategy and comment as appropriate prior to a formal public consultation being undertaken.

**Appendix A – Draft Development Strategy**

(Further appendices will follow)

Should you have any queries regarding the above please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team on Tel: 0300 300 4634

Yours sincerely

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A good planning system is essential for the economy, environment and society. The development plans that local authorities draw up, in consultation with local people, set a vision for what an area should look like in the future and help decide who can build what, where and how, and make sure that buildings and structures get built in the right place and to the right standards.
- 1.2 Following the formation of Central Bedfordshire Council as a Unitary Authority in April 2009, two separate Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) were progressed; one covering the north of Central Bedfordshire (the area formerly administered by Mid Bedfordshire District Council) and one covering southern Central Bedfordshire (the area formerly administered by South Bedfordshire District Council). The south LDF was being produced jointly with Luton Borough Council.
- 1.3 In the north of Central Bedfordshire there is currently an adopted Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document and a Site Allocations Document. However, in southern Central Bedfordshire the Core Strategy being prepared jointly with Luton Borough Council has been withdrawn from the examination process.

### National and Regional Policy

- 1.4 New legislation has recently been put in place which changes the way Local Authorities produce the plan for their area. The Localism Act, which came into effect on the 15th November 2011 contains provisions to make the planning system clearer, more democratic, and more effective by planning at the local level rather than a higher, more centralised level.
- 1.5 As a result of the Localism Act, the overarching direction of national policy which was previously set out within a series of documents known as Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes, has been replaced by the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which came into effect in March 2012.
- 1.6 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so. It provides a framework to be used by local authorities and people to produce their own local and neighbourhood plans which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.
- 1.7 Although the level of growth to be planned for within a specific area is technically still set out within Regional Strategies, the Localism Act has paved the way for their eventual abolition. For Central Bedfordshire, these growth targets are set out in the Regional Strategy for the East of England. While preparing this Development Strategy the Council has

had regard to the Regional Strategy but has also had regard to other factors. By the time of Submission of the Development Strategy (May 2013) the Regional Strategy will have been abolished and it is therefore appropriate to plan on that basis and produce growth targets based upon local evidence and identified local needs.

- 1.8 The publication of the Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework as well as the withdrawal of the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy from the Examination process, has therefore enabled the Council to plan for the area as a whole in a comprehensive and sustainable manner for the first time since becoming a Unitary Authority.

### **Sustainability Appraisal**

- 1.9 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, requires the assessment of environmental impacts of strategic actions contained in a wide range of plans and programmes, including planning policy documents. The objective of the SEA Directive is to provide high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans, with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.10 SEA and SA are very closely linked. SA aims to integrate sustainability issues into decision making by appraising the plan or strategy using environmental, social and economic objectives. SEA also aims to facilitate sustainable development, but its emphasis is on integrating environmental considerations into decision making through a thorough analysis of environmental issues.
- 1.11 Although the requirement to carry out both an SA and SEA is mandatory, it is possible to satisfy the requirements of both pieces of legislation through a single appraisal process. This SA therefore incorporates the requirements of both the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and the SEA Regulations.
- 1.12 A Sustainability Appraisal has been undertaken which should be considered together with the draft Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy.

### **Appropriate Assessment : the Habitats Directive**

- 1.13 When preparing planning policy documents, the Council needs to assess whether an “Appropriate Assessment” is required under European Directive 92/43/EEC – the Habitats Directive. The Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of wildlife habitats and species of interest to a favourable condition.
- 1.14 There are no Natura 2000 or Ramsar sites in Central Bedfordshire. There are five European sites outside of the district boundary but within

the potential influence of the plan. The Sustainability Appraisal concludes that the Development Strategy would have no adverse effects on these sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans.

### **Why is this document important to me?**

- 1.15 The draft Development Strategy is the first opportunity for Central Bedfordshire Council to spell out the local targets for housing and jobs growth that have been identified. It is also an opportunity for you to comment upon the targets and how the Council envisages they will be achieved alongside other aspects of growth including the regeneration of our town centres, improvements to our transport networks and the enhancement of our historic and natural environments.
- 1.16 The current consultation is being held between 11 June and 23 July 2012. Copies of the draft Strategy can be viewed at the local libraries as well as on the Council's website.  
[www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategicplanning](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategicplanning)
- 1.17 Comments can be made on the draft Strategy by completing the response form which is also available at the local libraries or can be downloaded from the Council's website. Hard copies of the response form can be made available upon request by contacting the Strategic Planning Team on 0300 300 4353.

### **What happens next?**

- 1.18 At the end of the consultation period, the Council will collate and consider all the responses that have been received in relation to the draft Development Strategy. Amendments will then be made to the Strategy.
- 1.19 The Development Strategy will then be published in December 2012 and following any further minor amendments, will be submitted for Examination in May 2013. It is expected that following the Examination process and the consideration of the draft Inspector's Report, the Development Strategy will be adopted in February 2014.

## 2.0 PROFILE, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- 2.1 Central Bedfordshire is a varied area containing a mixture of rural countryside, attractive villages, and small to medium sized towns. It is well connected, being traversed by the M1, A1, A5 and A6 as well as the East Coast Mainline, West Coast Mainline and the Midland Mainline. London Luton Airport is also in close proximity.
- 2.2 Much of the rural area is of high landscape and biodiversity value with extensive tracts of high-grade agricultural land. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers a substantial part of the area while some land outside of the main towns and villages is designated as Green Belt.
- 2.3 Covering 716 square kilometres, Central Bedfordshire currently has a population of approximately 255,200<sup>1</sup> and is the 18th largest unitary authority in England. Central Bedfordshire is one of the least densely populated areas and is classified as predominantly rural with just over half the population living in the rural area. Approximately 65% of the population are within the working age group, being between 16 and 65 years of age.

<<<Insert map here>>>

- 2.4 Central Bedfordshire has a number of towns of varying size. The two largest towns, Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable are located in the south of Central Bedfordshire whilst the north of Central Bedfordshire comprises a series of small towns including Biggleswade, Sandy and Flitwick.
- 2.5 Deprivation is a broad measure of poverty and is identified through income-based measures as well as more social issues such as crime, education, employment and health. Whilst overall levels of deprivation within Central Bedfordshire are low, there are three areas that are within the 10-20% most deprived area in England and a further 6 within the 20-30% most deprived areas. The majority of these wards are within the southern area of Central Bedfordshire.
- 2.6 Unemployment is lower in Central Bedfordshire than in England, with 4,220 people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in December 2011, a rate of 2.5% compared to the England rate of 3.8%. There is however a higher rate of unemployment in the southern area of Central Bedfordshire.
- 2.7 Just over half of Central Bedfordshire residents commute outside the area to work, with Hertfordshire and Luton being the most common destinations. Other work destinations of Central Bedfordshire residents include London, Milton Keynes and Bedford.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Bedfordshire Key Facts and Figures. January 2012



- 2.8 Educational attainment within Central Bedfordshire is relatively good, with almost 60% of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE's (including Maths and English) at grades A\* to C in 2011. This is fractionally higher than the England average which is 59%.
- 2.9 Central Bedfordshire residents are generally healthy and the life expectancy for both men and women is longer than it is in England as a whole. During 2010-2011, Child obesity levels were lower in Central Bedfordshire than the England average although the number of overweight children was similar to the England average at around 14%.

### **Issues and Challenges**

- 2.10 The Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy (2010-2031) was written by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP): Central Bedfordshire Together. The SCS sets out what sort of place Central Bedfordshire could be, which is described in the vision statement as "Globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all".
- 2.11 The LSP vision is one of greater economic prosperity based on sustainable growth and reflects the views of the local people, communities and stakeholders and responds to their aspirations.
- 2.12 The above profile, Sustainability Appraisal Scoping exercise and the Sustainable Community Strategy has identified a number of issues within Central Bedfordshire that may be addressed through the Development Strategy.
- 2.13 It is possible to consider the issues and the subsequent challenges that Central Bedfordshire is facing in three categories – economic, social and environmental. It is important to note however, that just because an issue or challenge has been recognised, it is not necessarily done so in a negative context, in other words, some aspects have been identified for their positive influence. The challenge in these instances may be to maintain current attainment levels and improve on them where possible. It is also important to remember that the issues and challenges that have been identified are likely to change as new development is delivered, and it is essential that the Development Strategy whilst being robust, is flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances.

#### Economic

- 2.14 Given the issues identified within the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, there are a number of economic challenges facing Central Bedfordshire. The key challenges are considered to include:

- Providing sufficient land and premises that is of a high standard and quality to retain existing businesses and help them grow, as well as to attract new businesses and inward investment to the area.
- Providing the right circumstances and support to current and future businesses in order to achieve a increase in the number and variety of jobs available within Central Bedfordshire.
- Reducing the disparity in deprivation and unemployment rates between southern Central Bedfordshire and the more affluent north.
- Ensuring the level of out-commuting by residents to other areas for employment is reduced.
- Ensuring the right infrastructure including roads and broadband is in place to ensure that connectivity in every sense within Central Bedfordshire is at an optimum level to support businesses and residents.
- Ensuring the regeneration of our town centres in order to improve their attractiveness and usability and to offer quality retailing experiences.
- Raising educational and qualification attainment to improve individual employment prospects and the attractiveness of Central Bedfordshire to future employers.

### Social

2.15 Given the issues identified within the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, there are a number of social challenges facing Central Bedfordshire. The key challenges are considered to include:

- Providing sufficient housing of the right size, type and tenure to meet the needs of all residents and communities within Central Bedfordshire.
- Ensuring the needs of the increasing elderly population as well as those with special needs are met in the right locations and in line with arising needs.
- Integrating new development with existing communities.
- Ensuring services within the rural area are of a high quality and meet the needs of the local communities.
- Improving connectivity between the more rural and urban settlements to ensure access to services and facilities for all.
- Ensuring the level of growth envisaged for the area does not detrimentally impact upon the quality of life, health and well-being of residents.

### Environmental

2.16 Given the issues identified within the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, there are a number of environmental challenges facing Central Bedfordshire. The key challenges are considered to include:

- Ensuring the Biodiversity Action Plan targets are achieved in relation to more local habitats and protected species.
- Halting the overall decline in biodiversity by helping establish coherent and resilient ecological networks and a net gain in biodiversity in accordance with the NPPF.
- Protecting our valuable townscapes and conservation areas.
- Improving access to the local and wider countryside.
- Balancing the role and function of the Green Belt with the need to deliver significant levels of growth.
- Reducing the carbon footprint of Central Bedfordshire residents and businesses.
- Improving water quality, efficiency and air quality levels across Central Bedfordshire

2.17 Having established the issues and key challenges within Central Bedfordshire, the Council has identified an overarching vision and a series of objectives for the Development Strategy. These are set out in the following section.

### 3.0 VISION AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy Vision seeks to ensure the delivery of growth in a sustainable and complementary manner, and to ensure that the various elements of the Strategy are working coherently to achieve the same goal through the delivery of significant growth over a 20 year period.
- 3.2 The Development Strategy Vision reflects the Council's 5 Priorities and is in accordance with the Council's Core Values.
- 3.3 The Vision and Objectives have been identified having considered the above priorities and values, the key issues and challenges, the vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy and, importantly, the comments that were received as part of the initial stakeholder workshops and consultation in March 2012. The Vision for the Development Strategy is shown below in diagrammatic form.

#### The Vision for Central Bedfordshire



### **Development Strategy Objectives**

- 3.4 To help achieve the Vision and to meet the challenges that have been acknowledged, a number of Strategic Objectives have been identified. These have been formulated based upon the key issues and challenges, the Sustainability Appraisal, consultation feedback and through collaboration with various departments across the Council whose activities impact upon and contribute to the delivery of the Development Strategy.
- 3.5 The table set out below details the 8 Strategic Objectives of the Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and identifies the relevant policies within the Strategy that will contribute to achieving the Objectives and the overarching Vision.

	<b>Table 3.1: Strategic Objective</b>	<b>Relevant Policies</b>
1.	28,750 new homes will be delivered between 2011 and 2031 to meet the housing needs of all our residents, ensuring the efficient use of land to provide safe, sustainable communities and development.	
2.	A mix of homes will be provided, with a particular emphasis on larger family homes. An average of 35% of the homes delivered on new development sites will be affordable and will be provided across a range of tenures to facilitate social inclusion.	
3.	27,000 new jobs will be delivered across a variety of sectors so as to ensure the economic potential of the area is achieved and to reduce the level of out-commuting. An appropriate mix of sites will be provided to ensure the right balance between new homes and jobs, and to promote Central Bedfordshire as a location for economic growth and success.	
4.	Development will promote our unique identity and will respect and enhance our green spaces as well as our natural and cultural heritage. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Green Belt within Central Bedfordshire will be respected and protected.	
5.	Development will maximise the potential of our natural environment by mitigating and adapting to climate change, enhancing a sense of place and delivering social and economic benefits for all our communities and businesses.	
6.	The town centres will be regenerated, promoted and enhanced, building upon their own unique characteristics and attributes to meet their economic, retailing and social potential. High quality, well designed development which is sensitive to our existing heritage, buildings, landscapes and townscapes will contribute to the quality of our town centres.	
7.	The distinctive and individual characteristics of Central Bedfordshire will be reflected across all new development at the same time as incorporating new, and innovative designs. High quality, well designed development will take account of the need to adapt to climate change as well as the need to be energy efficient by incorporating standards such as the Code for Sustainable Homes.	
8.	Central Bedfordshire will enable the delivery of appropriate infrastructure to facilitate and complement the delivery of housing and economic growth required by our residents and businesses to meet their needs, such as new educational establishments, healthcare services, social venues, roads, rail, public transport, utilities and broadband facilities. This will be secured through financial contributions from a variety of sources.	

## Monitoring

The Council will assess the performance of individual policies within the Development Strategy through the monitoring of indicators identified within the monitoring framework, [Appendix x](#). The monitoring framework is essential to check on the effectiveness of policy implementation and identify any need for policy adjustment. The monitoring framework along with more detailed monitoring will be monitored and reported through the Councils Annual Monitoring Report.

## 4.0 PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework sees a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” as the golden thread running through planning activities. Plans should be based on that presumption and include policies that explain how the presumption will be applied locally. Policy 1 below sets out what the presumption means in a Central Bedfordshire context and how it will be applied.

### Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Development Strategy (and, where relevant, with policies in neighbourhood plans) will be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

- 1) Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or
- 2) Specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted

## 5.0 A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

### Background

- 5.1 With the Localism Act, responsibility for determining the amount of growth to be planned for has passed from the regional to the local level. The NPPF requires local authorities to meet objectively assessed needs for their area. The Localism Act and NPPF also require consideration of issues beyond a local authority's boundary through the Duty to Cooperate. In producing this Development Strategy, Central Bedfordshire Council has worked actively and constructively with a range of Councils and organisations to seek a joined-up approach. This process of cooperation will be ongoing through to adoption of the Strategy and beyond into implementation of development proposals.

### Housing provision

- 5.2 Housing delivery in Central Bedfordshire as a whole has been relatively high in recent years, despite the impact of the recession. Looking ahead to 2031, the Council will plan for the delivery of **28,750 new homes**. This figure has been calculated based on a continuation of recent trends in terms of births, deaths and migration patterns. Migration into Central Bedfordshire plays a strong role in the functioning of the local housing market and while the Council is not seeking to encourage migration into the area, it recognises that not planning for it could have serious implications for housing affordability locally. Chapter 10 has more details.

### Jobs provision

- 5.3 This Development Strategy plans for an increase of **27,000 new jobs** between 2011 and 2031. This increase is higher than that suggested by recent economic modelling and is also slightly higher than recent job increases. However, given the Council's economic aspirations and the need to secure a sustainable balance of new homes and jobs, the higher level figure is considered appropriate. Around 45% (12,000) of these jobs are predicted to be in the B use classes and appropriate sites are identified for the increase in this Strategy. Chapter 6 has more details.

### Distribution of development

- 5.4 Previous planning policy work in Central Bedfordshire has left a legacy of suitable allocated sites, many of which already have planning permission. These are displayed on the housing trajectory and the plans at figure XXXX. The conclusion from this information is that there is considerably more provision in the north of Central Bedfordshire than the south, primarily due to the more advanced nature of previous planning policy work. The focus for this Development Strategy has



therefore been to achieve a sustainable approach to development across Central Bedfordshire.

- 5.5 Information included within the Housing Technical Paper also points to the degree of migration experienced in the south of the area, particularly from Luton. Attempting to provide development near to where the need is arising has been an important factor in determining the overall distribution of development.
- 5.6 The Green Belt continues to play an important role in shaping the pattern of development in the south of Central Bedfordshire. Nevertheless, when previously looked at through the regional and sub-regional planning processes, the conclusion reached was that it was appropriate to review the Green Belt boundaries in order to accommodate development. With the demise of regional and sub-regional planning it is appropriate to reconsider this position in the light of current circumstances.
- 5.7 Central Bedfordshire Council considers the Green Belt to be a vital part of the planning policy approach across the area. It is highly valued by local residents, continuing to keep settlements apart and preventing unplanned urban sprawl. Moreover, the principle of Green Belt protection is important on a much larger, national scale. The Government recognise the importance of the Green Belt in the NPPF, stipulating that Green Belt boundaries can only be changed in exceptional circumstances. The Council agrees with this and have sought to incorporate this approach in our policies throughout this document.
- 5.8 However, the Council is also mindful of the need to provide for the housing, employment and other needs of the area and of the implications if we do not make this provision. It has considered and appraised alternative approaches to accommodating development that do not impinge on the Green Belt but these have significant sustainability issues, as set out in XXXXX technical paper. Overall, the Council is satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances that require the Green Belt to be amended to provide for the development needs of the south of the area, and that there is sufficient evidence to support rolling back the Green Belt boundary in order to support employment provision at Flitwick.
- 5.9 Having established exceptional circumstances, it is then necessary to consider which sites are the most appropriate to accommodate growth. The Council has considered a number of possible alternative sites and subjected them to a rigorous assessment process, linked to the Sustainability Appraisal work. This is documented in XXXXX technical paper. The conclusion is that there are a number of strategic scale sites that are considered appropriate to include as allocations in this Development Strategy. These are listed in the policy below and are covered specifically in site-specific policies.

### Countryside and Rural settlements

- 5.10 The Council recognises the value that people place on the countryside and its contribution to the high quality environment of the area. The Council will protect the open countryside for its own intrinsic value and for the wider benefits it provides for agriculture and biodiversity. It will also safeguard landscapes against inappropriate development and work to ensure new development works with the landscape. Historically, the villages in Central Bedfordshire have played a small but important role in meeting development needs. The Green Belt and general countryside policies in this Strategy generally aim to prevent development outside of settlement boundaries but flexibility is provided for small-scale development brought forward through Neighbourhood Plans where it does not conflict with other policies to support rural communities.

### Environmental Enhancement

- 5.11 Protecting and enhancing the environment and making the best and most efficient use of the areas resources is key to sustainable development. The Council's strategy for environmental enhancement is to provide a "Green Framework for Growth" This framework includes:
- Identifying the most sustainable locations using sustainability criteria to identify where development minimises negative effects on the environment, and maximises the opportunity to deliver benefits.
  - adopting an "ecosystems services" approach to ensure an integrated approach is taken to identifying and maximising the services and benefits provided by the environment .
  - using new and innovative pieces of research (Spatial Mapping of Regulating Ecosystem Services (April 2012), to map the area's environmental resources and demonstrate how these can be used to provide a wider range of benefits; an example is reducing climate change risk through carbon storage through land use change which can also benefit wildlife, recreation, fuel and food production.
  - mapping of the area's environmental assets so that planning applications can be properly assessed. This will also help identify for example, where applications can provide biodiversity enhancements in line with Biodiversity Opportunities and should therefore contribute to restoring and enhancing the network of habitats and species.
  - Promoting a comprehensive approach to countryside management, particularly where this enhances or integrates growth.
  - giving support to the formation of a Local Nature Partnership should a proposal be brought forward.
  - identifying where the areas most at risk from climate change and environmental risks are (Local Climate Change Impact Profile (April 2012); Spatial Mapping of Regulating Ecosystem Services (April 2012)

ensuring that development takes account of any mitigation measures required to minimise these environmental risks, and ensuring that all development has a neutral impact or helps lessen the effects of climate change through greener design.

- promoting renewable energy that is appropriate for the area and is located to provide maximum benefit to residents whilst minimising environmental impact.
- growing a green economy and recognising that economic growth and protecting and enhancing the natural environment can be mutually compatible and that natural areas can provide benefits many times more valuable than the cost of their protection.

### **Policy 2: Growth Strategy**

The Development Strategy plans for the delivery of a total of 28,750 new homes and 27,000 new jobs between 2011 and 2031. The Council will support the delivery of the existing planned sites that make up the majority of provision.

New development will be planned for at the following locations

- North of Houghton Regis (see policy X)
- North of Luton (see policy X)
- East of Leighton Linlade (see policy X)
- Sundon Rail Freight Interchange (see policy X)
- Land south of Wixams (see policy X)
- Land at Maulden Road, Flitwick (see policy X)

In addition to these strategic sites, small-scale development will also be brought forward through Neighbourhood Plans (see policy X).

## **Green Belt**

- 5.11 Green Belt is a valuable tool in maintaining the separate identity of settlements and checking unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. One of the original and main reasons for creating the South Bedfordshire Green Belt was to prevent the coalescence of Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill and Flitwick as well as the villages that lie within it. The Southern Bedfordshire Green Belt was last finalised in 2005 in the former South Bedfordshire and 2009 in the former Mid Bedfordshire. It extends across much of the south of the area. In order to accommodate the growth required up to 2031 in a sustainable and controlled manner, the boundaries will be redrawn around the outer edges of the proposed strategic allocations. The Green Belt will continue to prevent the towns from coalescing and retain its key characteristics of openness and permanence and is illustrated on the Proposals Map.

**Policy 3: Green Belt**

The Green Belt is shown on the Proposals Map and generally covers the southern and western parts of Central Bedfordshire, outside the main settlements. The boundary of the Green Belt excludes the urban extensions identified elsewhere in this Strategy and shown at Appendix XXXX. Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development.

- 5.12 Although not a Green Belt proposal, the Council intend to consider the potential for the designation of Local Green Space around Aspley Guise in order to prevent coalescence with any growth of Milton Keynes in the longer term.

**Settlement Hierarchy**

- 5.13 To help inform where new development should take place, the Council believes it is helpful to set out a hierarchy of settlements. The hierarchy takes account of local sustainability credentials such as access to a variety of services and facilities (including schools, shops and public transport links) and is based on existing provision.
- 5.14 The hierarchy, which contains four tiers, helps to provide a framework for considering the levels of new development to be directed through neighbourhood plans or the site allocations process. It will also help to set the context for decisions on individual planning applications.
- 5.15 A number of settlements within the hierarchy lie within the Metropolitan Green Belt, particularly in the south of the district. Settlements that are categorised within the hierarchy as being Major and Minor Service Centres or Large Villages have all been inset from the Green Belt where appropriate. Those that are categorised as being Small Villages are washed over by the Green Belt but have infill boundaries wherein some very limited development maybe acceptable.
- 5.16 Settlements not identified within the hierarchy are, due to their small size and rural character, considered to be part of the countryside.

**Policy 4: Settlement Hierarchy**

**Major Service Centres**

Major service centres provide a focus for employment, shopping and community facilities for the local community and surrounding rural communities.

Dunstable  
Leighton Linlade

Houghton Regis  
Biggleswade  
Sandy  
Flitwick  
Amphill  
Wixams

**Minor Service Centres**

Minor service centres are large villages or small towns with a good level of services, possibly including a school, doctor's surgery, a basic retail offer and frequent public transport links.

Potton  
Shefford  
Cranfield  
Stotfold  
Arlesey  
Marston Moretaine  
Toddington  
Barton-Le-Clay  
Caddington  
Woburn

**Large Villages**

Henlow  
Harlington  
Clifton  
Langford  
Maulden  
Clophill  
Blunham  
Shillington (including Ends)  
Lower Stondon  
Haynes (main village)  
Upper Caldecote  
Silsoe  
Houghton Conquest  
Westoning  
Meppershall  
Heath and Reach  
Slip End  
Hockliffe  
Eaton Bray

**Small Villages**

Aspley Guise  
Southill

Moggerhanger
Everton
Dunton
Campton
Lidlington
Fairfield
Pulloxhill
Millbrook
Wrestlingworth
Old Warden
Northill
Upper Gravenhurst
Tempsford
Greenfield
Sutton
Upper Shelton
Ickwell
Flitton
Brogborough
Salford
Maulden (Clophill Rd)
Broom
Kensworth
Stanbridge
Tilsworth
Studham
Chalton
Streatley
Totternhoe
Upper Sundon
Eversholt
Ridgmont
Husborne Crawley

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

- 5.17 Neighbourhood Planning is a new way of allowing neighbourhoods to have a say in land use planning of their own areas. In the case of Central Bedfordshire, the organisations who are able to carry out neighbourhood planning are the Town and Parish Councils. A 'neighbourhood' may be part of an existing parish or town or may comprise the whole of the area within the boundary. In cases where two or more parishes have the same issues or aspirations, they may work together.
- 5.18 Neighbourhood planning will be generally supported by the Council, provided the aspirations of the community involved comply with the strategic policies of the Development Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework. Advice and help will be given by the

Council to those communities who choose to produce and implement a Neighbourhood Plan.

5.19 Neighbourhood Planning must arise from the community, with individuals and groups working in partnership together, and with local businesses and developers and landowners in the area, to deliver sustainable development to meet the communities needs for the future. There are two 'tools' for neighbourhood planning that may be produced;

- neighbourhood plans which may allocate land for development and/or include policies against which planning applications are judged,
- and neighbourhood development orders which can grant planning permission for a specific type of development.

5.20 The community is free to decide the content of the plan, although it needs to be land use based and generally deal with proposals that require planning permission. They can include a wide range of policies such as design policies and allocate land for development such as open space, allotments, housing, commercial buildings and community facilities. A Neighbourhood Plan could deal with many issues or just one, depending on the needs of the individual community. Other issues that are more practically based such as hedgecutting, street lighting etc would not be included, but can be included within a Town or Parish Plan.

5.21 Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders are subject to a formal process. The plan area needs to be agreed by the Council at the beginning of the process and then the Town or Parish Council will need to undertake a series of consultation and engagement activities to formulate the draft plan. The plan is then submitted to the Council who will invite comments and then arrange for an independent examiner to check that it is in conformity with the strategic planning policies of the Council, the National Planning Policy Framework and European directives. If the plan is successful at examination it then must be successful through a community referendum (a simple majority is required). The Council will then adopt it as part of the formal development plan. Subsequent planning applications which comply with the provisions set out in the Neighbourhood Plan will therefore be approved.

### **Settlement Boundaries and Green Belt**

5.22 New development may be identified by the community as needed, but due to constraints or lack of space within the existing settlement, can only be located outside the existing settlement boundary, whether a settlement envelope, Green Belt infill boundary or Green Belt boundary. A robust assessment of all alternative sites available will be required to show that no land within the boundary is available or

suitable in the first instance. The sites chosen must be located sustainably, minimising the need for travel by car to facilities within the settlement. The scale of development must be in keeping with the character and scale of the settlement and account must be taken of visual amenity, the impact on existing residents and impact on natural and built heritage and environment. The status of allocations made through the neighbourhood planning process is in effect, the same as if made by the Council through a site allocations development plan document because Neighbourhood Plans become part of the formal development plan for Central Bedfordshire, upon adoption. The boundaries may be adjusted if appropriate to reflect completed development at the next review of the Development Strategy.

**Policy 5: Neighbourhood Planning**

Neighbourhood Plans or Neighbourhood Development Orders may allocate and develop land for community based development that is:

- generally in keeping with the scale of the existing settlement
- beyond the Settlement Envelope, Green Belt infill Boundary or Green Belt boundary where there is no suitable alternative within the existing settlement
- in conformity with the Council's design policies



## 6.0 EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY

- 6.1 Central Bedfordshire has a relatively strong economy in comparison to the national economy and although it has been impacted upon by the recent economic downturn, Central Bedfordshire has remained reasonably resilient to economic changes
- 6.2 Central Bedfordshire has a relatively robust workforce. As of June 2011 there were 125,100 people in employment which is 76.2% of the working age population (aged 16 to 64). This is higher than England (70.3%), the South East Midlands (74.8%) and the East of England (73.5%). The number of people in employment in June 2011 further rises by 6,600 when taking into account those people who remain in work beyond the age of 65. Unemployment in Central Bedfordshire has consistently been lower than comparator areas, and in June 2011 stood at 6.0% compared to 7.8% in England and 6.8% in the East of England.
- 6.3 The Local Economic Assessment (LEA)<sup>2</sup> identifies that in 2011 there were 11,295 active enterprises within Central Bedfordshire and that in 2010 the five year survival rate for new businesses was 51.4% which was the highest rate in the East of England and above the regional (46.1%) and national averages (44.1%). The LEA also identifies that in the twelve months to February 2012, 0.8% of businesses became insolvent in Central Bedfordshire, compared to 1.1% nationally, which further highlights the strong survival rates of local businesses.
- 6.4 Central Bedfordshire has a diverse economy across a range of employment sectors and is home to world leading companies such as B/E Aerospace, Lockheed Martin, Nissan Technical Centre Europe, Amazon, Whitbread, Superdrug and The Jordan and Ryvita Company. The largest employer in the area is Central Bedfordshire Council, when taking into account all education/school based employment. Other large employers in the area include Cranfield University, Tesco, ASDA, Sainsbury's Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust, the Ministry of Defence, Woburn Enterprises and the RSPB. There are also a number of smaller businesses within Central Bedfordshire which also make a significant contribution to the local economy.
- 6.5 Central Bedfordshire has a number of employment specialisms which reflect Central Bedfordshire's strengths in the engineering/manufacturing sectors as well as indicating the importance of the rural economy, particularly through leisure, tourism and veterinary based activities. There is however an under-representation in certain sectors, notably business services, finance and insurance.

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<sup>2</sup> The Central Bedfordshire Local Economic Assessment. May 2012

- 6.6 The Economic Development Plan (EDP)<sup>3</sup> strives to ensure that the economic potential of the area is met, and the Development Strategy will work in partnership with the EDP to achieve this.
- 6.7 In order for Central Bedfordshire to achieve its economic potential, the Council is taking a positive and pro-active approach to creating the right conditions to enable our existing businesses to flourish and to attract new inward investment that supports and enhances the existing employment offer within Central Bedfordshire. The overall aim being to ensure that Central Bedfordshire is recognised as a place truly open for business and to create more opportunities for job creation and local employment within Central Bedfordshire.
- 6.8 Central Bedfordshire Economic Study (Stage 1, May 2012) identifies that 20,200 jobs are likely to come forward within the area up to 2031. As this is based upon economic forecasting (which estimates future trends based upon past information) , there are a number of local “real-world” factors that also need to be considered alongside this, including our historic annual delivery of 1,200 jobs and our aspiration to realise fully the area’s economic potential.
- 6.9 The quality of jobs provided within Central Bedfordshire is of paramount importance. In order to ensure the quality and choice of employment offer across Central Bedfordshire, and to increase economic activity, it is important that a wide variety of job opportunities across all sectors are attracted and catered for.
- 6.10 During recent years, Central Bedfordshire has worked closely with our neighbours to ensure that the growth within Central Bedfordshire is complementary with growth in neighbouring authorities. Due to historical working arrangements and the ‘Duty to Co-operate’ set out within the NPPF, Central Bedfordshire needs to consider the growth requirements of our neighbours and any limitations there may be to delivering that growth. As a result, Central Bedfordshire will need to make provision in order to accommodate some of Luton’s jobs growth which cannot be accommodated within their own administrative area. This particularly relates to the provision of B-Uses which are more land-hungry.
- 6.11 In determining the level of jobs to be provided within Central Bedfordshire, the expansion proposals of London-Luton Airport are also a key consideration. The proposals are expected to create a significant number of jobs related to the expansion itself, but also in relation to complementary services such as offices, hotels, restaurants and leisure activities. It is expected that due to the physical constraints of Luton, a high proportion of this jobs growth will also need to be accommodated within Central Bedfordshire.

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<sup>3</sup> The Central Bedfordshire Economic Development Plan November 2011

- 6.12 The Development Strategy will deliver 27,000 new jobs between 2011 and 2031 within Central Bedfordshire. This ambitious target has been identified through a robust evidence base to deliver identified local needs taking into consideration current economic forecasts and modelling as well as local circumstances such as market demand and past take up rates, and the 'Duty to Co-operate'.
- 6.13 This target is stretching in the current economic conditions. However, the ambition to deliver sustainable growth is essential, and without this level of job creation the longer term, economic future of the area could be significantly hindered.
- 6.14 In order to ensure the delivery of sustainable development, jobs should complement housing growth and should be provided where needs have been identified. Employment generating uses will therefore be delivered through the extensive portfolio of employment sites as identified within Policy 6 which includes sustainable urban extensions.

### **B-Uses and Non B-Uses**

- 6.15 Employment uses are classified as either B or non B-uses as set out within the Use Classes Order. When allocating land for the delivery of employment generating uses, Development Strategies typically identify sufficient land to accommodate the B-Use element which includes offices, industrial and warehousing. Non B-Uses, such as retail, leisure and public services are much more subject to market demand and tend to grow in line with population growth.
- 6.16 Within Central Bedfordshire it is anticipated that 12,150 (45%) of new jobs will be from B-Uses with the remaining 14,850 (55%) being delivered through non B-Uses.

### **Supply of sites**

- 6.17 The range and quality of existing employment sites and premises within Central Bedfordshire is good and equates to approximately 1100ha of land. Both the urban and rural areas accommodate a number of existing and established employment sites which perform a crucial role in maintaining a steady level of employment land stock and contributing significantly to the local economy. Map 1 below identifies the broad distribution of existing and established employment sites across Central Bedfordshire.

???Insert plan showing location of existing sites???

- 6.18 In order to enable the growth of the local economy, expand the range of employment sectors available and create the right conditions for higher levels of job creation, the employment land stock within Central Bedfordshire needs to be expanded and diversified. Greater choice in the range and size of land and premises across Central Bedfordshire

will contribute to enabling new business start-ups, existing businesses to expand, and to attracting new inward investment to the area.

- 6.19 This has in part been achieved through the Central Bedfordshire (North) Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted in April 2011) which identifies and allocates a number of sites suitable for the accommodation of employment and job generating uses. In total, 77ha of additional land was allocated in order to accommodate B1-B8 employment uses.
- 6.20 These employment allocations are to be delivered as part of mixed-use developments as well as stand alone employment sites. The allocations were only recently made and, while they have been reconsidered (see GVA Study for details), most of the allocations are considered to be suitable and are expected to contribute towards meeting the jobs growth target
- 6.21 The Council recognises that there are sites in the north that have not been allocated previously but which can contribute to meeting employment land deficits on a more localised scale. Such a location is at Flitwick, where there is an identified need for additional B1 to B8 employment land locally to meet the needs of existing businesses and residents as well as future inward investment opportunities.
- 6.22 In order to maintain a sustainable approach to the delivery of employment land and premises across Central Bedfordshire, it is essential that jobs are provided where needs arise and that there is a reasonable distribution of jobs across the whole area. It is also important that the allocations respond to market demand as far as this can be foreseen. The current distribution of sites across Central Bedfordshire results in a higher concentration of land, and therefore potential for B class jobs growth in the north of Central Bedfordshire. To ensure a more even distribution and to make sure the needs of the whole area are met, there is a requirement for further allocations of land particularly within the southern part of Central Bedfordshire.
- 6.23 The settlements of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard already accommodate a number of existing and established employment areas which will continue to contribute to the local economy and job creation. However, in order to deliver the number of jobs required, there is a need to provide additional land to accommodate employment generating uses, particularly for B1-B8 uses. As there is limited new land available within the existing settlement boundaries, and to avoid a high quantity of small to medium sized sites being 'pepper-potted' around all the settlements in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire, including the smaller, more rural settlements, additional land will be allocated for the delivery of employment and job generating uses in the form of larger, more strategic allocations adjacent to the existing larger settlements. This approach will be more attractive and responsive to market demand.

- 6.24 The strategic allocations will be delivered in line with the allocations made in chapter 13 of this document. In total, up to 117ha of additional employment land will be allocated, as set out in the table below.

Table 6.1: Employment land delivery

New sites – North Houghton Regis	30ha
New sites – North Luton	13ha
New sites – East Leighton Linslade	16ha
New sites – Sundon RFI	40ha
New sites – North east of Flitwick	Up to 18ha
<b>Total planned jobs delivery 2011-31</b>	<b>Up to 117ha</b>

- 6.25 Chapter 13 provide greater detail about the location of employment land within the urban extensions and in relation to the Sundon RFI.
- 6.26 If market demand for B-Uses exceeds supply, the Council will consider the potential benefits in terms of job creation and local need, of additional locations for the delivery of employment generation uses

**Policy 6: Employment Land**

The Council will work with the development industry and local communities to deliver an appropriate portfolio of employment land within Central Bedfordshire.

The portfolio will consist of:

- existing employment sites (as identified on the Proposals Map);
- established non-allocated sites in employment use;
- allocations from the North Site Allocations DPD; and
- up to 117ha of additional Strategic Sites.

**Employment Land Uses**

- 6.27 Central Bedfordshire has a broad range of employment offer across the whole area. In order to maintain and expand this diversity and to attract inward investment of both large and small businesses, the Council has adopted a flexible approach to employment provision.
- 6.28 The Council’s preferred approach is to continue to maintain a diverse portfolio of employment sites for B1 to B8 uses and as such, in relation to the portfolio of land identified in Policy EM1, permission will generally be granted for B Class uses. Through the portfolio of employment sites, the Council will seek to ensure a mix of type and size of premises to support business and jobs growth.

- 6.29 Whilst the Council would not wish to see current employment land lost to other uses, it is recognised that non B-uses can make a significant contribution to the local economy and to job creation, and that some non B-uses can complement and enhance B-uses. Consideration will be given to non B-use employment generating proposals on allocated employment land against a series of criteria which seek to ascertain that such proposals are suitable for the proposed location and will not detrimentally impact upon the delivery of B-uses or the quantity of land available to deliver B-uses. In some instances, it may be that allocated land is no longer suitable for its intended purpose for employment generating uses. In such instances, the Council would require significant, detailed evidence to be provided to ensure that the loss of employment land to a non-employment use is the only viable option.
- 6.30 Central Bedfordshire has a number of town centres which play a vital role in contributing to the local economy. In order to support the role and function of the town the Council would not generally wish to see inappropriate retail uses located on land allocated for employment generating activities. However, the Council acknowledges that some retail uses such as Bulky Goods provision may be more suited to out of centre locations and will need to be assessed on a site by site basis to ensure that such provision will not detrimentally impact upon the town centres. Chapter 7 provides greater detail in relation to the appropriate location of retail uses within Central Bedfordshire and specifically the town centres.
- 6.31 In line with the Council's growth aspirations, Economic Development Plan and desire to be truly open for business the Council will seek to consider emerging opportunities and mechanisms to stimulate and support sustainable development, where it can be evidenced that such activities are necessary and would bring forward jobs growth that would not otherwise have happened. The types of activity the council will consider include, but not exclusively, Local Development Orders, masterplans, planning and development briefs and innovative financing mechanisms to bring forward development.

**Policy 7: Employment Sites and Uses**

Across the portfolio of employment land within Central Bedfordshire, planning permission will be granted for appropriate B1, B2 and B8 uses.

In order to provide flexibility, choice and the delivery of a range of employment opportunities, proposals for employment generating non-B uses on employment sites will also be considered on a site-by-site basis in relation to the following criteria.

- The supply pipeline available for B1, B2 and B8 uses within the locality;
- The suitability and impact of the proposal in relation to the

location and neighbouring land uses;

- An increase in the number of jobs that can be delivered;
- Traffic generation and suitable accessibility; and
- The potential to strengthen existing clusters through the delivery of complementary employment generating uses.

To support the role and function of the town centres, retail uses will not normally be considered appropriate on employment sites. Exceptions will be considered on a site by site basis for bulky goods and other forms of specialist retailing less suited to a town centre location.

**Policy 8: Change of Use**

Proposals for non employment generating uses on employment land as identified in policy 6 will only be considered if suitable and detailed evidence is submitted proving that the following criteria can be met:

- The site is vacant;
- The site has been comprehensively marketed for the current employment generating uses as well as for alternative employment generating uses.
- There is no viable prospect of the site delivering an employment generating use.

**Employment proposals outside settlement boundaries**

6.32 Central Bedfordshire has a diverse portfolio of employment land which offers a variety in size, type and location of land and premises. Whilst the Council has sought to ensure the range of employment land within Central Bedfordshire is significantly comprehensive to meet the needs of current and future employers, there may be instances where the portfolio of sites does not meet the needs of a specific proposed employment use.

6.33 In order to promote Central Bedfordshire as a location which is ‘open for business’ and to ensure a variety of employment generating uses, the Council will, exceptionally, consider proposals for employment uses outside Settlement Envelopes where there are no suitable alternative sites.

**Expansion of Existing Businesses**

6.34 The Council values existing businesses within Central Bedfordshire and supports proposals for expansion which will contribute positively to the local economy and provide new jobs within the area. The portfolio of employment sites within Central Bedfordshire provides a variety of options for existing businesses to relocate to in order to expand.

- 6.35 In some instances, existing businesses may wish to expand on to land adjacent to their current site rather than relocate to a new location. In order to secure the retention of existing businesses within Central Bedfordshire, the Council has adopted a flexible approach to business expansion within Central Bedfordshire.

**Policy 9: Employment proposals outside Settlement Envelopes**

Exceptionally, it will be appropriate to consider applications for employment generating uses outside Settlement Envelopes where there are no existing or allocated sites that are available, suitable, achievable or viable within Central Bedfordshire.

1) For proposals to extend existing businesses onto adjoining land, evidence will need to be provided that intensification within the existing site is not possible;

2) For proposals for new employment generating uses outside Settlement Envelopes, evidence will need to be provided of the significant economic benefits that would flow from the proposal

In both cases the criteria set out in Policy 7 above will also be relevant considerations in such cases.

**Education and Skills**

- 6.36 Central Bedfordshire is home to leading higher and further education institutions, including Cranfield University, Central Bedfordshire College and Bedford College (Shuttleworth). We recognise that for Central Bedfordshire to fulfil its economic potential, the importance of skills cannot be over-stated. Skills are critical to all employees and employers in all sectors: public, private and the voluntary and community sectors. The Council will seek to support the continued delivery of high quality learning and education within Central Bedfordshire, and will seek to support the development of learning and higher education facilities.

**Rural Economy and Tourism**

- 6.37 The Local Economic Assessment has identified that 49.2% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire are based in wards that are classed as rural and 40.7% of all people employed in Central Bedfordshire are employed in wards classed as rural. The rural economy is therefore of critical importance to the overall economy of Central Bedfordshire.
- 6.38 Central Bedfordshire’s attractive natural environment is cited as one of the best aspects of the area by local businesses in Central Bedfordshire Business Survey 2012 and brings visitor spend into the



economy each year. In 2009 there were 5,269,100 trips<sup>4</sup> to Central Bedfordshire either just for a day or to stay longer. Visitors to Central Bedfordshire contribute significantly to the local economy and the total value of tourism in Central Bedfordshire in 2009 was £312,280,000 which was a 5.9% increase since 2008. The tourism economy in Central Bedfordshire supports approximately 6,035 jobs, accounting for 4.9% of total employment in the area.

6.39 Tourist attractions range from major facilities such as ZSL Whipsnade Zoo and Woburn Safari Park to a raft of historic towns and villages, country houses, outdoor attractions and activities for people of all ages. Center Parcs – a new Forest Holiday Village is due to open near Ampthill. The growing interest in Bedfordshire for tourism suggests potential for a wider tourist destination which could further increase the number of jobs generated in this sector. A positive policy will help to ensure this opportunity can be taken further, although considerations such as the impact on landscape and the rural road network will continue to be taken into account.

6.40 There is already a reasonable variety of tourist accommodation in the district ranging from country house hotels to budget hotels and self catering accommodation. The Tourism Growth Strategy for Bedfordshire and Luton (2007-2012) however, identifies the potential for significant growth in this sector. In particular it promotes the growth of the family and short breaks market and the attractions of the County's 'green offering' including countryside sites and rivers. The need to increase self-catering accommodation and the provision of low-cost accommodation has also been identified. Provision could take the form of lodges, campsites and rural pubs and the Council is willing to be flexible where these can support local services and provide opportunities for rural diversification. There is also potential for more budget hotels in the district because of the main transport links as well as at the higher end of the market, such as the conversion of large character properties.

6.41 The re-use and adaptation of rural buildings can make a significant contribution to the local economy. Proposals for employment generating uses and tourism activities will therefore need to be mindful of the benefits that existing buildings can deliver as detailed within Chapter 11 and particularly Policy 40.

**Policy 10: Rural Economy and Tourism**

The contribution of the rural area and tourism to the wider economy will be supported and new proposals for tourist-related employment generating uses will be considered in relation to

- the suitability and impact of the proposal in relation to the location and neighbouring land uses;

<sup>4</sup> East of England Tourism, Economic Impact of Tourism in Central Bedfordshire, 2009

- An increase in the number of jobs that can be delivered;
- traffic generation and suitable accessibility;

The Council will seek to promote tourism by supporting proposals for tourist or leisure developments which provide opportunities for rural diversification which are well located to support local services, businesses and other tourist attractions.

Proposals for static holiday and touring caravan parks and holiday chalet developments, should be considered against the need to protect valuable landscapes, environmentally sensitive sites and impact on the local residents.

## 7.0 TOWN CENTRES AND RETAILING

### Town Centre Strategy

- 7.1 Town Centres play an important role in supporting the local economy. They provide a wide range of services, facilities and employment and act as a focal point for surrounding communities. Competitive town centres should provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer. It is recognised that in order to support and enhance the viability and vitality of town centres, a range of uses should be encouraged, including residential premises and office space as well as retail and leisure uses.
- 7.2 Policy XX identifies a settlement hierarchy for Central Bedfordshire. The town centres within this hierarchy perform different functions to varying degrees of success. Town centres such as Leighton Linlade and Biggleswade are relatively vibrant with high occupancy rates and attractive shop fronts. Others such as Dunstable are characterised by a relatively high number of vacant units and, in certain areas, a less attractive physical environment. In general terms, towns within Central Bedfordshire suffer significantly from a leakage of expenditure to nearby towns such as Milton Keynes, Bedford and Luton.
- 7.3 The housing growth envisaged within this strategy will lead to a considerably increased population in Central Bedfordshire over the next twenty years. During this period, comparison and convenience retail expenditure is expected to increase significantly. In order to cater for a growing population, and to support and enhance the vitality and vibrancy of the town centres, a significant amount of additional floorspace will be provided for town centre uses. More information on the amount of additional floorspace to be provided in the various town centres can be found in corresponding development briefs and masterplans.
- 7.4 With the exception of Wixams new settlement, each of the Major Centres within the settlement hierarchy have designated town centre boundaries. In the future, a town centre boundary will be identified for Wixams. In order to maximise the vibrancy of Central Bedfordshire's town centres, retail and leisure uses should be focused within these boundaries wherever possible.
- 7.5 The National Planning Policy Framework advocates the use of the sequential test when considering proposals for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre. Within this sequential test, town centre uses should be located in town centres where possible. Where this is not feasible, sites on the edge of town centres should be considered followed by out of centre locations. When considering out of centre sites, preference will be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. Applicants will need to demonstrate that the sequential test has been followed.

- 7.6 It is recognised that certain types of retailing, whilst beneficial to the local economy, may not be appropriate within town centres, particularly bulky goods and other forms of specialist retailing. In order to meet the needs of shoppers and ensure a variety of retail offer within Central Bedfordshire, proposals for such uses will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 7.7 New retail facilities will be needed to support major areas of growth, such as the large urban extensions to the north of Houghton Regis and Luton and to the east of Leighton Linlade. In addition, there are a number of existing out of centre retail parks including the White Lion retail park in Dunstable and the London Road retail park in Biggleswade. It is important that the retail offer within the out of centre retail parks complements, and does not compete with, that of the town centres in order that the viability and vitality of the town centres is not diminished.

**Policy 11: Town Centre Strategy**

In order to promote and enhance the role of town centres, a substantial amount of additional floorspace for town centre uses will be provided across Central Bedfordshire in accordance with adopted/endorsed masterplans and development briefs. Within the identified town centre boundaries the Council will seek to retain existing A1-A5 uses at ground floor level. Proposals for changes of use, or re-development of properties, away from A1-A5 uses will be refused unless:

- 1) there is no realistic prospect of the property being retained for A1-A5 uses (evidence of marketing will be required);
- 2) the proposed use would enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre; and
- 3) there is not an existing over-concentration of such uses within the town centre, taking into account existing need on a settlement specific basis.

Above ground floor level, proposals for residential (C3) and general office space (B1a), will be encouraged.

The Council will rigorously apply the sequential test to proposals for retail, office and leisure uses that are not within a designated town centre boundary.

Retail Impact Assessments will be required for all proposals over 500 square metres gross external floorspace that are outside a designated town centre boundary.

Proposals for bulky goods and other forms of specialist retailing outside of town centre boundaries will be considered, in conjunction with Policy EM2, on a site by site basis taking into account the

following:

- 1) the suitability of the site;
- 2) the impact on the town centre; and
- 3) the potential increase in traffic generation.

### **Retail Uses in Town Centres**

- 7.8 While it is recognised that successful town centres should offer a diverse range of uses, it is considered that maintaining the retail offer within town centres is particularly important in order to protect their vibrancy and vitality.

#### **Policy 12: Retail Uses in Town Centres**

In order to protect the vitality of town centres, retail uses will be protected wherever possible. Proposals for changes of use away from retail (A1) to other uses at ground floor level will be refused unless:

- 1) there is no realistic prospect of the property being retained for A1 uses (evidence of marketing will be required);
- 2) the proposed use would enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre; and
- 3) there is not an existing over-concentration of such uses within the town centre, taking into account existing need on a settlement specific basis.

### **Retail in the Rural Area**

- 7.9 The Council recognises the vital role that shops and pubs play in supporting rural communities, particularly for those that are relatively isolated from town centre facilities and services. Proposals for new retail services within Large and Small Villages are therefore encouraged where appropriate, while existing services should be maintained where they remain viable.

- 7.10 Much of the rural community lacks access via public transport to service centres and if existing rural facilities are lost it could contribute to social exclusion in rural areas, particularly among the elderly and those without a car. All local shops and pubs are important features of the settlements, particularly if there are no alternative facilities within easy walking distance. Many local pubs and shops have been saved by a strict planning policy in the past and it is vital to maintain this strong policy stance in the context of the current economy.

- 7.11 Retail premises such as farm shops, which are located outside of rural settlements can also play an important role in supporting the rural economy.

**Policy 13: Retail in the rural area**

In order to support a vibrant and diverse rural economy, proposals for retail uses within villages will be approved subject to the following criteria:

- 1) the proposal is of a suitable scale;
- 2) the site is an appropriate location;
- 3) the proposal would not result in unsustainable levels of traffic generation.

Proposals for the change of use or re-development of shops or pubs in villages which would result in the loss of such facilities, will not be permitted unless:

- 1) there are other facilities performing the same function within easy walking distance of the village community; and
- 2) the applicant provides evidence that there is no realistic prospect of the use continuing, even if permission is refused.

Proposals for retail premises such as farm shops which are located outside of settlement boundaries will be considered against the above criteria.

**Dunstable Town Centre**

- 7.12 Dunstable is an historic town dominated by the A5 (T) which runs through the town and connects it to the M1 at J9 to the south and Milton Keynes to the north. The town as a whole has a relatively high percentage of convenience floorspace (26% compared to the national average of 17%), largely due to the presence of four supermarkets. However, the comparison offer is fairly low and consists of a range of middle to low market offer businesses. The number of vacant units in the town is marginally higher than the national average, the majority of which are concentrated within the Quadrant Shopping Centre. The quality of the town centre environment is severely compromised by the A5 in terms of noise, pollution and congestion. In addition, while the town centre does contain a number buildings of historic interest, many of the more modern buildings are showing signs of deterioration and require some attention.

- 7.13 To guide future redevelopment of the town centre, a Masterplan has been prepared and subsequently endorsed by the Council as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes. The

Masterplan identifies the potential for a significantly increased comparison retail offer, as well as additional housing, employment and leisure opportunities together with public realm improvements. Traffic congestion in the town centre should be reduced through the de-trunking of the A5, once the A5-M1 Link road and Woodside Connection have been constructed and the provision of new public transport facilities such as the Luton-Dunstable Guided Busway.

**Policy 14: Dunstable Town Centre**

Dunstable town centre will contribute positively to meeting the needs of the growing population in accordance with its role as a Major Service Centre. This will be achieved in accordance with the endorsed Masterplan through the redevelopment and expansion of the Quadrant Shopping Centre and the provision of new community facilities.

The appearance of the town centre will be significantly enhanced while safeguarding the town’s rich heritage assets and features. A reduction in traffic will be encouraged within the town centre through bus priority schemes, attractive pedestrian and cycle linkages, public realm and highway improvements and efficient parking provision.

Development proposals should be in accordance with the principles and objectives of the endorsed town centre masterplan.

**Leighton Buzzard Town Centre**

- 7.14 Leighton Buzzard is an attractive market town which grew significantly during the 1970s. The Town Council has prepared a document entitled ‘The Big Plan’ which outlines the community’s aspirations for the town. Central Bedfordshire Council is working closely with the Town Council to deliver many of the proposals, including new sports and community facilities and traffic management schemes.
- 7.15 The town has a good comparison retail offer, largely focused around the High Street, Market Square and Waterborne Walk. The percentage of convenience floorspace in the town centre (25%) is above the national average of 17%. Notably, vacancy rates are significantly below the national average. The town centre is characterised by a good choice of independent shops alongside some national chains.
- 7.16 Development Briefs have been endorsed by the Council as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes which will guide and attract development on two key sites: Land South of High Street and Bridge Meadow. The former will provide an opportunity to extend the retail offer of the town centre, the latter is an important site close to the town centre.

**Policy 15: Leighton Linlade Town Centre**

Leighton Linlade town centre will contribute positively to meeting the needs of the growing population in accordance with its role as a Major Service Centre. In accordance with the two endorsed development briefs, new community, leisure and cultural facilities will be provided alongside additional retail floorspace and new housing. Access from the train station to the town centre will be improved and connectivity between different parts of the town centre enhanced.

Development proposals elsewhere in the town should not prejudice development on these two sites, and should make a financial contribution towards their development where possible.

**Houghton Regis Town Centre**

7.17 Houghton Regis town centre contains a significantly higher proportion of convenience retail units than the national average (25% compared to 9%). The majority of the retail offer is at Bedford Square, although a new supermarket is currently under construction on the High Street. The physical environment of the town centre is relatively unattractive and suffers from a comparatively poor local public transport network and congestion. However, with the completion of the Luton-Dunstable Guided Busway and the proposed A5-M1 Link Road and Woodside Connection, these issues should improve.

7.18 An adopted Masterplan outlines how the town centre could be improved and how it could contribute to meeting the needs of a significantly increased local population. It is important that regard is had to Houghton Regis town centre when considering the master planning of the nearby urban extensions, particularly the location and scale of new local centres.

**Policy 16: Houghton Regis Town Centre**

Houghton Regis town centre will be rejuvenated in accordance with the adopted Masterplan through a mixed use redevelopment of the town centre which will deliver a significantly improved retail and commercial offer. Improved pedestrian and visual linkages will be provided as well as enhancements to the public realm. Sustainable transport links will be enhanced, particularly bus, pedestrian and cycling access from the urban extensions.

Development proposals should be in accordance with the principles



and objectives of the adopted town centre masterplan SPD.

### **Biggleswade Town Centre**

- 7.19 Biggleswade town centre has an attractive market town feel. There are a number of historic buildings in the town centre which give it character and contribute positively to the townscape. The town has a good range of convenience stores, largely due to the presence of three supermarkets. While the comparison retail offer is below average, there is still a good range of premises. The proportion of vacant units is well below the national average.
- 7.20 The provisions of the adopted town centre Masterplan will increase the retail offer of the town, whilst improving transport infrastructure and the public realm.

#### **Policy 17: Biggleswade Town Centre**

Biggleswade will maintain its reputation as a successful market town with a distinctive town centre whilst improving its economic performance within the local area and region. In line with the adopted Masterplan, this will be principally achieved through the provision of significant additional floorspace for town centre uses and improvements to the physical environment and public realm. In addition, improvements to key road junctions will be implemented along with the provision of a new transport interchange including a new bus link and additional car parking.

Development proposals should be in accordance with the principles and objectives of the adopted town centre masterplan SPD.

### **Flitwick Town Centre**

- 7.21 Flitwick is characterised by a relatively disjointed town centre and a fairly unattractive physical environment. The disjointed nature of the town centre is largely caused by the roads which run through it, which also have a detrimental effect on the town centre's environment, and the railway which splits the centre in two. The proportion of convenience units in the centre is comparable to the national average, although there are only three units including a supermarket. The comparison offer in the town centre is extremely limited with no national retailers.

- 7.22 The adopted Planning Framework and Indicative Masterplan for the town centre aims to guide the provision of a new focus for retailing and a significantly enhanced physical environment.

**Policy 18: Flitwick Town Centre**

Flitwick town centre will be regenerated in alignment with the principles of the adopted Planning Framework and Indicative Masterplan. A new town centre heart or core area will be provided through a retail led redevelopment of key sites adjacent to or in the vicinity of Flitwick railway station. The urban environment including pedestrian linkages, public spaces and highways network will be enhanced by a combination of development supported measures and locally led initiatives. A new transport interchange combining all forms of public transport will be provided at Flitwick railway station which will also provide additional facilities for cyclists, pedestrians and improved car parking provision.

**Other town centres**

- 7.23 Where town centres do not have adopted or endorsed masterplans or development briefs, the council will seek to support sustainable development in town centres and retain existing retail uses in line with policies 10 and 11 to ensure that town centres remain competitive, provide a range of services and customer choice and which reflect and enhance the individuality of town centres. Such town centres will be supported through a combination of appropriate investment and development, high quality public realm enhancement and design principles and the provision of transport infrastructure including public transport and car parking.

## 8.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

- 8.1 Infrastructure means the facilities and services that help us live our everyday lives. It can range from strategic provision, such as a new road or school, to the creation of a children's play area. Providing the type and level of new social, community, economic, environmental and physical infrastructure is crucial to delivering healthy and sustainable communities.
- 8.2 The delivery of growth and development is dependent on the timely provision of supporting infrastructure. It will be important to ensure that certain infrastructure is provided ahead of development to safeguard against adverse impacts. To facilitate this, it is essential that the local planning authority understands the infrastructure needs and costs early on as part of plan making.
- 8.3 As such, the Council has produced an Infrastructure Schedule to identify infrastructure provision required to support growth. The Infrastructure Schedule identifies a broad estimated cost, funding sources and who would be responsible for delivery. The Schedule brings together the results of extensive work with the service providers to set out a clear picture of new infrastructure needed to serve future needs. The areas covered by the Schedule include education, health and social care, transport, housing, recreation, leisure, green infrastructure, utility services, and recycling facilities.
- 8.4 The Infrastructure Schedule will provide an overview of the action required, who is responsible for delivery, a broad indication of phasing, costs and funding mechanisms. It will act as a focus for delivery by encouraging direct action, co-ordination of others and lobbying where appropriate. The Schedule should not be seen as a detailed investment programme.
- 8.5 Delivering sustainable communities and the successful implementation of the Development Strategy is the collective responsibility of a wide range of organisations. This entails a shared vision and shared objectives. It involves making sure there is co-ordinated action to ensure essential infrastructure is delivered effectively and on time.
- 8.6 In order to aid the prioritisation of infrastructure delivery the Council has categorised the infrastructure in the Schedule as critical, essential and desirable:

Critical: Critical infrastructure is that which has been identified as infrastructure that must happen to enable physical development. These infrastructure items are often known as 'blockers' or 'showstoppers', and are most common in relation to transport and utilities infrastructure. Failure to provide these pieces of infrastructure could result in significant delays in the delivery of development.

Essential: Essential infrastructure is infrastructure that is required if development is to be achieved in a timely and sustainable manner. Although infrastructure in this category is unlikely to prevent physical development in the short term, failure to invest in it could result in delays in development in the medium term. This type of infrastructure needs to be provided alongside development to make sure that the impacts of development are mitigated and therefore not creating unacceptable overuse of existing facilities or leaving developments without necessary support facilities. The most common type of essential infrastructure is social and community infrastructure such as schools, health facilities and children's play space.

Desirable: Desirable infrastructure is infrastructure that is required for sustainable development but is unlikely to prevent development in the short to medium term. Although infrastructure identified within this category is the least important in allowing sites to be developed, its importance to the overall success of development and the delivery of this Development Strategy should not be underestimated.

- 8.7 No development may commence until the critical infrastructure associated with the development, identified in the Infrastructure Schedule, has been shown to be fully funded, to the satisfaction of the Council.

Planning Obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy

- 8.8 The development industry will be funding a substantial proportion of the infrastructure. This will occur either through the usual agreements made in the course of individual planning applications (known as s106 Planning Agreements) or the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy, a tariff based charge.
- 8.9 The Community Infrastructure Levy will allow the Council to raise funds to support development and the money will assist the funding of a wide range of infrastructure projects needed as a result of development. The infrastructure to be funded by CIL will defined for the charging schedule and the Infrastructure Schedule will form the starting point for this. The Council needs to strike a balance between the desirability of funding infrastructure from the levy and the potential effects of the levy upon the economic viability of development
- 8.10 A meaningful proportion of the funds raised from CIL will be placed with the neighbourhoods where development takes place for local Town and Parish Councils to spend on local infrastructure priorities.
- 8.11 In some circumstances the infrastructure required to serve Central Bedfordshire may be provided in neighbouring administrative areas. Likewise in some cases it will be reasonable to seek a contribution from development from adjoining areas towards infrastructure in Central Bedfordshire that will support those developments.

- 8.12 With the introduction of CIL, s106 agreements will only be used in restricted circumstances. A Planning Obligations SPD will be prepared about the use of s106 agreements in light of CIL approval.

**Policy 19: Planning Obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy**

New development must be supported by the required infrastructure at the appropriate stage. Developers will be required to make appropriate contributions to offset the cost of providing new physical, social and environmental infrastructure required as a result of their proposals either by way of financial contributions, or direct provision of such infrastructure within larger developments.

The Council will work in partnership with infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities and other delivery agencies in seeking the provision of the necessary infrastructure to support new development. Contributions will be phased or pooled to ensure the timely delivery and implementation of the necessary infrastructure.

The Council will seek to introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy and retain the use of Section 106 agreements where necessary. In advance of the adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Council will seek to ensure the delivery of strategic infrastructure by Planning Obligations and other appropriate funding sources. An SPD on the role and purpose of S106 agreements will be prepared.

**Next Generation Broadband**

- 8.13 In December 2010 the Government launched a Strategy entitled Britain's Superfast Broadband Future. A key objective of this Strategy is to put in place a framework capable of better supporting the role out of next generation broadband. This states that new homes, where they are part of a larger development, should be built as standard with a superfast broadband connection. This is further supported in the NPPF which states that in preparing Local Plans, local planning authorities should support the expansion of high speed broadband.

- 8.14 Providing a minimum level of ICT connectivity or high speed broadband provision will be an important factor in supporting and growing businesses and improving the areas productivity in addition to attracting new investment in knowledge based and technology intensive sectors. Providing a minimum level of ICT connectivity and where possible high speed broadband enables people to access services and work from home and can have wider impacts on the need to travel, accessibility and the low carbon economy.

- 8.15 The Central Bedfordshire's approved Local Broadband Plan sets out the Council's vision to:
- Deliver improved standard universal broadband (At least 2Mbits/s) to all premises in Central Bedfordshire by 2015. The broadband should be reliable, robust and future proofed using a cost effective solution
  - Deliver next generation high speed broadband to at least 90% of premises in Central Bedfordshire by 2015. The technology should be future proofed, innovative, cost effective and flexible for upgrade in line with road mapped technology developments.
  - In-line with the need to support the effective operation of the market, seek to increase choice of broadband services and suppliers of services for Central Bedfordshire residents
- 8.16 A key part of delivering this vision for the area is ensuring that new developments adequately plan for and put in place the provision of digital infrastructure to support the delivery of high speed broadband services.
- 8.17 High speed broadband is generally considered to be internet access with connection speeds of greater than 25 Mega bits per second (Mbps), and ideally around 30Mbps. However, technological advances means available speeds are constantly increasing, and the Council wishes to ensure a network that can be upgraded, so residents and businesses are able to benefit from increasing access speeds.
- 8.18 New build infrastructure can be designed to provide high rates of connectivity. The Government and the British Standards Institution have produced a Publicly Available Specification (PAS 2016) which aims to inform builders and developers about how to install digital infrastructure into all new build domestic dwellings.
- 8.19 As such the Council wishes to see the necessary on-site infrastructure put in place at the time of construction, to ensure future connectivity to superfast services. This means that the development will seek to put in place a fibre optic network to deliver services. This should ideally be fibre to the premise solution, which provides for the highest level of potential speeds to consumers, but as a minimum should be based on a fibre to the cabinet network. Furthermore, detailed proposals will need to consider the necessary conduits/ducting to be incorporated into the development and consideration for relevant telecommunications infrastructure, including exchanges and or cabinets, to ensure accessing/ maintenance requirements and minimal environmental/ visual impact. Such infrastructure to alleviate the need in future for additional civil or excavation work to existing footways & highways.

**Policy 20: Next Generation Broadband**

Central Bedfordshire Council will expect new residential development of 35 units or more and all employment development to include provision for high speed next generation broadband infrastructure through a fibre optic network.

This should ideally be fibre to the premise solution, or the equivalent technology, which provides for the highest level of potential speeds to consumers, but as a minimum this should be based on a fibre to the cabinet network, or the equivalent technology.

Provision should be made with minimal disruption and minimal need for reconstruction, and allow for future growth/improvements in service infrastructure/broadband service.

Where the minimum standards are not met, evidence will be required to demonstrate why this would not be feasible or viable.

**Social and Community Infrastructure**

- 8.20 The Development Strategy has an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating strong, vibrant, healthy and inclusive communities. It aims to improve the health, social and cultural wellbeing of all; deliver sufficient community facilities and accessible services to meet local needs
- 8.21 Social and community infrastructure requires strong working partnerships between the Council, developers, public sector agencies, the voluntary and community sector and the business sector. Providers will need to meet the health and social care needs; educational, cultural and learning needs; social and community development needs of residents in new and existing communities.
- 8.22 Social and community infrastructure is defined as those facilities and activities that support a community's need for social interaction. These include community development, childcare, education and training, libraries, arts and culture, sports and leisure, open space, places of worship, health services, emergency services, utilities. The services and facilities supporting employment and housing growth makes for a more sustainable environment and adds to the place shaping agenda by helping to improve the well-being of all who live, work and play in the locality.

Delivering Social Infrastructure

- 8.23 Social infrastructure is less about the physical infrastructure and more concerned with the activities that will bring about strong communities.

- 8.24 Social infrastructure therefore includes:
- opportunities for residents to be actively involved in their community through their participation in community activities, forums, groups and volunteering;
  - the networks of people and organisations that provide contacts, services and opportunities for association with one another;
  - promoting and developing volunteering; recruiting and supporting volunteers;
  - promoting and developing cultural activities and learning;
  - opportunities for social action and community engagement
  - support, advice, training and assistance with the formation of new community groups, including the provision of 'start up' grants;
  - the recruitment, development and support of community leaders
- 8.25 Providing a permanent or temporary place for people and local groups to meet (e.g. community centres/community houses), along with community development workers, maintenance and running costs, is essential and needs to be available in a timely manner. For new developments this will be prior to the occupation of the first dwelling and until six months after the last dwelling is occupied.

#### Delivering Community Infrastructure

- 8.26 Community Infrastructure is about providing sufficient community facilities to deliver accessible services required to meet local needs. Community Infrastructure includes:
- meeting places, such as community centres, places of worship and community houses
  - leisure, recreational and cultural facilities, including sports venues and pitches;
  - local shops, food outlets and public houses;
  - post boxes, community notice boards, public art and other 'street furniture';
  - household waste collection services;
  - schools and child care facilities;
  - libraries, adult and community learning;
  - health centres, GP surgeries, dental practices and emergency services;
  - other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.
  - Access to green spaces
- 8.27 Community facilities require a pattern of development that makes fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling and provides ease of access to facilities and services.
- 8.28 Access to high quality well located facilities and services is essential to people's quality of life and the well being of our communities. Well designed community facilities and public spaces with inclusive access



and social integration will influence the way a place looks, how it works and how it is used; and thus contribute to a strong sense of place, as well as a strong sense of community.

- 8.29 In some communities certain facilities and services may be essential because they are one of a limited number in that area, or because it is necessary for the quality and convenience of everyday life in a community.
- 8.30 There may be opportunities for the co-location of facilities and services, providing shared facilities and integrated service delivery. This increases foot fall and helps to make services more sustainable; it also reduces unnecessary journeys and means that residents can access services and meet their every day needs with ease
- 8.31 Developers making provision for social or community facilities will be expected to work closely with those affected by their proposals and to evolve designs for community facilities and services that take account of the views of the community and have regard to the specific design requirements of those operating the facilities, at an early stage.

#### Provision for Social and Community Infrastructure

- 8.32 New residential development will increase pressures on existing and sometimes depleted social and community infrastructure, as well as necessitate new infrastructure. In urban and rural areas alike new residential development will impact some of the existing infrastructure and this will need to be taken account of when new housing is planned for. Where existing services and facilities are not adequate to support new development, developers will be required to contribute towards or provide these.
- 8.33 The creation of new communities will normally need to provide additional social and community infrastructure over and above existing urban areas where infrastructure often already exists.
- 8.34 The need for social and community infrastructure generated by new development should be planned ahead, ideally with interim or temporary provision provided ahead of full provision at a later date to a standard that ensures future residents are well served and that any existing community does not suffer adverse impacts. This may require certain facilities and services to be provided before dwellings are occupied or at a very early stage. Schemes must include an agreed timescale for the delivery of all social and community infrastructure. This must take account of the need to provide activities to integrate residents with the community and to meet their everyday needs through appropriate facilities and services.

- 8.35 Developers will be required to contribute to the long term management and maintenance of facilities to ensure future communities benefit from provision.

**Policy 21: Increasing Access to Quality Social and Community Infrastructure**

To deliver the facilities and services the community needs, the Council will work with developers, service providers and partners to:

- ensure an integrated approach to the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services;
- provide community facilities and services, including the creation of neighbourhood centres;
- ensure the timely delivery of social and community facilities;
- utilise the principles of shared space by maximising opportunities for co-location, shared facilities and integrated service delivery;
- retain existing facilities unless satisfactory alternative provision is made in the locality or it can be demonstrated that facilities are no longer needed or are economically unviable in the case of commercial services;

Where an application fails to provide adequate social and community infrastructure it should be refused.

Developers will be required to make contributions towards the maintenance and running costs of the social and community infrastructure needs of the local community. Contributions will be secured through planning obligations or CIL

**Healthy Communities**

- 8.35 The National Planning Policy Framework identifies the improvement of health and wellbeing as a core principle that planning should take account of in both plan-making and decision-taking.
- 8.36 Health is one of eight key priorities set out in the Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Communities Strategy. Overall health in Central Bedfordshire is better than the UK national average. There are however, significant differences in health and life expectancy depending upon where people live and by gender, income and ethnicity in some parts of the area.
- 8.37 The Development Strategy provides a series of policies which seek to enhance the health and wellbeing of communities in Central Bedfordshire. The health and wellbeing of communities is not just about the provision of health and care services. It is also about providing sports, recreation, leisure and community facilities which enable people

to participate in physical and cultural pastimes; delivering accommodation which meets the needs of different sectors of the community; designing high quality environments which increase social interaction; and promoting walking and cycling as sustainable forms of transport that also bring health benefits to participants.

8.38 The main policy areas where the Development Strategy seeks to secure more healthy communities are listed below:

- Provision for convenient walking and cycling routes and promoting sustainable and accessible transport modes that reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Protecting and increasing provision of high quality public open space and recreational facilities accessible to residents
- Promoting and enhancing access to the countryside and protecting public rights of way
- Ensuring appropriate provision of shared space, community facilities and other local services, including healthcare services
- Delivering appropriate physical infrastructure in line with growth
- Using design and layout to reduce crime and the fear of crime
- Ensuring high standards of design, maintaining a high quality visual environment and promoting planting to promote mental and physical well being
- Providing accommodation to meet the needs of different sectors of the community and delivering various tenures of affordable housing
- Ensuring buildings are accessible for all. 70% of new dwellings are required to meet the specific elements of the Lifetime Homes Design Criteria as stated in the Design Guide
- Promoting person-centred supported living housing options such as Extra Care Housing, minimising the requirement for residential and nursing home admissions

## **LEISURE AND OPEN SPACE**

8.39 With increased mobility and more people participating in sporting and recreational activities in their leisure time, the provision of accessible open space, recreation and leisure facilities is assuming greater importance. At the same time, large numbers of new houses are proposed to be built across Central Bedfordshire during the Plan period. The residents of these new homes will create additional demand for, and pressures on, open space and leisure facilities.

8.40 The health and well being of communities is not just about the provision of health and care services but also about providing new sports and leisure facilities and improving access to new and existing open space which enable people to participate in physical and cultural pastimes which in turn help enhance quality of life. The Development Strategy can assist by making provision for new open space and built leisure facilities through new development and by protecting existing facilities

and improving access in the area. It can also use, where appropriate, new development to address pressures on existing facilities.

### Leisure Strategy

- 8.41 On becoming a single authority in 2009, Central Bedfordshire inherited a number of different policies from the legacy authorities regarding the provision of leisure and open space facilities. As well as a range of policies, the provision of facilities across Central Bedfordshire varies in quality, quantity, mix and delivery.
- 8.42 The emerging Leisure Strategy will address the current mis-match of leisure provision. This work will include an audit of built facilities and open space provision across Central Bedfordshire. Through the audits and assessments, individual Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) will be developed. These will identify locally specific quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards which will be used to deliver new built leisure and open space facilities in new developments once adopted. It will also be used to inform and update S106 and CIL contributions. The emerging Leisure Strategy SPD will have regard to the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan and Local Green Infrastructure Plans.

### Accessible Open Space

- 8.43 Central Bedfordshire provides a variety of opportunities for residents to enjoy open spaces. There is a hierarchy of open space provision, ranging from local green spaces to community woodlands through to country parks. The enhancement of the network as the population of Central Bedfordshire and surrounding areas grows is an important factor in residents' quality of life. The Council will therefore protect existing green space and provide new green space accessible to the public. The maintenance of the existing and new open space provision is also important and the Council will seek contributions to secure the long term management of sites.
- 8.44 'Accessible open space or 'Greenspace' is a term used to mean an area of land that provides opportunities for open access to the public for recreational purposes. These can include:
- Country and urban parks,
  - Historic parks and gardens,
  - Natural greenspaces,
  - Green corridors
  - Amenity green spaces
  - Playing pitches and children's play areas.

8.48 The network of accessible greenspace also forms part of the green infrastructure network alongside biodiversity, heritage and landscape assets. The wider Green infrastructure network is covered under the Environment Section of this strategy

**Policy 22: Leisure and open space provision**

The Council will require:

- New development to be supported by the timely delivery of leisure facilities and open space. These will be provided as an integral part of new development to meet both the needs arising on and off-site.
- Provision should be made in line with the required qualitative, quantitative and accessibility standards.
- Where adequate on-site provision is not possible, contributions will be sought to maintain and enhance existing leisure and open space facilities.

Planning applications that contain proposals that would adversely affect existing accessible open space will not be permitted.

Developers will also be required to make contributions towards maintenance and running costs. Contributions will be secured through planning obligations or CIL.

Public Rights of Way

8.45 The public rights of way network offers people access to enjoy Central Bedfordshire’s countryside and heritage to the benefit of their quality of life and health. It also forms a practical part of our overall transport network providing valuable access on foot and often by cycle, to the wider countryside, shops and other local amenities.

8.46 There will be a need for improvements to the rights of way network linked to development proposals to improve accessibility, surfacing and connectivity. Where the scale and location of development will require connections and/or lead to increased use the Council will secure appropriate contributions. Particular consideration will be given to achieving off site local pedestrian/cycleway routes which connect development sites with open spaces and leisure/community uses and strategic access routes.

8.47 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan, Local Transport Plan, Green Infrastructure Plans and other emerging plans and policies will detail the routes for improvement and will provide the specific standards for how rights of way affected by development are to be provided.

**Policy 23 : Public Rights of Way**

The Council will protect, enhance and promote the enjoyment of the public rights of way network.

This will be achieved by:

1. Requiring applicants to record the route of any public rights of way affected by development, and develop a scheme for their improvement, accommodation or diversion in accordance with the Council’s Rights of

Way Standards.

2. Requiring contributions, through planning obligations towards the public right of way network including the delivery of routes both on-site and off-site where appropriate.

Planning applications that contain proposals that would adversely affect the existing public rights of way network will not be permitted

## 9.0 TRANSPORT

### Overview of the Network

- 9.1 Outside of Dunstable and Houghton Regis, which together with Luton form part of an urban conurbation, Central Bedfordshire is a largely rural area with a number of small to medium sized towns that provide services to their inhabitants and to surrounding villages.
- 9.2 The area is relatively well served by strategic north/south road links, notably the A1, A6, A5 and M1. East/west movement by road is less well served and is largely based on the A421, the A507 and a series of more rural roads.
- 9.3 The major rail links are north/south orientated with the Midland Mainline, and East and West Coast Mainlines all running through the authority and providing frequent services. The only east west route is the Marston Vale branch line, which connects Bedford to Bletchley, although there are proposals to upgrade this as part of the East West rail project.
- 9.4 Bus services operate between the main urban areas within the authority and to key service centres in neighbouring areas such as Bedford, Luton, Milton Keynes and the Hertfordshire towns of Hitchin and Stevenage. However, most of these services are reliant on local authority subsidies to operate and, apart from some buses running within and between urban areas, the services they provide are infrequent.

### Main Issues

- 9.5 The main transport issues affecting Central Bedfordshire are
  - Congestion in town centres,
  - poor air quality on busy roads,
  - a lack of accessibility to everyday services – particularly in rural areas and
  - road safety concerns.
- 9.6 The location of development and the delivery of both small and large scale transport measures can help to address all of these issues. Properly implemented, development can foster local economic benefits,

mitigate against the impact of climate change, improve the health and well being of local residents and reduce the impact of social exclusion.

- 9.7 Modelling carried out in preparing this Development Strategy makes it clear that a modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport must be achieved if development on the scale set out in this document is to be delivered sustainably. To this end, more sustainable patterns of development will be promoted leading to more sustainable forms of transport.
- 9.8 The Development Strategy alongside the Local Transport Plan, the document which sets out the strategic vision for transport within the authority, provide a framework for ensuring sustainable transport is integral to the growth and development of the authority.

### **Key Principles**

- 9.9 There is a hierarchy of actions and interventions which should be adhered to through the planning process to ensure that new development minimises the impact on the local transport network whilst also contributing towards addressing the main concerns associated with transport across the authority. These actions are:
- Reducing the need to travel,
  - Embedding sustainable transport within new developments,
  - Increasing accessibility particularly through sustainable travel opportunities,
  - Making best use of existing infrastructure and services, and
  - Providing additional network capacity where necessary.
- 9.10 Developers will be expected to ensure that new schemes fully mitigate their adverse impact on the transport network through adhering to this hierarchy. They will also be expected to demonstrate the actions they will undertake are in line with the principles set out above and explored in more detail below.

### **Accessibility and Connectivity**

- 9.11 Transport services and infrastructure are central to ensuring the accessibility of new developments and providing links between residential areas, employment provision, education, retail, healthcare, and leisure facilities for example. Areas with good accessibility by a range of means of travel create an environment conducive to economic growth, help to reduce social exclusion, encourage social interaction and develop a sense of place.
- 9.12 Accessibility issues are particularly important for those without access to a car and in addressing concerns associated with reliance on the car and unchecked growth in traffic.

- 9.13 The provision of realistic alternatives to the car is vital in this regard including through the encouragement of walking trips particularly for distances of under two miles, providing the opportunity to cycle to local services within a 5 mile radius and through the encouragement of public transport use for trips further afield.
- 9.14 Developments will also be required to demonstrate their links to strategic public transport corridors in place across the authority, as set out in the (emerging) Public Transport Strategy.
- 9.15 All buildings in sites to be taken forward should be within a 400 metre threshold of a bus stop or rail station with at least an hourly service connecting to the wider public transport network.
- 9.16 The connectivity of the pedestrian, cycle and public transport networks is vital to ensuring accessibility. They should also be comprehensive, convenient, coherent and convivial. The ability to interchange between services and different types of transport is a key part of this.
- 9.17 The Local Area Transport Plans which sit within the framework of the Local Transport Plan provide the basis for the delivery of schemes to increase accessibility along these lines. Such works should be supplemented by the provision of sustainable transport measures embedded within new developments to ensure that alternative travel options are available to residents and that sustainable travel habits can be developed from first occupation.

**Policy 24: Accessibility and Connectivity**

Connections to services will be strengthened through schemes identified within the Local Transport Plan. Public transport initiatives will be implemented in order to increase accessibility to services and facilities.

When allocating land for development, priority will be given to development schemes that:

1. Promote sustainable modes of transport;
2. Ensure convenient access for walking and cycling to healthcare, retail and leisure provision, education and employment;
3. Are located within 400 metres of a bus stop or rail station offering at least an hourly service connecting to the wider public transport network.
4. Provide or build upon use of public transport services that are effective, viable and sustainable; and
5. Develop sustainable and adaptable approaches to public transport in rural areas.



## Capacity of the Network

- 9.18 To cater for the increase in demand to travel which will arise from future economic and population growth it is important that the capacity of the local transport network can cater for the additional trips which will be undertaken across the authority.
- 9.19 A lack of capacity can lead to congestion on the roads, overcrowding on public transport and an increase in conflict between different types of road users which itself raises safety concerns and detracts from the attractiveness of the local environment. Conversely spare capacity can encourage investment, increase the competitiveness of business through reduced delays and foster an environment more conducive to sustainable travel.
- 9.20 The Local Transport Plan identifies a number of strategic transport schemes which are either planned or currently under construction to meet future capacity requirements, namely:
- A5-M1 Link and new Junction 11a
  - Luton and Dunstable guided busway and possible extensions;
  - Woodside Connection
  - M1 Junction 10a
  - East of Leighton Linlade Distributor road
  - Biggleswade Eastern Relief road
  - Luton Northern Bypass
  - East-West Rail including the Marston Vale line
- 9.21 Ease of movement between and within settlements will be strengthened with these improvements. They will deliver significant reductions in congestion in urban areas and enable existing highway space to be used for improvements to public transport, cycling and walking networks. Without them, development on the scale currently envisaged cannot be delivered.
- 9.22 The Council also wishes to explore potential to create a new bus route linking Leighton Linlade with Dunstable and Houghton Regis in the longer term. Such a route would have the potential to link a number of town centres, together with a large number of new homes and major employment provision.
- 9.23 Alongside the commitment to new capacity, development should seek to take advantage of existing spare capacity on the transport network through the location of development in urban areas and particularly around established public transport links and hubs. This ensures the potential for more sustainable travel patterns, reduces the need for new road building, helps to secure the viability of existing public transport services and increases the scope for improved service provision in the future.

9.24 Capacity issues are prevalent in places on the public transport network however, particularly at some railway stations and the public transport hubs they form. Particular emphasis will be placed upon increasing capacity for access by sustainable modes at:

- Leighton Buzzard Station
- Arlesey Station
- Biggleswade Station
- Flitwick Station
- Sandy Station

9.25 Furthermore development located near employment and service provision reduces the need to travel, the pressure placed on the transport network and the demand for additional infrastructure provision.

**Policy 25: Capacity of the Network**

The Council will seek to facilitate the delivery of the strategic transport schemes identified within the Local Transport Plan.

Development should seek to maximise the capacity of the existing transport network. Where such capacity is insufficient to cater for the increase in demand to travel as a result of a new development, the provision of new transport and travel infrastructure will be sought as a priority.

In the case of new development, such provision will be sought in parallel or before commencement where possible.

**Smarter Travel**

9.26 Encouraging sustainable travel is at the heart of creating sustainable and inclusive communities. The location of development and provision of infrastructure and services are the building blocks upon which this can be achieved.

9.27 However on top of the provision of these actual networks, there is a requirement to raise awareness of the travel options which exist within our communities and to ease the ability of local residents and visitors alike to utilise the provision on offer.

9.28 As such the concept of smarter travel relates to assisting people in the travel choices people make and increases their sense of empowerment and actual ability to negotiate the transport networks in place.

9.29 Smarter travel initiatives cover a wide area of works, including the development of Travel Plans at places of work, information provision both on the internet and at bus stops for example, integrated and

electronic ticketing, and tele-working. All of these interventions help enable an individual to make smarter choices when deciding how to travel, when to travel, and whether or not they need to make the trip in the first place.

- 9.30 Travel Plans are a proven means of delivering transport benefits. An effective Travel Plan will explore the relationship between a Transport Assessment and accessibility/access by all modes, including public transport, walking and cycling and also car parking. They help assess the transport impact of a development and the mechanisms necessary to ensure that sustainable travel options are considered at all stages of development.
- 9.31 Developers will be expected to reflect opportunities to encourage sustainable travel as and when development sites come forward through the provision of a site specific Travel Plan.

**Policy 26: Travel Plans**

Travel Plans will be required to accompany a Transport Assessment and submitted as part of planning applications in line with the thresholds set out in Appendix 1 demonstrating how new development will be accessible by a range of travel modes.

Where a Travel Plan is in place, the Council will expect the developer and/or user to implement and monitor the plan. The Council will also require, as appropriate, financial contributions towards sustainable travel options where connectivity to existing infrastructure is not of the required standard.

The Travel Plan should complement the Transport Assessment and detail a long term strategy to mitigate against any adverse impacts and maximise the potential for achieving sustainable transport behaviour. It will contain the following:

- Objectives.
- Detail of proposed actions and measures for achieving the objectives.
- Identification of levels of car parking to be provided as part of the development.
- Identification of targets against which the effectiveness of each measure will be reviewed.
- Consideration of short, medium and long term milestones.
- A timetable for implementation of the proposed measures.
- Arrangements for the ongoing monitoring and review of the travel plan.

**Car Parking**

- 9.32 The provision of car parking associated with new developments should adhere to the guidelines included within the emerging Parking Strategy.
- 9.33 The location, availability, cost and enforcement of parking provision can have a significant impact on the travel choices people make, the safety of the network, and even the look and feel of the urban environment.
- 9.34 Innovative approaches to parking such as the provision of electric charging points, dedicated spaces for people car sharing and secure, covered cycle lockers all help imbed sustainable transport options within new development.

**Policy 27: Car Parking**

Developers will be required to provide appropriate parking in terms of both the number of spaces and their location, given the need to encourage sustainable travel patterns and avoid creating congestion caused by excessive on-street parking.

Provide electric charging points for vehicles in line with requirements established within the Central Bedfordshire Council Parking Strategy.

**Understanding the Impact of New Developments**

- 9.35 In order to help ensure sustainable development, all planning applications will be assessed on their ability to reduce the need for travel. They will need to demonstrate the opportunities for travelling by sustainable modes, making full use of strategic public transport routes, identifying and improving cycle routes and cycle parking facilities, promoting more sustainable car use and encouraging and providing for pedestrians.
- 9.36 Transport Assessments (TA) consider the transport impacts of proposed developments detailing the measures to be taken to mitigate them, improving accessibility and safety for all modes of travel particularly for alternatives to the car such as walking, cycling and public transport.
- 9.37 Where a new development is likely to have significant transport implications, a TA should be prepared and submitted with a planning application for the development. Central Bedfordshire Council have a transport model in place which has been accepted by the Highways Agency and would encourage developers to utilise this tool as a means of understanding and demonstrating the impact on the local transport network where appropriate.
- 9.38 The Transport Assessment and Travel Plan should be written in parallel and the Council must be satisfied that the Travel Plan measures and mechanisms will achieve the necessary mitigation.

**Policy 28: Transport Assessments and Travel Plans**

The authority will seek the submission of a Transport Assessment with any major new development in line with the thresholds set out in Appendix 1.

Transport Assessments should be in line with appropriate best practice guidance. It should

- Include site assessment of existing transport links and site audit of transport/travel related infrastructure.
- Explain the site and its location, including details of the existing organisation if appropriate.
- Detail measures already in place, existing travel patterns and barriers to sustainable travel.
- Identify the likely trip generation associated with the site including the modal split.
- Detail the measures to promote accessibility by all modes of travel, in particular public transport, cycling and walking; assess the likely travel behaviour or travel pattern to and from the proposed site; and develop appropriate measures to influence travel behaviour including the travel plan.
- Detail the measures to mitigate the impact of the residual trips from the development on the highway network and ensure that suitable measures are proposed to manage these impacts.

## 10.0 HOUSING PROVISION

- 10.1 Provision of an appropriate level of new homes is vital, both to meet the social needs of the local community and help underpin the economic competitiveness of the economy.
- 10.2 This Development Strategy plans for the period from 2011 to 2031. Technical work undertaken to inform this Strategy suggests that a total of 28,750 new homes are needed during the plan period, based on local population forecasts (see Housing technical paper for more details). Well over half of these new homes have already been planned for through previous plans.
- 10.3 The table below sets out the planned approach to delivery of the required new homes.

Table 10.1: Housing Delivery

Committed* sites in the north	12,152
Committed* sites in the south	3,413
Assumed windfall (including Neighbourhood Plans)	1,700
New sites – North Houghton Regis	5,600
New sites – North Luton	2,900
New sites – East Leighton Linslade	2,500
New sites – Wixams extension	500
<b>Total planned housing delivery 2011-31</b>	<b>28,765</b>

\* = Committed sites are those either with planning permission, or that have been allocated in previous plans, or that have been identified as likely to come forward during the plan period (see Housing Trajectory for details)

- 10.4 Large-scale housing provision will be delivered through the proposed urban extensions set out in chapter 13. A certain amount of development is also predicted to be brought forward from as yet unknown sources.
- 10.5 Windfall sites are sites that come forward outside of the plan-making or allocation process but that receive planning permission. Historically windfall sites have represented a considerable proportion of overall housing delivery in both north and south Central Bedfordshire. While delivery on this scale is unlikely to continue throughout the plan period, it is reasonable to assume that additional sites will emerge that we are not aware of at this stage. There are two main sources of likely windfall: firstly sites within settlement boundaries that have historically come forward and are likely to continue; and secondly sites that arise from the Neighbourhood Plans process.
- 10.6 The Development Strategy contains a positive enabling framework for local communities to bring forward development through

Neighbourhood Plans. The Council will particularly welcome Neighbourhood Plans from those villages that have not had recent developments or allocations. The actual scale of development that will emerge from Neighbourhood Plans across the area is unknown at this stage. The Council is actively working with a number of Neighbourhood Planning groups and as these plans develop a clearer picture will emerge of the possible scale of housing delivery.

- 10.7 An overall allowance for windfall sites, including Neighbourhood Plans, of 1,700 homes has been built into the calculations. The Council is confident that this level of new homes can be delivered. However, should monitoring show that this amount is unlikely to be delivered during the plan period then the Council will allocate additional sites to ensure delivery of the 28,750 total. Monitoring will need to take place for a reasonable amount of time to show whether the anticipated delivery will take place before alternative courses of action are contemplated. The Council anticipates at least 5 years of post-adoption monitoring before considering alternative approaches.
- 10.8 Any additional sites needed will be identified through a Site Allocations document and allocations will follow the overall approach set out in this Strategy, particularly the Settlement Hierarchy. The timing of any such Site Allocations document will enable timely delivery of sites within the plan period.

**Policy 29: Housing Provision**

The Council will work with the development industry and local communities to deliver a total of 28,750 new homes between 2011 and 2031. The Council will support the delivery of the existing planned sites that make up the majority of provision. New strategic sites are identified in this Development Strategy to deliver around 11,500 new homes. In addition, the Council expects sites for a further 1,700 homes to emerge over the plan period from windfall sites, including provision from Neighbourhood Plans.

**Housing Mix**

- 10.9 The dominant theme running through the NPPF is the need for sustainable development. The social dimension of this theme cites providing a supply of housing to meet the needs of the current and future generations as a key component of creating sustainable development.
- 10.10 Achieving a good mix of housing will be critical in meeting the needs of Central Bedfordshire. Development of an appropriate mix of property sizes, types and tenures will provide a wide range of choice of quality

homes, opportunities for various forms of home ownership and create mixed & sustainable communities.

- 10.11 A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was undertaken for Bedfordshire in 2010 and this work was refreshed for Central Bedfordshire and Luton in early 2012. The SHMA explored the various housing types, sizes and tenures needed to meet housing requirements at the time. These results will form a key consideration in terms of determining an appropriate mix of housing on development sites.
- 10.12 Information from Central Bedfordshire's population & household forecasts tell us that the population of Central Bedfordshire will grow by 27,700 households by 2031 with particular growth amongst the elderly population over 65 years of age.
- 10.13 The elderly population increasingly have specific care needs which often require well thought-out housing solutions and specialist care. Providing accommodation to support the ageing population will form a key area of the overall housing mix. This is dealt with under a later section but in terms of housing mix, the Council will expect an element of accommodation for older people as part of all larger developments – those of 100 homes or more.
- 10.14 It is evident that house prices have increased in recent years making home ownership simply un-affordable for many CBC residents. Some areas of Central Bedfordshire maintain house prices which are significantly higher than the national average, which further compounds the problem of home ownership. Also prospective first-time buyers currently find it difficult to secure mortgage finance from banks and other lenders.
- 10.15 The combined effect of high house prices and lack of mortgage finance makes it extremely difficult for aspiring first-time buyers to access the private housing market. This demonstrates that there is a significant need for affordable housing. Various forms of affordable housing options are needed to meet the varying degrees of housing need across CBC. A good mix of tenures including Social Rent, Affordable Rent, Shared Ownership and other forms of low cost home ownership should all be provided as part of a good housing mix.
- 10.16 Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to creating sustainable, mixed and balanced communities. This will include meeting the needs of those with specialist needs such as physical disabilities, social care needs and the elderly.
- 10.17 The principal of creating sustainable & mixed communities should be the overarching theme which governs decisions on housing mix for all development sites.



**Policy 30: Housing Mix**

All new housing development will provide a mix of housing types, tenure and sizes in order to meet the needs of all sections of the community. Larger developments will be expected to include an element of accommodation for older people. The overarching principal is to encourage sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities.

The main considerations for determining an appropriate mix of housing will be:

- The most up-to-date, strategic evidence base on the housing needs across Central Bedfordshire and adjoining housing markets.
- Local Housing Needs Assessments
- Local Authority Population & Household projections
- Census information
- Current Housing Market Conditions
- Locality and characteristics of the site including it's accessibility to local services
- Existing housing mix of the locality

**Gypsy and Traveller Provision**

10.18 Central Bedfordshire Council is required to set pitch targets for Gypsies and Travellers and plot targets for Travelling Showpeople to address their likely accommodation needs.

10.19 Specific allocations to meet the levels of identified local need for both the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople community will be addressed through a Gypsy and Traveller Plan. The Gypsy and Traveller Plan will also identify policies to assess planning applications for windfall sites.

10.20 In making provision, the Council needs to identify and update a supply of deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of sites against the locally set targets and sites or broad locations for growth, for years six to ten and, where possible, for years 11-15. If the Council is unable to demonstrate an up-to-date five-year supply of deliverable sites, this should be a material consideration in any subsequent planning decision when considering applications for the grant of temporary planning permission.

**Policy 31: Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Provision**

Provision will be made in a Gypsy and Traveller Plan for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation.

The scale of provision will be informed by a locally derived evidence

base. Such provision will be informed and refined by future local needs assessments when required and provision adjusted accordingly.

Applications for Gypsy and Traveller windfall sites will be considered, having regard to the unmet level of need.

Relevant and up to date guidance will inform this process.

## Affordable Housing

- 10.21 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the governments clear intention to provide good quality affordable housing for all. This forms part of a wider agenda to create sustainable, mixed and integrated communities.
- 10.22 The case for affordable housing is well documented both nationally and particularly within Central Bedfordshire. The updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2012 highlights how the average house price within Central Beds has risen over the years to a point where the average house price is now £206,388. When this is coupled with the fact that the average household earnings have not risen in line with house prices, this gives a stark depiction of just how serious the problem is.
- 10.23 Mortgage availability has been a problem for prospective house buyers primarily because it is extremely difficult to save the amount of deposit that the national lenders require to secure the mortgage. All of these factors subsequently mean that the volume of house sales within Central Beds has reduced dramatically over a ten year period since 2001. This means an increasing number of households are in need affordable housing.
- 10.24 The SHMA encourages us to not only look at the housing problem within our own geographical boundary but also to consider wider housing market areas. These are broadly defined as the Luton market, the Hertfordshire market, the Milton Keynes market and the Bedford market. All of which have an influence on migration patterns and housing needs within Central Bedfordshire Council. This approach encompasses the duty to co-operate which was cited in the NPPF.
- 10.25 The results of the SHMA recommend that 35% of all qualifying sites must be affordable housing. The 35% allocation will normally be provided on-site and integrated within the development. In order to cater for a wide range of housing needs, various tenures of affordable housing should be made available. These should include affordable rent, shared ownership and other intermediate tenures.

- 10.26 The task of meeting these housing needs is set against a backdrop of significant changes in national policy in terms of both affordable housing reform and welfare reform. There is very little government grant available through the Homes & Communities' (HCA's) Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) to enable affordable housing. The HCA expect that housing providers will find other ways of making affordable housing developments financially viable without government subsidy.
- 10.27 Although delivery may be difficult under these circumstances, Central Bedfordshire Council have enabled over 300 affordable homes per annum within this framework. The existing 35% target in the north of Central Bedfordshire has also stood up to viability testing in a significantly large proportion of cases. It is therefore considered reasonable to retain the 35% target as evidenced by the SHMA and expect deliverability across Central Bedfordshire Council.
- 10.28 The viability of each site will be considered on a case by case basis and will be discussed with the applicant. The emphasis of these discussions will be to enable a viable degree of affordable housing on site.
- 10.29 In order to secure delivery and provide mixed new communities, the Council has a preference for affordable housing delivery on-site. However, there may be occasions, mainly for larger sites, where a commuted sum towards off-site provision may be considered in lieu of part of the 35% requirement to complement the on-site affordable housing provision.
- 10.30 In exceptional cases, it will be appropriate to consider a commuted sum instead of onsite provision. In such exceptional cases, the applicant will have to submit a robust case to justify why on-site provision is not appropriate.
- 10.31 The commuted sum will be calculated to represent the value it would have cost to build the affordable housing on-site. Commuted sums will be calculated on the basis of 50% of the open market units provided in order to maintain parity with onsite provision and retain the 35% affordable/65% open market split. As an example, a development of 6 units providing onsite affordable housing would deliver 2 affordable units (35%), cross-subsidised by the value generated from the 4 open market units. If that same development were to provide a contribution towards off-site provision, the value generated from the 6 open market units could subsidise 3 affordable units (50%) in the same way as a development of 9 units providing 3 affordable units on site (35%).

**Policy 32: Affordable Housing**

Residential Development of 4 dwellings should provide at least 1
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affordable dwelling. For all development above this threshold, 35% of the qualifying site should be provided for affordable housing on-site. The affordable homes should meet the following requirements:

- An appropriate mix of affordable tenures, including Social Rent, Affordable Rent and Intermediate Tenures, having regard to housing needs and best available evidence;
- Small clusters of affordable homes which are dispersed throughout the site in order to integrate with the private homes;
- The quality & design of the affordable homes must be of an equally high standard to that of the private homes on site.

If the above requirements are not achieved due to financial constraints, a financial appraisal should be submitted to the Council demonstrating exactly why the above the requirements are not viable. This financial assessment will form the basis of further viability testing by the Council and detailed discussions with the applicant. The emphasis of these discussions will be to enable a viable degree of affordable housing.

Provision will normally be made onsite but for larger sites commuted sums in lieu of part of the 35% requirement will be considered. In exceptional circumstances, and where justified, commuted sums will be considered instead of onsite provision.

## EXCEPTIONS SITES

- 10.32 Central Bedfordshire contains a number of small settlements which are rural in character. Typically because of their attractive rural location and character, house prices in these villages are relatively high in comparison to more urban areas. This often makes it difficult for some households to purchase or privately rent properties within the villages.
- 10.33 Historically there has been a shortfall in the delivery of affordable housing within these rural areas, partly due to the limited opportunity for in-fill development within these villages. Rural exceptions sites – sites outside the settlement boundary used for affordable housing – have been the most efficient way of providing affordable housing for rural communities to date.
- 10.34 In addition, there is also a need for additional affordable housing provision around the larger settlements. While development opportunities are greater here, so is the level of need. The policy below therefore enables exceptions sites to be brought forward around the larger settlements.
- 10.35 Whilst neighbourhood planning could potentially bring forward a degree of affordable housing, the continued delivery of exception sites will form a key part of affordable housing delivery.

- 10.36 A careful balance must be struck in terms of having regard for a settlement's character and settlement boundaries whilst being cognisant of the need to meet an identified local housing need from that settlement. The use of sites which relate well to the settlement boundary go some way to achieving this balance.
- 10.37 The underlying purpose of an exception site is to meet the housing needs of local people. It is designed to accommodate households local to the settlement in accordance with the Council's adopted Local Lettings Policy. It is envisaged that the supply of exception sites will provide a means for people who would ordinarily not be able to afford to live within that settlement to remain within their local community.
- 10.38 A pre-requisite of any household being eligible for these properties will be that they have a demonstrable housing need. This will be evidenced by the household being registered with the housing association or alternative affordable housing provider.
- 10.39 A local housing needs survey will be conducted within the settlement to evidence the level of demand for affordable housing. It will record the demand for the number of affordable homes, the tenure and size of property needed. This will form the evidence base upon which the Council, landowners, house builders and the Town or Parish Council will work-up plans for the exception site.
- 10.40 The sites in rural areas will usually be limited to 10 dwellings in order to preserve the character of the village. However if a housing needs survey supports a demand for more than 10 dwellings and it can be demonstrated that a larger development will not have an adverse effect on the character of the village, larger sites may be considered.
- 10.41 The site will be subject to a Section 106 agreement which will set out that the properties will remain as affordable housing in perpetuity. In essence no affordable homes will be sold or converted into private properties at all. A householder of a shared ownership property will be able to buy additional equity shares of their property. However, this will be restricted to an 80% equity share of the property so that the property is not completely owned outright by the householder. Any re-sale of shared ownership properties will go to a household in housing need as directed by the Council's Local Lettings Policy in regard to the procedure for shared ownership.
- 10.42 The overall aim of the policy below is to provide high quality, affordable homes for local people in housing need.

**Policy 33: Exception Sites**

The Council may make an exception to the usual settlement boundary

constraints surrounding settlements within Central Bedfordshire under very specific circumstances. This will only apply to the development of Exception Sites which meet the following criteria:

- Designed to meet local housing needs. This local need will be evidenced by a housing needs survey
- Subject to a Section 106 legal agreement or unilateral undertaking.
- Allocated in accordance with the Council's adopted Local Lettings Policy
- Small-Scale development (usually 10 dwellings but in special circumstances larger developments may be considered)
- 100% affordable homes in perpetuity
- A mix of tenures to be made available to meet the identified local need
- In the case of shared ownership, 'stair-casing' or purchasing additional equity shares will be restricted to 80% of the properties' open market value. This is to ensure that the property remains affordable in perpetuity.
- Situated outside the existing settlement envelope but relates well to the existing settlement and is in-keeping with surrounding character.

## **SUPPORTING AN AGEING POPULATION**

10.43 The demographics of Central Bedfordshire Council mirror national trends in that there is significant growth in the older population over 65. This is by far the fastest growing age group of the population within Central Bedfordshire with particular growth in the 85+ category.

10.44 Alongside this population growth is the fact that residents of Central Bedfordshire have a longer life expectancy than the national average (*source ONS male & female life expectancy at birth, 2008-10*).

10.45 The combination of these statistics poses a challenge for Central Bedfordshire Council in terms of providing appropriate accommodation and care for an ageing population. With ageing, there is an increase in disease, disability and frailty that can lead to complex and challenging care needs, perhaps requiring specialist care.

10.46 The Government's Housing Strategy; Laying the Foundations, encourages local authorities to provide accommodation which promotes greater independence for older people. One preferred model of combining housing with care is called Extra Care Housing which enables the older person or couples to live in their own flat and retain the maximum freedom and independence while receiving the care and support they need across 24 hours.

- 10.47 Like most people, older people would like to remain in their existing homes rather than move. It can be daunting to leave the home and neighbourhood just at the time when support and care needs are developing or increasing. As such, the current thinking amongst the Adult Social care sector is to move towards a model of care which supports people in their own homes as their needs change; moving only when this is in the best interests of the individual .
- 10.48 The Governments' Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods guidance document highlighted the concept of Lifetime Homes as being one way to achieve this. The development of Lifetime Homes will help people to remain in their own home as their needs change as they get older in the future.
- 10.49 Lifetime Homes will be supported as part of the wider policy on Adaptation however they will be essential to the agenda of meeting the needs of an ageing population. As such Lifetime Homes will also be fully supported within this policy.
- 10.50 For some people their care and support needs will be such that they may find a move necessary, perhaps due to the size of their home or the maintenance required to the house or garden. Moving once to a place that can meet changing needs over time, while allowing people to remain as independent as possible is the aim of Extra Care Housing.
- 10.51 Extra Care Housing provides the individual with their own self-contained flat which they rent or buy. This promotes independence and a personal space as 'home'. There will also be communal areas for people to use for dining, as a lounge area, relaxation, activities etc.
- 10.52 Residents of Extra Care will be able to access various forms of tenure such as social rent, of which housing benefit will usually cover a large proportion of the costs. Shared Ownership can also be available for those people who feel that they would like to own a stake in their extra care apartment. There will also be the option for outright purchase/leasehold for those able to do so.
- 10.53 The Extra Care Model is designed for people over 65 years with a care need. However, it will not cater for extremely complex health or social needs or advanced dementia. It is proposed that care homes are better placed to give this level of intensive care.
- 10.54 The Council have analysed the level of care provision currently available across the authority. The results of this gives a very clear steer on what we need to deliver in the future. Along with this analysis, the Council are continually bearing in mind ways to deliver the modal shift from existing sheltered housing to new forms of extra care housing.

10.55 In response to the needs of the authorities' ageing in population, the Council will support the development of extra care housing and additional residential care homes will be planned across all Central Bedfordshire to include:

- Mixed tenure, extra care housing options in all areas of Central Bedfordshire that meet the flexible needs of self funders and socially supported customers.
- Accommodation based care services that are adaptable enough to meet people's changing support needs as they grow older.
- Care homes that focus on specialised provision, including dementia and complex care or health needs.
- Services that are able to cater for a range of short term accommodation based support needs, for example respite, reablement, and rehabilitation.

10.56 This will be achieved through the policy below

**Policy 34: Supporting an Ageing Population**

In accordance with the latest evidence base available, The Council will support planning applications which meet the strategic aims of the Council in relation to meeting the housing and support needs of the aged population.

Examples of supported accommodation for older people will include:

- Lifetime Homes
- Sheltered Housing
- Extra Care Housing
- Residential Care Homes
- Care Homes with Nursing
- Short-term Services – respite, reablement, rehabilitation

Opportunities to secure appropriate accommodation for older people will be supported in planning terms where they meet the following criteria:

- A strategic location in accordance with information from the latest evidence base available & the Council's Strategic aims.
- Sustainable location in terms of access to local services and shops.
- Offers various affordable tenures such as Social rent, Shared ownership and outright purchase to promote choice & independence.
- Financially viable in terms of the whole care and support package rather than just the physical building.
- Meeting the standards set by the Department of Health and the Housing Corporation for Extra Care Housing developments
- Meeting the standards set by Care Quality Commission for



Residential Care Homes and Care Homes with Nursing

These criteria are in addition to the requirements from other DM policies. Delivery of supported accommodation for older people should constitute sustainable delivery in terms of planning, social care, health and housing.

## 11.0 SETTLEMENTS, GREEN BELT AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

### Green Belt

- 11.1 Green Belt is a valuable tool in maintaining the separate identity of settlements and checking unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. One of the original and main reasons for creating the South Bedfordshire Green Belt was to prevent the coalescence of Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill and Flitwick as well as the villages that lie within it. The Southern Bedfordshire Green Belt was last finalised in 2005 in the former South Bedfordshire and 2009 in the former Mid Bedfordshire. It extends across much of the south of the area. In order to accommodate the growth required up to 2013 in a sustainable and controlled manner, the boundaries will be redrawn around the outer edges of the proposed strategic allocations. The Green Belt will continue to prevent the towns from coalescing and retain its key characteristics of openness and permanence and is illustrated on the Proposals Map.
- 11.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the general restrictions on development that apply to the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is defined as any development harmful to the Green Belt and should not be granted except in very special circumstances. The construction of new buildings for example, is generally inappropriate as it would adversely affect the openness of the designated areas. The NPPF also makes it clear that Green Belt land can also have a 'positive' role to play. It may, for example, provide access to open countryside and opportunities for quiet recreation and sport. Green Belt can also help retain valued landscapes and protect biodiversity and it provides many possibilities to protect and improve green infrastructure, especially in urban fringe locations. The Council will favourably consider development proposals that will actively improve the character and quality of the Green Belt.

### Development in the Green Belt

- 11.3 Maintaining and improving the quality of development throughout Central Bedfordshire is an important aim of the Council. All development proposals will be expected to pay due regard to the Design in Central Bedfordshire: A Guide for Development'. Within the Green Belt, however, the need to protect the character and openness of the landscape is a primary consideration and any development proposals in the Green Belt, will be expected to maintain the character of the Green Belt and not undermine the reasons for including land within it. High standards of design and careful siting will therefore be essential for any development proposals.

### Affordable housing and the Green Belt

11.4 Within the Green Belt, as elsewhere in the area, there is a shortage of affordable housing. This can have a disproportionate effect on rural communities as many young people and families cannot afford to stay because decent homes are either too expensive or simply unavailable. This, in turn, can lead to a fall-off in demand for local services such as schools and public transport and the disappearance of local jobs, shops and pubs. Ultimately, some places risk becoming dormitory settlements with very little sense of community life. The supply of affordable housing is therefore seen as important, not just in order to provide homes for those in greatest need, but to help keep balanced communities. There is a need for affordable housing in the Green Belt settlements and the Council will consider favourably the provision of affordable housing on rural exception sites in the Green Belt.

### **Policy 35: Development in the Green Belt**

Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development. Planning permission will only be granted where there are demonstrable, very special circumstances which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt

Certain forms of development are not considered inappropriate and accordingly, planning permission will be granted for the following provided they preserve the openness of Green Belt:

- buildings essential for agriculture and forestry;
- necessary mineral extraction, engineering and other operations, including associated plant and buildings;
- facilities for outdoor sport, recreation and green infrastructure;
- cemeteries ;
- the re-use of buildings of substantial and permanent construction;
- the extension, alteration or replacement of an existing dwelling providing it does not result in a disproportionate increase in the original size of the dwelling;
- within existing curtilages, the limited extension or alteration of existing commercial buildings, or the re-arrangement of uses, or the erection of free-standing new buildings and structures ancillary to the existing development;
- affordable housing required to meet identified local needs.

### **Safeguarded or White Land**

11.5 The National Planning Policy Framework allows local authorities to designate 'safeguarded land' (also known as 'white land') if necessary. This land normally lies between existing settlements and the inner Green Belt boundaries. Safeguarded land is not currently allocated for

development, but may be required in future. Previous development plans have identified safeguarded land and the following areas will be retained and shown on the Proposals Map.

**Policy 36: Safeguarded Land**

Two sites will be safeguarded from development except for proposals which are considered acceptable in the Green Belt.

1. Land at Slip End: car storage site and adjacent land (9.59 hectares)
2. Land at 'The Paddocks', Dunstable (1.8 hectares)

**Green Belt Settlements**

11.6 Settlements that fall within the Green Belt fall into three categories. Some are 'inset' and are defined by inner Green Belt boundaries which effectively define the settlement boundary. Essentially the 'inset' settlements are excluded from the Green Belt. The remainder are either completely 'washed over' by the Green Belt designation or have a defined 'infill only' boundary. This means that whilst some of the settlement is 'washed over', the remainder is considered suitable for appropriate infill development.

11.7 Within the 'infill' boundaries, proposals for development will be considered acceptable in principle. Infill development can be defined as small-scale development, utilising a plot which should continue to complement the surrounding pattern of development. High quality design principles will be applied and further detail is given in 'Design for Central Bedfordshire: a Guide for Development'.

**Policy 37: Development within Green Belt Infill Boundaries**

The Council will consider infill development acceptable in principle within the defined Green Belt Infill Boundaries. Particular attention will be paid to assessing the quality of development proposed and the likely impact on the character of the settlement and its surroundings.

**Development Within Settlements**

11.8 In the north of Central Bedfordshire, the boundaries between settlements and surrounding countryside are defined by Settlement Envelopes. In the south of Central Bedfordshire, Green Belt is predominant and the boundary between the settlement and the countryside is defined by Green Belt boundaries. Some smaller settlements are washed over by Green Belt and may have a Green Belt Infill Boundary. These three types of boundary are referred to in general terms as settlement boundaries. The policies relating to

settlements washed over by Green Belt and proposals within infill boundaries are set out above.

- 11.9 The Council has defined Settlement Envelopes for all those communities outside the Green Belt that are identified in the Settlement Hierarchy. The Settlement Envelopes separate the settlement from the countryside and are shown on the Proposals Map. They are not an attempt to define the extent of a particular town or village community. Thus the Envelopes are unrelated to the administrative boundaries of town and parish, which serve this particular function.
- 11.10 Within the Settlement Envelope, land use must be settlement related, for example residential development, domestic gardens, playing fields and community facilities; and not related to agriculture or considered to be part of the countryside. In some instances, where there is ambiguity in defining that boundary, the Envelope has been used to reflect the character of the predominant land use, using the most appropriate and clear physical features on the ground.
- 11.11 Settlement Envelopes have been defined to enable the clear, unambiguous and consistent application of policies in the control of development. Settlement Envelopes also serve to prevent coalescence between settlements and in the case of places like Shillington they also protect the separate character and physical identity of the various 'Village Ends'.
- 11.12 The scale of any type of new development should reflect the scale of the settlement in which it is located. Most of the opportunities for development within settlement boundaries will be infill development which can be defined as small-scale development utilising a vacant plot which should continue to complement the surrounding pattern of development. This type of development will generally be acceptable but will need to be designed carefully to minimise the impact on surrounding properties and the street scene. Design and sustainability criteria relating to the proposal will also be major factors in determining any planning application. More detailed guidance is to be given in the Design for Central Bedfordshire: A Guide for Development.
- 11.13 Within settlements, housing development will be considered acceptable. Proposals for community, education, health, sports and play facilities are specifically encouraged, in particular those identified as being required in any given parish in the Infrastructure Schedule. Given the need to provide both more jobs as set out in the Development Strategy and to reduce out commuting, new employment generating uses within settlements will also be encouraged, provided they are compatible with residential properties. This approach accords with one of the key principles in the National Planning Policy Framework which advocates patterns of development which reduce the need to travel by private car, and allow improved access to jobs and services particularly in rural areas.

- 11.14 In circumstances where there is a clear need for community, education, health, sports and play facilities development and employment generating uses, but a lack of suitable sites within the Settlement Envelope, sites adjacent to the Settlement Envelope will be considered acceptable except in the Green Belt. Such development should make the best use of available land.

**Policy 38: Within and Beyond Settlement Boundaries**

Within the settlement boundaries of both Major and Minor Service Centres, the Council will approve housing, employment and other settlement related development commensurate with the scale of the settlement, taking account of its role as a local service centre.

Within settlement boundaries of Large Villages, small-scale housing and employment uses, together with new retail and service facilities to serve the village and its catchment will be permitted.

Within Settlement Envelopes of Small Villages beyond the Green Belt, development will be limited to infill residential development and small-scale employment uses.

The Council will also support schemes for community, education, health, recreation, employment generating uses or mixed community and other uses where a need for such facilities is identified through the Infrastructure Schedule or up to date evidence. For this type of development, where no land is available within the Settlement Envelope, a site adjacent to the Settlement Envelope may be granted planning permission particularly if brought forward through a Neighbourhood Plan.

**Important Open Spaces**

- 11.15 Open spaces within a settlement may have a number of important functions; as recreational open space, as amenity open space, or simply adding to the character of a settlement and making it a pleasant and distinctive place to live.
- 11.16 Within the settlement there may be a presumption in favour of development, subject to other policies and material considerations. However if every area of land within the settlements were to be developed, then there would be a detrimental impact on their character and appearance, particularly in those settlements that have retained their rural character or historical heart.
- 11.17 In order to protect the character of settlements, open spaces which are important both in visual and functional terms, should be protected from development unless there are exceptional circumstances. Open space also performs a variety of other important functions such as enhancing

biodiversity, helping to create linkages for wildlife and humans, improving health and well being, carbon fixing and reducing the heat island effect of built development.

11.18 Within Central Bedfordshire some open spaces within settlements have already been designated as Important Open Space and these areas are shown on the Proposals Map. In other areas they have not been formally designated but still need protecting. These areas include amenity areas and allotments. There are two policy approaches for these areas and it is proposed to keep these until new designations have been agreed with Town and Parish Councils through the Neighbourhood Plan process.

**Policy 39: Formally Designated Important Open Space**

The Council will protect designated Important Open Space within Settlement Envelopes by refusing planning permission where proposals would result in the loss of Important Open Space and this would have an unacceptable adverse impact on its value either in visual or functional terms.

Redevelopment or partial redevelopment of an Important Open Space will only be considered favourably:

- where proposals would result in enhanced provision in functional terms (both the facility itself and its location),
- where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in overall community benefit;
- where there would be no adverse effect on the visual quality of the settlement.

**Policy 40: Other Areas of Open Space within Settlements**

Within the towns and villages of Central Bedfordshire where Important Open Space has not been designated, planning permission will not be given for the development of open space, including amenity open space and allotments, for non-open recreational purposes. Exceptions to this policy will only be considered where the proposed new development is essential for the improvement, enhancement or enlargement of an existing open space or area for sporting or recreational use and where only a small part of the existing open space will be lost.

**Local Green Space**

11.19 The National Planning Policy Framework introduced a new landscape designation known as Local Green Space. The designation, which can be made through Neighbourhood Plans and reviews of the Development Strategy, will allow protection of valued local areas from new development other than in exceptional circumstances. The land to be designated must be demonstrably special to a local community and

hold a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and must be local in scale and in reasonably close proximity to the community. However, it will normally be located beyond the Settlement Envelope because valuable open space within the settlement will be designated as Important Open Space.

11.20 Local Green Space, once designated, is subject to the same strong development restrictions as Green Belt. Because of this the Council would not normally expect Local Green Space to be designated within the Green Belt.

11.21 The Council intends to explore the potential for the designation of Local Green Space around Aspley Guise. The continued potential for growth around Milton Keynes in the longer term raises issues of coalescence with nearby villages, particularly Aspley Guise. A Local Green Space designation will be considered as a mechanism to prevent such coalescence and secure the separate identity of Aspley Guise.

#### **Policy 41: Local Green Space**

The Council will designate Local Green Space and support designation of Local Green Space through Neighbourhood Plans where the space has a special character and significance to the local community by virtue of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value or wildlife value. Development that would affect the openness and character of Local Green Spaces will not be permitted unless very special circumstances would outweigh harm to the Local Green Space.

#### **Development in the Countryside**

11.22 Central Bedfordshire has a varied and contrasting landscape, ecology and settlement pattern, all of which contribute to the much valued countryside and rural nature of the area. Some of the change that takes place in the countryside does not constitute development and therefore falls beyond the scope of its control. Where control is possible the Council accepts the need to ensure that necessary change is accommodated in the countryside, in accordance with sustainability principles.

11.23 However, such change must be appropriate in terms of the Green Belt and other policies of the Strategy. Any development must be appropriate to the character and appearance of the local landscape. The use of Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) will help to protect the essential character of defined types of landscape and enhance landscapes of lesser quality. The Council accepts that in some cases new development can also result in the improvement of the countryside and enhancement of degraded landscapes.



- 11.24 A grading system for the quality of agricultural land has been in place for many years. Any development proposal, identified to be within the most valuable agricultural land (grades 1-3a), must consider alternatives in areas of less valuable agricultural land. If there are no viable alternatives, development within higher grades of valuable agricultural land may be considered acceptable.
- 11.25 The Council will provide positive support to new sustainable development within the countryside which seeks to improve the vitality of rural villages and improve the rural economy. Where development is proposed, the Council will seek to encourage careful consideration of landscape character, the protection of important features in the landscape, existing accessibility and the compatibility of design of development with forms and patterns of settlement in the area.
- 11.26 Outside settlements, where the countryside needs to be protected from inappropriate development, only particular types of new development will be permitted. This includes residential development within Exceptions Schemes, or dwellings for the essential needs of those employed in agriculture or forestry. Proposals which re-use or replace an existing dwelling will be acceptable provided they do not have an adverse visual impact on the rural nature of the surroundings. Development which supports the expansion of major existing facilities, promotes tourism and visitor facilities, caters for horse and livestock development and seeks to diversify the rural economy will be generally permitted, in accordance with the specific policy.
- 11.27 Extensions to gardens beyond settlement boundaries that are limited in scale may be permitted where there would be no harm to the character of the area, particularly to the intrinsic value of the countryside or to the need to safeguard agricultural land or land with ecological or environmental value on a farm. This would be where a garden extension is of very limited size, or creates a natural rounding off or where the original garden size is very restricted. By restricting permitted development rights, buildings would not be permitted on the extended garden area.

**Policy 42: Development in the Countryside**

The Council will seek to maintain and enhance the intrinsic value of the countryside. All development must have regard to the impact on the area's biodiversity, landscape, ecology, accessibility and agricultural land value.

Development appropriate to the countryside outside settlement boundaries will be supported by the Council subject to the appropriate policies. Proposals to re-use or replace existing dwellings in the countryside will be approved provided the resulting dwelling is not unacceptably larger in height and scale than the original dwelling.

Limited extensions to gardens beyond settlement boundaries may be permitted provided they do not harm the character of the area or the intrinsic value of the countryside and safeguarded agricultural land. They must be suitably landscaped or screened from the surrounding countryside and buildings may not be erected on the extended garden area.

### **Significant Facilities in the Countryside and Green Belt**

11.28 Central Bedfordshire is notable for the presence of a number of significant employment facilities in the countryside and Green Belt. These sites have the potential to provide additional jobs, which would help to meet the employment objectives of the Development Strategy. It is clear that these major sites can continue to make a significant contribution to the local economy. A number of these facilities also have the potential to attract high technology orientated businesses, creating a cluster effect.

11.29 The National Planning Policy Framework is clear about the need to secure economic growth. It recognises that the challenges presented by a low carbon future can still be met while also delivering this core objective. In order to proactively plan for businesses in emerging sectors like green technology, the Council supports the development of 'green' industries which may include the development of low emission vehicles or renewable energy equipment particularly around the existing cluster of high technology centres of excellence of Cranfield University and Technology Park and Millbrook Proving Ground.

11.30 In the future, major new sites may emerge in Central Bedfordshire, such as Centre Parcs and NIRAH (National Institute of Research into Aquatic Habitats), that should also be included within the remit of this policy issue.

### **Policy 43: Significant facilities in the Countryside and Green Belt**

Planning permission would be granted for infilling at or redevelopment of major development sites listed in this policy provided that the infilling or redevelopment is within the boundaries of the existing use.

Significant expansion of sites into the open countryside will be subject to the production of a management plan, development brief or masterplan prior to any application.

These facilities have been identified as: Cranfield University and Technology Park, Shuttleworth College, Millbrook Proving Ground, RAF Henlow, DISC Chicksands, Toddington Motorway Services Area, and Faldo Road Industrial Estate in Barton-le-Clay.

All proposals for significant development at these facilities will be

assessed against their:

- 1) Impact on the open countryside;
- 2) Provision of sustainable transport;
- 3) Justification;
- 4) Scale, layout and design – which must be appropriate to the establishment and its setting.
- 5) Compatibility with Green Belt policy

Planning applications that are considered acceptable against these criteria will be approved.

Further major facilities that may be developed with a similar level of importance in terms of employment or research will be considered under this policy.

### High Quality Development

11.31 Design is a crucial issue, and encompasses far more than the aesthetics of a building. It also involves the space around buildings, the features required to make the building function successfully, e.g. parking, garden space, access for people with disabilities and also minimising the role of new buildings in contributing to climate change.

11.32 The Council places great emphasis on the need for new development to be of the highest possible quality, ensuring that the places created now provide a lasting legacy. New residential development will need to provide homes that are of the right size to fulfil modern space requirements and that have good size gardens and amenity space. Parking provision will need to be provided in line with the Council's Parking Strategy. A mix of dwellings types and sizes will be needed, with a particular emphasis on larger family homes to complement the previous focus on smaller homes and flats. The Design Guide will be updated to reflect this approach.

11.33 Design and sustainability criteria relating to any proposal will also be major factors in determining any planning application. The Council has been very proactive in its approach through the preparation of design guides, and will require a range of urban design tools including urban design frameworks and design briefs to be used by developers to implement good design.

11.34 On larger housing schemes, the promotion of the use of design codes, such as that used at Fairfield has been very effective in achieving top quality developments. Accordingly, the Council requires development briefs to be provided at an early stage for housing developments for 35 dwellings or more. These must be consulted upon with the local community prior to submitting any planning application, in accordance with methods set out in the Statement of Community Involvement and

adopted by the Council for Development Management purposes. More detailed guidance on design is given in 'Design in Central Bedfordshire: A Guide for Development'.

11.35 Commercial proposals can be small or large scale and involve the erection of all sizes and types of structures that are often not subjected to as rigorous an assessment in terms of their design. The range of such development includes industrial, retail, tourist related and telecommunications facilities. While the Development Strategy encourages commercial schemes as part of its aim to increase employment, the Council is also mindful of the need to promote high quality and sustainably designed buildings.

11.36 Other requirements for providing sustainable features and the provision of infrastructure will be set out in other policies in this plan and other documents including the Community Infrastructure Levy.

#### Sustainable Design and Adaptation to Climate Change

11.37 Climate change will affect different aspects of the built environment, including external building fabric, structural integrity, internal environments, service infrastructure (e.g. drainage, water, waste, energy, transport and telecommunications), open spaces, human comfort, and the way people use indoor and outdoor space. Clearly good design is crucial and indeed integral to the way in which the Council can mitigate against these impacts. This process of adaptation through design to meet these expected future risks is further explored elsewhere in the Development Strategy.

#### Allocations

11.38 Allocations of land for new housing and commercial development may not have a readily identifiable locally distinctive design solution, either because of the scale of the new development and distance from the original settlement in the case of strategic allocations or in smaller scale allocations, the relationship with other housing. Before an application is submitted, a design approach to the development should be agreed with the Council, local community and other stakeholders which will cover Master Planning, coding of design, strategic and detailed landscaping, open space, sustainable design and construction, drainage, infrastructure and high quality development among other matters. This should be informed by a thorough understand of the opportunities and constraints of the site and an assessment to ensure that the site can assimilate the housing numbers and other uses allocated to it, while maintaining a high quality of sustainable design. Usually a development brief will be required and consultation with the local community is a critical part of putting together such a document.

#### Density

11.39 There is a difficult balance to be struck between density of development, quality of design and safeguarding the countryside for its intrinsic value. The lower the density of development, the more land

needs to be used and a greater part of the countryside has to be developed. To develop at higher densities would mean using less of the valued countryside, but this could be at a density which is not so common in a rural area. It is also more challenging to ensure that high density development is built to a high standard and is attractive to people to live in.

- 11.40 The government have now changed the guidance on development of garden land and there is no national standard or target for housing development density, this is to be set locally. The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to deliver a wide choice of quality homes, as well as boost significantly the supply of housing. Quality of life and opportunities for living a healthy lifestyle can be increased through high quality of design. Lower densities can allow for more space within and around homes, sufficient parking spaces, and allow development to be more adaptable for future climate changes. More green space around buildings will help to mitigate against impacts of future temperature increases and more frequent heatwaves and allow space for example for recycling, composting and water harvesting. It therefore is not considered appropriate to set out in the plan a prescriptive series of densities.

#### Local Distinctiveness

- 11.41 Local distinctiveness is an important characteristic. Without it the towns, villages and rural areas would lose their individual identities and their interest and attraction would be diminished. New development should therefore seek to contribute towards maintaining and where possible, enhancing local character and distinctiveness. This does not rule out bold, contemporary designs so long as they relate well and respect their surroundings. The Council recognises that principles of design need to be adopted that will enhance the public realm and promote local distinctiveness.
- 11.42 Public Art is recognised as a key mechanism to accomplish this and will be integral in achieving sustainable development and regeneration. The Public Art Framework defines Public Art to and gives guidance on its role in developments, regeneration and future growth. The Framework identifies the themes, locations and opportunities that will inform and shape the commissioning and delivery of Public Art in Central Bedfordshire by the Council and its partners and the actions necessary to achieve the frameworks aims and objectives.
- 11.43 New development proposals within the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should follow the guidance set out in the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide. This guidance is used as the basis for design advice to ensure that the special character of this area is conserved and enhanced. Elsewhere the Landscape Character Assessment provides a summary of the development of most settlements and their characteristic construction and building types.

### Landscape and Linkages

11.44 Landscape and green infrastructure can have many functions including creating a setting for development, habitat provision and access to nature, flood attenuation, improving water infiltration and water resource management as well as carbon fixing, noise attenuation and other environmental and health benefits. To maximise the benefit from this, it is important that every proposal considers the landscape, countryside and green infrastructure context within which it sits and the linkages between them and ensure that it does not function in isolation. Opportunities should be recognised and implemented to link development with the wider landscape, both visually and to allow access to the countryside.

11.45 A well designed and implemented landscaping and planting scheme can add considerable amenity, quality of life and environmental value (in the widest sense) to any development scheme or proposal. Planting schemes will generally be expected to be of native species and where possible add to local distinctiveness of an area.

### Housing Mix

11.46 When considering housing to be delivered over the life of the plan it is important that it meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area. This will change over time and be different in different parts of the area. Housing mix will be expected on any application to provide a good varied mixture of dwelling sizes and not show a particular bias to one size type, either large or small. The particular mix for each site should be agreed with the Council and be informed by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment or other appropriate local evidence, which will identify the need for a variety of dwelling types to cater for all levels of affordability, age groups and household types.

### **Policy 44: High Quality Development**

The Council aims to deliver the highest possible quality of new development within Central Bedfordshire. As such, all proposals for new development, including extensions will:

- be appropriate in scale and design to their setting,
- contribute positively to creating a sense of place and respect local distinctiveness through design, use of materials and planting,
- use land efficiently, taking into account quality of life,
- meet the required standards for energy and resource efficiency and include climate change adaptation and mitigation measures,
- respect the amenity of surrounding properties,
- enhance community safety,
- comply with the current guidance on noise, waste management, contaminated land, vibration, odour, water, light and airborne pollution,
- incorporate appropriate access and linkages, including provision for pedestrians, people with disabilities, elderly persons and for those with prams and pushchairs, cyclists and public transport,

- provide adequate areas for parking and servicing,
- be complimentary to the landscape setting both in the immediate proximity as well as longer views,
- provide soft and hard landscaping, greenspace, and green corridors appropriate in scale and design to the development and its setting with appropriate linkages for wildlife and human access to existing landscape features, corridors and green infrastructure,
- consider the provision of public art,
- for housing, contain a locally appropriate mix of sizes and types of dwellings,
- ensure that buildings are accessible for all, and comply with current guidance on accessibility to buildings,
- respect and complement the context and setting of all historically sensitive sites particularly those that are designated.

Any proposal for 35 dwellings or more will be required to provide a development brief covering the above issues if applicable.

## Heritage

- 11.47 The Council is committed to protecting, conserving and enhancing Central Bedfordshire's heritage assets and recognises the need to ensure new development respects their special interest and value. The historic environment is central to the identity of Central Bedfordshire and reconciling its protection with the economic and social needs and aspirations of the local community is essential for the benefit of present and future generations.
- 11.48 It is an objective of Government policy to conserve and enhance all aspects of the historic environment. National advice on the identification and conservation of the historic environment, as well as development management decisions is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Council will take full account of those requirements in the consideration of planning applications and allocations for development.
- 11.49 The Council is required to maintain or have access to a historic environment record which contains details of all known heritage assets within the area. In Central Bedfordshire, the Historic Environment Record comprises nearly 11,000 records relating to buildings, landscapes and archaeological sites and monuments and includes designated and non-designated heritage assets. The Council will ensure that information gathered through plan making or development is made publicly accessible via the Historic Environment Record.
- 11.50 Understanding the value and significance of a place is essential to inform decisions about its future. The degree of significance will determine what, if any, protection, including statutory and local designation, is appropriate for heritage sites.

### Archaeology and Development

11.51 The Historic Environment Record contains information on around 5,000 archaeological sites and monuments. However this resource is not static, it is constantly evolving as new research is undertaken. Prospective developers should contact the Council's Archaeology Team in order to establish whether there is potential archaeological interest at a proposed development site and to determine if there is a need for a field evaluation of this resource prior to the submission of a planning application. Where it is deemed that there is archaeological potential the minimum developers will be required to submit is an archaeological desk-based survey for the site. In some cases, developers will be required to commission an archaeological field evaluation to define the character, extent and condition of any remains. These requirements are in line with paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework and applications submitted without sufficient information regarding the heritage asset with archaeological interest may be refused. Where a permitted development affects a heritage asset with archaeological interest resulting in the loss, wholly or in part, of the significance of the asset, developers will be required to secure the implementation of a scheme of archaeological investigation. This scheme will be approved in writing by the Council in advance of development and include the provision for the long term curation of any resulting archive and appropriate publication.

11.52 Central Bedfordshire also has 83 Scheduled Monuments, protected under the terms of the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. The Council will maintain a presumption against development that will result in harm to or loss of any Scheduled Monument or its setting. Any development that has the potential to impact upon a Scheduled Monument or its setting will have to demonstrate that the harm or loss is necessary to achieve public benefits which outweigh the harm or loss and will have to comply with paragraph 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

11.53 Non-designated heritage assets with archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to Scheduled Monuments will be subject to the policy requirements applied to designated heritage assets.

### Historic Buildings and Development

11.54 The repair, renovation, alteration and extension of a Listed Building should not be at the expense of its intrinsic special interest and significance. It is important to guard against unnecessary change or over-restoration. In any change, materials should be sympathetic and appropriate to those used in the original building. In particular the Council will resist applications that result in the loss of traditional local features such as long straw thatched roofs, locally manufactured clay tiles and bricks and local stone.



- 11.55 When considering applications for change of use to Listed Buildings, the original use is usually the most appropriate and will be encouraged where possible. Where this is not practicable, the alternative use proposed must not require alteration to the extent that the character and historic interest of the building is destroyed. If the Listed Building is in the countryside and not suitable for conversion to employment use, then the most appropriate use for that building will be considered, retaining the original use where possible.
- 11.56 In cases where Listed Buildings may become vacant and derelict, there is a presumption in favour of their retention so consent to demolish will be wholly exceptional and only allowed if all other options to retain the building are demonstrated to have been thoroughly explored. In exceptional cases where there is no alternative to demolition, the Council will require an appropriate record to be made and the appropriate salvage of materials.
- 11.57 The Council takes an active role in promoting the repair and reuse of historic buildings or other listed structures to reduce the number of vulnerable historic buildings, structures and objects, particularly those considered 'at risk' on the Council's 'buildings at risk' register. Occasionally as an exception to policy, in a situation where the public benefit of retaining an 'at risk' feature or building is significant and there is no other means of securing its retention, enabling development will be considered by the Council. Further guidance on enabling development is set out in publications by English Heritage.

#### Historic Landscapes and Development

- 11.58 A particular feature of Central Bedfordshire is the presence of a high number of historic parks and gardens. The 13 registered parks and gardens within the area include those of exceptional interest and international importance; namely Woburn Abbey, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Old Warden Park (including Swiss Garden), Luton Hoo Park and Southill Park. There are also a number of undesignated historic parks and gardens across Central Bedfordshire. All of the parkland makes an important contribution to local distinctiveness both in the wider landscape and historic importance.
- 11.59 Historic landscapes similarly add interest and variety to the generally farmed countryside. Over 168 historic landscapes and features are protected by other policies or legislation, for instance if they are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a Scheduled Monument. However, the complexity of the historic landscape means that there are many sites, features and areas which do not have such a designation but nevertheless should be retained because of their contribution to the wider landscape and our ability to read our heritage. The Council's heritage professionals are constantly obtaining further information on Central Bedfordshire's historic landscapes and adding this to the Historic Environment Record.

### Historic Settlements and Development

- 11.60 Another important feature of Central Bedfordshire is the number of historic market towns and villages with their traditional buildings built from local materials. Central Bedfordshire has 61 Conservation Areas, 1,938 Listed Buildings, 290 historic rural settlements and 9 historic towns. These are a key indicator of local distinctiveness. The Council recognises the need to conserve and enhance all of these important features, which make up an essential component of the character of the area.
- 11.61 Whilst individual settlements have their own character, there are four broad settlement types in Central Bedfordshire: market towns; linear settlements; villages, and estate villages. With the exception of estate villages, the other settlement types are mainly medieval in origin and display classic characteristics of layout and form. The area has a surprising number of estate villages, mostly linked to large historic parklands. The groups of estate cottages provide a rich selection of neo-vernacular cottages which have been the model for the 'suburban dream' throughout the 20th Century.
- 11.62 Other local buildings include: vernacular cottages, farm houses, town houses, artisan houses, barns, onion sheds, model farms, and watermills amongst other building types. These buildings usually have few architectural pretensions and are simple in form and detailing. Their building materials were generally sourced from the locality and this is reflected in the pattern of distribution of brick colour across the area – in the east a gault brick predominates, whereas in the west of the area a red/orange brick is found.
- 11.63 The Council is required to regularly survey its area to determine whether to designate Conservation Areas (areas of special architectural or historic interest). The Council is also required to regularly review and update (as required) existing Conservation Areas in order to protect or enhance their special architectural or historic interest through the implementation of an on-going programme of Conservation Area Appraisals. These appraisals will evaluate the appropriateness of the Conservation Area boundary, define their special character and set out guidelines for development and enhancement schemes. Conservation Areas are designated not on the basis of individual buildings but because of the overall quality of the area, its mix of uses, historic layout, characteristic materials, scale and detailing of buildings and open spaces. Designation also takes into account the need to protect trees, hedges, walls, railings and other characteristic features. Once designated, special attention must be paid in all planning decisions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The boundaries are identified on the Proposals Map.
- 11.64 The Council will require new development to provide a level of visual interest that is equivalent to the existing buildings in the Conservation

Area. Choice of materials and detailed design are vital elements in achieving new buildings worthy of the local character and interest which typifies Central Bedfordshire's Conservation Areas.

11.65 It is important to reiterate the importance of high quality, appropriate and locally distinctive design when submitting planning or Listed Building applications in the historic environment context. Applications are required to be accompanied by good quality plans and designs which meet high standards. Guidance for making applications is contained on the Council's web site under the Heritage, Conservation and History within the Planning section.

11.66 Further detailed guidance on conservation and heritage issues are contained in 'Design in Central Bedfordshire: A Guide for Development'.

**Policy 45: The Historic Environment**

The Council will conserve, enhance, protect and promote the enjoyment of the historic environment including

- a. Listed Buildings,
- b. Scheduled Monuments,
- c. Conservation Areas,
- d. Registered Parks and Gardens,
- e. Historic Landscapes, Archaeological Sites and Monuments,
- f. other non-designated assets and the
- g. setting of all heritage assets.

This will be achieved by:

- Requiring applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by development, including any contribution made by their setting.
- Requiring the highest quality of design in all new development, alterations and extensions and the public realm in the context of heritage assets and the historic environment. Design which positively contributes to local character and distinctiveness, and sustains and enhances the character or appearance of Conservation Areas and the setting of Listed Buildings will be encouraged and supported.
- Safeguarding and promoting improvements to Central Bedfordshire's historic environment including securing appropriate viable uses and improvements to Listed Buildings and reducing the number of heritage assets "at risk".
- Encouraging the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment by supporting appropriate management and interpretation of heritage assets.
- Refusing development proposals that will lead to harm to or loss of significance of a heritage asset whether designated or non-designated,

unless the public benefits outweigh the harm or loss.

- Requiring developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage asset that will be lost, wholly or in part, as a result of any permitted development, and to make that information publicly accessible.

### **Re-use of Buildings in the Countryside**

11.67 The re-use and adaptation of rural buildings has an important role to play in ensuring the sustainability of rural areas. It can assist in agricultural diversification, conserve resources, avoid dereliction, improve the visual appearance of the landscape, reduce demands for new building in the countryside, provide opportunities for tourism and recreation and produce local employment, thereby reducing the need for travel.

11.68 In the interests of promoting the rural economy, employment generating uses will be the preferred end use of the converted building or buildings. Residential conversions will be resisted where the most appropriate use of the building is commercial. Residential conversions are generally the least suitable form of re-use as they usually require the greatest change to the fabric of the building and this, together with the need for gardens, fencing and parking areas can have a suburbanising effect on the countryside and villages. The only circumstances where residential conversions are acceptable are where the siting and access would not be suitable for commercial development.

11.69 Industrial, commercial, tourism and recreation re-uses which are of a scale appropriate to a rural area can make suitable conversions provided they do not require new areas of hardstanding, parking areas, vehicle turning areas, extensive new boundary fencing/walling or substantial areas for outside storage. The conversion of an existing building must be carried out in a manner which is beneficial to the rural area and does not result in harm to the character and appearance of the building, the countryside or the Green Belt.

11.70 The Council, whilst recognising the benefits of the re-use of rural buildings, wishes to ensure that development in the countryside is properly controlled. The original building or group of buildings to be converted should therefore be appropriate to the rural setting in terms of scale and appearance. Applications for the re-use of agricultural buildings erected under permitted development rights will be carefully examined to ensure these rights are not abused and to avoid the proliferation of farm buildings.

11.71 In many instances it may be possible, through re-use and adaptation, to achieve improvements to the external appearance of a building and its surroundings thereby enhancing the visual appearance of the countryside.

**Policy 46: Re-Use Of Buildings In The Countryside**

The Council will support the re-use of existing buildings in the countryside provided the proposal complies with the following criteria:

- The building is of suitable rural appearance, and has a permanent and substantial construction capable of conversion.
- The proposed use supports the rural economy, unless the building is only suitable for residential conversion by virtue of its location and access.
- The conversion will be sympathetic and in keeping with the character and appearance of the building and the appearance of the rural surroundings.
- No harm will be caused to features of architectural, or historic importance
- Would not be detrimental to protected species

Where re-use is proposed in the Green Belt, Green Belt policies will be applied in addition to the above.

**Rural Worker’s Dwellings**

11.72 To sustain and enhance the rural economy the Council will seek to support the growth of the rural economy. Agriculture and forestry have a key role to play in the countryside, underpinning both the rural economy and the landscape character of those areas. Long term conservation objectives are also sometimes best served by environmentally friendly forms of farming and forestry.

11.73 In order to sustain some work practices, it is accepted that in some cases there is a required need to have workers living in close proximity to a specific location or use. This predominantly, but not solely, relates to agricultural and forestry uses. A functional need test is necessary to establish whether it is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available at most times. This may include the need to provide essential care at short notice or to deal with the serious loss of crops or products.

11.74 A functional need will have to be established and capable of being sustained over a period of time. If a new dwelling is essential to support a new farming activity, whether on a newly-created agricultural unit or an established one, it should, for the first three years, be provided by temporary accommodation such as a caravan. Any temporary or

permanent dwelling permitted will be restricted to occupancy of the worker on the establishment.

- 11.75 The siting, design and external appearance of agricultural and forestry residential development can be visually intrusive in the landscape and can result in the loss of important features including those of historic and nature conservation value. Accordingly, any proposal would be considered against design policies set out in the document.

**Policy 47: Rural Worker’s Dwellings**

New permanent dwellings will be allowed to support existing agricultural or forestry activities, where:

- There is a clearly established existing functional need;
- The unit and the agricultural activity concerned have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so; and
- The functional need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned.

Where rural worker’s dwellings are proposed in the Green Belt, Green Belt policies will be applied in addition to the above.

**Equestrian Development and Development Related to the Keeping and Breeding of Livestock**

- 11.76 By its very nature, equestrian and livestock development requires a countryside location. There continues to be considerable pressure for equestrian and animal related development within Central Bedfordshire. These activities can make a considerable contribution to sustainable recreation, conservation grazing and the rural economy through diversification of agricultural holdings in the area. However, intensive private activity as well as commercial activities can be visually harmful in the countryside so it is important that environmental quality and landscape character is respected. As such the Landscape Character Assessment should be employed to inform the appraisal of development proposals. In Central Bedfordshire it is particularly important to consider the context of proposed development in the flat landscapes towards the eastern part of the area where even small buildings will be prominent against the skyline.

- 11.77 Larger commercial livery yards may be restricted on the grounds of sustainability and accessibility as well as the impact on the landscape and surroundings and ideally should be based on an existing holding.

11.78 In recent years a number of alternatives to traditional grazing and livestock have become popular. The keeping and breeding of livestock includes any creature kept for the production of food, wool, skins, fur or for the purpose of farming land. These uses often support the ability of an existing business to diversify and can contribute to the rural economy.

**Policy 48: Equestrian Development And Development Related To The Keeping And Breeding Of Livestock**

Horse-related facilities and small scale extensions to existing equestrian enterprises in the countryside will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- The proposals should be closely related to the bridleway network and should not have an adverse impact on the public rights of way network.
- New freestanding stables should be well screened from the surrounding countryside and should not interfere with the amenities of adjoining residents.
- New buildings for indoor equestrian use should be located adjacent to existing buildings.
- Any proposals for equestrian development including jumps, schooling areas and new buildings/extensions will be considered in the context of the Landscape Character Assessment and their design, scale, siting and use of materials should respect the rural setting.

Proposals for larger scale private or commercial enterprises (comprising ten horses or more) will only be permitted should demonstrate the sustainable nature of their location by means of a traffic impact assessment.

Proposals for small scale development related to the keeping and breeding of livestock in the countryside will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- Their design, scale, siting and use of materials should respect the rural setting.
- Development should be well screened from the surrounding countryside and should not interfere with the amenities of adjoining residents.

Where equestrian or livestock development is proposed within the Green Belt, Green Belt policies will be applied in addition to the above

## 12.0 ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Renewable & low carbon energy development

- 12.1 The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (July 2009) sets a renewable energy target of 15% of total energy to be generated from renewable sources by 2020. In addition to this the Climate Change Act 2008 makes binding the need to cut UK greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. To help meet these national targets and to fulfil one of the core principles of the National Planning Framework, the provision of renewable and low carbon energy sources must be positively explored in Central Bedfordshire.
- 12.2 However, the Council recognises that on-site solutions may not always be feasible or viable in meeting the standards set out in Policy x: Resource Efficiency. In such cases, near-site solutions can be considered to allow greater flexibility to the developer and increase the feasibility and viability of renewable and low carbon energy developments. Smaller scale development could also incorporate on-site renewable energy measures or contribute to strategic schemes across the district.
- 12.3 Renewable energy is a broad term covering a range of sustainable energy sources which can not be depleted. Sources include wind power, solar power, the movement of water (tidal and other flows) and the combustion or digestion of materials such as crops, wood and waste products.
- 12.4 Low carbon energy is power that continues to utilize the world's natural resources, such as natural gas and coal, but employs techniques that reduce carbon emissions from these sources when burning them for fuel. An example of this is Combined Heat and Power and other district heating schemes which can be up to 95% efficient in comparison with traditional fossil fuel powered electricity generating stations, which are only about 40% efficient.
- 12.5 Overall the development of new more sustainable energy sources brings opportunities for increased diversity and security of energy supply, protecting residents from fuel poverty as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.
- 12.6 Clearly the strategic allocation sites set out in this plan present significant opportunity for the provision of large scale low carbon energy schemes due to concentration of significant demand in a single location, and the fact that they can be integrated into the development at the initial design stage. It is expected that medium to large-scale development schemes will play a critical role in meeting targets by



providing on site renewable energy generation at a more commercially viable scale.

- 12.7 Any proposals for new renewable or low carbon energy generating schemes will be considered favourably subject to the criteria set out in policy However studies like the East of England Low Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Capacity Study (DECC, April 2011) and the Central Bedfordshire Utilities and Growth Study (Arup, 2012) have shown that certain technologies are particularly suitable for this area. These are district heating schemes which include combined heat and power, photovoltaic energy, biomass and land fill gas and these will therefore be given greater support.
- 12.8 Currently Central Bedfordshire has landfill gas generators at Arlesey, Brogborough and Sundon, which generate about 45MW of electrical energy. When the BEaR project contract for the procurement of the management of municipal waste in Central Bedfordshire is awarded, the new strategic waste facility could provide significant renewable heat and power. This would help to off-set carbon emissions from current energy generation methods and reduce the amount of municipal waste going to landfill.
- 12.9 In addition to this opportunity for energy production, further work will be undertaken to identify suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure, and opportunities for co-locating potential heat customers. The Council will also support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy where these are delivered through Neighbourhood Plans and in other areas as appropriate.
- 12.10 In accordance with guidance set out in the NPPF, careful consideration will be given to proposals in order to minimise adverse impacts on landscape and amenity in the widest sense.

**Policy 49: Renewable and low carbon energy development**

The Council recognises the environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable or low-carbon energy, and so will consider favourably proposals for renewable energy installations identified in paragraph xxx, above which directly benefit local communities, subject to the following criteria. Developments must:

- Firstly be directed to those areas where it would have least impact and be of an acceptable scale. Any unavoidable adverse impacts including noise, pollution and visual amenity, should be mitigated through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures;
- Have good accessibility to the transport network;
- Be located and designed so as to have no adverse impact on Green Belt areas, the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns AONB or any area identified through the Landscape Character Assessment as being of high

sensitivity;

- Be located and designed so as to have no significant adverse effects on the character of the landscape, townscapes and historic features in all other areas.

In addition:

- If a district heating scheme is proposed then all occupiers must be connected to that installation.

- When a renewable energy installation is no longer operational, the facility must be decommissioned, removed and the site restored to its original condition where appropriate.

### Resource Efficiency

12.11 Resource efficiency simply means using the Earth's limited resources in a sustainable manner. We depend on many resources including fuels, water, and clean air for our survival, but the supply of natural resources is limited, and is fast being eroded. Growing global demand is increasing pressure on the environment, and inevitably competition for resources is also increasing. Many natural resources are fundamental to our health, well-being and quality of life, so it is essential that we urgently reduce our consumption.

12.12 The Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) (2008) is an environmental impact rating system for housing in England and Wales, which sets new standards for energy efficiency and sustainability. It is a government led system which allows the environmental impact of new housing to be measured against nine categories of sustainable design. The categories cover energy/CO<sub>2</sub>, water, materials, surface water runoff (flooding and flood prevention), waste, pollution, health and well-being, management and ecology. The Code uses a one to six star rating system to score the overall sustainability performance of a new home against these nine categories. The Code sets minimum standards for energy and water use at each level.

12.13 The Council will require that new housing meets Code Level 5 for water by 2013 some three years ahead Building Regulations. This is to address the predicted scarcity of water resources in this region which is evidenced by the Local Climate Impact Study (CBC, 2012). The study highlighted that climate change alone is likely to cause significant water supply shortages. The predicted growth in Central Bedfordshire will put additional stress on our water resources and therefore it is essential that any new development is as water efficient as possible.

12.14 The Environment Agency recommends that areas with high growth should aspire to achieve water neutrality<sup>5</sup>. This means that growth will

<sup>5</sup> Briefing Note on Water Neutrality, (Environment Agency, 2009)

not result in an increase in water demand or usage. In order to achieve this, and in addition to the high water efficiency standard for new development, water efficiency in existing developments needs to be improved. The council will therefore require that any planning application for extensions to existing buildings will be accompanied by a proposal detailing how water efficiency will be improved in the existing building. The Council will also require a water meter to be installed, where none is present, as a planning condition.

12.15 The UK government’s target to make all new homes zero carbon from 2016 (now equivalent to code level 5) previously demanded that all emissions from the house and the activities that take place within it must be net zero over the course of a year. In view of the fact that this has only been achieved in practice by a handful of exemplar schemes, it was considered that this definition presented too great a challenge in mainstream roll out, not least because it treats every home as an individual energy ‘island’ which must generate all the power and heat it needs.

12.16 The new definition is represented by the Zero Carbon Hierarchy triangle below, addresses these difficulties and makes the zero carbon standard genuinely achievable. Zero carbon is made up of three parts, Energy Efficiency, Carbon Compliance and Allowable Solutions. The overall onsite contribution to zero carbon (including energy efficiency above) is called Carbon Compliance. This includes on-site low and zero carbon energy such as PV and connected heat such as a community heating network.

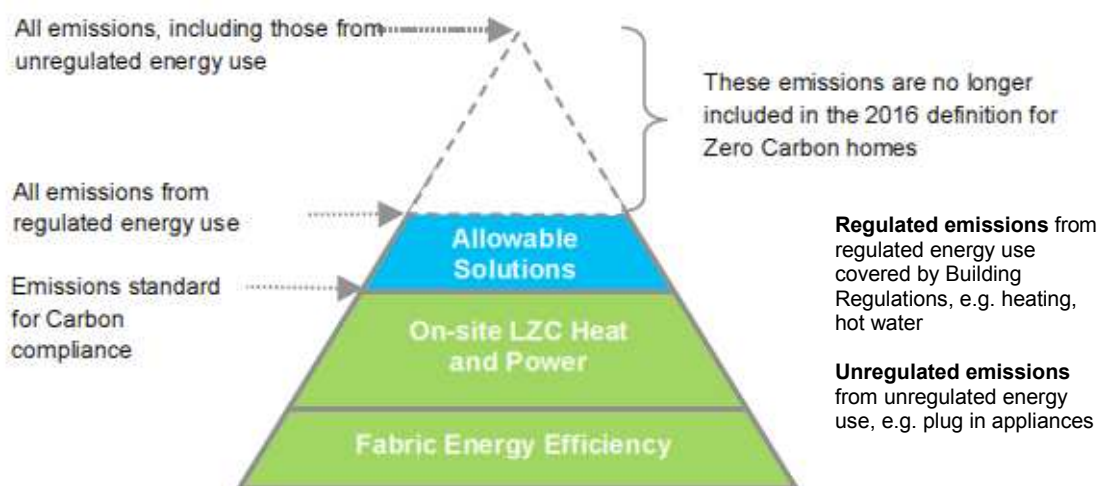


Figure 1 The Zero Carbon Policy ‘Triangle’, showing the post-Budget 2011 extent of Allowable Solutions and its relationship with Carbon Compliance.

Source: Allowable Solutions for Tomorrow’s New Homes (Zero Carbon Hub, 2011)

12.17 Any carbon not mitigated on site will be dealt with through a range of ‘allowable solutions’. These represent the remaining carbon emissions

from the energy use regulated by the Building Regulations. The allowable solutions will cover carbon emitted from the home for thirty years following its completion. Examples of potential allowable solutions include, energy efficient appliances meeting a high standard which are installed as fittings within the home; exports of low carbon or renewable heat from the development to other developments; and investments in low and zero carbon heat infrastructure.

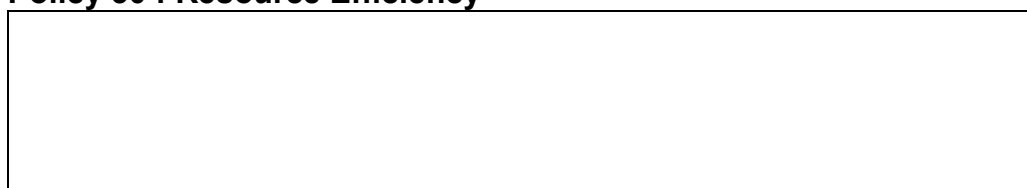
12.18 It may also be the case that developers will be able to invest in properly accredited offsite renewables as an 'allowable solution'. In this instance, the Council will ensure that the benefits of these measures are captured within the unitary authority area.

12.19 For all other elements of the code, level 5 will only be required in 2015, one year ahead of Building Regulations in order to encourage that step-change in behaviour that will be necessary ahead of the government's mandatory 2016 target.

12.20 Non residential buildings including care homes are also an important consideration. Their environmental performance is measured to recognised standards by the BREEAM environmental assessment method and rating system. A BREEAM assessment uses established benchmarks, to evaluate a building's specification, design, construction and use. Like the Code for Sustainable Homes, the measures used represent a broad range of categories and criteria from energy to ecology. The Council will require non-residential buildings to achieve a BREEAM Excellent rating for water by 2013 and for other elements by 2015; or a comparable standard if a new nationally recognised scheme like the mooted Code for Sustainable Buildings is introduced

12.21 The Energy Act 2011 includes provisions for the new 'Green Deal', which intends to reduce carbon emissions cost effectively by increasing the energy efficiency of properties in the UK. The new innovative Green Deal financial mechanism eliminates the need to pay upfront for energy efficiency measures and instead provides assurances that the cost of the measures should be covered by savings in electricity bills. This should mean that the cost of retrofitting in particular is made more affordable. The Council requires planning applications for extensions and change of use to be accompanied by the Energy Performance Certificate, Green Deal Assessment or equivalent nationally recognised assessment;. Any viable and feasible measures identified will be set as planning conditions

**Policy 50 : Resource Efficiency**



In order to ensure that we mitigate against the impacts of climate change and deliver sustainable and efficient development,

New homes will be required to:

- Meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5 standard for water by 2013
- Meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5 standard for all elements by 2015

If offsetting is proposed as an 'allowable solution' to achieve Code Level 5, then the benefitting scheme must be located within Central Bedfordshire.

Non-residential development will be required to:

- Meet BREEAM Excellent or the equivalent nationally recognised standard (if introduced) for water by 2013
- Meet BREEAM Excellent or the equivalent nationally recognised standard (if introduced) for all elements by 2015

Planning applications for extensions or alterations to existing buildings must be accompanied by:

- an Energy Performance Certificate/ Green Deal Assessment or other equivalent nationally recognised assessment;
- details of how greater water efficiency will be achieved for the existing building.

## ADAPTATION

12.1 Adaptation to both Climate Change and to meet the differing needs of our population throughout their lifetimes is essential if Central Bedfordshire is going to be able to deliver growth effectively. The aim of adaptation is to reduce the impact of changes to the population and climate which are happening now and to increase our resistance and resilience to future impacts. This is especially important given the increase in the ageing population and their vulnerability to the worst impacts of the changing climate. The adaptation process requires that risks and any opportunities, are identified and action is taken to develop appropriate responses.

12.2 Soil is a resource that, among other things, can store carbon. The effect of development is a loss of carbon stored in the soil, which is then released into the atmosphere. This is a one off negative effect that occurs as a result of development. The spatial evidence base to

improve regulating ecosystem services in Central Bedfordshire identifies the effect of soil carbon arising from potential development. Developers will need to take account of this effect, and demonstrate how they will compensate for this loss.

- 12.3 The case for designing for future climate is strong. Buildings and infrastructure have long life spans and what we build today will, in many cases still be around in fifty years or more. We generally build to suit the current climate and take no account of their performance in future. As a result, the impacts of climate change can make buildings and infrastructure uncomfortable, unsafe or even commercially unviable to maintain.
- 12.4 Climate change will affect different aspects of spatial planning and the built environment, including external building fabric, structural integrity, internal environments, service infrastructure (e.g. drainage, water, waste, energy, transport and telecommunications), open spaces, human comfort, and the way people use indoor and outdoor space. It is predicted that we will have hotter drier summers, milder wetter winters with the associated extreme weather impacts of drought and flooding.
- 12.5 Nationally, the Climate Change Act 2008 makes the United Kingdom the first country in the world to have a national, legally binding, long-term framework to cut carbon emissions. Following this, the Environment Agency is leading on the development of the government's first National Climate Adaptation Programme. This will use the findings of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment that DEFRA published in January 2012. This document highlighted the need to take early action to mitigate against the risks to the environment, the economy and to health. The National Planning Framework is similarly clear in its requirement that development plans must develop policies that require developments to adapt to take account of the impacts of climate change.
- 12.6 Adaptation needs to be a dynamic and flexible process, with decisions made in light of the long lifespan of buildings and infrastructure. This includes opportunities that might be exploited to adapt existing buildings and towns. For example, increasing the amount of urban greenery can help absorb floodwater and can help make buildings and public spaces more comfortable in hot weather. They can help improve air and water quality; encourage use of public spaces; while at the same time adding to the value of nearby homes.
- 12.7 At a local level the findings of the Central Bedfordshire Climate Change Adaptation Evidence Base show that we must be particularly responsive to the impacts of water scarcity in Central Bedfordshire and the wider south and east of England area. Central Bedfordshire is also at risk of impacts arising from flooding, subsidence, overheating and climate impacts on natural environment, which need to be appropriately addressed. The study recommends that all development proposals

must demonstrate how they have considered climate change resilience in their design. It also recommends that the Council promotes on-site ecological enhancement as a easily implementable method to support adaptation.

- 12.8 It is clear that green infrastructure can provide many benefits for climate change adaptation including flood storage, climate cooling and habitats creation. Site conditions are important in deciding the approach to planting and habitat creation in particular soil, exposure, drainage, space, hardiness and human activity. However with careful consideration of these sorts of factors, it is accepted that appropriate green infrastructure provision is one of the most practical and achievable ways of mitigating against the future effects of climate change.

### An Aging Population

- 12.9 The case for designing for an aging population is equally compelling, as the CLG guidance document, 'Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods' has demonstrated. Better provision of appropriately adapted housing would help to reduce the cost of care and support for the ageing population by allowing people to remain in their own homes much longer.
- 12.10 The concept of Lifetime Homes was developed in the early 1990s by a group of housing experts, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The principles of Lifetime Homes have been developed to support the growing demand for choice, flexibility and independence among disabled people of all ages, as well as promoting high quality and adaptable housing design for the general population.
- 12.11 Lifetime Homes are standard homes which incorporate 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes at relatively minimal cost. Each design feature adds to the comfort and convenience of the home and supports the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life. These include widths of parking spaces and doorways, wet rooms, approach gradients and layouts.
- 12.12 Lifetime Homes promote flexibility, adaptability and independence. They are designed to create and encourage better living environments for everyone. From raising small children to coping with illness or dealing with reduced mobility in later life, the Lifetime homes concept means that the property has the capacity to adapt to changing needs over time.
- 12.13 The Council has set a target of delivering 70% of homes to meet those 'Lifetime Homes' design criteria that are considered to be the most practical solutions to meet the changing needs of Central

Bedfordshire's diverse households. These required standards will be set out in a technical guidance note.

- 12.14 It is expected that evidence of compliance with this policy will be produced as part of the Design and Access Statement that is submitted with each planning application. Further detailed guidance on sustainable design in support of this policy will be provided in a technical guidance note.

**Policy 51: Adaptation**

To ensure development is resilient and adaptable to the impacts arising from climate change and an aging population, all new developments will be required to:

- Use design, layout and orientation to maximise natural ventilation, cooling and solar gain
- Retain and enhance existing trees, landscaping and other natural features
- Incorporate additional landscaping including green and brown roofs and walls as appropriate
- Use appropriate strategies including Sustainable Drainage Schemes to prevent surface water flooding
- Use water efficient fixtures and fittings and incorporate rain water harvesting and storage
- Use a range of measures to mitigate for the effect of loss of carbon in the soil as a result of development

In addition to this, 70% of new dwellings must meet specific elements of the Lifetime Homes Design Criteria as set out in the accompanying technical guidance note.

Further information about how resource efficiency and adaptation measures can be delivered will be set out by the Council in separate guidance

Managing Flood and Drought Risk and Water Quality

- 12.15 The predicted effects of climate change include a greater risk of extreme weather events which may increase the risk of flooding, including flash flooding and droughts. An important role for local planning authorities, in partnership with the Environment Agency, the water companies and developers, is to help new and existing development adapt and mitigate against current and future flood and drought risk.

- 12.16 The Council's Climate Change Adaptation Evidence Base identifies areas at higher risk of flooding and hot spots such as along the River Ivel at Biggleswade, Sandy and Langford. The Clipstone Brook and the Ouzel Valley are prone to problems in the south of the District. The risks in these areas, and potentially elsewhere, could be increased if climate predictions are accurate. The spatial evidence base to improve



regulating ecosystem services in Central Bedfordshire (Cranfield University, 2012) identifies both existing runoff rates and the implications for surface runoff of changes to urban landuse. Developers will be expected to use this information to identify the extent to which developing sites could result in increased runoff rates, and demonstrate what mitigation measures have been put in place to ensure that the development does not result in a net increase in runoff rates. Therefore, the provision of sustainable ways of managing flood risk, including surface water run-off from new and existing development is important. This is particularly applicable to larger scale new proposals.

12.17 Central Bedfordshire Council will support the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) to manage flood risk and improve water quality. SUDS enable different design solutions, dependent on site circumstances such as underlying geology, to be used to create environmentally sustainable approaches to surface water drainage management. There are a number of benefits to using SUDS, for example:

~ they can be used to control peak flows of surface water run-off to watercourses or sewers by using more natural drainage features such as swales and ponds. Not only can SUDS reduce on site flood risk, they can also be used to reduce flooding elsewhere by providing flood water storage;

~ they can be used to provide valuable open space and new or improved habitats based around new planting, water channels and storage ponds. Therefore, they can make significant contributions to green infrastructure, landscapes and making quality places to live, play and work.

~ SUDS can, depending on location, nature and size, provide economies of scale so helping to reduce developer costs. For example a strategic SUDS scheme could be shared by a number of developments;

- SUDS will also act to improve water quality at source.

12.18 The underlying ground conditions will usually determine the types of SUDS approach suitable. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRAs) give an indication of the ground conditions in the District, chiefly around the larger settlements. However, the SFRAs are a guide only and detailed ground investigations will need to be carried out to assess the suitability of a specific proposal for SUDS. The Council will have a duty to form a SuDS Approving Body (SAB) and will have responsibility for the approval of proposed drainage systems in new developments and re developments subject to exemptions and thresholds. Through the promotion and adoption of Surface Water Management Plans the Council will expect all developments to use

SUDS as normal practice in order to help achieve sustainable forms of development. This will include schemes to ensure long-term maintenance.

12.19 The NPPF sets out a number of requirements that flood management policies need to meet in local plans. Therefore, in Central Bedfordshire, when locating development, the floodplain will be protected by applying the Sequential Test and, if necessary, the Exception Test where the Sequential Test cannot be satisfied for wider sustainability reasons. **(The Sequential and Exception tests are set out in Appendix XX).** The Flood Risk Assessments will provide the basis for applying the Sequential Test.

12.20 Land will also be safeguarded which is needed for current and future flood management and opportunities provided by new development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding will be pursued. Development that increases the risk of flooding elsewhere will not be permitted.

### **Policy 52: Mitigating Flood Risk**

Overall the Council will promote and support a strategic approach to flood management through the adoption of Surface Water Management Plans.

In order to safeguard the floodplain from inappropriate development and help prevent flooding overall, the Council will follow the sequential approach when identifying new sites for development. If necessary the Exception Test will be applied if the wider benefits for sustainable development significantly outweigh flood risk.

Detailed Flood Risk Assessments and Design Statements will be required to support development proposals that demonstrate how proposals will:

1. make a positive contribution to reducing or managing flood and drought risk and improving water quality, for example through the implementation of SUDS;
2. operate within the provisions of the Surface Waters Management Plan;
3. meet the required Greenfield run-off rate, ensure that the development does not result in a net increase in runoff rates from the existing baseline and maximise the potential for on-site storage;
4. avoid increasing flood risk elsewhere;
5. adapt to future changes in climate conditions;
6. contribute to the provision of a range of green infrastructure networks and achieving a net gain in biodiversity;
7. where appropriate, contribute to the recommendations of the Landscape Character Assessment and aims of the Design Guide for Central Bedfordshire; and
8. safeguard land required for current and future flood management.

Where possible these should be agreed by the EA, Drainage Boards, Utility

Companies and the Councils prior to a planning application being submitted.

Detailed site specific flood risk assessments will be prepared to inform the preparation of master plans for the Strategic Expansion Areas and any other development as required. This will ensure appropriate and specific flood mitigation and sustainable drainage measures are in place that build on the recommendations of the Water Cycle Studies.

The Councils will work with the EA, Drainage Boards and developers to seek contributions for the creation and maintenance of practicable river restoration and habitat creation programmes that also manage flood risk across the area.

### **Biodiversity and Geological Conservation**

- 12.21 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity when going about their activities. The role of the planning system has been reinforced by documents such as the Government White Paper 'The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature' 2011, the 'UK National Ecosystem Assessment Understanding Nature's Value to Society' and 'Biodiversity 2020 and 'A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services'. The National Ecosystem Assessment shows that over 30% of the "ecosystem services" provided by the natural environment are in decline. Habitats are fragmented and unable to respond to pressures such as climate change and development pressures.
- 12.22 Through the White Paper and the NPPF, government expects the planning system to facilitate a strategic and integrated approach within and across local areas. Planning should guide development to the best locations, encourage green design and enable development to enhance natural networks making them coherent and resilient as part of sustainable development. Most importantly it reinforces the overall objective of no net loss of biodiversity and supports a net gain in biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.
- 12.23 The NPPF also requires policies to reflect the strength of protection according to the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated conservation sites and to map components of local ecological networks for habitat restoration or creation; planning permission for development that would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused.
- 12.24 Central Bedfordshire contains a variety of habitats and landscapes which are integral to its character. These not only have an intrinsic value but also make a vital contribution to the quality of life for the people who live here.

- 12.25 Within the area some areas are designated as being of particular importance for biodiversity and geology/geomorphology. They include 32 nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) such as Dunstable Downs, Sundon Chalk Quarry, Marston Thrift, Flitwick Moor and Wavendon ponds and Sandy Warren. There are also three National Nature Reserves (NNRs) at King's Wood near Heath and reach, Barton Hills and Knocking Hoe near Shillington.
- 12.26 Additionally there are also 11 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and numerous County Wildlife Sites. There are also Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGGS). **All these sites are mapped and are shown on Fig X on page X.** There are no internationally designated sites in the District.
- 12.27 Beyond these sites there are also a large number of local priority habitats and species which are set out in Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan 2001 (BAP) launched in 2001. The LBAP provides details of how the rarest and most threatened habitats and species should be protected and allowed to flourish. These include lowland grassland, lowland acid grassland, lowland calcareous grassland, lowland heath and wetland habitats such as wet woodlands. In addition Central Bedfordshire is home to a number of species protected by law like the Great Crested Newt.
- 12.28 Since then the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Forum has done further work to map opportunity areas of greatest potential, for enhancement, restoration and creation of priority habitats. This work, contained in "Rebuilding Biodiversity in Bedfordshire and Luton" 2006 has also informed the production of the various Green Infrastructure Plans across Central Bedfordshire.
- 12.29 On the face of it Central Bedfordshire appears to possess a reasonably healthy level of biodiversity, but this is not necessarily the case. For instance, compared to the national average a lower percentage of the District is covered by ecological designations. One of the most serious problems facing biodiversity in the District is the continued fragmentation of habitats many of which have become isolated islands surrounded by intensively farmed agricultural land, unsympathetic development and busy transport routes. Not only does isolation critically reduce genetic diversity and hence chances for long term survival, it also makes habitats more susceptible to the effects of climate change as species cannot easily adapt, for example by migration. The LBAP, the Landscape Character Assessments and the Green Infrastructure Plans together provide a detailed framework and strategy designed to address the problems facing biodiversity in Central Bedfordshire.
- 12.30 Furthermore the Design Guide for Central Bedfordshire also provides advice and guidance aimed at ensuring biodiversity is protected, improved and/or created in new development.

### **Policy 53: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation**

The Council will seek a net gain in biodiversity by protecting all sites of nature conservation interest, providing the strongest protection Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves. The Council will ensure that:

- Development which adversely affect SSSIs and NNRs will be refused. Assessing adverse impacts will apply to potentially damaging development proposals both within and outside of the designated area and include a consideration of adverse cumulative effects with other existing or proposed development.
- development that would adversely affect County Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Regionally Important Geological or Geomorphological Sites and nationally, regionally or locally rare species, will not normally be permitted.
- development that would impact on the strategic ecological network causing fragmentation or otherwise prejudice its effectiveness will not normally be permitted.

Where the need for development outweighs its impact and is permitted within adjacent to or in close proximity to designated sites or known locations of protected species or elements of the ecological network adequate mitigation to minimise such impacts will be necessary.

### **Green Infrastructure (GI)**

12.31 The proposed Green Infrastructure (GI) network is set out in the Green Infrastructure Plans that cover Central Bedfordshire (available on the Council's website). The GI network is designed to a strategically planned and managed system of green spaces, access routes, wildlife habitats, landscapes and historic features which meets the needs of existing and new communities by providing:

- some of the essential ecosystem services on which we rely;
- a healthy and diverse environment;
- attractive places to live and visit and a good quality of life; and
- help in achieving a carbon neutral future.

12.32 The NPPF recognises the wider benefits of ecosystems services and the need to encourage the most effective use of land. Green infrastructure provides an integrated way of promoting this approach and the Council has undertaken further work in partnership with Cranfield University to understand the role that GI can play in ecosystems services (Spatial Mapping of Regulating Ecosystem Services (April 2012). To date this work has mapped the areas environmental resources and demonstrates how these can be used to best effect to reduce climate change risk through carbon storage and

multiple use of land to benefit for example wildlife, recreation, fuel and food production.

- 12.33 Central Bedfordshire Council currently works in partnership with neighbouring local authorities, environmental groups to promote an integrated approach to providing GI through the Green Infrastructure Consortium. This has led to the identification of the network across Central Bedfordshire. The Consortium has produced the two GI plans that cover the Northern and Southern areas of the District respectively: Ongoing partnership working will include working with neighbouring local authorities to achieve implementation of the GI network across administrative boundaries.
- 12.34 The Plans describe a ‘multifunctional’ network of GI which includes protected habitats, nature reserves, green spaces and green links which, when taken together, will help provide a robust natural environment which not only respects biodiversity for its intrinsic value, but will help create the quality environment needed for a healthy society. One of the principle outcomes of the GI planning process has been the designation of The Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Green Infrastructure Network. ***This is shown in Fig XX***. The Strategic Network will be the focus of GI provision. New development will be expected to contribute to the on-site delivery and ongoing management of GI to help achieve the aims of the GI plans.
- 12.55 Within the green infrastructure network there are strategic scale projects. The Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park is a project to create a new waterway within a green corridor between the River Ouse in Bedford and the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes. Not only would it provide opportunities for water based tourism and recreation it would also enable the delivery of major GI components such as a canal-side footpaths, cycleways and water habitats. As a council, we are supporting the delivery of this project. We will not permit development that prejudices the delivery of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway, and will ensure that development along the route of the Waterway includes the delivery of the Waterway and the associated green corridor.'
- 12.35 The green infrastructure network includes large publicly accessible green spaces that are highly valued by local communities and visitors. The Leisure Strategy will define a hierarchy of publicly accessible green spaces. The Council will protect these sites and also take opportunities to promote their improvement through, for instance, proper management. This will be achieved through the invaluable work of local groups and communities and additional funding will be sought through planning obligations where it is required to ensure GI is delivered. Whilst development in the GI priority areas may be expected it should not fragment the existing or proposed GI network or build over key GI opportunity sites.

12.36 In addition to the larger GI sites there are numerous smaller areas that are no less valuable, especially when taken in combination. Local GI can comprise many types of use including parks, gardens, church yards, allotments, the rights of way network, ponds, streams, rivers, canals, woods, copses and hedgerows. All are valuable and all require safeguarding, especially where they form an important part of a wider GI network. There are a number of existing Parish Green Infrastructure Plans and through the emerging Neighbourhood Plan system, the Council will work with local communities to help identify and protect local GI.

**Policy 54: Green Infrastructure**

The Council will work towards achieving a net gain in Green Infrastructure (GI) by:

~ requiring contributions, through planning obligations to help provide GI including the delivery of a linked network of new and enhanced open spaces and corridors off-site.;

- using the Green Infrastructure by Design and the Residential Design Guide for Central Bedfordshire to plan high quality multifunctional GI within development, that incorporates sustainable urban drainage systems and enhances biodiversity, landscape character and design quality and makes provision for the ongoing and effective management of GI;

~ focussing significant GI provision in the priority areas as identified in the Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan. This will include maintaining support for the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway.

~ working positively with communities, for example through the Neighbourhood Planning process, developers, landowners and environmental groups to identify locally significant GI and any potential shortfalls in provision and the means by which shortfalls can be rectified

~ not permitting development that would fragment or prejudice the GI network.

**Landscape, Woodlands, Trees and Hedgerows**

12.37 The landscape is probably the most defining feature of any location. The underlying topography and geology of any landscape will fundamentally shape human activity and biodiversity. Central Bedfordshire possesses a large number of varied landscapes for its size and these have been identified and described in two Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs).

12.38 The LCA process is an accepted and recognised method for understanding how the landscape evolved., how it may change in the future and how that change may be managed. LCA describes and

classifies the recognisable and consistent pattern of features that makes one landscape different from another rather than better or worse. Character is what makes each part of the landscape distinct and gives each area its particular sense of place.

12.39 The LCA approach considers that all landscapes are valuable and seeks to protect their essential character. The purpose of the LCA is to help ensure change and development does not undermine whatever defines and or is valued about a place. It also advises on ways of improving character. The LCAs for Central Bedfordshire provide a comprehensive evidence base which helps underpin forward planning and development management decisions. It provides key information for local authority officers, developers, local interest groups and local communities. It should be used to provide guidance for Neighbourhood Plans and should help steer development to the best location and positively influence its scale and design.

12.40 The landscapes and associated countryside of Central Bedfordshire are highly valued by the people who live within them as well as visitors who enjoy them for recreation. The Council will protect the open countryside for its own intrinsic value and for the wider benefits it provides for agriculture and biodiversity. It will also safeguard landscapes against inappropriate development and work to ensure new development accords with landscape character. The LCAs will be critical in this process and particular note should be taken of the sensitivity analysis. Development proposals will be required to include plans for landscape improvements in accordance with the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment. This will apply to all landscapes, but particularly to those affected by the Strategic Expansion Areas, the existing urban fringe, the built edge of other settlements, along prominent road corridors and proposals for development within the Forest of Marston Vale and the Ivel Valley. Depending on the nature and/or scale of the proposals, improvements may be required on or adjacent to the development site or to contribute towards wider, strategic landscape enhancement in the affected areas.

### **The Chilterns AONB**

12.41 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are a national landscape designation and are therefore subject to very robust protection, equivalent to that afforded National Parks. The Chilterns Conservation Board has produced a management plan for the AONB which provides a framework within which local authorities, government and the Board itself operate. A Chilterns Building Design Guide has also been published and the Council expects any development proposals to take this fully into account. The Council will continue to support the management plan and provide protection against inappropriate development. This may, depending on the nature and scale of the proposals, include development outside of the AONB boundary which



might threaten its unique qualities, for instance by harming views from the AONB and/or adding to noise and light pollution.

### **Policy 55: Landscape**

The Council will ensure that:

~ the highest level of protection will be afforded to the landscape of the Chilterns AONB primarily through conservation and enhancement. Any development which has an unacceptable impact on the Chilterns landscape will be normally be refused. This will, where relevant, include development outside of the AONB which is judged harmful to the AONB, through for example, adverse impacts due to visual intrusion and noise.

~ Elsewhere the varied and distinctive landscapes of Central Bedfordshire will be conserved and enhanced in accordance with the conclusions of the Landscape Character Assessment. Proposals that have an unacceptable impact on the landscape quality of an area will normally be refused. In particular, proposals that have an adverse impact on important landscape features or highly sensitive landscapes such as the Flit Valley and the Greensand Ridge.

~ Development proposals will normally be required to include plans for landscape improvements in accordance with the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment. This will apply in particular to Strategic Expansion Areas, the built edge of settlements, along prominent road corridors and proposals for development within the Forest of Marston Vale and the Ivel Valley.

Depending on the nature and/or scale of the proposals, mitigation may be required on or adjacent to the development site or to contribute towards wider, strategic landscape enhancement in the affected areas in accordance with the LCA and the Design Guide..

### **Woodlands, Trees and Hedgerows**

2.62 Woodlands, especially semi-ancient natural woodlands, individual trees and hedgerows not only provide one of the most important habitats but also contribute to landscape character. Throughout Central Bedfordshire they make up distinctive elements of the landscape. Unfortunately the District has a relatively low level of woodland cover, compared to other areas of the Country, and many trees and hedgerows have been lost due to post war agricultural intensification. A lack of proper management of many remaining assets has also been an issue leading to stress and susceptibility to disease. The impacts of Dutch Elm Disease have already been experienced and there are also new threats from pests and diseases which could affect many species of tree including the beech, a defining species of the Chilterns. . Poorly

planned development has also had adverse impacts due for example to root damage during construction.

12.42 However, initiatives like the Forest of Marston Vale and the adoption of more environmentally friendly farming practices like the farm stewardship scheme and support through the English Woodland Grant Scheme are helping to stop, and even reverse losses. A better understanding and management of woodlands, trees and hedgerows and tree planting in new development is also helping reverse some losses. The Council is also keen to promote tree planting both within the rural area and as part of new development. Trees have a vital role to play in helping to offset the potential effects of climate change. The predicted worsening of the urban heat island effect can be mitigated through tree planting in urban areas which provide shade as well as helping store carbon. Short rotation coppice can also provide renewable fuel for biomass boilers.

12.43 The landscape and biodiversity value of individual trees, notably ancient and specimen trees, including those found in traditional orchards, should not be underestimated particularly where they provide 'stepping stones' between otherwise isolated habitats. Hedgerows also provide vital wildlife corridors as well as being habitats in their own right. Development proposals will be expected to protect these features and contribute towards new planting in line with government advice.

### **Policy 56: Woodlands, Trees and Hedgerows**

The Council will ensure that:

~ woodlands, including ancient and semi-natural woodland, orchards, hedgerows and aged and veteran trees found outside woodlands will be protected from development and improved through proper management. Developers will be required to retain and protect such features from root damage and avoid changes to soil structure that could also increase the risk of subsidence where they lie in close proximity to building works. Any trees or hedgerows unavoidably lost to development will be replaced.

~ support is continued for the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale and the need to regenerate the environmentally damaged landscape of the Vale through woodland creation in order to achieve the target of 30% woodland cover in the Forest area by 2030;

~ an increase in tree cover, including new and/or expanded woodlands, will be promoted where it would not threaten other valuable habitats. New planting or contributions towards planting for the purposes of enhancing or regenerating urban areas and rural landscapes will be sought from new developments.

~ tree planting for the purposes of mitigating the adverse impacts of climate

change, including minimising the urban heat island effect, providing fuel from biomass etc, will be sought in line with best practice.

## 13.0 SITE SPECIFIC POLICIES

### North of Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation

- 13.1 The area to the north of Houghton Regis has been identified as a suitable location for major new mixed-use development and all associated infrastructure..
- 13.2 A total of around 7,000 new homes can be accommodated in total – 5,500 homes on site 1 and 1,500 on site 2. Similarly around 40 hectares of employment is planned for – 32ha on site 1 and 8ha on site 2. However, of these totals only a proportion is likely to be delivered during the plan period. The figures in tables 6.1 and 10.1 (5,600 homes and 30ha of employment) represent the totals that are likely to be delivered during plan period.
- 13.3 The North Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation (SA), which sits between the M1 and the A5, will be delivered across two sites although forming a whole. Site 1 comprises the eastern side of the strategic allocation extending from the M1 to the A5120 whilst Site 2 is located to the east of the A5 to the A5120. The proposed A5-M1 link road provides the northern boundary for both sites.
- 13.4 Sufficient land has been removed from the Green Belt in order to accommodate the full development potential of the SA, as this will remove the need for a further review of the Green Belt boundary immediately after the plan period. The new Green Belt boundary is aligned with the A5/M1 link road.
- 13.5 The delivery of the SA over two sites will allow a more detailed approach to phasing to be undertaken. The two sites will be fully integrated with each other as well as with the urban area of Houghton Regis so as to provide truly sustainable development. The timely delivery of supporting infrastructure within the strategic allocation will complement and enhance existing services and facilities as well as assisting in the regeneration of the existing urban area.
- 13.6 A Master Plan/Framework Plan and accompanying delivery strategy are being prepared for the SA encompassing both Sites 1 and 2. The Master Plan/Framework Plan and Delivery Strategy, which will be adopted as a supplementary planning document (SPD) when completed, are being prepared in partnership between the Local Authority, Developers, Statutory Bodies and Service Providers. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will finalise the layout of the strategic allocation and provide guidance on the scale and location of different land uses and infrastructure requirements. It will also provide more detailed principles to guide the design of the development.

### Site 1

Vision - North Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation Site 1

- 13.7 Site 1 of the SA will provide a community where people want to live, work and visit. It will form a distinctive place whilst appropriately integrating with the existing urban edge. It will complement the wider regeneration of Houghton Regis and Luton by providing a range of housing, employment opportunities and community facilities. A mix of commercial, civic, residential and leisure uses will be focused around high quality public spaces connected to each other and the existing urban area by sustainable modes of transport. Networks of green infrastructure will create links with the surrounding environment to promote a healthy lifestyle and a safe and well-balanced community.
- 13.8 Although relatively unconstrained, Site 1 does contain some existing features which need to be considered as part of the development proposals. These include small areas of flooding in relation to the River Lee and the River Ouzel both of which fall within Flood Zone 2 and the subsequent impact that these have upon the Houghton Brook which is identified as having a high risk of flooding. There are also existing landscape and ecological characteristics within the site as well as a number of archaeological sites, features and listed buildings within the vicinity of the strategic allocation and there are electrical power lines running along the eastern edge of the site following the M1 corridor.
- 13.9 The relative lack of large scale significant constraints combined with its proximity to existing facilities makes this site a suitable location for a new large scale development and provides an opportunity to contribute to the regeneration of the existing urban area as well as enhancing the area as a whole.
- 13.10 The Master Plan/Framework Plan for the North Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation, identifies various aspects of the development of a strategic allocation including the A5-M1 link road, new Junction 11A and the Woodside Connection. These, and others, are being taken fully into account to facilitate the provision of a fully integrated and sustainable development.

Development Principles and Land Uses

- 13.11 Site 1 has the capacity to deliver around 5,500 new homes. The final number, however, along with the delivery of affordable housing and the mix of housing types and sizes, will be determined through the preparation of the Master Plan/Framework Plan.
- 13.12 Provision for at least 32 hectares of new employment land will be made within the plan period. This will comprise a range of employment uses and be concentrated at the proposed new Junction 11A and along the M1 corridor so as to maximise opportunities for good road access. Smaller pockets of employment land will be located in the strategic allocation within local centres.

- 13.13 The Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Funding Study (IDP&FS) identifies the critical, essential and desirable infrastructure requirements associated with the strategic allocation. The IDP&FS identifies the need for new nursery provision, new educational facilities, community and health facilities, quality open spaces and the delivery of reliable public transportation. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will also make provision of a number of facilities and services within Site 1 including a cinema, a hotel and public house, retail facilities including a supermarket and commercial uses such as a car showroom. The IDP&FS also identifies the provision of a new Junction 11A, the A5-M1 link road and the Woodside Connection as critical infrastructure. Initial enabling works will start towards the end of 2014.
- 13.14 Site 1 will benefit from strategic and local connections from the proposed A5-M1 link that will connect to the M1 at a new junction, Junction 11A. The proposed Woodside Connection will alleviate heavy goods traffic by directing this away from the strategic allocation and Houghton Regis. An extension of the Luton and Dunstable Busway into Site 1 will contribute to an improved choice of sustainable, public transport and improved access to the existing urban centres.
- 13.15 New development will be of a high quality, integrating local natural features and incorporating sustainable construction and design, creating a distinct identity and sense of place for Houghton Regis and encouraging the regeneration of the existing urban area. Site 1 of the strategic allocation will be developed with distinctive character areas and connected to the urban area at Houghton Regis by green corridors and key access routes. These will forge strong links with the existing communities and ensure opportunities for connectivity with Site 2
- 13.16 A network of green infrastructure in and around the strategic allocation, and linking to the countryside to the north will be created to join up and enhance existing features and create new features, including biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space. Particular opportunities include creating new strategic multifunctional greenspace at Chalton Cross Farm, enhancing Houghton Hall Park and enhancing sustainable walking and cycling routes along the Chilterns Way and National Cycle Route 6, encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport.
- 13.17 Areas at risk of flooding have been identified in the south eastern corner of Site 1 along the Houghton Brook in the Luton and South Bedfordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2008. Opportunities to reduce the risk of flooding here and further downstream in Luton along the River Lea will be investigated and alleviation methods will be implemented. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will be supported by a site-specific flood risk assessment, which will take account of the advice in the Water Cycle Study and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Phase 1 Water Cycle Study 2008, Phase 2 Water Cycle Study 2010

and Luton and South Bedfordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1, 2008 relating to flood risk mitigation and betterment.

## Site 2

### Vision - North Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation Site 2

13.18 Site 2 will build upon the strong sense of existing local community and will complement the wider regeneration of Houghton Regis initiated through development of Site 1. High quality residential, commercial, community, leisure and open space facilities will be located in accessible locations that can be reached by walking, cycling or by public transport. Neighbourhoods will be connected by a green infrastructure network, maximising the opportunities created by the existing natural features and promoting healthy lifestyles.

### Development Principles and Land Uses

13.19 Being slightly smaller in scale, Site 2 will accommodate at least 1,500 homes. As with Site 1, the final delivery of affordable housing and mix of housing types and sizes will be determined through the preparation of the Master Plan/Framework Plan.

13.20 Provision of approximately 8ha of new employment land will be provided within Site 2 that complements and supports employment opportunities provided in Site 1 and maximises its direct access to the strategic road network via the A5-M1 link.

13.21 The Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Funding Study (IDP&FS) identifies the critical, essential and desirable infrastructure requirements associated with the North Houghton Regis strategic allocation and growth as a whole. The IDP&FS identifies the need for new nursery provision as well as new schools. However the strategic allocation will also contribute to the delivery of community and health facilities, quality open spaces and the delivery of reliable public transportation. The Master Plan/Framework Plan for the strategic allocation will also make provision of a number of facilities and services within Site 2 of the strategic allocation including retail facilities and commercial uses. The IDP&FS also identifies the provision of a new Junction 11A, the A5-M1 link road and the Woodside Connection as critical infrastructure. As indicated above, these are included within the Master Plan/Framework Plan for the strategic allocation with the initial enabling works starting towards the end of 2014.

13.22 Site 2 will also be accessed from the existing urban area and the A5120 and will be supported by public transport opportunities such as the extension of the Luton-Dunstable Guided Busway. Access routes and the use of green corridors will also create a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

13.23 To contribute to the regeneration of Houghton Regis and provide a distinctive identity and character, the design of Site 2 will be of a high

quality and incorporate sustainable design and construction. The design, scale and height of the new development will also reflect the existing urban character as well as the topography of the local landscape and will protect views from this area into the surrounding countryside. It will also have regard to the natural and heritage features found in this area, such as hedgerows and woodlands, the County Wildlife Site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Houghton Quarry and Thorn Spring Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).

13.24 The natural features within and surrounding the site, together with the area at risk of flooding along the Ouzel Brook provides a key opportunity to develop a green infrastructure network through creation of new and enhancement and linking of biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space features. Particular opportunities involve creating new multifunctional greenspace and enhancing biodiversity at Houghton Regis Quarry, enhancing Houghton Hall Park, enhancing and creating sustainable walking and cycling routes along the National Cycle Network Route 6, the guided busway, the Icknield Way and the Chilterns Way, enhancing existing greenspaces at Plaiters Way and Blue Waters Woodland, and enhancing heritage features at and around the Icknield Way and Thorn Spring (SAM).

13.25 The Council-owned site at Thorn Turn has been identified by the BEaR Project as the likely site to develop the infrastructure required under the contract. The procurement will see the delivery of a residual waste treatment solution, an organic waste solution, the redevelopment of the the Councils existing Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) as well as the relocation of Dunstable HWRC to Thorn turn and the deliver of two strategically located salt barns. The site has also been identified in the submitted Minerals and Waste Core Strategy. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will consider the possible linkages with this proposed development and any potential synergies.

13.26 As with Site 1, Site 2 will be developed in accordance with the detailed Master Plan/ Framework Plan which will be supported by a site specific flood risk assessment, taking account of the advice in the Water Cycle Study and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment relating to flood risk mitigation and betterment.

**Policy 57: Houghton Regis North Strategic Allocation**

**Site 1** comprises the area between the A5120 and the M1. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will deliver a strategic allocation that:

- 1) Provides a mix of uses necessary to achieve a sustainable community. These will include
  - a) approximately 5,500 private and affordable homes;
  - b) 32 hectares of new employment land in a combination of B1, B2 and B8 Use Classes;
  - c) commercial facilities including retail units, a supermarket; cinema, and a public house;



- d) provision for educational facilities;
  - e) retirement accommodation;
  - f) community and health centres; and
  - g) up to 78 hectares of open space and green infrastructure
- 2) Provides opportunities to assist in the regeneration of Houghton Regis through the timely delivery of supporting infrastructure that complements and supports existing facilities;
  - 3) Provides the opportunity for long term integration with Site 2 to facilitate the delivery of the wider strategic allocation for this area;
  - 4) Provides for efficient public transport routes that link with Houghton Regis town centre and the guided busway as well as dedicated and safe pedestrian and cycle links from the new and existing neighbourhoods to local centres, employment opportunities and social and community infrastructure;
  - 5) Provides a green infrastructure network that links and enhances biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space features within the existing urban area, the strategic allocation and the wider countryside; and
  - 6) Seeks to reduce flood risk along the Houghton Brook and further downstream in Luton by engaging with the EA to explore practical opportunities that manage flood risk.
  - 7) Incorporates measures to minimise energy use and includes renewable energy technologies.

**Site 2** comprises the area from the A5 to the A5120, and extends northwards to the proposed A5-M1 Link Road. The Master Plan/Framework Plan will deliver a strategic allocation that:

- 1) Provides a mix of uses necessary to achieve a sustainable community. These uses will include
  - approximately 1,500 private and affordable homes,
  - 8 hectares of new employment land in a combination of B1, B2 and B8 Use Classes within the plan period;
  - commercial facilities including a local centre;
  - provision for education facilities including sports and playing fields;
  - retirement accommodation
  - community and health centres; and
  - up to 88 hectares of open space and green infrastructure including a new Nature Reserve.
- 2) Provides opportunities to assist in the regeneration of Houghton Regis, through the timely delivery of supporting infrastructure that complement and supports existing facilities;
- 3) Integrates with Site 1 to facilitate the delivery of the wider strategic allocation for this area;
- 4) Provides for efficient public transport routes that link with Houghton Regis town centre and the guided busway as well as dedicated and safe pedestrian and cycle links from the new

and existing neighbourhoods to local centres, employment opportunities and community facilities;

- 5) Provides a green infrastructure network that links and enhances biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space features within the existing urban area, the strategic allocation and the wider countryside.; and
- 6) Seeks to reduce flood risk along the Ouzel Brook by engaging with the Environment Agency to explore practical opportunities that manage flood risk.
- 7) Incorporates measures to minimise energy use and includes renewable energy technologies.

The Master Plan/Framework Plan will confirm the timing and phasing of the development, taking account of the capacity of both the current and proposed infrastructure.

The Green Belt boundary follows the alignment of the A5-M1 Link Road.

### **Delivery Strategy**

13.27 The delivery of Site 1 will be phased over a number of years and will be secured by both public and private funding. Up to 900 homes and 200 jobs have been identified with the potential for early development within the plan period and could be delivered ahead of major highway infrastructure, such as the A5-M1 link and Woodside Connection, subject to detailed consideration within a transport assessment for any planning application. There is the potential within the strategic allocation for this early delivery of homes and jobs to be provided across multiple “start points” within the strategic allocation. This will allow the maximum potential to be realised in relation to the delivery of development whilst taking advantage of existing access points to the site.

13.28 Site 2 will be delivered in phases over a number of years and will be secured by both public and private funding. There is the potential for early development within Site 2 across multiple “start points” that could be delivered ahead of major highway infrastructure, such as the A5-M1 link. This will allow the maximum potential to be realised in relation to the delivery of development whilst taking advantage of existing access points to the site.

13.29 The Delivery Strategy will outline in more detail the phasing of housing, employment and infrastructure provision. It will also confirm the roles and responsibilities for the delivery and funding of the associated infrastructure. An overview of the key milestones in relation to the delivery of the strategic allocation as a whole, which will be expanded upon further within the Delivery Strategy, is provided below.

North Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation Key Milestones

Master Plan Completed	Spring 2012	
Applications Submitted	Spring 2012 onwards	
Application Determined	Winter 2012	
Estimated development phasing	2011-2016	350
	2016-2021	1,750
	2021-2026	1,750
	2026-2031	1,750
	Post 2031	1,400
Total Dwellings	7,000	
Start of A5-M1 Link Road and Junction 11A	2012	
Start of the Woodside Connection	2016	
Start of Development (Employment)	2014-2031	30ha
	post-2031	10ha

**North of Luton Strategic Allocation**

North of Luton SA - Vision

- 13.30 The sustainable urban extension to the north of Luton will maximise and respect its attractive setting and location adjoining the Chilterns AONB. It will contribute to the regeneration and enhancement of Luton through provision of a greater range of housing and employment opportunities and through contributions to improved transport links into and around the town. Popular and viable new centres with attractive community facilities and public spaces will promote a sense of pride and provide a focal point for community activity and social interaction. New green infrastructure will be provided, in particular linking existing and new green spaces within the urban area and to the countryside to enable greater accessibility and enjoyment of the area's rich and historic natural environment.
- 13.31 The North Luton SA lies to the north of the built edge of the urban area of Luton between the M1 and the A6. Apart from the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), forming the northern flank, this location is a relatively unconstrained area although containing some discrete landscape and ecological features. The impact on the AONB and the predominantly open arable farmland is likely to be a negative but limited incursion. However, there is likely to be scope for protection, mitigation and enhancement of the local features within the topography and proposed development.
- 13.32 In other respects, this location has a relative lack of constraints being of predominantly low environmental sensitivity. However, there are areas of designated landscape associated with the Sundon Manor and the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Drays Ditches along the northern edge of Luton, and whilst the site falls entirely within Flood Zone 1, the risk of fluvial, groundwater and sewer flooding will be investigated as part of the Flood Risk Assessment. The large scale and relatively open

field network currently provides open views to Sundon Ridge and part of the AONB and there are some minor power lines which transect the site, both of which will impact upon the design and location of development within the site.

- 13.33 Combined with its good proximity to existing facilities and public transport, the land to the North of Luton is a suitable location for new, large scale sustainable development.
- 13.34 The urban area will form the southern boundary to the SA with the A6 and the M1 forming the boundaries to the east and west respectively. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will form the northern boundary, albeit with a limited degree of incursion, to new development for this SA. The Green Belt boundary will be altered in this area to reflect the extent of the SA.

### **Development Principles and Land Use**

- 13.35 The land has the capacity to accommodate at least 4,000 dwellings, 20 hectares of employment land, community facilities and green infrastructure. It is anticipated that a mix of approximately 2,900 private and affordable homes will be delivered in the plan period in this SA. Provision has been made for a contingency of 1,100 additional homes for future needs when required. The phasing of the development, number, percentage of affordable housing and mix of housing types and sizes will be determined in detail through the preparation of the Master Plan.
- 13.36 Provision will be made for the phased delivery of 13 hectares of new employment land within the plan period and a contingency of 7 hectares for future needs when required. This will comprise primarily B1 and B8 uses, and will be concentrated to the western and eastern ends of the SA to maximise opportunities for good road access. Opportunities within the local centres will be encouraged where appropriate and deliverable.
- 13.37 The Infrastructure and Funding Study (2010) identifies the critical, essential and desirable infrastructure requirements associated with the SA and growth as a whole. It identifies the need for new educational facilities as well as significant utility infrastructure including a new primary sub-station. The SA will also contribute to the delivery of retail provision, community and health facilities, quality open spaces and the delivery of reliable public transportation. However, some larger community facilities such as swimming pools and sports halls will be provided within the existing urban conurbation which will meet the needs of current residents as well as future residents of Luton and the North Luton SA.

- 13.38 Green infrastructure provision here will focus on the creation of new infrastructure as well as the enhancement and linking of existing biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space features, and ensuring that the setting of the Chilterns AONB is maintained. Particular opportunities include the possible creation of new multifunctional greenspaces at Sundon House, Sundon Quarry, Warden and Galley Hills, and between Sundon and Sharpenhoe. Existing assets include Sundon Quarry (SSSI), Bramingham Park, George Wood (CWS), Sundon Wood (CWS), Sundon Park, Bramingham Wood (CWS), Sharpenhoe Clappers (SSSI), Drays Ditches (SAM) and the Theedway.
- 13.39 Access to the SA will primarily be gained from the existing urban area via existing roads and the A6. The SA will also benefit from access on to the Luton Northern Bypass in the longer term.
- 13.40 The network of strategic green infrastructure, existing roads and access points will provide the basis for dividing the SA into separate areas for development. These will be linked principally by a spine road(s). High density development, local centres and other land uses generating significant volumes of travel will be located along the spine road(s) to encourage public transport use. Along these roads and within the neighbourhoods, priority will be given to cycling and walking to encourage and enable sustainable travel opportunities.
- 13.41 The delivery of the new Junction 11A and the North Luton Bypass would impact upon the phasing of development to the North of Luton. However, funding has been secured for the new Junction and some limited development has been identified to be delivered ahead of the Northern Bypass. Therefore, access to the strategic road network is a constraint that can be overcome. This and other minor site constraints will be overcome through the sites careful design and masterplanning.
- 13.42 The design, scale and height of new development will protect key views and reflect the gentle rolling nature of the landscape. New development immediately adjoining the access points to the M1, the A6 and, in the longer term, the Luton Northern Bypass will be of high design quality to provide a good impression for people entering the main conurbation.

**Policy 58: North of Luton Strategic Allocation**

The North of Luton SA will

- 1 provide a mix of uses necessary to achieve a sustainable and vibrant community including
  - a) approximately 2,900 private and affordable homes within the plan period;
  - b) 13 hectares of new employment land in a combination of B1, B2 and B8 Use Classes within the plan period;
  - c) provision for educational facilities including a new primary school and contributions to a new secondary school;
  - d) parks and children's play facilities;
  - e) allotments; and
  - f) formal and informal open spaces.
2. provide a contingency of approximately 1,100 private and affordable homes and 7 hectares of employment land, which will be developed only in accordance with the contingency arrangements set out elsewhere in this strategy.
3. create a series of attractive and well connected neighbourhoods comprising high quality new development and well designed amenity spaces;
4. provide dedicated and safe pedestrian and cycle links from the new and existing neighbourhoods to local centres, employment opportunities, schools, shops and community facilities;
5. provide for efficient public transport routes through the SSSA that link with the guided busway and contribute to improving public transport links to Leagrave Station and Luton town centre;
6. Link and enhance existing biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and open space features within the existing urban area, the SA and the wider countryside to provide a green infrastructure network.

The Green Belt boundary follows the extent of the Strategic Allocation.

The Master Plan will confirm the timing and phasing of the development taking account of the capacity of both the current and proposed infrastructure and the need for a contingency.

### North of Luton SA - Delivery and Monitoring

- 13.43 A Master Plan and accompanying Delivery Strategy will be prepared in partnership between Central Bedfordshire Council, adjacent Luton Borough Council, service providers, statutory bodies and the developers. The timeframe for the delivery of the master plan is yet to be finalised but it will be in place before the commencement of any residential development. Whilst the potential for some limited development to be delivered ahead of the Northern Bypass has been identified, this early delivery should not impact upon the existing urban area and should not prejudice the future delivery of the SA as a whole. Any early delivery of development within the SA should also provide for the delivery of associated infrastructure improvements. The Master Plan will finalise the layout of the SA and provide greater guidance about the scale and location of different land uses and infrastructure requirements. It will also provide more detailed principles to guide the design of the development.
- 13.44 The associated Delivery Strategy will outline in more detail the phasing of housing, employment and infrastructure provision. It will also confirm the roles and responsibilities for delivering and funding the associated infrastructure. An overview of the key milestones in relation to the delivery of the SA as a whole, which will be expanded upon further within the Delivery Strategy, is provided below.

#### North of Luton SA Key Milestones

Master Plan Completed	Early 2014	
Application Submitted	2014	
Application Determined	2015	
Estimated development phasing	2011-2016	0
	2016-2021	900
	2021-2026	1,000
	2026-2031	1,000
	2031+	1,100
<b>Total Dwellings</b>	<b>4,000</b>	
	2011-2031	13ha
	Post-2031	7ha

### East of Leighton-Linslade Strategic Allocation

- 13.45 Leighton-Linslade is an attractive market town located on the western edge of Central Bedfordshire that is made up of two historic settlements, Leighton Buzzard and Linslade, which straddle the River Ouzel. The town has a current estimated population of about 37,000.
- 13.46 The town is well connected to London, Milton Keynes, and Birmingham by road and rail and it is ideally located to access the strategic highway

network. These key routes also provide access to a number of surrounding towns including Luton, Dunstable Houghton Regis and Aylesbury.

- 13.47 The town centre offers a range of retail and community facilities that contribute substantially to its attractiveness as a place to live but both its physical and social infrastructure would benefit from improvement.
- 13.48 The town is surrounded by a rural hinterland but has significant amounts of land which have either been quarried (with limited restoration) or which are currently being quarried for minerals.

#### Vision for Leighton-Linslade SA

- 13.49 The Leighton-Linslade urban extension will be integrated physically and socially into the town in a way that respects the character of the place as a market town, meets overall sustainability objectives, improves public transport for both new and existing residents and reduces outward commuting. It will improve the green infrastructure network and address the deficit of sporting facilities in the town. It will also introduce new community facilities commensurate with the needs of the urban extension in particular.
- 13.50 The East of Leighton-Linslade SA lies on the eastern and north-eastern edge of the town, about 2 miles from the town centre. It is about 240 hectares in size and extends from Heath Road in the north to the Stanbridge Road in the south. The site will be accessed largely by existing roads, with access to the A505 via Stanbridge Road.
- 13.51 The current uses of the site primarily consist of a large area of existing and proposed mineral extraction which has had a major impact on the character of the existing urban edge, and open farmland which extends southwards to Stanbridge Road. The topography of the site is relatively flat although land further to the east has occasional small hills or knolls. There are two watercourses, the Clipstone Brook and the Eggington Brook, which extend across the site into the existing urban area to the River Ouzel. There are also other minor watercourses and ditches which bound and cross the site and form part of the existing natural and man-made land drainage system. The Clipstone Brook has a flood plain which falls within Zone 2 and Eggington Brook currently includes a flood attenuation feature.
- 13.52 There are a number of existing ecological features within the site including small areas of woodland, scrub and grassland such as at Broomhills, Chamberlains Barn and Shenley Hill, as well as numerous hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The Clipstone Brooke is also a designated County Wildlife Site.
- 13.53 The Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway, which currently operates as a tourist attraction, runs within the site close to Vandyke Road. There is a level crossing near the junction with Meadway across



Shenley Hill Road, however a new crossing would be required to access the site north of the Vandyke Road.

- 13.54 Leighton-Linslade Town Council has published its "Big Plan" following extensive public consultation. The "Big Plan" proposed a comprehensive and ambitious agenda for improving the town's infrastructure and facilities in order to address the implications of expected housing and employment development over the coming years. This has been taken into consideration during the identification of the Vision for the SA as well as during the production of the East of Leighton Linslade Masterplan.

### **Development Principles**

- 13.55 As outlined above, an appropriate mix of private and affordable homes will be delivered in the SA to the East of Leighton Linslade. Up to 2,500 homes will be delivered in this SA by 2031. In addition, provision for approximately 16 hectares of new employment land will be made. This will comprise a range of employment uses to contribute to local employment opportunities, strengthen the local economy and help reduce out-commuting.
- 13.56 The Infrastructure and Funding Study (2010) identifies the critical, essential and desirable infrastructure requirements associated with the SA and growth as a whole. These are identified within Table 10.4. In relation to the East of Leighton Linslade SA, the IDP&FS specifically identifies the need for new lower and middle schools as well as a contribution to the expansion of the existing upper school. These will be included within the delivery of this site, which will also ensure the delivery of a neighbourhood centre to accommodate retail facilities, a multi-purpose community hall, youth facilities and other uses such as a new doctors surgery, a nursery and a public house/restaurant. Smaller-scale local centres will also be provided to ensure residents have access to local facilities.
- 13.57 The IDP&FS also identifies a new Eastern Distributor Road as a critical piece of infrastructure. This will be delivered as part of the overall development in order to:
- provide a high standard multi-modal transport link through the development, linking new homes with schools, the neighbourhood centre, community facilities and employment areas;
  - link the town's four existing eastern radial routes and providing an alternative route for cross-town movements, avoiding the town centre;
  - facilitate the delivery of new, looped public transport routes to serve the development and town; and

- to facilitate the introduction of potential traffic management, road safety and environmental improvement schemes for the eastern side of the town.

13.58 A 'Green Wheel' of interconnecting green infrastructure will be provided, that provides open space, recreation and walking, cycling and riding routes, and enhances the landscape, biodiversity and heritage. Particular opportunities include creating multifunctional greenspace at Clipstone and Shenley Hill, enhancing the Clipstone Brook (CWS), Ouzel and railway line corridors, and creating links to and enhancing nearby green infrastructure assets including Tiddenfoot Waterside Park, Linslade Wood, and the area around Stockgrove (including Stockgrove Country Park, Rammamere Heath, Kings Wood, Oak Wood and Rushmere Park). Additional Green Infrastructure will also be provided in accordance with Policy CS10: Green Infrastructure.

13.59 New social and community infrastructure will be provided to meet the needs of new residents in a way and on a scale as to also benefit existing residents. These facilities will include retail, community, health and education uses.

13.60 The highway network leading from or associated with the new development will be designed or altered to minimise the impact of any increase in vehicular traffic on the town centre. The new development will bring about improvements to local public transport accessing the town centre.

#### **Policy 59: East of Leighton Linslade**

The East of Leighton–Linslade SA will comprise the area from Shenley Hill to the north to Stanbridge Road to the south.

The development will:

1. provide a mix of uses to achieve a sustainable community. These will include:
  - a) up to 2,500 dwellings;
  - b) 16 hectares of employment land creating up to 2,400 new jobs;
  - c) a neighbourhood centre and two local centres;
  - d) provision for educational facilities;
  - e) a Country Park;
  - f) allotments;
  - g) parks and children's play facilities; and
  - h) formal and informal open spaces and sports provision.

In conjunction with delivering the above, the development will provide:

- an Eastern Link Road through the development such that it minimises impact on the existing road network. It is to be provided on a phased basis concurrently with new development to link Heath Road with Stanbridge Road, new or extended bus

services and in a manner that accords with best practice urban design principles.

- new employment land in locations that are attractive to employers, gives good access to the primary route network and will provide good quality, local job opportunities.
- residential land which can be developed with a mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures and respects the general character of Leighton–Linslade using best practice urban design principles.
- land for assisted living for the elderly.
- additional and improved educational capacity, including new lower and middle schools, in accessible locations to meet the demand of new residents. Land will be provided for the expansion of Vandyke Upper School in a way that allows for replacement of the buildings in due course.
- a contribution to Green Infrastructure around the town by creating a ‘Green Wheel’ of corridors that include open spaces, walking and cycling routes and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and heritage of the area.
- a neighbourhood centre and local centres in accessible locations within the new development. The facilities will include a community hall, health services and retail facilities commensurate with the size of the development, residential areas and small scale Class B1 uses.
- land for a new town cemetery.
- a form of development that incorporates sustainable drainage systems, recycling centres and renewable energy facilities.

The Green Belt boundary will follow the extent of the SA

### **Delivery and Monitoring of the East Leighton-Linslade SA**

13.61 The Master Plan and its accompanying delivery strategy will be prepared as an SPD for the East Leighton Linslade SA in partnership between the Local Authority, developers, statutory bodies and service providers. The Master Plan will finalise the general layout of the SA and provide guidance on the scale and location of different land uses and infrastructure requirements. It will also provide more detailed design principles to guide development.

13.62 The East of Leighton-Linslade SA will be delivered in phases over a number of years and will be secured by private funding. This will be outlined in greater detail within the delivery strategy of the Master Plan which will also confirm the roles and responsibilities for those partners who will be responsible for the delivery and funding of the associated infrastructure. An overview of the key milestones in relation to the delivery of the SA as a whole, which will be expanded upon further within the Delivery Strategy, is provided below.

East of Leighton Linlade SA Key Milestones

Master Plan Completed	Summer 2011	
Application Submitted	Autumn 2011	
Application Determined	Spring 2012	
Start of Development (Housing)	2011-2016	350
	2016-2021	1,250
	2021-2026	900
Start of Bypass	2015	
Completion of Bypass	2017	
Start of Development (Employment)	2014-2026	16ha

**Sundon Rail Freight Interchange Strategic Allocation**

Sundon RFI – Vision

13.63 The strategic allocation on the land adjacent to Sundon Quarry will maximise the advantages arising from its specific location, alongside the Midland Mainline railway and M1 Motorway, to provide a Rail Freight Interchange for the sub-region. It will contribute to the regeneration of Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire through the provision of a range of employment opportunities and reduction in freight movements. A road link off the proposed Junction 11a on the M1 motorway will improve accessibility to the RFI, as well as to the north of Luton and the North of Luton SA. Green infrastructure, in the adjoining SSSI and CWS, will be well managed and maintained enabling greater accessibility to the areas rich and diverse natural environment.

13.64 Sundon Rail Freight Interchange (RFI) SA is located on land adjacent to Sundon Quarry and lies to the north of the built edge of the urban area of Luton bounded to the west by the Midland Mainline railway and the M1 motorway. North of Luton SA adjoins the site in the south east. The village of Upper Sundon is located to the north east and the Chilterns AONB lies beyond Upper Sundon village.

13.65 For the purposes of the Development Strategy and allocation purposes, the site referred to as the Sundon RFI SA refers to the arable land adjoining the rail line to the east, adjacent to the former Sundon Quarry. The adjacent County Wildlife Site and Site of Specific

Scientific Interest, formerly used for quarrying, are not included in the SA designation. The RFI site is to be located on the arable land which is level with the railway line but rises towards the south of the site to the level of the houses in the hamlet to the south of the site.

- 13.66 Current access to the site is obtained through Upper Sundon village; however the development will necessitate improved and direct access to the site from the M1 motorway, in particular from the proposed Junction 11a. A new and improved road network to this junction will be constructed prior to the occupation of the RFI development.
- 13.67 Adjoining the site to the east is a disused quarry comprising Sundon Chalk Pits County Wildlife Site (CWS) and within the CWS is Sundon Chalk Quarry Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The SSSI comprises a variety of habitats containing important plant and animal species. Due to unauthorised access to the site over the years, there are areas of the CWS and SSSI that could be enhanced and better managed. The CWS forms part of a larger CWS that extends to the north into the Chilterns AONB. There is also a small CWS to the south of the site; Chalton Scrub and Grassland CWS.
- 13.68 Only the land to be developed as part of the RFI will be removed from the Green Belt. This will provide a permanent Green Belt boundary.

### **Development Principles and Land Use**

- 13.69 The land at Sundon RFI SA, approximately 55 hectares in area, will be developed as a Rail Freight Interchange providing an intermodal facility providing pick-up/drop-off access to the rail network on the western side of the site. The RFI itself will be approximately 5 hectares in size. To complement the RFI, provision will be made for approximately 40 hectares of employment land, accommodating some 170,000 sqm of B8 floorspace in the central and eastern parts of the site.
- 13.70 It is essential for the RFI to have direct access to the M1 via the proposed Junction 11a. The development of the RFI will contribute towards the delivery of a road connection from Junction 11a to Sundon Park Road, which will form the first part of the strategic route linking the M1 and the A6, the Northern Bypass. The IDP and FS identify the provision of the new Junction 11a and North Luton Bypass as critical infrastructure for the sub-region.
- 13.71 Although the development is primarily of a warehousing nature, the design of the buildings and site layout will be of a high quality so as to enhance the site and surrounding area. The design, scale and height of the buildings will respect the topography especially to the south of the site, and will seek to minimise the intrusiveness of the development. Landscaping will be used to enhance the environment of the RFI and be sensitive due to its close proximity to the adjoining CWS and SSSI. Landscaping will also be used to mitigate potential

visual impacts and improve the local wildlife habitats creating linkages with the adjoining CWS and SSSI.

- 13.72 The use of sustainable building techniques and technologies that are energy efficient and the use of renewable energy sources, where viable, will be adopted to minimise the impact on the environment.
- 13.73 The development of the RFI offers the opportunity to enhance and manage Sundon Chalk Pit CWS and Sundon Chalk Quarry SSSI because these are in the same ownership as the SSSA. Enhancement and mitigation measures will be carried out to increase the ecological value of the site and these adjacent designated areas. Specific opportunities for enhancement measures and improvement to the management of the CWS and SSSI to enhance the Green Infrastructure opportunity will be identified at the masterplanning stage.
- 13.74 Although there are no areas at risk of flooding on site, balancing ponds and SuDs will be incorporated into the development to manage the run-off. These will also ensure that there is no increased run-off into the SSSI and CWS which could impact upon its ecology.
- 13.75 The Rail Freight Interchange proposed on land adjacent to Sundon Quarry is a specific form of development responding directly to its particular location adjacent to the Midland Mainline railway and proposed Junction 11a on the M1 motorway, and to the consequent opportunity to provide a strategic rail freight interchange resource for the sub-region. The RFI will also provide an opportunity to reduce road freight movements in the wider sub-region and is critical to the delivery of a substantial proportion of the employment resource for Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire.

**Policy 60: Sundon Rail Freight Interchange**

Sundon RFI SA will

1. provide an intermodal rail facility on approximately 5 hectares of the site;
2. provide for approximately 40 hectares of new employment land accommodating approximately 170,000 sqm of B8 floorspace;
3. provide for a potential mineral distribution depot on approximately 7 hectares of the site;
4. is connected by a strategic road to the M1 Junction 11a; and
5. enhance and manage Sundon Chalk Pits CWS and Sundon Chalk Quarry SSSI to improve their ecological value and contribute to the GI network.

The Master Plan will confirm the timings and phasing of the development taking account of the capacity of the proposed infrastructure.

The Green Belt boundary will exclude the site.

### Delivery and Monitoring

- 13.76 A Master Plan and accompanying Delivery Strategy will be prepared for the Sundon RFI SA in partnership between Central Bedfordshire Council, adjacent Luton Borough Council, service providers, statutory bodies and the developers.
- 13.77 The time frame for the production of the Master Plan is yet to be finalised but it will be in place before submission of a planning application and commencement of development of the RFI. It is essential for the site that the strategic road from the M1 Junction 11a is constructed and an appropriate road connection to that junction is in place prior to the occupation of the RFI development. That road connection will form the first part of the North Luton Bypass.
- 13.78 The Master Plan will finalise the layout of the SA and provide more detailed guidance about the scale of development and infrastructure requirements. It will also provide more detailed principles to guide the design of the development including the enhancement and management measures for the adjoining CWS and SSSI.
- 13.79 The associated Delivery Strategy will outline in more detail the phasing of the development. It will also confirm the roles and responsibilities for delivering and funding the associated infrastructure. An overview of the key milestones in relation to the delivery of the SA as a whole, which will be expanded upon further within the Delivery Strategy, is set out below

#### Sundon Rail Freight Interchange SA: Delivery of key milestones

Master Plan Completed	2013
Application Submitted	2013
Application Determined	2014
Completion of M1 Junction 11a	2016
Delivery of a road link between site and M1 Junction 11a	2016/2017
Start of development	2017
Completion of development	2021

### North East of Flitwick Strategic Allocation

- 13.80 Land to the north east of Flitwick and to the north of the Maulden Road, Industrial Estate, has been identified as a suitable location for an employment site.
- 13.81 The site, which will deliver up to 18ha of B1, B2 and B8 employment generating uses, is accessed directly from Maulden Road which in turn

provides direct access to the A507 and subsequently the A1 and M1. The site is also in close proximity to the railway station within Flitwick as well Flitwick town centre which offers a range of services and facilities.

- 13.82 The site will form a direct extension of, and will be linked to, the existing industrial estate off Maulden Road, providing the opportunity for existing businesses to expand as well as the opportunity to attract new inward investment to the town.
- 13.83 The Green Belt boundary will be altered in this area to remove the land within the red line as shown in the Proposals Map Amendments. The new defensible Green Belt boundary will be enforced by the creation of a Country Park to the north of the site up to the A507, which could include a new burial ground. The Country Park will also act to further ensure the permanent separation between Flitwick and Ampthill
- 13.84 The vision for the site is that B1 to B8 employment generating uses will contribute to the regeneration and enhancement of Flitwick through the provision of an attractive business development, with landscaping and boundary planting which seeks to provide a separation between this site and existing residential areas.

#### **Development Principles and Land Uses**

- 13.85 An appropriate mix of B Use employment will be provided within the site. The provision of non-B employment generating uses will be considered in line with policies set out within Chapter 6 of the Strategy.
- 13.86 18ha of land are to be removed from the Green Belt in order to form a logical and defensible boundary to the north of the allocation. However, the topography of the land within the site is such that the visual impact of development will be a key consideration in determining the extent to which built development will extend. A Landscape Impact Assessment will therefore be undertaken to determine the extent of the area that can be occupied by built development.
- 13.87 The layout would be designed along a link road between Maulden Road and Enterprise Way, with extensive landscaping adding to a high quality development. Shared surfacing around the public open space could ensure a pedestrian friendly environment and traffic calming devices would be employed to prevent the road being over-used by through traffic. Additional planting would be provided on the western side of the site where it borders the residential use and B1 employment uses, which will have limited impact on the neighbouring residential area would be promoted in this part of the site.

#### **Policy 61: North East of Flitwick**

Land to the north east of Flitwick and to the north of Maulden Road Industrial Estate is allocated for the delivery of B1 to B8 employment
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uses. The Green Belt is amended as indicated on the Proposals Map and a Landscape Impact Assessment will be undertaken to identify the extent of the built area.

Within the site, planning permission will be granted for appropriate B1, B2 and B8 uses. Proposals for employment generating non-B uses will also be considered having regard to policies within Chapter 6.

### **Wixams Southern Extension**

- 13.88 Wixams is a new settlement being built on the former Elstow Storage Depot, which straddles the boundary of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. Planning permission has been granted for about 4,500 homes in total. The adopted Planning and Development Brief for Wixams identified land to the south as an expansion area, which was allocated in the Site Allocations DPD for mixed use development comprising 1,000+ dwellings, a minimum of 5 ha of employment land and other uses to be identified in a Planning and Development Brief and Master Plan.
- 13.89 The Wixams is designated as a Major Service Centre, recognising the scale of the settlement and the level of facilities committed, and is considered a sustainable location to accommodate additional development. The Site Allocations DPD identified a need to explore the potential of additional land to the south of allocation MA3 to deliver further mixed-use development. The Southern Extension will deliver mixed use development, including 500 dwellings and a Country Park.
- 13.90 A Masterplan and Design Code will be produced to ensure the comprehensive development of both allocated site MA3 and the Southern Extension. The timing of development will be determined through the masterplanning process. In particular, the masterplan will consider whether it is appropriate to begin development before 2021.
- 13.91 In order to safeguard and maintain adequate separation from Houghton Conquest, a Country Park will be established on land within the red line between the southern boundary of the Southern Extension and Houghton Conquest. This Country Park will be brought forward with the development of the 1,000 dwellings and 5 hectares of employment land, allocated in Policy MA3 of the Site Allocations DPD. Advance planting will be needed in this area to establish the Country Park as quickly as possible. The Masterplan will consider the timing of development in relation to the timing of the Country Park.

### **Policy 62: Wixams Southern Extension**

The Wixams Southern Extension will be contained within the red line shown on the Proposals Map, and will deliver mixed use development,

including 500 dwellings and a Country Park.

A Masterplan and Design Code will be prepared to ensure the comprehensive development of allocated site MA3 and the Southern Extension.

Advance planting on the southern boundary of the Southern Extension will be required at the commencement of development of allocated site MA3, in order to safeguard and maintain separation from Houghton Conquest. A Country Park of strategic importance will be delivered, incorporating this advance planting.

Development of this site will be subject to:

6. Production of a Masterplan and Design Code;
7. Provision of strategic landscaping and publicly accessible open space within the site;
8. Preparation of a town-wide Transport Assessment to ensure that potential cumulative impacts on the Strategic Road Network are taken into account;
9. Provision of sufficient capacity within the public foul water system and the wastewater treatment works to meet the needs of the development; and
10. The provision of a suitable buffer zone to protect significant water and wastewater infrastructure from inappropriate development.

The Masterplan will confirm the timing and phasing of development.