

## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

### *Background*

**6.1** In terms of landscape character, English Nature identifies most of the Borough as part of a wider “Natural Area” known as the West Anglian Plain, which also includes the clay vales of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. To the south, the Brickhills form part of the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge while higher ground on the northern edge of the Borough falls within the Yardley - Whittlewood Ridge. The Borough also covers a large part of the upper stretches of the River Great Ouse catchment area.

**6.2** The Borough includes extensive areas of countryside, typically villages set in a mix of arable fields and pasture on fairly fertile chalky clay soils. Apart from some woodland remaining as green islands, the wetland habitats provided by the River Ouse and its tributaries and floodplains, the wildlife habitats have become degraded as a result of intensive farming. Hence the importance of protecting and enhancing what remains, including by wildlife friendly management of farms.

**6.3** During the development of the City, new habitats have been created and enhanced, such as Linear Parks and grid road corridors. Some of the best habitats have been protected but others have been lost. New habitats such as the balancing lakes have greatly enhanced the variety of birdlife and possibly other wildlife but further help from positive planning measures is still required to save and enhance what remains,

The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features. (Countryside Commission and English Nature, 1997)  
See also English Nature's Natural Area Profiles

### *National, Regional and Local Objectives*

**6.4** A key tool is the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 1994. This sets out steps for the conservation of the most important species and habitats including the creation of local BAPs. The Buckinghamshire BAP, which includes Milton Keynes, has recently been published; a BAP specifically for Milton Keynes is proposed.

### *This Local Plan*

**6.5** The Local Plan Vision includes the aspiration for “a clean, green environment” and Plan Aim No.3 supports wildlife conservation. The relevant Plan target is that the percentage of the Council area covered by nature conservation designations should increase from 17.5% to 18% by 2011.

### *Policies*

## NATURE CONSERVATION SITES

### Objective of policy

- To protect from development all designated sites of importance for nature conservation

**6.6** PPG9 states that the key to the conservation of wildlife is the protection of the habitat on which it depends, and this is primarily achieved in planning terms by the protection of designated sites, both statutory and non-statutory, as well as the wider countryside. This policy sets out three tiers of protection for nature

conservation sites according to their relative importance. There are no sites of international importance in the borough at present but this tier is included in the policy as it is possible that such sites might be designated in the future.

**6.7** Sites of national and international nature conservation importance are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature and are protected by law. There are two SSSIs in this area - Howe Park Wood and Oxley Mead - plus a small part of Yardley Chase on the Northamptonshire boundary and Salcey Forest just inside that county. The Council must consult English Nature on planning applications within a SSSI and also on proposals within 500 metres of them.

**6.8** Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are designated by local authorities as habitats of local significance which contribute to both nature conservation and public appreciation and understanding of wildlife. There is one LNR in the Borough at present – Blue Lagoon, Bletchley.

**6.9** The natural heritage, whether of biological or geological interest, is not confined to the various statutorily designated sites such as SSSIs and LNRs. There is a continuous gradation of nature conservation interest down to locally important features such as a pond or a hedgerow.

**6.10** Milton Keynes Wildlife Sites (MKWS) meet a set of agreed criteria. They are equivalent to the “County Wildlife Site” designation used by many other local authorities. They are designated on account of their special features or habitat, plant or animal communities, species or geology. Although not statutorily designated, they do receive protection through policies in development plans. Criteria used in evaluating sites for designation include their irreplaceability, diversity, size, rarity, position in the ecological unit and amenity, historical and educational value. The category of MKWS also includes Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). RIGS are sites that are considered worthy of protection for their educational, research, historical or aesthetic importance. RIGS are generally selected and conserved by an informally constituted, largely voluntary RIGS group organised at county level. Details of all sites currently identified as RIGS are held by Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre.(BMERC) .

MKWS, RIGS and Wildlife Corridors are shown on the Proposals Map

**6.11** The Milton Keynes Wildlife Sites (MKWS) are:

- Costerpits
- Grand Union Canal, Stanton Low
- Jubilee Pit
- Newport Pagnell Gravel Pits
- Chalk grassland, Olney
- Valley Fen, Ravenstone
- Walton Lake
- Lavendon Wood
- Linford Wood
- Old Limestone Quarry
- Shenley Wood
- Threeshire’s Wood
- A509 East of Sherington

- Field at Yew Tree Farm
- Roadside verge, Olney

**6.12** Wildlife Corridors are also given the same status as Milton Keynes Wildlife Sites. They are linear pathways containing habitats that encourage the movement of plants and animals between important wildlife sites. The Wildlife Corridors in Milton Keynes were defined through an innovative project in the mid 1990s, sponsored by the local authorities, CNT, the Parks Trust and English Nature. Four types of corridors were identified – wetland, woodland, railway and road corridors. Where development proposals lie within or adjoining a Wildlife Corridor, the Council will consider whether the proposals would damage the viability of the Corridor. Section 4 of “The Wildlife Corridors of Milton Keynes” (1996) sets out general recommendations for the protection and management of wildlife corridors. Specific management issues are set out in the evaluation of each individual wildlife corridor.

Wildlife Corridors are described in detail in the document “The Wildlife Corridors of Milton Keynes” (1996)

**6.13** The remaining category of designated sites is called Local Wildlife Sites. They are still of importance but because of their large number and often small size they are not shown on the Proposals Map. There are currently about 200 sites recorded by the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre

**6.14** The Council will consult the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre on development proposals likely to affect these sites. BMERC will provide all relevant data on the biodiversity and geological importance of the sites. The Council will use this information and that from other specialist bodies in determining whether a development proposal would have a significant impact on a Local Wildlife Site.

**6.15** Policy NE1 will apply to any new sites of importance for nature conservation designated during the lifetime of the plan.

## NATURE CONSERVATION SITES

### POLICY NE1

- (i) Development will not be permitted if it is likely to harm the nature conservation value of an international site (RAMSAR sites, SACs and SPAs)
- (ii) Proposals for development likely to affect a National Nature Reserve or Site of Special Scientific Interest will be only be permitted if they can be subject to conditions that will prevent damaging impacts on biodiversity interests, or if other material considerations are sufficient to override nature conservation interests.
- (iii) Development which would be likely to harm the biodiversity or geological conservation value of a site of county-wide (RIGS, MK Wildlife sites) or local importance (Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Corridors, local wildlife sites) will only be permitted if the importance of the development outweighs the local value of the site.

## PROTECTED SPECIES

### Objective of policy

- To help conserve those animal and plant species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

**6.16** These species can occur in many places, not necessarily in the relative safety of land designated as a wildlife site. This is a particular feature of some animals e.g. bats and birds, which are very mobile. Habitats such as old barns are often the homes of such species.

**6.17** Although they will be used where necessary, it is not generally appropriate to use conditions as the responsibility for specifying, licensing (where appropriate) and enforcing mitigation for protected species rests with the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations, either English Nature (works in houses, minor works in churches and anything affecting badgers) or DEFRA (for all other works).

**6.18** It is expected that site surveys to determine the impact of the proposed development on protected species should be carried out prior to the granting of planning permission.

## PROTECTED SPECIES

### POLICY NE2

Planning permission will be refused for development if it would be likely to adversely affect animal or plant species, or their habitat, specifically protected by law.

Where necessary, planning conditions will be attached to permissions to require the developer to take steps to secure the protection of the species or habitat affected by development.

## BIODIVERSITY AND GEOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT

### Objective of policy

- To achieve positive gains for biodiversity and geology in the design of new development.

**6.19** Planning for biodiversity and geology is not simply a matter of protecting what is left of a declining resource. Proposals for new development provide many opportunities for creating new habitats and building-in features that are beneficial to biodiversity and geology as well as providing benefits to building occupiers. PPS9 encourages local planning authorities to maximise such opportunities in and around developments using planning obligations where appropriate.

**6.20** New buildings provide many opportunities for wildlife. Boxes or spaces can be supplied for birds to nest or bats to roost. Green roofs can be used in place of conventional ones to create wildflower meadows for insects and feeding birds. Elements such as climbing plants can create habitats, enhance the visual appearance of buildings as well as providing cooling, insulation and microclimate

moderation. New woodland is useful for screening, sound insulation, absorbing air pollution and for locking up carbon to offset global warming.

**6.21** Landscaped spaces can include appropriate native trees and plants, new woodland, hedgerows, semi-natural grassland, ponds, bird boxes, and even artificial badger setts or otter holts. Decisions about what is appropriate will be influenced by the relevant Biodiversity Action Plans. Planting schemes for new developments should include 60% of native species by area or number, including at least 60% of any block over 400sq m. Native species used should be of approved local provenance wherever possible. Non-native species should be selected for their wildlife value.

**6.22** Local Nature Reserves are an important tool for nature conservation. The Council will seek to provide them in connection with new development where appropriate.

**6.23** The Policy makes use of thresholds in order to ensure that the policy is applicable to all developments of a significant size.

## **BIODIVERSITY AND GEOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT**

### **POLICY NE3**

All new development exceeding 5 dwellings (in the case of residential development) or incorporating gross floorspace in excess of 1000 sq m (in the case of other development) will be required to incorporate proposals to enhance biodiversity and geological features which are appropriate to, and where possible compensate for, impacts on the immediate area and the site characteristics.

Measures may include use of native species in landscaping schemes, or the improvement or creation of wildlife habitats or features of geological interest.

Priority will be given to woodland planting and other habitats and species identified by local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Where enhancement is not possible on the site, appropriate enhancements will be sought on other land.

## **CONSERVING AND ENHANCING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

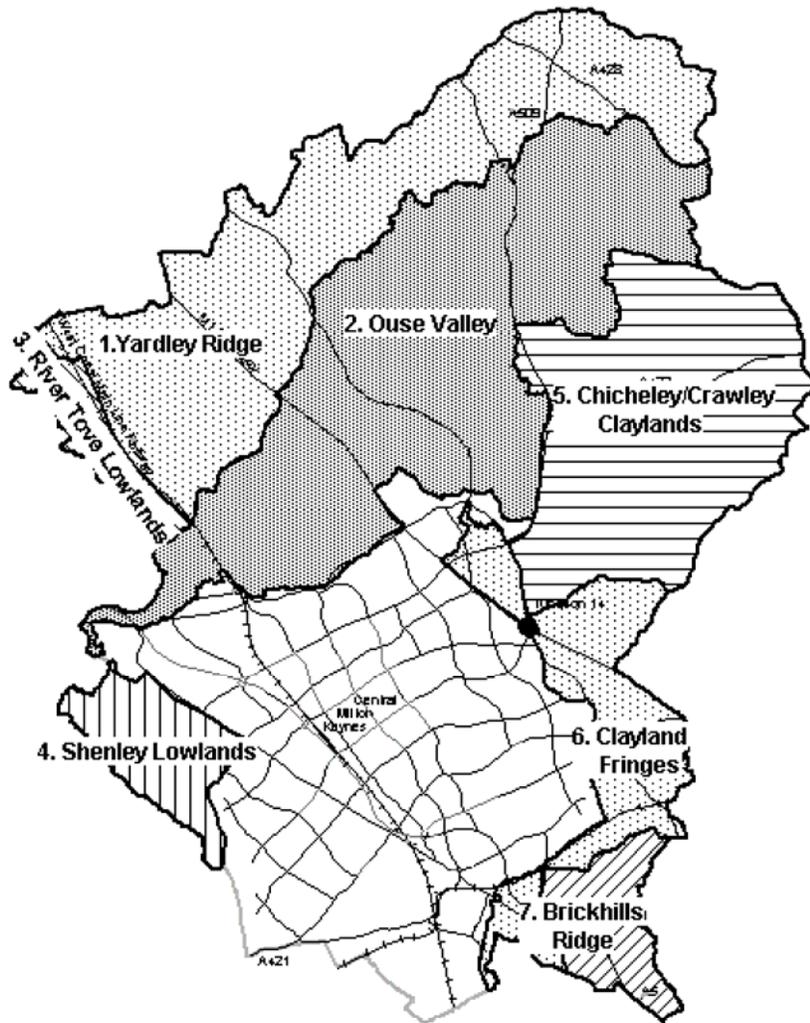
### Objective of policy

- To conserve the Borough's landscape

**6.24** The countryside is a resource used by many different people with different requirements and expectations. More positive management of the countryside - e.g. through management agreements - can secure improvements, resolve conflicts and protect vulnerable areas.

**6.25** The Countryside Agency promotes a multi-functional countryside and together with English Nature has identified a set of Character and Natural areas. In 1999 the Council commissioned a study that identifies in more detail the landscape character of the Borough. The study has been informed by other landscape assessments that relate to the area and is broadly consistent with the character

areas in the Countryside Agency's "Countryside Character Map of England" and the Landscape Strategy for Buckinghamshire. It identifies 7 landscape character areas within the Borough – these are shown on Plan NE1



PLAN NE1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THE MILTON KEYNES LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY 1999

## CONSERVING AND ENHANCING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### POLICY NE4

Where development in the open countryside is acceptable in principle under other policies in this plan, it should respect the particular character of the surrounding landscape.