Section 2.0 Understanding The Strategic Character of West Bletchley

2.1 Introduction

This section aims to gain an understanding of the strategic characteristics of West Bletchley. This is derived primarily from a desk based assessment and identifies characteristics which affect the whole area. This provides the structure within which assessments can then be made of the individual neighbourhoods and other areas which make up West Bletchley.

2.2 Topography and Natural Features

The landform of West Bletchley is part of the National Landscape Character Area (LCA) 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands. It is characterised as a broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys. The broader character area is associated with extensive extraction of clay for brick making and sand and gravel extraction with sites being restored as wetland areas or landfill sites.

The topography is shown in Figure 2, which shows the landform with 5m contour intervals. The land slopes generally from west to east with the highest ground at Windmill Hill in the west and slopes down to the north towards Tattenhoe Brook valley and more steeply to the south. With a ridge of higher land stretching roughly through the middle of the parish. While there are slopes these are not particularly distinctive and there are no watercourses within the area.

2.3 Boundaries

West Bletchley is defined by strong boundaries. These are shown in Figure 3. To the northwest of the parish the A421 is a Milton Keynes grid road (dual carriageway) (H8 Standing Way) with associated strong planting and access into West Bletchley at grid road roundabout intersections. The A421 is the main route from Milton Keynes to Buckingham and the M40, and is a very busy peak time route.

The east and southern boundaries of the parish are formed by elevated railway lines. To the east is the West Coast Mainline and to the south the East-West line, which is being upgraded to restore rail links between Oxford and Cambridge. The rail lines create strong boundaries both in terms of their visual impact and the way they restrict movement. The visual impact is associated with strong planting, train movements and the fact that major sections of the routes are on embankment and therefore contain views. Access by road, bike and foot across the lines is limited to a few key gateway locations. These are shown in Figure 7. The western edge is less strongly defined with housing abutting neighbouring agricultural land.
2.4 Main Streets

The main streets that provide access into and across the area are shown in Figure 4. These streets are "traditional" in that they carry cars, buses, bikes, and pedestrians. These streets provide the main distributive network through and within the area and serve each of the individual neighborhoods and areas. Some of the routes carry through traffic such as Buckingham Road which links Bletchley town center and the A421 Standing Way.

2.5 Strategic Cycle Routes

The New Town area enjoys an extensive network of dedicated cycle routes called Redways. These do extend into West Bletchley but only partially at its edges as the area was mostly developed before the Redway system was laid out. The extent of the Redway network is shown in Figure 5.

The main links to the north connecting into Furzton, Emerson Valley, and Tattenhoe with links through Racecourses which was laid out later in the development of West Bletchley. More recently the "Fixing the Links" project has provided improved footway/cycleway connections from Bletchley town center to the railway station and will be extended to provide links to Bletchley Park.

National Cycle Route NCR 51 is to the east of the area and provides a strategic cycle link through to Bicester and Oxford in the west, and Bedford to the east, and links with other National Cycle Routes along the way. National Cycle Route NCR6 just to the east of the parish provides a cycle link north to Sheffield and the Peak District, and south to Watford linking with other cycle routes providing access into and around London.

Figure 4: Main Streets

Figure 5: Redway & National Cycle Routes
2.6 Access on Foot

The majority of the street network through the parish provides access for pedestrians with footways alongside the streets. Some of the housing areas were designed with layouts which provided a complex network of pedestrian routes and green spaces between houses and away from roads. This type of layout creates low density areas typical of this period and a very distinctive character. This is investigated further within the individual character area assessments in Section 4.

There are areas however which are less permeable and have few pedestrian routes across them. To the east the area around the station and Bletchley Park has few cross links largely because of the secure edges created to Bletchley Park and the employment areas to the west. Windmill Hill golf course creates an extensive area with few pedestrian links.

Given the strong boundaries to the area the opportunities for pedestrian links between West Bletchley and neighbouring areas are very limited and focused on the few opportunities that do exist. These pedestrian gateways are important elements of how people perceive the environment.

Weasel Lane to the south west provides a valuable traffic free route into the countryside. Other pedestrian routes under the railway line to the south connect to Blue Lion Local Nature Reserve.

2.7 Key Gateways

Figure 7 provides a summary of the gateway access points into West Bletchley. While there are more frequent access points to the north, access to the east and to major facilities at Bletchley town centre, MK1 and the stadium have very poor access. The western and southern boundaries have the potential to provide good links to the countryside and wider areas of open space.
2.8 Land Use

Figure 8 shows the key land use pattern in the parish. The main concentration of mixed uses occurs in the eastern part of the area around the railway station which includes the station itself, Bletchley Park, the college and employment areas. The second concentration of mixed uses is in the central area associated with the medical centre, secondary school, two local centres, two of the main local parks and the parish offices.

The remainder of the area then generally follows a pattern of residential neighbourhoods with primary schools and smaller parks and some local centres with a series along Buckingham Road.

2.9 Green Space

There are a wide variety of scales of green space within the area with the larger parks shown in Figure 9 there are also a large number of smaller and incidental open space areas scattered throughout the area. The character of some housing areas is strongly influenced by the location and character of small incidental open spaces. The southern and eastern edges of the area have broad areas of informal space associated with the railway, which is of wildlife value although not easily accessible. The grid road planting is also a wildlife corridor.

At a strategic scale the main parks, however, have limited effect on the overall character because they tend to be largely hidden within neighbourhoods with housing backing onto them. They have very limited frontages to the main streets and are therefore not generally seen when travelling through the area.

The green spaces that people do see tend to be the tree lined verges to the main streets and the smaller incidental grassed areas associated with the housing layouts. Some of these have a poorly defined character and function, but are nevertheless important to their local communities and collectively combine to create one of the more distinctive elements of the character of the area.

The result is that the contribution that major green spaces make to the character is more fragmented and localised but nevertheless, the larger parks are important because of the relief they give from the urban area and also the wildlife value and functions they accommodate, including sport and recreation.

It is notable that there are no sites identified as being of wildlife interest within the parish and although Milton Keynes as a whole has a strong network of wildlife corridors these are limited to the parish boundaries, with none that cross the parish.
West Bletchley Character Assessment

2.11 Summary

The Bletchley Conservation Area encompasses Bletchley Park, the Edwardian country house and park close to Old Bletchley and associated listed buildings, Conservation Area which includes Bletchley Park designated and recognised. The area is of international significance. It was declared a Grade I Listed Building by English Heritage in 1950. Bletchley Park is a major tourist attraction and the home of the National Museum of Computing.

2.10 Protected Areas and Features

There are three main groups of listed buildings. The first includes St Mary’s Church which is listed Grade I. It has 12th Century origins, and retains a reset 12th Century door or chancel arch. It was rebuilt in stages between the 13th Century and 15th Century and in 1964-74 it was comprehensively restored. It is clearly visible from Shenley Road and the park woodland but camouflaged by overhead vegetation.

St Mary’s Church

The most architecturally significant listed building is St Mary’s Church. The church is a Grade I Listed Building and was built in the 13th Century. It has a wide variety of architectural features, including Norman, Perpendicular and Jacobean elements. The church is a focal point of the town and is surrounded by a number of old trees.

Buckingham Road.

The group of other listed buildings along Buckingham Road. and Old Bletchley and associated listed buildings, Conservation Area which includes Bletchley Park.

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The next section, Section 3 traces the historical evolution of West Bletchley as a whole, and brings together the strategic character elements considered in this section.

The buildings within Bletchley Park are all listed as Grade II and were largely not included within the innovative town plan of the 1950s. However, they have made a significant contribution to the character of the area.

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Employment areas are of less significance than some other areas.

Change in future is likely to be limited to further redevelopment of areas, with most employment in small groups pre-existing areas, with most of the more recent development being close to the station and Watling Street.

Building areas are hidden in strategic views and a great number of smaller incidental open spaces of the area and the remainder of the area being largely residential.

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Figure 11: Summary of Strategic Key Features