



BLETSOE DRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Our Parish – Our Plan – Our Future

August 2019

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LIST OF REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Localism Act 2011

Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012

Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

National Planning Policy Framework 2019

Town and County Planning Act 1990

Bletsoe Housing Needs Survey (2014)

Saved Local Plan 2002 policies

Saved Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2005 policies

The Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan 2008 (CSRIP)

Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan 2008

The Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 (ADLP)

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Strategic Sites and Policies (2014)

Bedford Borough Draft Local Plan 2030

BBC Achieving Quality in Residential Layouts (1997)

BBC Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities: Design and Good Practice (2014);

BBC Residential extensions, New Dwellings and Small Infill Developments (2000)

Bletsoe Conservation Area Appraisal (2008)

Heritage England.org.uk

Bletsoe Parish Council website: Bletsoe.org.uk

Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Site Assessments Report

Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment

Photographs courtesy of Ann Gibbons

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document forms the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Bletsoe (BNP) and sets out the neighbourhood development plan for the parish over the period 2017 to 2035. For simplicity throughout this document the BNP may sometimes be referred to as “the Plan”.
- 1.2 The Plan has been prepared by Bletsoe Parish Council and the community under the guidance of the Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (BNPSG) in accordance with the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2015 (as amended).
- 1.3 Bedford Borough Council (BBC), as the Local Planning Authority (LPA), designated the Neighbourhood Plan area for the Bletsoe Parish in July 2013 to enable Bletsoe Parish Council to prepare the Plan. **Map A** below shows the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- 1.4 The purpose of the Plan is to shape development within the parish and provide guidance to any parties wishing to submit planning applications for development within Bletsoe. As a tool to assist the determination of planning applications, the Plan will sit alongside the adopted Local Plan for BBC and will form part of the Development Plan suite of documents which is currently made up of the following documents:
- Saved Local Plan 2002 policies;
 - Saved Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2005 policies;
 - The Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan 2008 (CSRIP);
 - Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan 2008;
 - The Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 (ADLP);
 - The Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Strategic Sites and Policies (2014);
 - Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008).
- 1.5 BBC have commenced preparation of a new Local Plan, and some of the current adopted Development Plan documents will eventually be superseded by this once adoption has taken place. As a consequence of this, once the new Local Plan is

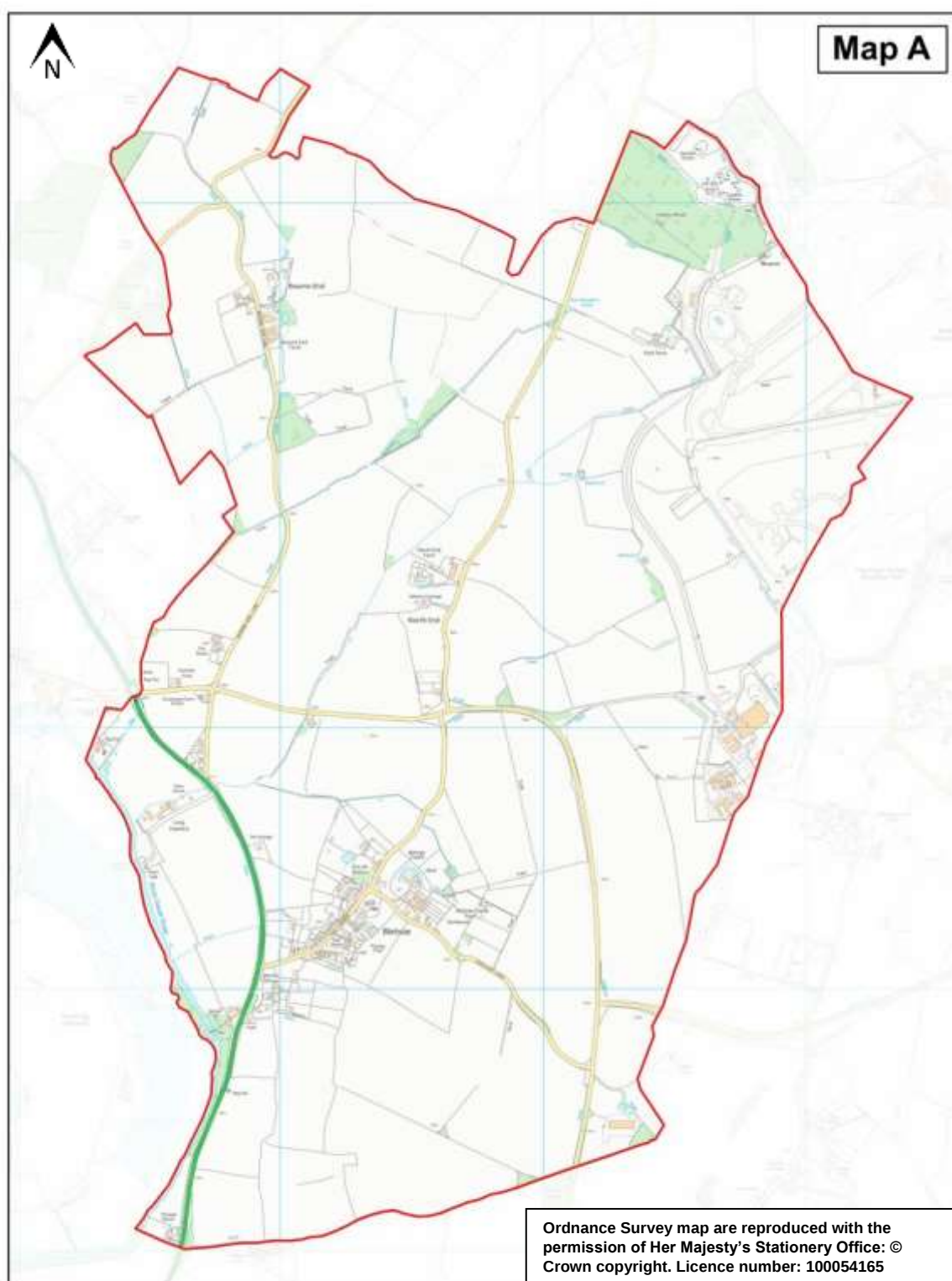
adopted the BNP will need to be reviewed in accordance with current legislation and guidelines to ensure it remains broadly in compliance with the Local Plan.

- 1.6 Throughout the process of producing the Plan, BNPSG has sought to involve the community as widely as possible through various methods of consultation, as explained in Section 4 of the Plan and set out in detail in the accompanying Consultation Statement. The different topics covered within the Issues and Options documents are reflective of the areas that are considered of most importance to Bletsoe and its residents and have helped form the policies within the BNP.
- 1.7 Each section of the Plan covers a specific topic area and sets out the justification for the resulting policy and what it is seeking to achieve. The policies themselves are presented in boxes for clarity. In order to understand the full context for any individual policy, it should be read in conjunction with the supporting text.
- 1.8 The Plan is accompanied by a Policies Map, shown in **Appendix A** at the end of the document. Other supporting documents of relevance include the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Site Assessments Report.

What happens next?

- 1.9 Neighbourhood Plans have to be prepared following a set procedure issued by the Government. This procedure includes two six week periods of consultation on the draft Plan and will finish with a local referendum on whether the plan should be “made” (brought into force) as part of the statutory development plan for BBC.
- 1.10 The Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan (BNP) has now reached the stage where full consultation with the community can be undertaken. Following any changes that may be required, the Plan is then be submitted to BBC who will undertake a further consultation for a period of six weeks.
- 1.11 The BNP will then be subject to an independent examination to ensure it meets the statutory requirements and any amendments required will need to be carried out. Following this the BNP will be put to a referendum where Bletsoe residents will have a chance to vote on whether it should form part of the statutory development plan for the area. The referendum must show that there is 50% support for the Plan before it can be “made” by the Borough Council.

Map A Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Area



Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Area

Neighbourhood Planning

- 2.1 In 2011 the Localism Act introduced changes to the planning system. As part of these changes Neighbourhood Planning became part of the English planning system. The Localism Act enables communities to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for a specific area with the intention of giving communities more say in the development of their towns and villages (within certain limits and parameters). Neighbourhood Plans will, therefore, assist in shaping the future of the places where people live and work.
- 2.2 Neighbourhood Plans set out planning policies that will be used to help determine planning applications for new development. Therefore, once the BNP has been agreed at referendum and is made, it will form part of the BBC Development Plan Documents. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The BNP is, therefore, an important document and will carry weight in the determination of planning applications.

National Planning Policy

- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out land use policies for England and was first published by the Government in 2012, revised in July 2018 and updated again in February 2019. It aims to achieve sustainable development via the planning system through three objectives: economic, social and environmental. It requires Local Authorities to produce strategic Local Plans which conform to the guidance set out in the NPPF, and requires Neighbourhood Plans to be in general conformity with the strategic policies for the area. What is meant by the term '*sustainable development*' is described in detail within the NPPF, but in summary sustainable development is about positive growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.

- 2.4 Paragraph 29 of the NPPF relates specifically to Neighbourhood Planning and states:

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies.

- 2.5 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) sits alongside the NPPF and provides advice on the planning system and interpretation of the NPPF policies. The NPPG includes specific advice on the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and explains the key stages and decisions (e.g. deciding neighbourhood areas, the legal tests for neighbourhood plans, and the process of independent examination and referendum). There are five key stages to the preparation of a Neighbourhood plan which can be summarised as:

Stage 1: Defining the neighbourhood. Once the community has agreed a Neighbourhood Plan is to be prepared, the Parish Council will take the lead and the neighbourhood area will be defined. The area will be agreed by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Stage 2: Preparing the plan. The local community will begin work on putting ideas together to draw up their plan. This will enable general planning policies to be established for the development and use of land in the designated neighbourhood plan area. Planning Policies must be in line with local and national planning policies, and if the LPA has identified that an area needs to grow, then communities cannot use neighbourhood planning to block the building of new homes and businesses. They can, however, use neighbourhood planning to influence the type, design, location and mix of new development.

Stage 3: Once a plan has been prepared through various consultation processes, the community will be formally consulted on the draft plan. Following this an independent examiner will check that it meets the basic conditions. The examiner can recommend that changes be made.

Stage 4: If the LPA are content with the comments made by the independent examiner, they will organise a referendum with the local community who will have the final say on whether a neighbourhood plan comes into force. People living in the

neighbourhood who are registered to vote in local elections will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

Stage 5: If the referendum results are in favour of the neighbourhood plan the plan becomes 'made'. Once a neighbourhood plan is made, it carries weight in the decision making process for development proposals in the neighbourhood plan area.

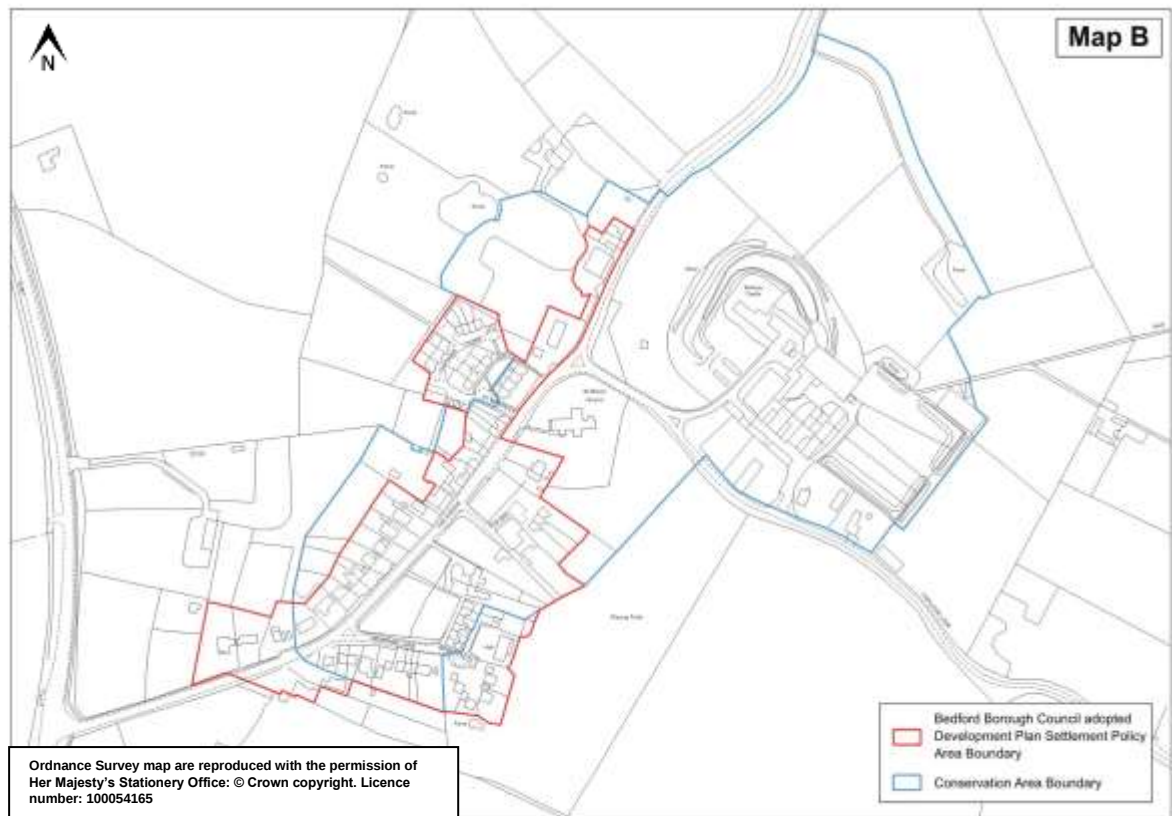
Bedford Borough Council Development Plan Documents

- 2.6 The relevant Bedford Borough Development Plan Documents consist of the Saved Policies within the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2002 (BBLP) Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (CSRIP) - April 2008 and the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 (ADLP) and the Proposals Maps. **Map B** below identifies the Policies Map for Bletsoe.
- 2.7 In accordance with the basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted local plan.
- 2.8 However, BBC has now commenced the preparation of a new Local Plan which will set out how much growth there should be in the Borough over the coming years (housing, jobs and associated infrastructure) and where it should take place. Current planning policy documents look ahead to 2021 whereas the new Local Plan will extend the period of planned development to 2030.
- 2.9 The policies within the BNP are consistent with the detailed policies within the CSRIP, BBLP and the ADLP. However, it is also a requirement of legislation that plans take into account any policies within a draft local plan whatever stage it may be at. At this moment in time the draft Local Plan is in the early stages of preparation, however a number of background documents have been published and these have been reviewed to inform the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Borough Council's initial Issues and Options Consultation in 2014 set out the growth strategy for the plan period and options on the best locations to accommodate the growth throughout the district. It suggested that small villages such as Bletsoe could provide a limited number of new dwellings to assist in accommodating the growth.
- 2.10 In a 2nd Call for Sites exercise and number of new settlement sites were put forward for which the Borough Council requested further detailed information from the

applicant's leading to a delay in the local plan process. Consequently, the Borough Council's preferred development strategy potentially now includes one or more new settlements to accommodate a significant proportion of the Borough's growth over the next 20 years. It does not, however, rely on allocations in smaller Group 3 and Group 4 villages, like Bletsoe, to deliver homes to meet the borough-wide requirement. However, under the proposed development strategy, communities in these locations are as expected able to bring forward development through their own Neighbourhood Plans.

- 2.11 The BBLP Draft Plan for Submission was published for consultation between 22 January 2018 and 29 March 2018, however the consultation raised issues regarding the deliverability of a key allocation for a new settlement at Colworth Park to the north of the Borough. On 16 May 2018, the Borough Council's Executive agreed that Officers should carry out additional work on the evidence base to support an amended Plan for Submission, which the Council intends to publish for a second Regulation 19 consultation in September 2018. The revised BBLP Draft Plan for Submission deleted the allocation at Colworth Park and reduced the time of the plan period to take account of the homes that could not be delivered through the new settlement. The BBLP 2030 Plan for Submission was submitted for examination on 14th December 2018.
- 2.12 Given the stage of the BBC Local Plan 2030, it will be necessary to review the Neighbourhood Plan and its policies, in accordance with current guidelines and legislation, once the new Local Plan 2030 has been adopted.
- 2.13 **Appendix C** of the BNP includes a list of the policies and their relationship with the NPPF and the adopted Bedford Borough Local Plan documents.

Map B - Reproduction of BBC Policy Map for Bletsoe



Bletsoe history – a brief review

- 3.1 The settlement of Bletsoe is likely to have originated as a late Saxon manor reorganised in the mid-11th century by its Norman conquerors. Five hundred years later it had become the estate village that survived until the 1950's. In the last half-century, Bletsoe has ceased to be an agricultural community and has become mainly residential village for local and regional commuters and retired people.
- 3.2 Bletsoe lies in a long-settled river valley landscape six miles north of Bedford. A villa site west of the village may represent the centre of a Roman farming estate, and 4th century burials were found associated with it. The place-name suggests Saxon settlement slightly higher up the valley side, dispersed around the 'hoh' or hill-spur where one 'Blaecc' once lived.
- 3.3 Probably the most imposing building in the village is Bletsoe Castle. It may have originated as 11th Century Norman timber buildings within a circular bank and ditch later replaced in stone as the medieval manor house of the Beauchamps and Pateshulls. In the 15th century it was the birthplace of Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII. In the 16th century it was acquired by the St Johns who built themselves a new mansion visited by Elizabeth I and James I.
- 3.4 The earthworks north and east of Bletsoe Castle are the only remains of their formal gardens and the castle site and gardens are now scheduled monuments (SM).
- 3.5 In the early 17th century, the basic village layout in the 1620's could be understood from a written survey of the St John family's estate. It included reference to the Great Green, an open space in the centre of the village which originated as medieval communal grazing land.
- 3.6 The St Johns managed Bletsoe as an estate village, constructing rows of 18th and 19th century cottages for their workers. Latterly the Great Green has become a series of hedged or walled compartments some laid out as allotments. After the estate was sold in the 1950s, these were gradually abandoned in the 1980s and 1990s until they became the highly appreciated and mostly publicly-owned grassy open spaces of today. The north west side of the green was developed in the 1960s. In the 1970s

the addition of Bennetts Close rounded off the end of Memorial Lane; and in the 1980s Captains close, a further row of housing, was added behind St Marys Close. The model farm barns at Castle Farm were converted to residential uses in the 1990s.

Bletsoe Character

- 3.7 The village has an elongated triangular form arranged around the central open spaces. The main road from the A6 (The Avenue) runs along one side of the former Great Green and rises towards the parish church of St Mary. Beyond it are the Old Rectory and Bletsoe Castle. North End is half a mile or so along the road out of the village heading to Riseley. The two most significant spaces within the Conservation Area are the former Great Green around which the village is arranged, and the village field, for itself and for views of the parish church from the south east.
- 3.8 The centre of the village is less open visually than it was many years ago, due to the growth of trees and hedges. On the central green spaces, next to the former school is the David Bayes Memorial Garden. Two smaller areas between Old Way and The Avenue and in front of Old Pear Tree Cottage are privately owned; the largest, between the Avenue and Memorial Lane retains several apple trees from its days as an allotment and is owned by the Parish Council.
- 3.9 Most of the historic village lies within the Conservation Area boundary where there are a number of listed buildings. It includes the Tudor/Stuart garden earthworks, an important part of the setting of Bletsoe Castle.
- 3.10 Bletsoe Castle lies on the east of the main road and can be seen when passing through the village. South of the castle, on the same side of the road, lies the church of St. Mary.
- 3.11 The Conservation Area boundary excludes a small cluster of buildings around the A6 turn as they are quite separated from the historic core of the village. Nevertheless, Bletsoe Cottage and The Falcon Inn (positioned close to the A6 turn) are listed buildings.
- 3.12 In terms of residents, the population at Domesday was a little over a hundred people, making it quite a significant settlement at that time. Population figures rose in the first half of the 19th century (to in excess of 400 residents reported between 1831 and

1861) then began to fall back as local people drifted to larger towns like Bedford and Rushden to find work (falling to a reported 337 in 1891). In the early part of the 20th century, as work in agriculture declined, it is reported that the population fell to 219 by 1931 but that, in the latter part of the 20th century, figures rose again but to nowhere near the levels in 1831-1861. The population was reported to be 260 in the 2011 census.



4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 In July 2013 a Steering Group (BNPSG) comprising residents and Parish Councillors was set up to assist in the preparation of the BNP, reporting to the Parish Council.
- 4.2 Recognising the importance of local knowledge in the process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan, the BNPSG focussed on front-loaded consultation to ascertain the views of the local community on what they consider to be the important local issues and opportunities. A Launch Event to promote local awareness about the Plan was held on 25 September 2014 at Bletsoe Village Hall and was well attended. This represented the beginning of the neighbourhood planning process for BNP.
- 4.3 70 consultation responses were received in response to this event, which helped the BNPSG collect a large amount of useful information, and these early stages of consultation helped to inform the Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives and enabled the formation of the draft Issues and Options document.
- 4.4 Throughout the preparation of the Plan consultation events have been organised to promote local awareness of it and to understand what the community thinks about the local area, what is good, what should be changed and what could be improved.
- 4.5 As part of the BNP process an assessment of all sites in Bletsoe, submitted as part of the Bedford Borough Council Call for Sites exercise, was carried out by an independent planning consultant and helped to identify those sites which could be suitable for future development. Given the number of sites put forward, no further Call for Sites as part of BNP was felt necessary. Further consultation on the Issues and Options, including the sites considered most suitable for allocation in the BNP took place between September and October 2016. This consultation attracted 84 responses, equivalent to 76% of households and 32% of local residents.
- 4.6 In January 2019 the Parish Council were made aware of two further Call for Sites submissions made to BBC for potential housing allocations in the Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan area; one at Crossways Farm, Sharnbrook for up to 500 new dwellings (of which a potential 100 could fall within the Bletsoe Parish) and one for 9 The Avenue, Bletsoe for 9 dwellings. Given the extensive work already carried out on the Site Assessments and the Draft BNP, the Parish Council felt that both sites

had come forward too late in the process to be considered further. In addition, the two sites allocated in BNP meet the identified housing need for the Parish.

- 4.7 The exhibition material and neighbourhood plan documents have continued to be available to the community on the Parish Council's established web-site, www.bletsoe.net
- 4.8 The community response to all of the consultation exercises has been used to help review and shape the draft vision and overarching objectives. Together with the response to the Issues and Options consultation document, a good level of qualitative data has been provided which has been invaluable in establishing priorities, identifying problems and generating ideas which in turn have enabled the formation of the policies within the BNP.
- 4.9 In terms of neighbourhood planning, to meet the requirements of the Regulations an Environmental Report (ER) must be published for consultation alongside the draft BNP and must present information on the likely significant effects of implementing the plan. To this end, following the results of a Screening Opinion with BBC, a Strategic Environmental Assessment has been prepared to support the BNP the scope of which was agreed with BBC. The contents of the SEA must be taken into account, along with any consultation responses when finalising the BNP. The full Strategic Environmental Assessment Report can be found at www.bletsoe.net.
- 4.10 The full details of community engagement and consultation is set out in the Consultation Statement which forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan suite of documents.

5. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

5.1 At the initial launch event for BNP an explanation of what a neighbourhood plan is and the various stages and timelines for taking the plan forward was provided. A number of key questions were posed with the intention of setting the vision and objectives for the Plan, such as:

- What do we need to retain a viable community in Bletsoe?
- What do we need to make Bletsoe an even better place to live?
- What do we value and what do we want to preserve?
- What is Bletsoe missing?
- What do you think should be changed or improved?

5.2 The initial consultation questionnaire and feedback from the September/October 2016 Issues and Options Consultation helped establish the following Vision and enabled five key objectives to be formed. Overall the consultation attracted 84 responses with 93% of the respondents supporting the proposed Vision and Objectives.

Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Vision

Bletsoe will remain a peaceful rural village that seeks to meet the housing, economic and infrastructure needs of its residents. Any future development must therefore be sensitive and must respect the character of the village that makes it so special.

Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

- To deliver housing which both sustains the current and meets the future needs of the community
- To protect and enhance existing and future open spaces
- To manage both existing and future traffic and transport provision and encourage safe and sustainable movement
- To ensure the Village benefits from sufficient facilities and services
- To protect and enhance all listed buildings and the Scheduled Monument within the Parish

- 5.3 The NPPF places a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be applied to all development proposals in order to meet the needs of the growing population, supported by appropriate infrastructure whilst also protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. The policies within BNP take a proactive approach towards appropriate new development proposals to deliver sustainable development that contributes to the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.
- 5.4 Beneath each policy box the relevant NPPF sections and corresponding policies within the Borough's Core Strategy and Rural Issues Policies, Saved Local Plan Policies and any relevant Allocations and Designations are listed so as to demonstrate general conformity and the preceding text to each policy provides the justification and supporting evidence for the policy. The following section sets out the BNP policies in relation to each of the key objectives.

OBJECTIVE 1 – DELIVERING HOUSING WHICH BOTH SUSTAINS THE CURRENT AND MEETS THE FUTURE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Delivering Housing

- 6.1 The NPPF makes it clear that Local Planning Authorities should plan to meet housing needs based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community.
- 6.2 In order to assess local housing need a Housing Needs Survey (HNS) for Bletsoe was undertaken in March 2015 by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) which identified a local need for properties of various types, sizes and tenures. The survey identified there are 6 households wishing to downsize and 7 seeking to move out of the family home and/or purchase their own property in the area. This evidence demonstrates that there is a particular need for smaller market housing (2-3 bedrooms) if Bletsoe is to meet the identified current and future needs of its existing residents wishing to stay in the village, as well as former residents wishing to return.
- 6.3 The provision of a range of property types, sizes and tenure in new build development would assist in meeting the identified housing need, and in particular younger and older people, the opportunity to move to more appropriate properties. This would create secondary gains through making best use of the existing housing stock by addressing under-occupation and promoting improvements in the rate of turnover of existing family units. This could be further enhanced if specialist accommodation to meet the changing requirements of the increasing older population were also provided.
- 6.4 The provision of a mix of housing size and type to meet local need is further supported by the Bedford Borough Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (CSRIP). Policy CP7 within it accords with the guidance of the NPPF in that it seeks to ensure development meets the needs of all sectors of the community. As some new housing is planned for Bletsoe through the allocation of sites in BNP, an appropriate housing mix on the allocated sites will be sought that should reflect the results of the most up to date HNS for Bletsoe.

- 6.5 In addition, Policy CP18 of the CSRIP sets out an expectation that 30% affordable housing is provided on sites of 3 dwellings or more (or over 0.1ha) in villages having a population of less than 3,000. Contrary to Policy CP18, recent changes have been made to National Planning Policy in relation to affordable housing meaning that at present affordable housing contributions cannot be sought from developments of ten units or less (and which have a maximum combined gross floor space of no more than 1,000 square metres).
- 6.6 No respondents to the Bletsoe HNS were seeking affordable rented housing. Consequently, there appears to be no identifiable local need for affordable rented housing within the village. However, the HNS report concluded while most respondents to the survey were seeking to buy on the open market, provision for some shared ownership housing may be prudent, reflecting the fact that some households could not afford to buy their own home.
- 6.7 During the September/October 2016 Issues and Options consultation with residents the following key issues in relation to housing were raised:
- Desire for a better mix of housing (tenure and price).
 - No major developments in the parish.
 - Need to respect the Conservation Area and the setting of the Church and Castle site should be maintained.
 - Small scale housing development would be appropriate.
 - Some provision of affordable homes for local people would be appropriate.
 - Need to ensure that the village retains its character, rural atmosphere and in particular its compact and historic nature.
 - Any new housing should help to broaden the range of stock available in the Parish.
 - The type, tenure and cost of new housing should meet the housing needs of the local area.
- 6.8 Taking into account the above, and given the scale of development appropriate for a small village like Bletsoe, it is unlikely that affordable housing could be provided within any development proposal. However, as the HNS identified some need for shared ownership properties housing proposals that could offer such accommodation will be encouraged.

- 6.9 In response to the issues raised, small scale residential proposals in Bletsoe will be supported to help to broaden the range of housing available in the Parish to encourage a sustainable, inclusive and mixed community whilst retaining the rural character of the village.

Location of Development

- 6.10 Bletsoe is fortunate to be located on the edge of attractive open countryside and to have several areas of open space, all of which are highly valued by local people. The majority of the village has been designated as a Conservation Area, a heritage asset, meaning any development within or adjacent to it should sustain and enhance the significance of the heritage asset and its setting in accordance with the NPPF and the adopted Local Plan policies. During consultation the community expressed a very strong view that any new development should be on a need only basis and should be limited in scale so as to respect the rural character of the village and limited infrastructure provision in the village.
- 6.11 Having regard to both the character of the village and nature and extent of housing need, the community is keen to ensure that further development on green fields and open spaces is resisted. Bletsoe is a small village that is not considered to need significant housing allocations or commercial developments, therefore, the emphasis of BNP will be on protecting the village from inappropriate development and maintaining the openness at the entrance to the village from the west, whilst supporting some small scale infill developments on vacant or underused sites within the Settlement Policy Area, or on land which represents a limited natural extension to the existing built up area, where it can be demonstrated there would be no significant harm as a result of the development proposed.
- 6.12 It is established in planning policy that some forms of development are acceptable in rural locations and outside of the defined Settlement Policy Area, in exceptional circumstances and where there is explicit compliance with any relevant development plan policies and the NPPF, such as residential dwellings for the essential need of a rural worker. This type of development proposal would need to be supported with robust evidence as part of a planning application.
- 6.13 The following Policy establishes a key priority for Bletsoe. It supports development proposals in the Settlement Policy Area for Bletsoe in accordance with the principles of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF and the adopted development plan. Broadly speaking, development proposals outside of the Settlement Policy Area will generally be resisted, unless they are exceptions appropriate for a rural location

as noted above. Note: The current Settlement Policy Area for Bletsoe will need to be amended to take into account BNP policies as identified on the Policies Map (Appendix A).

BNP Policy 1 General Development Principles

Development proposals within the defined Settlement Policy Area as identified on the Policies Map (**Appendix A**), will be supported subject to compliance with the NPPF and any other relevant policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

In order to maintain the intrinsic value of the countryside, development proposals located outside of the defined Settlement Policy Area (except for the sites allocated by BNP policies 2 and 3) will be resisted unless the proposal satisfies the appropriate policies within this Plan, or it can be clearly demonstrated the proposal is sustainable development which seeks to enhance the vitality of the village, the historic environment and rural economy.

(Compliance NP Objective 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; BBLP Policy H24; ADLP AD1; CSRIP Policies CP2, CP7, CP8, CP12, CP13, CP14, CP16 and NPPF paras 7, 8, 9, 10, 28, 29, 30, 69, 79)

- 6.14 In acknowledgement of the need for a limited amount of growth in Bletsoe, and following consultation with Bletsoe residents, BNP proposes the allocation of small scale housing developments on two parcels of land, each having their own specific policy that reflects the individual circumstances of these preferred sites. In the September/October 2016 Issues and Options consultation, residents were asked to comment on the sites which they considered most suitable for future development of those put forward through the BBC Call for Sites.
- 6.15 In determining which land to allocate for residential development, all sites put forward as part of the Call for Sites have been assessed by an independent Planning Consultant within a separate Site Assessment Report in a manner that accords with the guidance on assessing sites for allocation, as set out by the NPPF and the Planning Practice Guidance. Given the number of sites put forward in the BBC Call for Sites, no further call for sites took place as part of the neighbourhood plan process. The Site Assessment Report provides an overview of the potential planning constraints, where known, in order to ensure any sites allocated within the Neighbourhood Plan comply with the NPPF and broadly comply with the adopted policies within BBC Local Plan and are deliverable. The full Site Assessment Report can be found at www.bletsoe.net.

- 6.16 Further consultation with the community resulted in the following sites being considered as acceptable for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to compliance with their individual site specific policy and any other relevant policy within BNP, the NPPF and BBC Local Plan.
- 6.17 The first draft BNP included an allocation on site at First Field, The Avenue (ref no: 30/517) (Draft Policy BNP2) located between the edge of the existing village development and the A6 on the western fringe of Bletsoe. The land on both sides of The Avenue, between the main road and the entrance to the village, has been viewed as an important area of undeveloped space separating the built edge of the settlement which has historically been detached from the main road. Bletsoe residents have commented that an unacceptable level of development would unbalance this undeveloped approach to the village and set a precedent for equally damaging development on the other side of The Avenue, coalescing the village with the A6 road.
- 6.18 During consultation on the draft BNP in March 2019, the strong desire to retain the openness of the village entrance became clear therefore in response to the community consultation it was felt appropriate to delete the allocation at First Field, The Avenue. The deletion of this site allocation is not considered to prejudice the BNP objective of meeting local housing need as the identified need can be met through the remaining site allocations.

Land behind Captains Close

- 6.19 The land behind Captains Close (Site ref no. 537) is a 0.4ha site located just outside of the defined Settlement Policy Area but adjoins it's boundary and existing development to the east. It is centrally located in the village and would form a logical extension to Captains Close in a westerly direction. Access to the site is through Captains Close which is owned and managed by Bedford Pilgrims Housing Association (BPHA) and this could affect delivery, however, it has been confirmed in writing by BPHA that they are keen to work with Bletsoe Parish Council to deliver housing on this site (see **Appendix D**). A public footpath runs through the site from Captains Close to the A6 which may need minor diversion depending on the final layout of the development. Given the proximity of the site to known heritage assets at planning application stage an archaeological evaluation will be required to assess the significance of any on site and adjacent heritage assets and the likelihood of potential impacts. In order to ensure the access to the site is suitable and adequate visibility can be achieved, the promoter of the site commissioned a Transport

Assessment (TA). The TA concluded a suitable access can be provided therefore the site is considered appropriate for allocation.

- 6.20 There are no known major constraints which could affect development of this site. It scored well in the Site Assessment process and the feedback from consultations identified the site as a preferred location for development. 44 residents were in favour of this site, with 5 neutral and 31 opposed it. A development of up to 8 dwellings was considered to be most appropriate for this location, allowing limited growth commensurate with the size of Bletsoe.

BNP Policy 2 Land behind Captains Close

A residential development of up to 8 dwellings on the land behind Captains Close, as identified on the Policies Map (**Appendix A**), will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- The design and layout respects and enhances the natural, built and historic environment;
- It can be demonstrated through archaeological evaluation that the development would not have negative and irreversible impacts on archaeological interests present at the site;
- It can be demonstrated the mix and tenure proposed meets the identified need;
- Parking provision is provided in accordance with Bedford Borough Council adopted standard unless it can be demonstrated that a reduction would not result in a significant increase in on street parking;
- Private amenity space is provided in accordance with BNP Policy 4 unless it can be demonstrated that a reduction would not result in substandard amenity standards for future occupiers;
- It can be demonstrated that an appropriate standard of access can be achieved for both vehicles and pedestrians.

(Compliance: NP Objective 1; CSRIP Policies CP7, CP8, CP14, CP16, CP23, BBLP Policies BE24, BE25 and NPPF paras 7, 8, 13, 29, 30, 59, Sections 12 & 16)

Land North of the Old Rectory

- 6.21 Land North of the Old Rectory (site ref: 685) is a small site of 0.3ha on the northern edge of the village. It adjoins the Conservation Area and lies on the opposite side of the road to Bletsoe Castle. Whilst outside the Settlement Policy Area, it is not isolated from the village core and the site scored well in the Site Assessment process.

- 6.22 Consultation feedback identified there is support for a very small development of up to 3 dwellings on this site provided the design and siting of the development is integrated into the landscape through appropriate screening and is sensitive in design terms to the adjacent historic environment. 38 respondents agreed this site is a preferred site suitable for development, while 10 were neutral and 18 did not support development on this site.
- 6.23 In order to ensure the access to the site is suitable and adequate visibility can be achieved, the promoter of the site commissioned a Transport Assessment (TA). The TA concluded a suitable access can be provided therefore the site is considered appropriate for allocation.

BNP Policy 3 Land North of the Old Rectory

A residential development of up to 3 dwellings on the land north of The Old Rectory, as identified on the Policies Map (**Appendix A**) will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- The design and layout respects and enhances the natural, built and historic environment, particular consideration should be given to the setting of the Conservation Area and the setting of the adjacent heritage assets which includes the scheduled monument of Bletsoe Castle;
- It can be demonstrated through archaeological evaluation that the development would not have negative and irreversible impacts on archaeological interests present at the site;
- It can be demonstrated the mix and tenure proposed meets an identified need;
- Parking provision is provided in accordance with Bedford Borough Council adopted standard unless it can be demonstrated that a reduction would not result in a significant increase in on street parking;
- Private amenity space should be provided in accordance with Bedford Borough Council adopted standards, unless it can be demonstrated that a reduction would not result in substandard amenity for future occupiers;
- It can be demonstrated that suitable access and adequate visibility can be achieved for vehicles and pedestrians;

(Compliance: NP Objective 1; CSRIP Policies CP7, CP8, CP14, CP16, CP23; BBLP Policies BE24, BE25 and NPPF paras 7, 8, 13, 29, 30, 59, Sections 12 & 16)

Achieving Quality Design and Local Distinctiveness

- 6.24 The NPPF sets out the Governments objectives in respect of good design and comments that design is not solely about appearance or location, but must also provide a sustainable quality of life in terms of energy efficiency and affordability. Bletsoe has experienced some limited post war growth, but some properties do little to reflect local design and materials and the rural character of the settlement. Although they may provide some variety, there is a lack of distinction.
- 6.25 There is a strong desire amongst residents to ensure that all new development is sensitively designed so as to respect the local landscape, and should also take into account the need to provide sufficient parking, appropriate levels of amenity space and facilitate the retention and/or addition of tree, hedge and other planting. Where appropriate, development should seek to integrate well with the surrounding landscape and countryside and avoid being designed with hard edges, particularly when exposed to the countryside beyond. When preparing proposals for new development consideration should be given not only to individual house design, but also the type of hard and soft landscaping proposed, street layout and accessibility and appearance.
- 6.26 The designated Conservation Area consists of many listed and historic traditional buildings thereby preserving the character of the historic core. It is critical that any further infill development is sympathetic to the Conservation Area. Design should be of a high standard, which can be assisted by more stringent planning policies providing guidance on the use of local traditional design and materials.
- 6.27 New development should not be prominent in scale, or significantly change the character of the village and should reflect the grain, density, quality and materials identified in the village. Additionally, all new development should be of a height, massing and appearance that does not adversely affect key distinctive views into and out of the Parish. Particular attention should be given to views to and from listed buildings, open spaces within villages, the Conservation Area and key landscape features.
- 6.28 The following policy has been developed to ensure that all development is designed to a high standard, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. Design principles for the layout and appearance of new buildings are set out in the

Bletsoe Village Design Advice (VDA) which is attached at **Appendix B** and should be a consideration for all development proposals. Applicants will be required to explain how their proposals have considered the design principles through the submission of a written statement which need only be a short document, commensurate to the type of development proposal. Other requirements are set out in Bedford Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents as follows:

- Achieving Quality in Residential Layouts (1997);
- Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities: Design and Good Practice (2014);
- Residential extensions, New Dwellings and Small Infill Developments (2000);
- Bletsoe Conservation Area Appraisal (2008).

BNP Policy 4 Design Criteria

All proposals for new development, including extensions to existing dwellings will be expected to meet the following criteria to be considered acceptable in design terms:

- The design and layout is of a high quality that is considered to be in keeping with the scale and character of the immediate surroundings;
- Respect the context and setting of all Heritage Assets, particularly those that are designated;
- It can be demonstrated that the proposal would provide sufficient parking in accordance with Bedford Borough Council adopted standards and would not result in an unacceptable increase in on street parking;
- Provide hard and soft landscaping appropriate to the scale, location and design of the development;
- There is no unacceptable loss of amenity to neighbouring developments through loss of privacy, loss of light, visual intrusions, noise and pollution.

All planning applications should provide a written statement which demonstrates how the above criteria has been considered and incorporated into the proposal. Proposals should take into account the design criteria as set out in the Village Design Advice (**Appendix B**)

(Compliance: NP Objective 1; BBLP Policy BE9, BE11, BE29, BE21, BE32; CSRIP CP21 and NPPF Section 12)

OBJECTIVE 2 – MANAGING BOTH EXISTING AND FUTURE TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT PROVISION AND ENCOURAGING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE MOVEMENT

- 6.29 Section 4 of the NPPF encourages the use of sustainable modes of transport, however it also recognises that in rural areas transportation opportunities are limited. Bletsoe is a rural village with limited public transport services available and so the use of the private motor is accepted as almost essential for most residents.
- 6.30 The community recognises that most households today have access to the use of more than one car and on street parking arrangements in Memorial Lane and The Avenue are overloaded. Through a combination of the Neighbourhood Plan, and a complementary community strategy, the Parish Council is committed to ensure that any additional private cars in the village are accommodated through sufficient parking provision and safe access. In addition, there is a desire to promote alternative forms of transport such as better public transport services, cycling and walking, however Bletsoes countryside location makes this aspiration difficult to achieve.
- 6.31 The community's response to the consultations undertaken supported the need to provide off-road parking for residents, with specific attention required in The Avenue. Speeding was identified as a further concern with traffic calming and average speed cameras identified as possible solutions. The following key issues were identified:
- Parking issues in the village, particularly on The Avenue and Memorial Lane.
 - Traffic issues and, in particular, speeding through the village.
 - Growth will impact on infrastructure and capacity issues must be addressed with careful integrated planning.
 - The impact of new development on traffic movement.

Parking issues

- 6.32 It is clear from the consultation with the community the location of any new off-street parking provision needs to be carefully assessed. Feedback from consultation reinforced the desire to protect the green spaces in the village centre; there was also a suggestion that some additional parking provision could be provided on the site of the former allotments, now known as the orchard. The provision of any new car parking must therefore be sensitive to the character and identity of the village.

- 6.33 All new developments will be expected to provide adequate parking for its future residents and should adhere to the standards set out by Bedford Borough Council as there is limited space for off-street parking in Bletsoe. Larger dwellings (3 bedrooms or more) are generally occupied by larger families and with older children living at home for longer, it is likely they will also need their own transport to access employment or college. This should be taken into account if larger properties are to be constructed in Bletsoe and sufficient space for on plot parking factored into the design.
- 6.34 Proposals that provide additional off-street parking for existing residents will be encouraged. It is however accepted that there will be circumstances where it is not practical or possible to provide the additional parking, such as existing properties seeking minor extensions. In these situations, applicants will be expected to demonstrate that their proposals would not adversely increase street parking through the loss of existing parking arrangements or result in an impact on highway safety.

BNP Policy 5 Vehicle and Cycle Parking

All new development will be encouraged to provide vehicle and cycle parking in accordance with Policy BNP4 of this Plan, and set out in the Village Design Advice (**Appendix B**) attached to this Plan, unless it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not have a significant adverse impact upon existing parking arrangements and would not result in an unacceptable increase in on street parking.

(Compliance: NP Objective 2; BBLP Policy BE29, BE30; CSRIP CP21, and NPPF Section 9)

- 6.35 Through consultation with the community, a site has been identified as having the potential to provide additional resident parking. However, in order to deliver this provision, the relocation of the existing play area adjacent to the Village Hall will be required. To address the community's concerns, it is an aspiration of the Parish Council to relocate the existing play area to within the village hall field, but this would be subject to the granting of planning permission. The new location would need to be suitable in terms of any impact on neighbouring properties and secure in terms of future users of the play area.
- 6.36 In the September/October Issues and Options Consultation, 41 residents were in favour of providing additional off-street parking for residents on the land adjacent to the Village Hall, 9 were neutral and 30 were not in favour. Whilst this may alleviate some of the parking problems for residents of Memorial Lane, it may not necessarily

help residents of The Avenue or other streets in the village. The Parish Council recognise they will need to undertake a separate consultation with Bletsoe residents if the intention is to provide additional off-street parking for residents so that an appropriate solution to the issue of parking can be agreed. The following Non- policy Action has been developed in terms of the relocation of the play area, the potential extension of the Village Hall car park and prospective measures to alleviate existing parking pressures.

Non Policy Action 1 Parking

The Parish Council recognise the need to alleviate the pressure from limited off street parking provision in Bletsoe. The Parish Council will continue to work with residents to find a solution and will consult further on the relocation of the play area and extension of the Village Hall car park in an appropriate manner.

Infrastructure

- 6.37 Bletsoe is distant from the major road network and is served by a number of minor roads which connect to the A6, the main route north of Bedford. Other roads link to surrounding villages and hamlets. Roads between the village ends and the outlying hamlets lack pavements and there is no dedicated provision for cyclists. Outside the village the national speed limits apply with the 30 mph limit only in the built up area where there is street lighting.
- 6.38 Whilst there is limited scope for small scale developments to provide additional pedestrian footpaths or cycle routes within the Parish the NPPF states that “transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development, but also in contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives”.
- 6.39 In this regard the following policy has been developed to ensure new developments which provide benefits to the existing infrastructure in and immediately around Bletsoe will be supported provided there is compliance with any other relevant policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

BNP Policy 6 Transportation

All proposals that make a contribution towards improvements to existing and/or new public and community transport services in the Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan Area (BNPA) will be supported subject to there being no conflict with any other relevant policy within this Plan.

Proposals for new development should ensure that, where practicable, provisions are made to ensure there is connection to existing footpaths enabling residents to walk to village amenities.

(Compliance: NP Objective 2; BBLP Policy T6; CSRIP CP21; ADLP AD36 and NPPF Section 9)

Speed awareness

- 6.40 During the initial launch of the BNP residents made clear their concerns relating to the speed at which vehicles travel through Bletsoe from the A6 to the villages and countryside beyond. This is recognised as a continuing problem and possible solutions include traffic calming measures and average speed cameras. New development in the village, albeit small scale, has the potential to place additional pressure on the road network and this will strengthen an existing case for a 20mph speed limit through the village. The issue of speeding is behavioural and therefore whilst a concern for residents, it is not a land use policy that could be included in a neighbourhood plan, however the Parish Council recognise there is need to address the issue and therefore the following Non Policy Action has been developed.

Non Policy Action 2 Speed awareness

The Parish Council will work with Bedford Borough Council to improve local awareness of traffic problems. This will include the provision of regulation compliant signage to encourage traffic to slow down and a review of speed restrictions. The Parish Council will liaise with the Borough Council to assess the costs and benefits of additional traffic calming measures such as the provision of average speed cameras in Bletsoe (if appropriate) to reduce speed and improve safety.

OBJECTIVE 3 –PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR EXISTING AND FUTURE OPEN SPACES

- 6.41 A significant aspect of the character of Bletsoe is its rural feel, openness and access to open space and the countryside that residents enjoy. Protecting the existing open spaces that have a clear community value and promoting new communal open space, such as allotments or recreation areas, is a key objective of the Plan.



- 6.42 The consultation feedback demonstrates there is some community support for the provision of allotments within the Parish. As such, there is also a commitment under this objective to identify potential land for allotments or other communal open space, to protect existing cemetery provision and ensure future provision and to review opportunities to improve access to the countryside.
- 6.43 Much of the open space in the village is already protected by existing BBC Policies. BNP Policies Map (at **Appendix A**) identifies the six areas of designated Village Open Space, labelled A to F, including the Playing Field which are already protected under Policy AD40 in the BBC Allocations & Designations Plan, however the policy does allow for the re-development of the Open Space provided it does not compromise the reasons for designation, or if other material considerations outweigh the need to retain the space.

Village OpenSpace

- 6.44 The NPPF advises that neighbourhood plans have the opportunity to designate Local Green Spaces which are of particular importance to the local community. This will afford protection from development other than in very special circumstances.

6.45 Paragraph 97 of the NPPF says that Local Green Spaces should only be designated where the green space is;

- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of wildlife; and
- local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

6.46 In developing BNP, it became clear the community value the green fields and open spaces within and surrounding the village, nevertheless the community have not indicated a strong desire to designate additional areas of Local Green Space within the BNP. Feedback from the consultations undertaken with the community identified the following key issues:

- The need to protect green space in the village.
- The need to improve accessibility for all throughout Bletsoe to support healthy communities.
- The need to consider the allocation of land for allotments given that there is some demand for such provision in the area.

6.47 Based on the consultation responses, it is clear there is support for the continued protection of the open space within the Parish, with 96% of residents wishing to protect these valuable areas. Therefore, the following policy has been developed for the purpose of preserving the existing areas of Village Open Space in the BNP. This will ensure continued protection for these valued areas, but allows for some flexibility where there are special circumstances as set out by the policy below.

BNP Policy 7 Village Open Space

The areas of Village Open Space as identified on the Policies Map (**Appendix A**) will be protected from inappropriate development. Redevelopment or partial redevelopment of the Village OpenSpace will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated;

- the proposals would result in enhancement of the existing Village Open Space;
- development of the Village Open Space would result in significant benefits for the community as a whole; and/or

- there would be no significant adverse impact on the visual quality of the surrounding area and overall character of the village.

(Compliance: NP Objective 2; BBLP Policy BE15, H24, H25, ADLP Policy AD40; CS RIP CP22, and NPPF paragraph 97)

Village entrance

- 6.48 The consultation feedback identified some interest in protecting the open space at the entrance to the Village on either side of The Avenue. There was no overwhelming desire to include these areas within the Open Space/Local Green Space designation, however it is an aspiration of the Parish Council to protect these areas from inappropriate forms of development in order to maintain the historic openness on both sides of The Avenue at the western entrance to the village.

Non Policy Action 3 Protection of the Village entrance

The Parish Council will seek to resist proposals for new development on the land at the village entrance to the west. As part of BNP this land is not allocated as Village Open Space however it is considered to be an important landscape gap between the built form of the village and the A6. The Parish Council will not support proposals that would result in the loss of the openness of these important gaps and will endeavour to work with relevant land owners to ensure these areas remain clear of clutter.

- 6.49 Given the community feedback on the provision of allotments, the Parish Council will undertake a separate community consultation to ascertain whether there is sufficient interest within Bletsoe or jointly with surrounding villages before embarking on steps to secure land for allotment use.

Non Policy Action 4 Identifying potential allotments

The Parish Council will identify whether there is suitable demand for community allotments. Should an appropriate level of demand exist the Parish Council will seek to establish the Bletsoe Allotment Association in order to identify suitable locations for allotments. This could also include joint discussions with neighbouring parishes.

Public Rights of Way

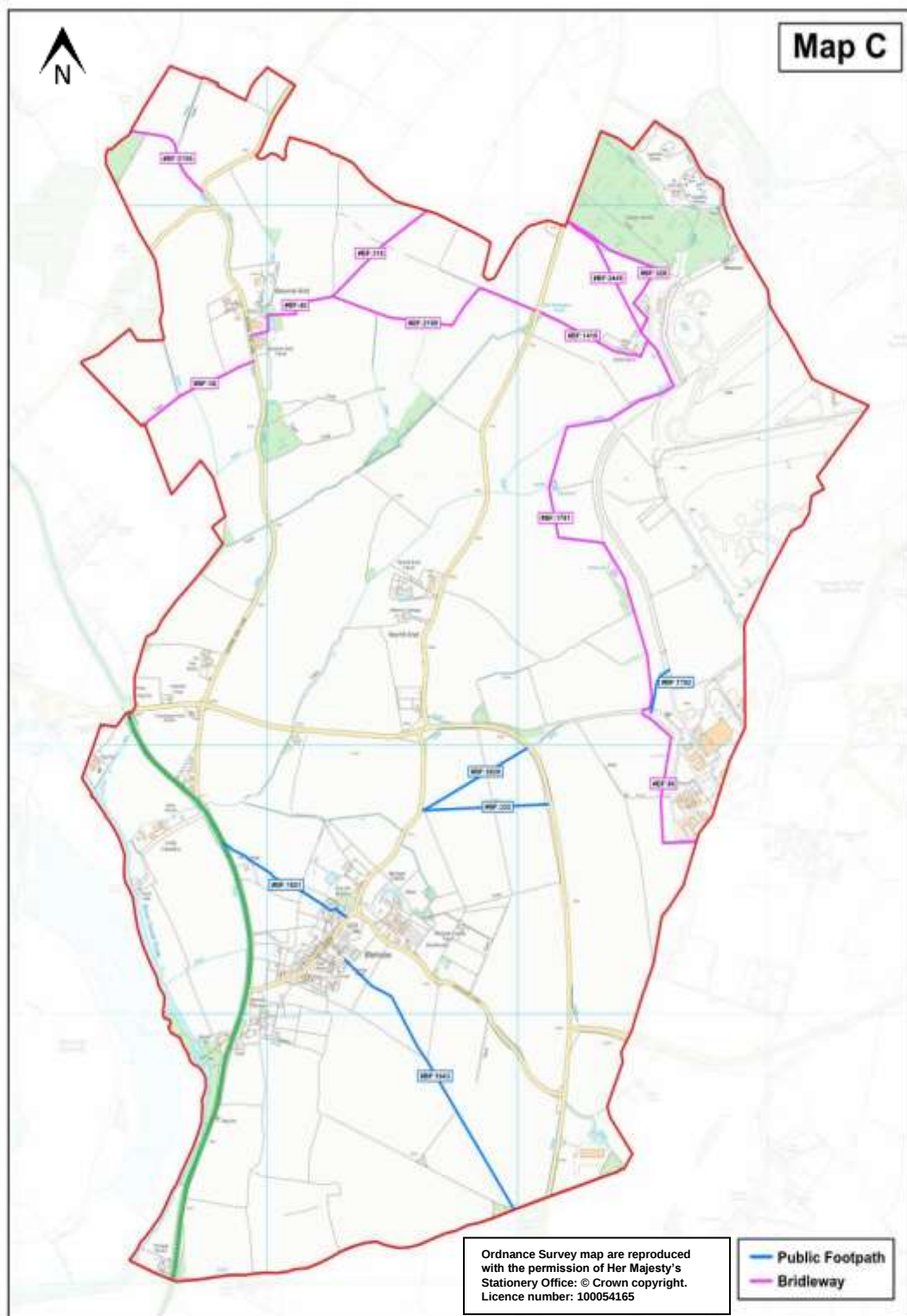
- 6.50 Given the rural location of Bletsoe and the restricted access to public transport there are limited opportunities to provide alternatives to the private motor car as a means of travel, however, there are clear health benefits through increased walking and cycling. The development and maintenance of safe walking routes is, therefore, an important issue for the residents of the Parish.
- 6.51 Within the Plan area there is good access to the surrounding countryside via a number of Rights of Ways and Bridleways as identified on **Map C** below. In response to the consultations the community emphasised support for the protection of the footpaths together with further environmental improvements through the promotion and enhancement of Parish Walks.
- 6.52 Whilst, in response to resident's aspirations, the Issues and Options Consultation identified opportunities for developing a series of additional "Parish Walks" to promote lesser known routes and encompass features of local interest, there is a legal process for the creation of a public right way, which is quite separate to the Neighbourhood Plan process. The Highways Act 1980 gives BBC the power to make Public Path Orders to create, divert, and extinguish footpaths, bridleways, and restricted byways. However, there are a number of legislative tests that any order must satisfy in order for it to be confirmed and thus take effect. For this reason it would not be appropriate for a Neighbourhood Plan to identify any new routes for public rights of way.
- 6.53 BBC have recently undertaken a review of the Rights of Way Plan and have considered areas where improvements could be made with assistance from parish councils and as a result the Rights of Way Plan 2018-2023 has now been adopted by the Council.
- 6.54 In recognition of the community aspirations to improve the right of way links to the surrounding area, the following Non-Policy Action has been developed which ensures a commitment from the Parish Council with regard to continuing work on improvements to the rights of way network within BNP area.
- 6.55 Parishes where a Neighbourhood Plan is in place will receive 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) raised from new developments in the area. These charges are set by BBC and are based upon the size and type of development. Money

generated from new development in BNP area would be retained by the Parish Council and could be spent on maintaining the existing footpath network in the BNP area.

Non- Policy Action 5 Improvements to local Rights of Way

In conjunction with BBC, the Parish Council will continue to encourage improved links to the public rights of way connecting to neighbouring parishes in order to support and enhance health and wellbeing beyond Bletsoe Parish. Further work is needed to assess these and to prioritise areas for improvement, such as seating and drop kerbs to assist with accessibility. Where steps are the only option, signage could be improved to advise users that there are steps ahead and to suggest alternative routes where available. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other sources of funding will be required to assist with financial support for the promotion and improvement of the Parish Walks.





Bletsoe Public Rights of Way

OBJECTIVE 4 –ENSURING THE VILLAGE BENEFITS FROM SUFFICIENT FACILITES AND SERVICES

- 6.56 Bletsoe is a small village with little in the way of facilities and services. The Village Hall, St Marys Church and the Falcon Public House provide some level of service provision appropriate to the small scale of the village collectively and help to create a real sense of community spirit. It is accepted there is unlikely to be sufficient demand for a village shop or additional facilities, but there is a strong feeling amongst the community that the existing facilities should be retained and supported.

Village Hall

- 6.57 The Parish Council acknowledge there is a need to promote and support the Village Hall to ensure its continued viability, together with the provision of new or upgraded play and other community facilities and it is clear from the community consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan that Bletsoe residents feel the same. In the September/October Issues 2016 and Options Consultation 80 respondents were in favour of local facilities being supported and retained such as the mobile library and weekly post office visits. Only 1 respondent remained neutral and none disagreed.



- 6.58 As noted previously the Parish Council will receive 25% of the CIL raised from new developments in the area if the Neighbourhood Plan is made. These charges could be spent on community facilities such as updating the village hall, or any other improvements to local facilities, a matter that was viewed favourably by residents in the consultation. The Parish Council will allocate any CIL funds to current and/or appropriate projects as and when such funding is received. Accordingly, the following non-policy action is proposed as an aspiration of the Parish Council to ensure community facilities are kept up to date and are fit for purpose.



Non Policy Action 6 Continued promotion of village services

The Parish Council will continue to promote the use of the village hall and will work with and support the Village Hall Committee in taking steps to improve the facility where appropriate. The Parish Council will also support existing community groups and clubs together with encouragement for residents to use local services such as the mobile library and weekly post office visits.

Where possible additional sources of funding retained by the Parish Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will be spent on improvements that benefit the community.

Broadband

- 6.59 In response to the consultation exercises, the community emphasised the need to improve broadband provision. It is understood that Bedford Borough Council are working in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council, Milton Keynes Council, BroadBand Delivery UK (BDUK) and BT Openreach, to deliver superfast broadband to homes throughout the three Local Authority areas.
- 6.60 Fortunately Bletsoe is included in the roll out programme, however the approach to delivery is planned over several phases and Bletsoe is identified as being in Phase 4 of the programme. Realistically, superfast broadband is not expected to be complete in the village until 2020.
- 6.61 To ensure all new development has the ability to connect to superfast broadband when delivery is complete the following policy will apply to all new development.

BNP Policy 8 Next Generation Broadband

All new residential, commercial and community buildings within the Neighbourhood Plan Area should be provided with the necessary cabling for a superfast broadband (fibre-optic) connection to premises unless it can be demonstrated, through consultation with Next Generation Access (NGA) Network providers, that this would not be either possible, practical or economically viable.

Where this is the case, sufficient and suitable ducting should be provided within the site and to the property to facilitate installation at a future date.

(Compliance: NP Objectives 1, 4; and NPPF Section 10)

OBJECTIVE 5 –PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR LISTED BUILDINGS AND SCHEDULED MONUMENT

6.62 The National Planning Policy Framework defines a heritage asset as follows:

‘A building, monument, site, place or landscape identified as having a degree of significance, meriting consideration in planning decisions because of its heritage interests’.

6.63 Heritage assets include statutorily designated heritage assets and those identified by the LPA, included on a local listing or as a non-designated heritage asset. Significance of a heritage asset derives not only from the asset’s physical presence but also from its setting. The village boasts a number of historic characterful buildings and monuments, ancient green amenity spaces and farmland which all add significantly to the historic character of the village.

6.64 The village, for the most part, is designated Conservation Area and the Bletsoe Conservation Area Appraisal (2008) provides a good description of the village setting and character areas. Section 3 gives a brief overview of Bletsoe and its history.



6.65 The following buildings are statutorily listed buildings within the BNP area.

- 36 The Avenue, Grade II listed
- 46-52 The Avenue, Grade II listed
- The Old School and School House, Grade II listed
- Bletsoe Castle, Coplowe Lane, Grade II* listed
- Pixie Cottage, 9 Memorial Lane, Grade II listed
- The Falcon Inn, Milton Road (A6), Grade II listed

- North End Farmhouse, North End, Grade II listed
- Gilbert's Cottage, North End, Grade II listed
- 1 Oldway, Grade II listed
- Bletsoe Park Farm, Grade II listed
- 44 The Avenue, Grade II listed
- 54-62 The Avenue, Grade II listed
- Old Pear Tree Cottage, The Avenue, Grade II listed
- Church of St Mary the Virgin, The Avenue, Grade II* listed
- 1-6 Top Row, Grade II listed
- Bridge over Bletsoe Castle Moat, Coplowe Lane, Grade II listed
- Bletsoe Cottage, Milton Road (A6), Grade II listed
- North End Farm Cottages, North End, Grade II listed
- 2 & 3 Oldway, Grade II listed
- 38 & 42 The Avenue, Grade II listed
- The Old Rectory, The Avenue, Grade II listed
- Barn at Bletsoe Castle Farm, Coplowe Lane, Grade II listed
- 15 & 17 Memorial Lane, Grade II listed

Source: www.HistoricEngland.org.uk

Local Issues

- 6.66 The Neighbourhood Plan recognises that new development in Bletsoe should seek to ensure that it does not negatively impact on the historic character of the village and one of the key objectives of BNP is to ensure that both the fabric and the setting of listed buildings and other heritage assets continue to be protected, including those considered by residents to be of local importance.
- 6.67 Of great importance is Bletsoe Castle a Grade II* listed building. It stands on the site of a scheduled monument (SM) comprising a medieval moated manor house with an associated 16th-17th century garden enclosure and landscape earthworks. The moated area is almost square in plan, surrounded by a ditch measuring up to 25 metres wide by 3.5 metres deep with an outer bank 2 metres high and 5 metres wide. The western arm of the moat has been partly filled in and landscaped into modern gardens but is still 2 metres deep and 10-15 metres wide; there is no outer bank on this side. The southern corner of the moat lies beneath a group of farm buildings

which includes a 17th-18th century barn. The interior of the moated area measures at least 70 metres across. The bridge across the moat is grade II listed.



- 6.68 St Marys Church is also a Grade II* listed building and stands proud in the centre of the village.



- 6.69 It is clear from the consultation process that there are several buildings and features of historical interest within Bletsoe as well as locally important heritage assets which includes archaeological interests, that residents strongly feel should be protected. Both national and local policy make it clear that all development affecting a heritage asset and/or its setting must pay special regard to the need to conserve and enhance the asset and/or its setting and any special features of significance. The NPPF requires great weight to be given to the conservation of a heritage asset and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Any harm or loss requires clear

justification and the public benefits of the scheme should be weighed against even less than substantial harm.

- 6.70 Whilst it is not for a Neighbourhood Plan to introduce a further layer of protection for non-statutorily listed and undesignated buildings, in the September/October Issues and Options Consultation there was overwhelming support for undesignated heritage assets to be protected. 75 respondents were in favour, 6 were neutral and there were none who disagreed.
- 6.71 BNP expects special care to be given to all historic buildings and any proposed works that affect these buildings and their setting should be carefully considered so that new development does not result in any undue harm to their heritage and community value. However, as both National and Local policy offer significant protection for heritage assets, it is not necessary for BNP to reproduce a similarly worked policy.
- 6.72 Some local authorities have produced a list of locally important buildings and sites which are not protected by statutory designation. As a consequence, whilst the list provides no additional planning controls, any building or site on the list is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset and which is a material consideration when determining the outcome of a planning application.
- 6.73 The NPPF contains policies applicable to heritage assets regardless of whether or not they are locally listed. However, local listing provides a consistent and accountable means of identifying local heritage assets to the benefit of good strategic planning for the area and to the benefit of owners and developers as a means of understanding future development opportunities and constraints.
- 6.74 The production of a local list would be undertaken by BBC based on guidance of Historic England who have produced detailed advice on best practice in producing local lists of heritage assets.
- 6.75 To assist in progressing the preparation of a local list, which would not only benefit Bletsoe but for the Borough as a whole, the Parish Council proposes the following non-policy action.

Non Policy Action 7 Protection for buildings of local interest

The community will work with Bedford Borough Council to explore the development of a Local List for the Bletsoe Neighbourhood Plan area to include buildings noted as historically important in the Neighbourhood Plan engagement process.

- 7.1 Throughout the process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan, Bletsoe residents have raised a number of points, ideas and concerns some of which are not directly related to land-use matters (although they may indirectly relate to the use of land). As such, they are not issues that can be addressed through planning policy in a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 7.2 For Bletsoe residents, these issues are important and it is essential those identified as Non-policy actions are progressed. Together with the identified land use policies, this will help to achieve the overall vision and objectives of BNP over the plan period.
- 7.3 Once made BNP will form part of the Development Plan for BBC and will be a material consideration in all planning applications. However, BBC are preparing a new Local Plan and the current adopted version of the Local Plan will eventually be superseded by the new Local Plan once the examination process is completed and adoption has taken place.
- 7.4 As a consequence of this, once the new Local Plan is adopted the BNP will need to be reviewed in accordance with current legislation and guidelines to ensure it remains broadly in compliance with adopted policy. This will be the responsibility of the Parish Council.



Members of Bletsoe Active Recreational Club (BARCing)

Affordable Housing. Social rented, affordable rented and shared ownership housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the current market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provision to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Archaeological interest. There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Consultation Statement. Consultation statements explain and demonstrate how engagement took place with the community and others to shape the development of the neighbourhood plan. The consultation statement will include and summarise all the statutory (i.e. the pre-submission consultation) and non-statutory consultation that has taken place with the community, organisations and other relevant bodies to develop the plan.

Designated heritage asset. A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation.

Development Plans. This includes adopted Local Plans, neighbourhood plans and is defined in Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2000.

Heritage Asset. A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

Highway Authority. Highways authorities are responsible for producing the local transport plan and for managing existing or proposed new local roads in the area. Bedford Borough Council is the local highway authority.

Historic environment. All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora. Infrastructure. Basic services necessary for development to take place: for example roads, electricity, sewerage, water, education and health facilities.

Listed Building. A building of special architectural or historic interest. Listed buildings are graded I, II* or II with Grade I being the highest. Listing includes the interior as well the exterior of the building and any buildings or permanent structures within the curtilage of that listed building.

Local Planning Authority. The public authority whose duty it is to carry out specific planning functions for an area. The Local Planning Authority is Bedford Borough Council.

Local Plan. A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

Localism Act. The Localism Act has devolved greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and given local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.

Material Consideration. A matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or an appeal against a planning decision.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so. It provides a framework within which local people can produce their own Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Neighbourhood Plan. A plan prepared by a Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum for a particular Neighbourhood (made under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

Open Space. All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

Parish Council. Parish Councils are the first tier of Local governance, and the closest to the community. Parish Councils are elected bodies and have the power to raise taxes via the precept. Their responsibilities vary.

Planning Condition. A condition imposed on a grant of planning permission (in accordance with the Town and Country Act 1990) or a condition included in a Local Development Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Planning Obligation. A legal agreement entered into under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal.

Planning Permission. Formal approval sought from a local planning authority allowing a proposed development to proceed. Permission may be sought for in principle through outline planning applications, or sought in detail through full planning applications.

Public Open Space. Urban space, designated by a council, where public access may or may not be formally established, but which fulfils or can fulfil a recreational or non-recreational role (for example amenity, ecological, educational, social or cultural images).

Saved Policies/Saved Plan. Policies within unitary development plans, local plans and structure plans that are saved for a time period during replacement production of Local Development Documents.

Section 106 Agreement. A legal agreement under section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. Section 106 agreements are legal agreements between a planning authority and a developer, or undertaking offered unilaterally by a developer, that ensure that certain extra works related to a development are undertaken.

Setting of a heritage asset. The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). Documents which add further detail to the policies in the Local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the Development plan.

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). Supplementary Planning Guidance may cover a range of issues, both thematic and site specific and provide further detail of policies and proposals in a development plan.

Sustainability Appraisal. An appraisal of the economic, environmental and social effects of a plan, from the outset of the preparation process to allow decisions to be made that accord with sustainable development.