

Sherington Neighbourhood Plan Statement from Milton Keynes Council (MKC) to the Examiner.

Background:

Sherington Parish Council, which has submitted this Neighbourhood Plan, is the qualifying body for the purpose of neighbourhood planning in the plan area. The Neighbourhood Plan area was designated on 21 April 2015 and covers the whole of the Sherington Parish area.

Initial public consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan began in February 2015 and the draft Sherington Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) was subject to public consultation between 4th July and 4th September 2016. Further consultation was undertaken with the Statutory Consultees during September to November 2016. All of the responses received during the consultation periods were considered and changes to the Plan discussed by the Sherington Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, as established by Sherington Parish Council. The responses and any resulting changes are documented in the Consultation Statement submitted in support of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The plan has been screened by Milton Keynes Council in consultation with the three statutory bodies (Natural England; the Environment Agency and Historic England) to assess if a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was required. The screening concluded that an SEA was not required.

Sherington Parish Council subsequently submitted the Neighbourhood Plan, including a map of the plan area together with a statement demonstrating that the plan meets the Basic Conditions and a Consultation Statement on the engagement undertaken on the Plan during its preparation. This is to meet the requirements of Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and the Localism Act 2011, Schedule 10, para 1.

Following submission of the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying documents, Milton Keynes Council arranged for an eight week round of public consultation on the plan from Thursday 15 December to Thursday 9 February 2017. Representations that were received were forwarded to the Examiner.

Officers at Milton Keynes Council have been working with the SNP Working Group throughout the plan making process. During the consultation stages in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan, officers have given advice and also made comments throughout the plan making stages.

Planning status of Sherington

Sherington is mentioned in the Milton Keynes Core Strategy (CS) policy CS1 as a selected village where a limited amount of housing development will be permitted.

Footnote 23 (in the Core Strategy, page 22) to policy CS1 indicates that the scale of new housing development sought in Sherington was around 20-40 new dwellings.

The Core Strategy originally envisaged [e.g. footnote 23 to policy CS1 (p.22)] that '*The limited amount of development to be allocated in Sherington will be determined through work on the Site Allocations Plan*'. Additionally CS policy CS9, which defines the strategy for development in the Rural Area in accordance with policy CS1, also referred to site(s) for housing development in Sherington being brought forward through the Site Allocations Plan (SAP).

However, there is nothing in the Site Allocations Plan about allocating housing sites in Sherington. This is because it is not now the intention of the Council to allocate housing sites in the rural area through the SAP. The SAP focuses on the development of sites for housing within the urban area of the city and therefore does not refer to the development of housing sites in rural settlements such as Sherington. Housing sites in the rural area are to be allocated through Neighbourhood Plans subject to formal approval.

The SAP was submitted to the Secretary of State on 31 March 2017, and an Inspector has been appointed to examine whether the plan is sound and legally compliant.

The Council is preparing a new Local Plan, Plan:MK, which will replace the existing 2005 Local Plan and the 2013 Core Strategy. The Preferred Options version of Plan: MK has been published for consultation from 17th March to 9th June 2017.

Table 4.2 accompanying Policy D1 in Plan:MK proposes that development in villages and rural settlements such as Sherington will be within defined settlement boundaries in compliance with adopted Neighbourhood Plans. The Council considers that the 1000 dwellings it is seeking in rural settlements to be allocated in Neighbourhood Plans (Plan:MK policy DS2) is for new Neighbourhood Plans to identify that are prepared from now on.

Allocation on the Proposals Map

The Local Plan 2005 Proposals Map identifies this site as being in the Open Countryside (Policy S10), and in an Area of Attractive Landscape (Policy S11). Part of this site, in the north-west corner, is within the Sherington Conservation Area.

Hearing:

The Examiner has raised the following matters considered to be essential for an adequate examination of the proposed designation of land east of the High Street, adjacent to Knoll Close (Field S9 in the Site Allocation Assessment, SNP Annex A) as Local Green Space:

- 1) Paragraph 77 of the NPPF comments that 'Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open spaces'. In this context is it appropriate for the parcel of land concerned to be designated as Local Green Space in the submitted Plan?
- 2) Is the parcel of land demonstrably special to the local community and does it hold a particular local significance?

Milton Keynes Council Comments

Question 1

The Localism Act 2011 which introduced Neighbourhood Plans gave people the powers to shape their surroundings with plans which set out a positive vision for the future of their area.

As acknowledged in the NPPF para 76, "Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them." It is also acknowledged that by designating local green space, communities will be able to rule out development other than in special circumstances.

The NP does not designate land east of the High Street, adjacent to Knoll Close for housing development, but does proactively propose housing development sites elsewhere in the Parish area.

Question 2

- The site is located in the open countryside and has been free from development as it has been outside the settlement limits, both in the current adopted Local Plan 2005 and the previous Local Plan 1995 and the Village Plan of the 1970s.
- The SNP (para 1.2 of the submission version) does highlight that the "...open structure of the village has been one of its most important features...the surrounding countryside flows into the heart of the village at numerous points"
- The submitted consultation statement refers to the village survey conducted in August 2015 which summarises the most important issues to the village residents. Paragraph 4.1, sixth bullet point on page 13 highlights that: *'key features that residents would like to*

protect included: the land around St Lauds Church ;the Knoll , the White Hart and the historic open land at the heart of the medieval village;

- The Council's Senior Conservation Officer Martin Ellison has commented as follows.

'Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. My recollection of the parcel of land in question is that it forms part of the foreground setting for the prominently set and grade I listed St Laud's church. There is a robust mature hedge screen running alongside High Street that prevents views of the church but it is glimpsed from Harriet's End cottage. Within the field, however, the church is evident as a conspicuous local land mark set on a low hill that rises gently above the hedges, trees and greensward. Despite the presence of standardised housing development on the south side of the field the church is a visually dominant feature and, by virtue of being the overriding visual presence, the eye is accordingly strongly drawn to it.

- *Development within this foreground would harmfully disrupt the quiet but positive contribution made by the spacious, open, westward ground to the setting of the listed building. The degree of harm is difficult to judge at this early stage but it is highly probable that whilst not amounting to substantial harm it would still cause a level of harm that would need to be weighed against wider public benefits including heritage benefits. The harm would be caused by introducing buildings into the foreground thereby creating an inappropriate visual distraction from the attractive views of the church. As heritage benefits to be gained from permitting development into this sensitive foreground appear to be absent, there is accordingly nothing of any weight to offset the harm caused and hence there are strong reservations on conservations grounds about development in this location.'*

References

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space#Local-Green-Space-designation>

7.4.2017