

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Northhill Parish Neighbourhood Plan is to establish a framework from which to influence developments within the Parish and to give guidance in the planning process.

This is the result of the Government's policy to devolve decision-making on local developments and as such should reflect the views of the parishioners. It must also, however, be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local planning policy - established by Central Bedfordshire Council.

To ensure that the Plan reflected views of the community, considerable effort was made, through public workshops and household questionnaires, to assess the opinions of the local parishioners.

The Plan is divided into seven sections covering the key topics. These are summarised below.

## HOUSING (SECTION 4)

Feedback from the local consultation process clearly indicated particular concerns that young people, especially those with local connections, were being priced out of the housing market. In addition, there were concerns over excess new house building and that new housing should be sympathetic to the nature of the Parish.

These views have to be considered against the background of government demands to rapidly increase housing stock and a strong demand for new houses from outside the community.

Thus, on the one hand, a preference to build no more than 40 new houses in the Parish by 2031 (the end date of the Plan) was evidenced from the public consultations, but an independent report from AECOM, which took account of wider issues, suggested a total of 218 new houses should be planned for through the period to 2035. Taking account of the Plan's shorter time frame and the fact that there is a backlog of 81 houses in the parish, which have already received planning permission and have therefore been deducted from the total, we thus project a maximum target of an additional 89 houses through 2031.

The Plan sets out clear policy objectives for new housing (*Policy NP1*), the key aspects of which are:

- Planning permission will be granted for up to 40 new rural exception affordable homes in four specified sites around the parish, outside the settlement envelopes;
- A further 50 new market housing properties may be supported, providing they meet all the policies within the plan;

Further policies are included on housing mix, infill, back-land development, density and design.

## **WATER MANAGEMENT (SECTION 6)**

The public consultation process highlighted two main concerns regarding water management namely: mitigating the threat of flooding and ensuring that maintaining effective sewage infrastructure was not compromised by increased housing.

Parts of the parish lie within relatively high flood risk areas, arising from overflowing rivers, excess groundwater or inadequate drainage. In addition, there have also been several occurrences of sewer flooding, where ground water has infiltrated the sewage system and overloaded it.

This indicates that the Parish drainage and sewage system are near capacity. The Plan therefore emphasises the existing Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and that Drainage Guidelines should be diligently applied. Developers need to be fully aware of the likely impact on flooding, drainage and sewer capacity issues of future development.

As a result, the Plan has adopted several policies (*Policy NP12*) relating to new housing, which require developers to ensure appropriate drainage systems, avoid the loss of open water courses, minimise drainage and sewer problems through appropriate design and liaison with Anglia Water and ensure they do not add to the flood risk of the area.

## **ENVIRONMENT (SECTION 7)**

Public consultations revealed a strong desire to preserve the green spaces in the parish, improve the green environment and support conservation of both the landscape and the wildlife.

In order to help preserve some of the green spaces of significance and/or community value, the Plan has selected several sites with a view to designating them as official “Local Green Spaces” (*Policy NP13*). This should protect them against new development and ensure they remain available for the parishioners to enjoy. These include the four village greens, Home and College Woods, Ickwell Bury parkland, Flitton Scar and Caldecote Playing Fields.

Emphasis has also been put on policies aimed at conserving and improving the local environment (*Policy NP14*) which aim to extend existing examples of good environmental management practice such as those already being implemented in parts of the Parish to encourage the bird population. In addition, protection and preservation of the ancient woodlands of Home and College woods are specifically covered in the Plan (*Policy NP15*), whilst the protection of natural habitats (*Policy NP16*), is aimed at ensuring developments do not lead to the degradation or loss of existing natural habitats and/or part of the green infrastructure.

The Plan additionally establishes the objective (*Policy NP17*) of helping to stimulate the expansion of green infrastructure within the parish by identifying specific sites where there are opportunities to enhance the existing biodiversity and make the wildlife populations more sustainable.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING (SECTION 8)

This covers a wide range of issues relating to encouraging a healthy lifestyle within the parish. The Plan subdivides these into two categories: community facilities and outdoor routes for walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

Under the first of these the Plan notes that although there are several outdoor sporting facilities, there is a paucity of children's play equipment, no adapted outdoor equipment for disabled people nor any facilities for structured outdoor exercise. The Plan thus sets out (*Policy NP18*) to support proposals for the provision of additional play and leisure facilities.

This section also covers the perceived need, identified by the community consultations and local businesses, for additional catering facilities, in particular a family-orientated, cafeteria type venue and the Plan commits to supporting such a development (*Policy NP19*).

Other issues addressed within this section include:

- A policy to support the establishment of allotments (*Policy NP20*);
- Helping to facilitate the protection and enhancement of public rights of way by ensuring the maintenance and improvement of existing footpaths and bridleways;
- Identifying priority new routes for footways within the parish;
- Resisting the loss of existing footpaths, cycleways and bridle ways (*Policy NP21*)

## VALUING OUR LOCAL HERITAGE (SECTION 9)

Northill Parish enjoys a rich historical heritage and the protection of these assets ranked high in the responses to the public consultations. Many of these assets are protected by being Listed with Historic England but others, including 'street furniture', fishponds, locally significant buildings and remnants of industrial heritage do not. The Plan thus identifies 23 specific buildings and artefacts of sufficient community interest and historical significance to warrant conservation.

If these are not eligible for official Listing, they will be considered for inclusion on a 'Local List' which should provide some protection through local planning controls. Specific restriction on developments which would impact on these heritage assets are set out in the Plan (*Policy NP22*).

This section also addresses issues relating to Conservation Areas, preservation of which also generated strong support in the public consultations. A specific policy is thus included in the Plan which is aimed at protecting the appearance of dwelling within and adjacent to the Conservation Areas (*Policy NP23*).

## **GENERATING AND CONSERVING ENERGY (SECTION 10)**

Environmental concerns and support for renewable energy forms were evident from the consultation process and as a result, the Plan addresses the issue of community energy policies.

National government support, including grants, are available for developing rural energy schemes and the Plan provides a commitment to support renewable energy generation schemes (*Policy NP24*).

Considerations are also given to smaller scale generating capabilities of new houses, which will, under the right circumstances also be supported (*Policy NP25*).

## **BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES (SECTION 11)**

Apart from the established businesses, mainly comprising agriculture, market gardening, nurseries and related activities, there is a relatively high number of sole traders and small entrepreneurial enterprises operating in the parish.

The NPPF specifies that neighbourhood planning should encourage local economic growth but the feedback from local consultations provided a mixed response with some concern over further development of businesses but at the same time there was recognition that local employment opportunities needed to be encouraged. The Plan therefore proposes encouraging the development of small scale new businesses, preferably on brownfield sites with low environmental impact. Limited expansion of existing businesses will also be supported

Other related issues covered in the Plan include:

- Ensuring new business developments are not out of scale with their setting and do not lead to an increase in local traffic, especially HGVs (*Policy NP27*);
- The need to improve available broadband speeds by stipulating that new developments should, wherever possible, provide linkage to superfast broadband via fibre optic connections (*Policy NP28*).