



# Neighbourhood Plan

2020 - 2031



**September 2021**  
**Referendum Version**

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Astwood & Hardmead are two villages with a population of around 320 individuals situated within two miles of each other within a shared Civil Parish in the borough of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.
- 1.2 The village name of Astwood is Anglo-Saxon in origin and means 'eastern wood.' The name Hardmead was derived from old English for 'Heoruwulf's meadow' and the village appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Herulfmede.
- 1.3 Within Astwood there are some small businesses providing a range of services. The village hall provides an important meeting place for the community and the local public house (The Old Swan) is a charming thatched roof coaching inn dating back to the 17th century. There are two local churches, St Peter's which is Grade II\* listed and dates back to the late 12th Century and St Mary's which dates back to the 13th Century and is Grade I listed.
- 1.4 The Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to provide a planning vision for the Parish up to 2031.
- 1.5 Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act of 2011 to provide local communities with the chance to shape the future development of their areas. Neighbourhood plans must meet some 'basic conditions.' A neighbourhood plan will be considered to have met the basic conditions if:
- having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan;
  - the making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
  - the making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Development Plan for the area of the authority; and
  - the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations
- 1.6 The Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to be in general conformity with Plan:MK, the 2019 Local Plan adopted by Milton Keynes Council, and to be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019). Once made the plan is a statutory part of the development plan for the area and carries significant weight

in how planning applications are determined in the Parish. The plan covers the entirety of the Parish, as follows:

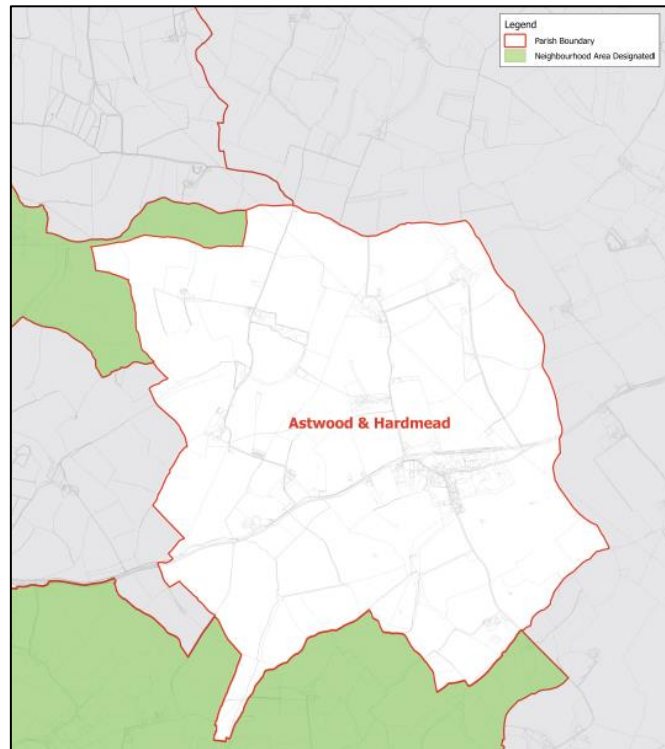


Figure 1: Designated neighbourhood plan area

1.7 The preparation of the Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan began in 2018 with the Parish Council creating a Steering Group to lead its development. The plan has been subject to an extensive amount of consultation and engagement with the local community and interested parties which in summary comprised:

- Village drop in session explaining the purpose and background to Neighbourhood Plans;
- Parish-wide questionnaire;
- Letters to landowners;
- Formal 'call for sites' letters to ascertain land availability;
- Second drop-in session to present site options and general principles for future development; and
- Leaflet and questionnaire concerning site assessments and third village drop-in session

1.8 Full details of the background to the preparation of the Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan can be viewed in the accompanying supporting documents:

- Consultation Statement;
- Site Assessment document; and
- Basic Conditions Statement

1.9 The following Vision has been adopted to inform and direct the policies contained within the Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan:

***To sustain and enhance rural village life through sympathetic expansion***

By 2031, the Plan seeks to meet the following objectives:

- Small scale housing growth will have taken place which is respectful of the surrounding area and built to a high standard of design;
- Sustainable and appropriate rural employment will have been accommodated;
- Important local green spaces and community facilities will have been protected; and
- The surrounding landscape that is important to the character of the area will have been preserved and maintained

1.10 Each of the following chapters explains why and how particular issues are important to the Parish and specifies the relevant planning policy that will be applied to planning applications. Policies are distinguishable by their specific number and being contained in text boxes.

## 2 Housing

- 2.1 Astwood & Hardmead is a small rural parish and as such is not expected to deliver any allocated growth in Plan:MK. Milton Keynes Council has however published a briefing note entitled 'Arriving at Indicative Housing requirement for Neighbourhood Plans' (December 2018) as an interim position to provide an indicative housing figure for those areas preparing new neighbourhood plans, in accordance with Paragraph 66 of the NPPF 2019.
- 2.2 The indicative housing figure for the neighbourhood plan area is 1 dwelling, although, in the interests of positive planning, plans are encouraged to allocate land for more homes. Accordingly, and in line with the views of local residents (see Consultation Statement), the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to deliver a small amount of housing growth in the Parish. The accompanying Site Assessment document explains how development options were each assessed and a preferred site for 1-2 dwellings identified.
- 2.3 Existing housing in the Parish is predominantly located in Astwood, with Hardmead and other isolated properties washed over by 'open countryside' in Plan:MK. Astwood has a defined settlement boundary in Plan:MK as per Figure 2 below. As such, housing sites were sought that are adjacent to the settlement boundary so as to be as consistent as possible with the existing village:



Figure 2: Existing Astwood settlement boundary, as defined by Plan:MK

- 2.4 A total of 11 sites were suggested and assessed as fully detailed in the accompanying Consultation Statement and Site Assessment document. The allocated site was selected after extensive consultation and a vote following due process.
- 2.5 One site is allocated for development in the plan, with other windfall sites coming forward over the plan period within the settlement boundary or through other changes-of-use (e.g. through permitted development rights).

#### **Policy H1: Housing Requirement**

The Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan will provide for up to two new homes over the plan period 2020-2031.

Other new housing will be considered on windfall sites<sup>1</sup> that lie within the Settlement Boundary of Astwood in accordance with other policies of the development plan, existing permissions, and other sites that may come forward under permitted development.

The following site is allocated for housing in accordance with the specific criteria in Policy H2:

- Land to the north-west of former St. Peter's Church.

<sup>1</sup> Windfall sites are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) as 'Sites not specifically identified in the development plan.'

#### **Policy H2: Land to the north-west of former St. Peter's Church**

The land to the north-west of the former St. Peter's Church is allocated for one or two dwellings as per the Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map. Development proposals should satisfy all of the following criteria:

- 1 Development should be of a scale and form that respects the setting of the listed building. This should be achieved through the use of single-storey elements to preserve glimpses of the church and appropriate landscaping;
- 2 Proposals should be accompanied by a proportionate archaeological desktop based assessment and field evaluation to understand the likely presence of archaeological remains within the site and to inform mitigation of any impacts;
- 3 Dwellings should be constructed from traditional materials (e.g. stone or local brick) to provide a high-quality development at the western entrance to Astwood;
- 4 Off-street parking in accordance with MK Council's adopted parking standards should be provided;

- 5 Appropriate external amenity space for each dwelling should be provided commensurate with the scale with the dwelling and reflective of the character of the area;
- 6 To ensure the setting of the listed building continues to be preserved, consideration should be given to imposing a planning condition on any permission to remove householder permitted development rights; and
- 7 There is an existing sewer in Anglian Water's ownership within the boundary of the site and the site layout should be designed to take this into account. This existing infrastructure is protected by easements and should not be built over or located in private gardens where access for maintenance and repair could be restricted.

## 3 Economy

- 3.1 Employment facilities in Astwood & Hardmead are limited with Manor Farm Business Park in Astwood being the only small-scale collection of business premises in the Parish. Other businesses are restricted to farms and other small units.
- 3.2 The plan does not seek to directly address the fact that most residents will out-commute from the Parish for work but nevertheless does support sustainable rural growth in line with Paragraph 83 of the NPPF 2019 and Plan:MK. In particular, the diversification of farm buildings in and around the Parish is directly supported by local residents, provided this can be achieved without any significant impact on the road network around the Parish, which, other than the A422, is typically comprised of narrow country lanes that are unsuitable for any increase in traffic.

### **Policy EC1: Commercial Development**

Commercial development in Astwood & Hardmead including farm diversification will be supported where it can be demonstrated that traffic generated will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the local highway network. Particular consideration should be given to the ability of rural roads in the Parish to accommodate larger vehicles, and the need to avoid conflicts with cyclists, horse riders, and other users.



## 4 Environment

- 4.1 The wide and open nature of much of the countryside around the Parish might naturally lend itself to large-scale renewable energy projects at some point in the future. Whilst supporting the need to encourage green and renewable energy initiatives, the Neighbourhood Plan only wishes to see these come forward in areas that will have minimal impact upon the landscape and visual amenity of residents and visitors to the Parish.

### **Policy EN1: Renewable Energy**

Proposals for renewable energy projects will be supported where it can be demonstrated there will be no adverse impacts on the amenity of homes within the Parish. Applications should be supported by a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment depending on the scale and location of the project to confirm that wider landscape impacts are appropriately mitigated.

## 5 Design

- 5.1 Neither Astwood nor Hardmead have a Conservation Area or similar that influences the look and form of new development. However, the Parish still retains an historic form and appearance that should be respected in all new development that comes forward.
- 5.2 There are a variety of house types and styles prevalent in the Parish and as such the neighbourhood plan does not seek to unduly restrict how new development should look. It is nevertheless considered appropriate that a policy be included that seeks to retain a degree of consistency with the existing village, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the development.

### **Policy D1: Design**

The design of new development should be appropriate for its location using high quality materials that respect the existing palette of materials used within the area. The design of new buildings should complement the street scene, with particular reference to the scale, spacing, massing, materials and height of neighbouring properties. Boundary treatments should comprise stone walling or hedging in keeping with the existing streetscape.

## 6 Landscape

6.1 The landscape around the Parish is inherently rural in nature and, as such, is protected for its intrinsic beauty under both the NPPF 2019 and Policy DS5 of Plan:MK. There are nevertheless specific areas that warrant additional protection according to local residents. These include areas within and adjacent to the built-up parts of the village that are particularly special as areas of open green space, and Rights Of Way that afford access to the wider countryside for the enjoyment of all. The public consultation recognised the importance of retaining green spaces in the Parish.

6.2 Paragraph 98 of the NPPF 2019 recognises that the designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Paragraph 100 states that in order to be designated as Local Green Space, an area must be:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) 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 its wildlife; and
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

6.3 The following table demonstrates that the three areas designated as Local Green Spaces in Policy L1 below meet the criteria of Paragraph 100 of the NPPF 2019:

Area	<b>(a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves</b>	<b>b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance</b> <b>(1) beauty</b> <b>(2) historic significance</b> <b>(3) recreational value</b> <b>(4) tranquillity</b> <b>(5) richness of wildlife</b>	<b>c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land</b>
The Village Garden	<p>✓ The area is in a central position in the village close to other community facilities</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>(1) The area is visually attractive with an excellent variety of trees and other natural features</p> <p>(2) The area is within the central historic core of the village and is appreciated in the context of the listed Swan Public House making a positive contribution to its setting</p> <p>(3) The area is publicly accessible and is well used for informal recreation and relaxation with a path and seating available</p> <p>(4) The area is secluded and has a high degree of self-containment which limits noise and disturbance on site</p>	<p>✓ The area is approximately 800sqm in size and makes an important contribution the setting of the local area and streetscene</p>

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		(5) The site is not in, or within close proximity to any designated area of ecological significance. There is however an assumed level of wildlife value to the site (habitats and species)	
Play Area in Astwood	<p>✓ The area immediately adjoins the eastern edge of Astwood in an accessible location to the local community</p>	<p>✓ (1) The area is visually attractive with views of open countryside beyond and provides a positive contribution to the setting of the local area</p> <p>(3) The play area has local significance for recreation through the variety of informal recreational activities it supports</p> <p>(4) The area is located on the edge of a residential area with low levels of noise and visual intrusion</p>	<p>✓ The area is approximately 1.7 ha in size and is self-contained with clearly-defined edges. It makes a positive contribution to the visual amenity of the street scene</p>
Play Area in Hardmead	<p>✓ The area immediately adjoins the properties on The Close in Hardmead in an accessible location to the local community and with off street parking available</p>	<p>✓ (1) The area is visually attractive with views of open countryside beyond</p> <p>(3) The play area has local significance for recreation</p>	<p>✓ The area is approximately 1ha in size and is self-contained with clearly-defined edges. It is well related to the adjoining residential development</p>

		<p>through the variety of informal recreational activities it supports</p> <p>(4) The site is located adjacent to residential development set back from the road with low levels of noise and visual intrusion</p>	
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Table 1: Local Green Space Assessment

**Policy L1: Local Green Space Designation**

The following areas are designated as Local Green Spaces, within which inappropriate development will not be granted permission unless there are very special circumstances for doing so. Proposals to enhance recreation and leisure will be supported:

- The Village Garden
- Play area in Astwood
- Play area in Hardmead

Each are shown on the accompanying Policies Map.

**Policy L2: Rights of Way**

New development affecting a Right of Way should make provision for the Right of Way as part of the development or for its diversion on a convenient alternative route. Improvements to the standard of accessibility will be supported such as enhanced surfacing and signage where necessary.

## 7 Community Facilities

7.1 Astwood & Hardmead are fortunate to sustain both a pub and a village hall despite the relatively small population they serve. The neighbourhood plan seeks to protect both of these assets and ensure that they are not lost to development in the future.

### **Policy C1: Loss of Community Facilities**

Proposals that would result in the loss of an existing community facility will not be supported, unless evidence is provided to demonstrate that:

- a) Two years of marketing for the existing use has been undertaken with no realistic offer received; or
- b) Alternative premises have or will be provided.

For the purposes of this plan, community facilities in the village are defined as:

- the village hall; and
- the Old Swan Public House.

## 8 Monitoring and Review

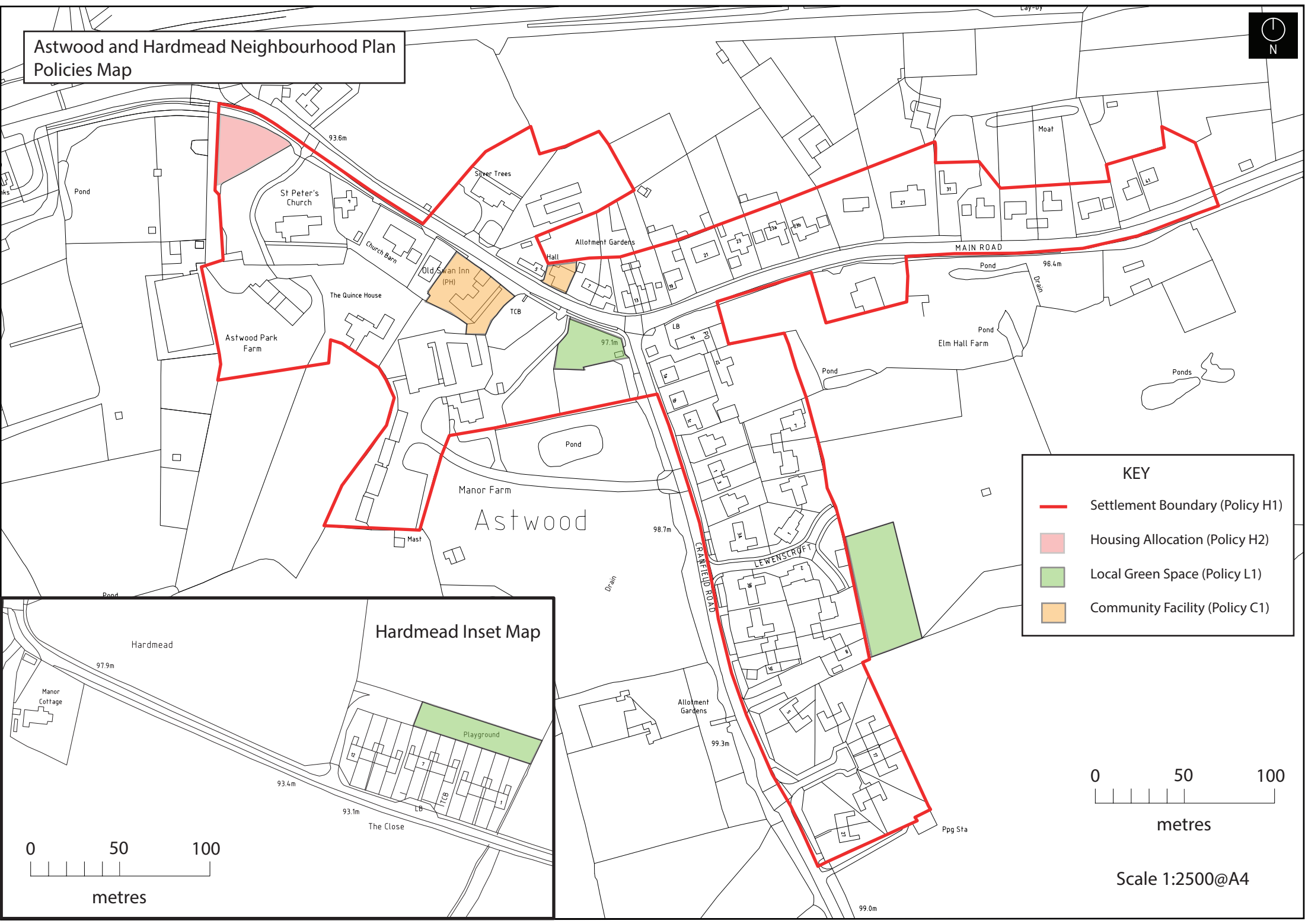
- 8.1 Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan will run concurrently with Plan:MK and will apply until 2031. It is however recognised that matters may change over the plan period and that the plan may, in whole or in part, require some amendments before 2031. It is therefore essential for the long term success of the plan that developments in the Parish are monitored and reviewed against the plan’s overall aims and objectives and changes in national and local planning policy.
- 8.2 The Steering Group will ensure that the Astwood & Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan is proactively monitored and will produce an Annual Monitoring Report to record the effectiveness of its policies in decisions made on planning applications within the Parish post adoption.
- 8.3 The following table will be used:

Planning application reference	Proposal	Decision	Relevant Neighbourhood Plan Policies	Commentary on policy accordance and contribution towards meeting objectives in paragraph 1.9

Table 2: Monitoring table

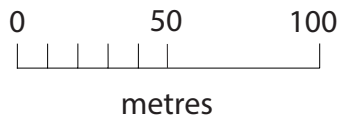
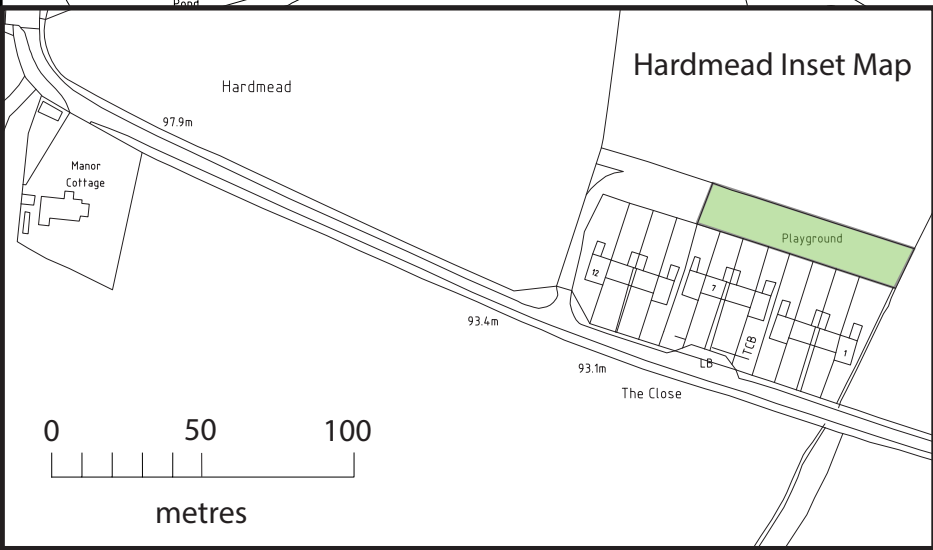


# Astwood and Hardmead Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map



**KEY**

- Settlement Boundary (Policy H1)
- Housing Allocation (Policy H2)
- Local Green Space (Policy L1)
- Community Facility (Policy C1)



Scale 1:2500@A4