

## 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 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 they 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.

Figure 2: Topography

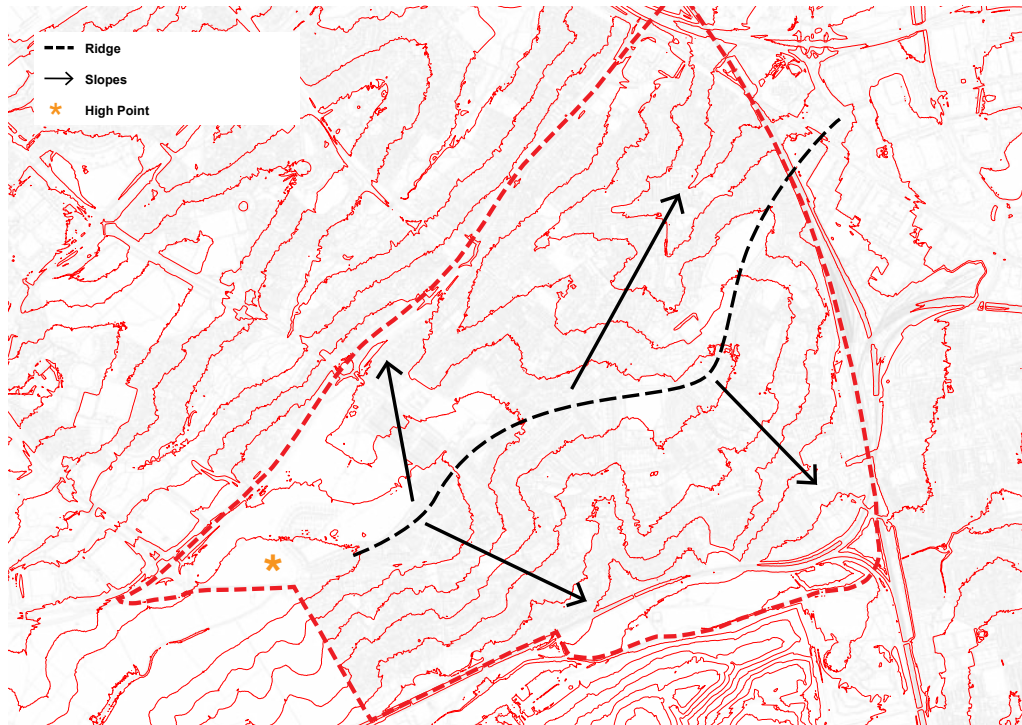
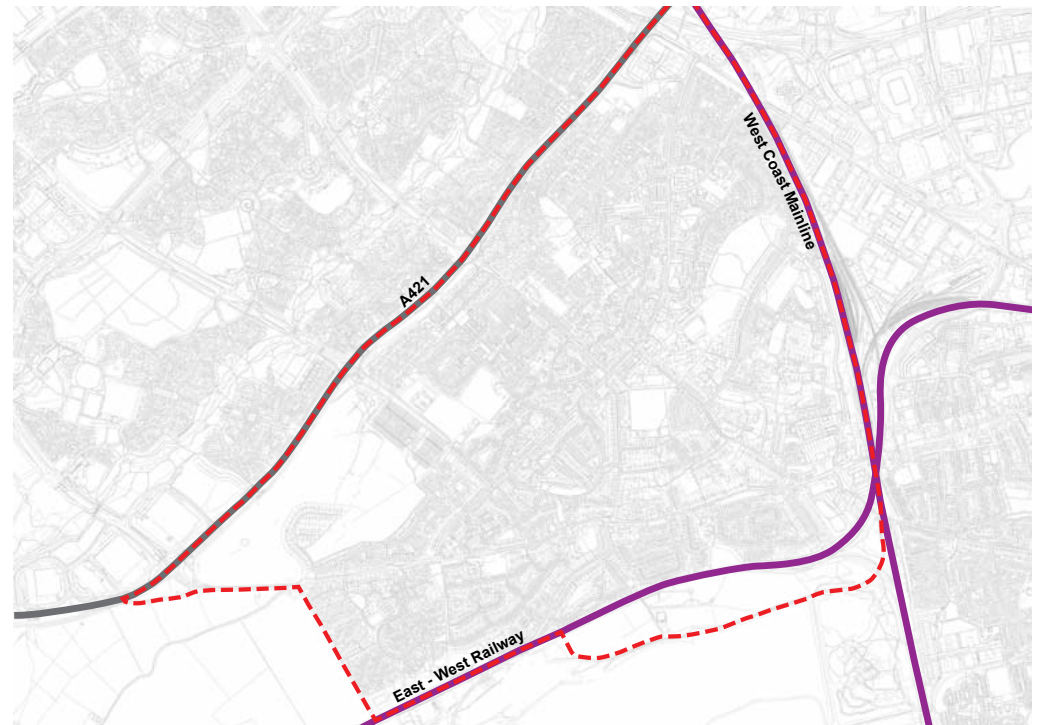


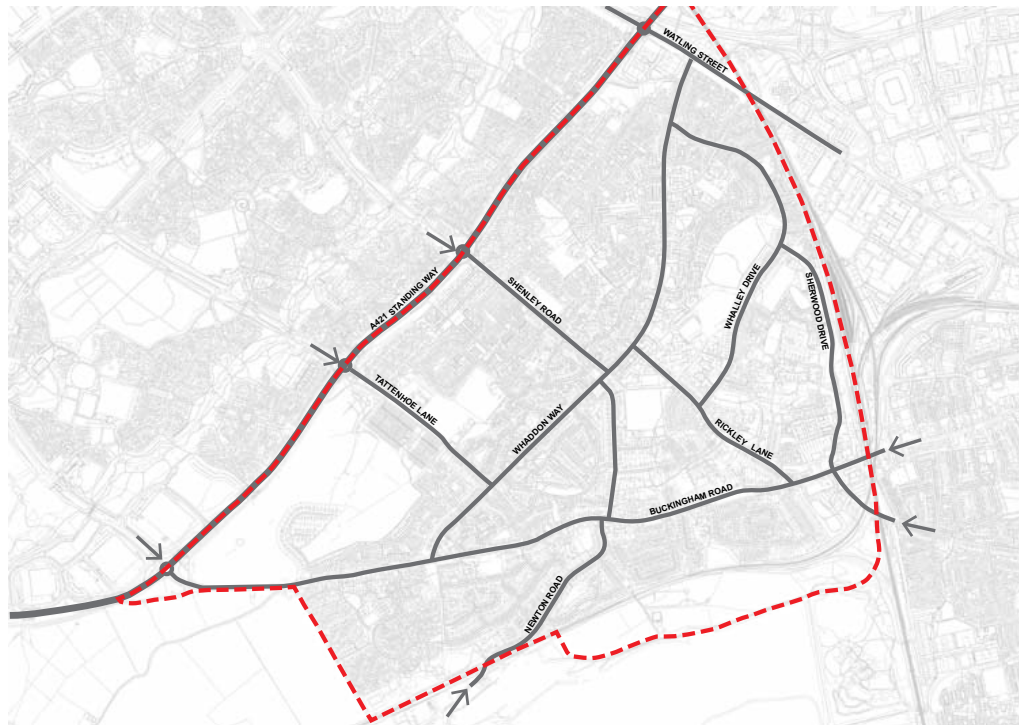
Figure 3: Boundaries



## 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 neighbourhoods and areas. Some of the routes carry through traffic such as Buckingham Road which links Bletchley town centre and the A421 H8 Standing Way.

Figure 4: Main Streets



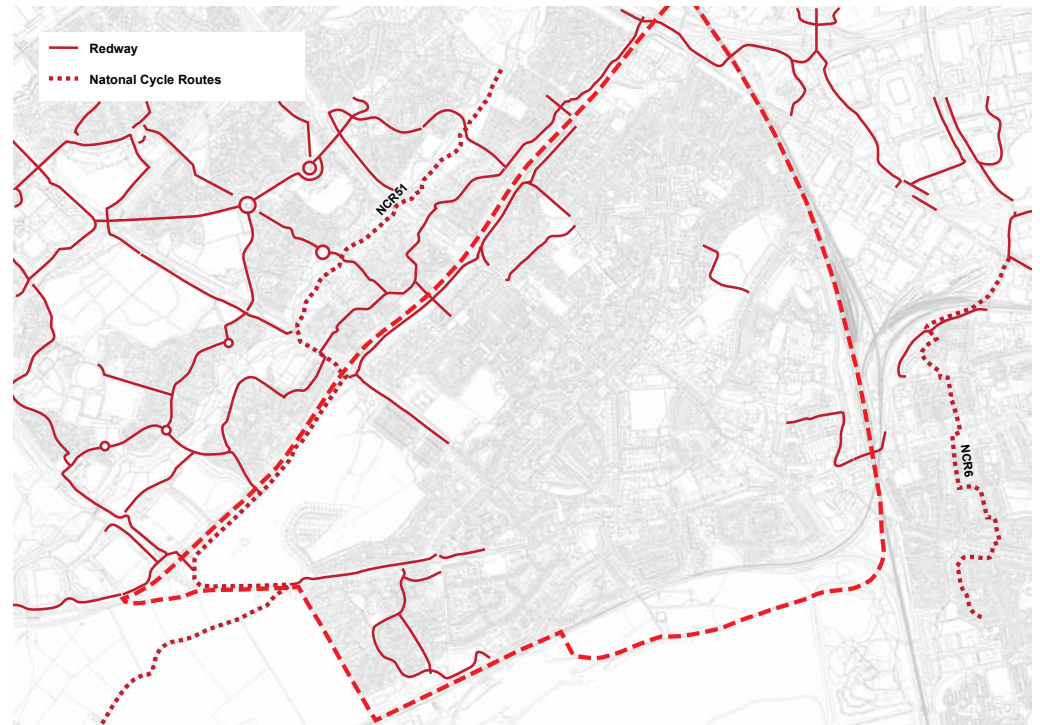
## 2.5 Strategic Cycle Routes

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 centre 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 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.

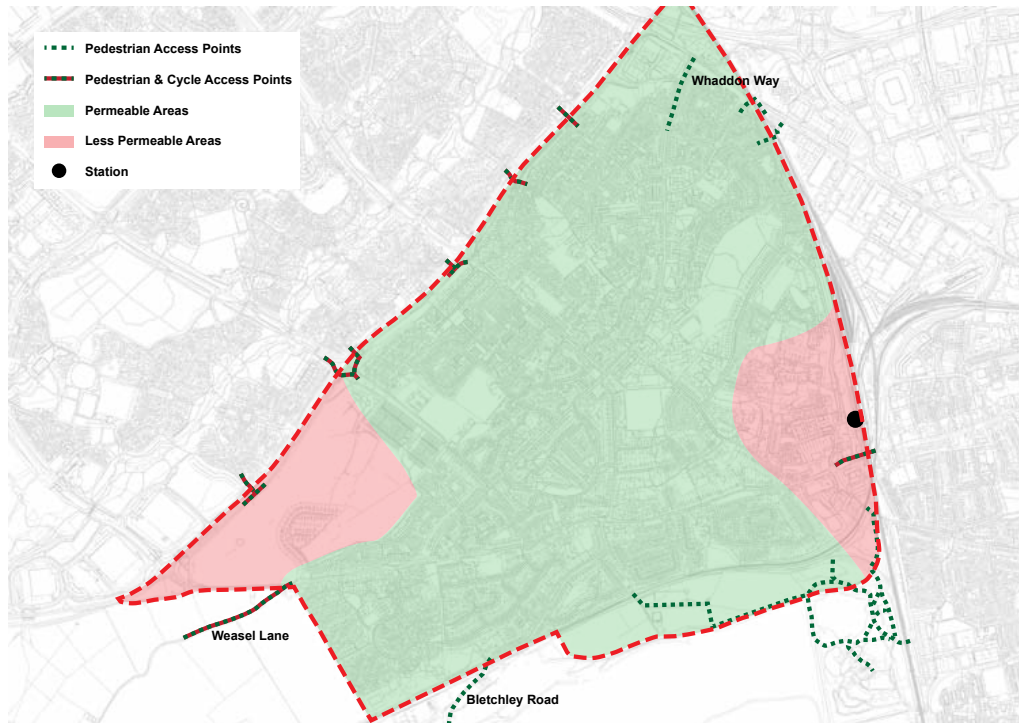
Some of the housing areas were designed with layouts which provided a complex network of pedestrian routes and green spaces between houses and away from roads. This type of layout creates low density areas typical of this period and a very distinctive character. This is investigated further within the 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. In the west, Windmill Hill golf course creates an extensive area with few pedestrian links across.

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 in accessing the facilities beyond the boundaries and accessing the countryside to the south and west of West Bletchley. Access to the countryside is one important element of how people perceive their 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 via Blue Lagoon Local Nature Reserve and to the Lakes Estate. These routes seem to be largely unmarked and not formally promoted at present.

Figure 6: Access on Foot

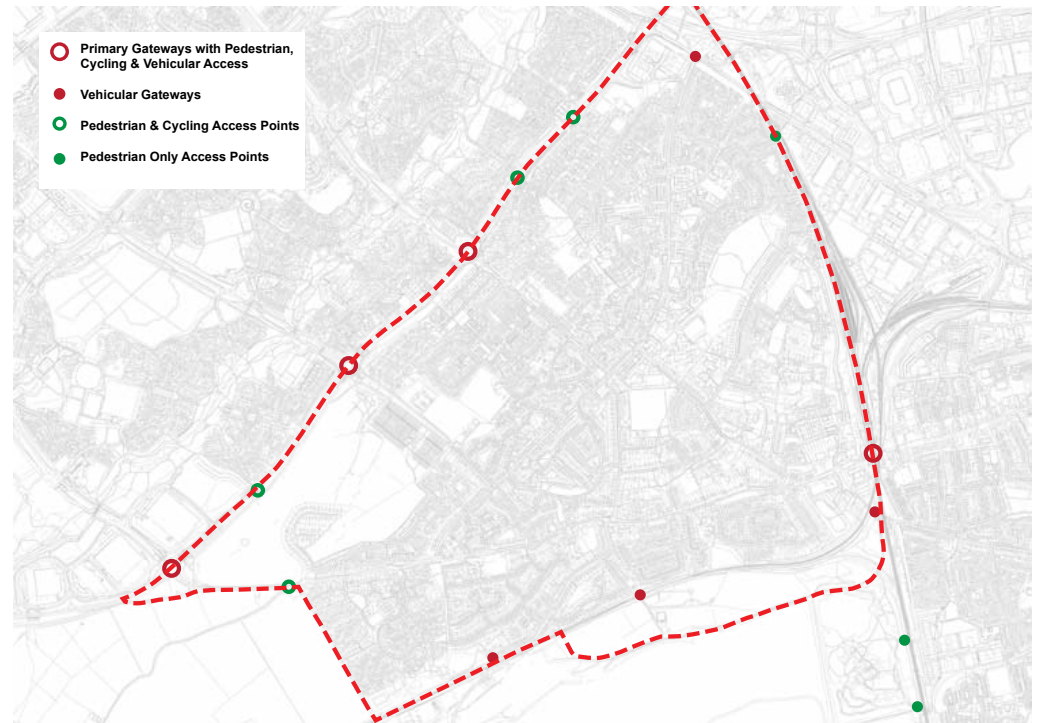


### 2.7 Key Gateways

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.

Figure 7: Key Gateways



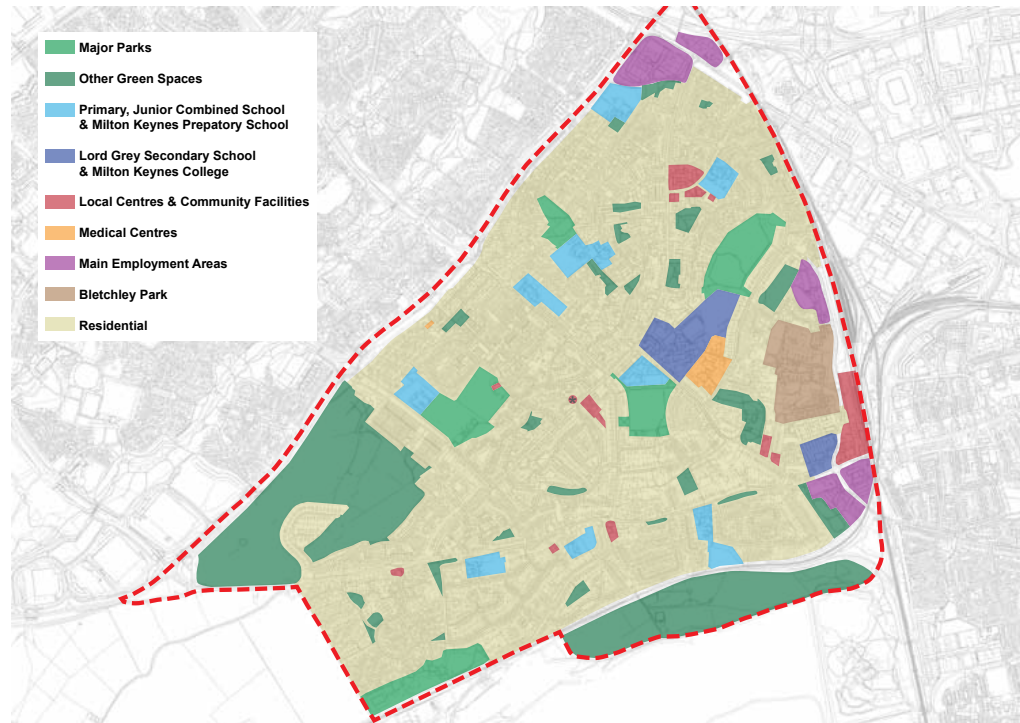
## 2.8 Land Use

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.

Modern West Bletchley was laid out as a series of estates or neighbourhoods that generally provided for their own local needs but there were few strategic connections between areas other than the main street network. So for instance, the parks differ from the New Town area in that they aren't continuous or linked and tend to be more hidden behind housing or isolated and there isn't the wide variety of informal natural open space that much of the rest of Milton Keynes enjoys. Where strategic connectivity does exist it is primarily along the street network.

Figure 8: Land Use



## 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.

Figure 9: Green Space



## 2.10 Protected Areas and Features

The Bletchley Conservation Area encompasses Bletchley Park and the historic core of Bletchley around and including St Mary's Church.

There are three main groups of listed buildings. The first includes St Mary's church; the second is the group of listed buildings within Bletchley Park, including those associated with the war time codebreaking activities, both of which are within the conservation area and, a third group including a number of individual houses extending along Buckingham Road.

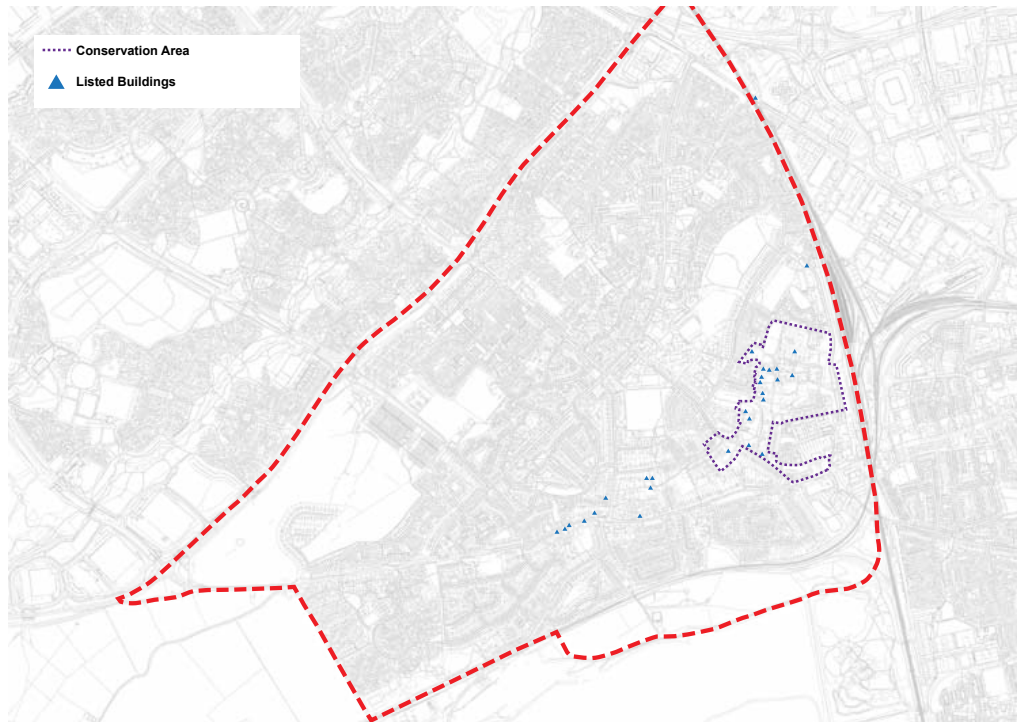
The most architecturally significant listed building is St Mary's Church which is listed Grade I. It has 12th Century origins, and retains a reset 12th Century door or chancel arch. It was rebuilt in stages between the 13th Century and 15th Century and shows a complex and interesting building history. It also has excellent medieval roofs and a very fine tomb of Richard, Lord Grey de Wilton d.1442.

Bletchley Rectory Cottages and Museum are also notable for being Grade II\*.

The buildings within Bletchley Park are all listed as Grade II but the park has great significance as the home of British codebreaking and a birthplace of modern information technology.

The next section, Section 3 traces the historical evolution of West Bletchley to identify the separate phases of growth, which helps inform the definition of the individual character areas.

**Figure 10: Protected Areas & Features**



## 2.11 Summary

Figure 11 summaries the key elements of the assessment of West Bletchley as a whole, and brings together the strategic character elements considered in this section.

At a strategic level the character is defined by:

- A gently sloping but largely featureless topography with no distinctive natural features;
- Strong boundary edges particularly to the south and east that contain but also separate West Bletchley from its neighbours;
- A network of traditional main streets crossing the area east to west and north to south, combining all forms of movement;
- A limited network of dedicated cycle routes with access to the Redway system at its periphery, but no cycle routes through the area;
- Extensive pedestrian access throughout along the street network but with less permeable areas associated with Bletchley Park and Windmill Hill golf course;
- The gateways into the area are of great significance especially the national gateway at the station and links to the MK grid road network and Bletchley town centre;
- A land use pattern with a cluster of mixed uses round the railway station and within the central part of the area and the remainder of the area being largely residential neighbourhoods;
- A dispersed pattern of larger open spaces which are mostly hidden in strategic views and a great number of smaller incidental open spaces of variable quality;
- The recognised and designated Bletchley Conservation Area which includes Bletchley Park and Old Bletchley and associated listed buildings, and the group of other listed buildings along Buckingham Road.

West Bletchley is a distinctive part of Milton Keynes because it was largely developed before the designation of the New Town and was largely not included within the innovative town plan but reflects a wide variety of different residential estate designs typical of the post-war era. These estates were developed out from the medieval core and generally along the main historic pre-existing streets of Buckingham Road, Tattenhow Lane and Shenley Road.

Bletchley Park, the Edwardian country house and park close to the station remained largely hidden until the late 20th Century when its war time activities became known and has since developed as a major museum and visitor attraction, and of international significance.

The West Bletchley area was largely developed out by the late 1990s, with most of the more recent development being smaller-scale infill and redevelopments, but there has also been extensive redevelopment of the parklands around Bletchley Park, with housing and the Further Education College.

Employment areas are of less significance than some other pre-existing areas, with most employment in small groups of modern buildings close to the station and Watling Street and dating from the late 20th century, some of these buildings are of distinctive design.

Change in future is likely to be limited to further redevelopment opportunities and replacement of some of the older and less suitable uses, such as the garage courts, for new uses, and to respond to the influence of the re-establishment of east west rail connections from Oxford to Cambridge through the area.



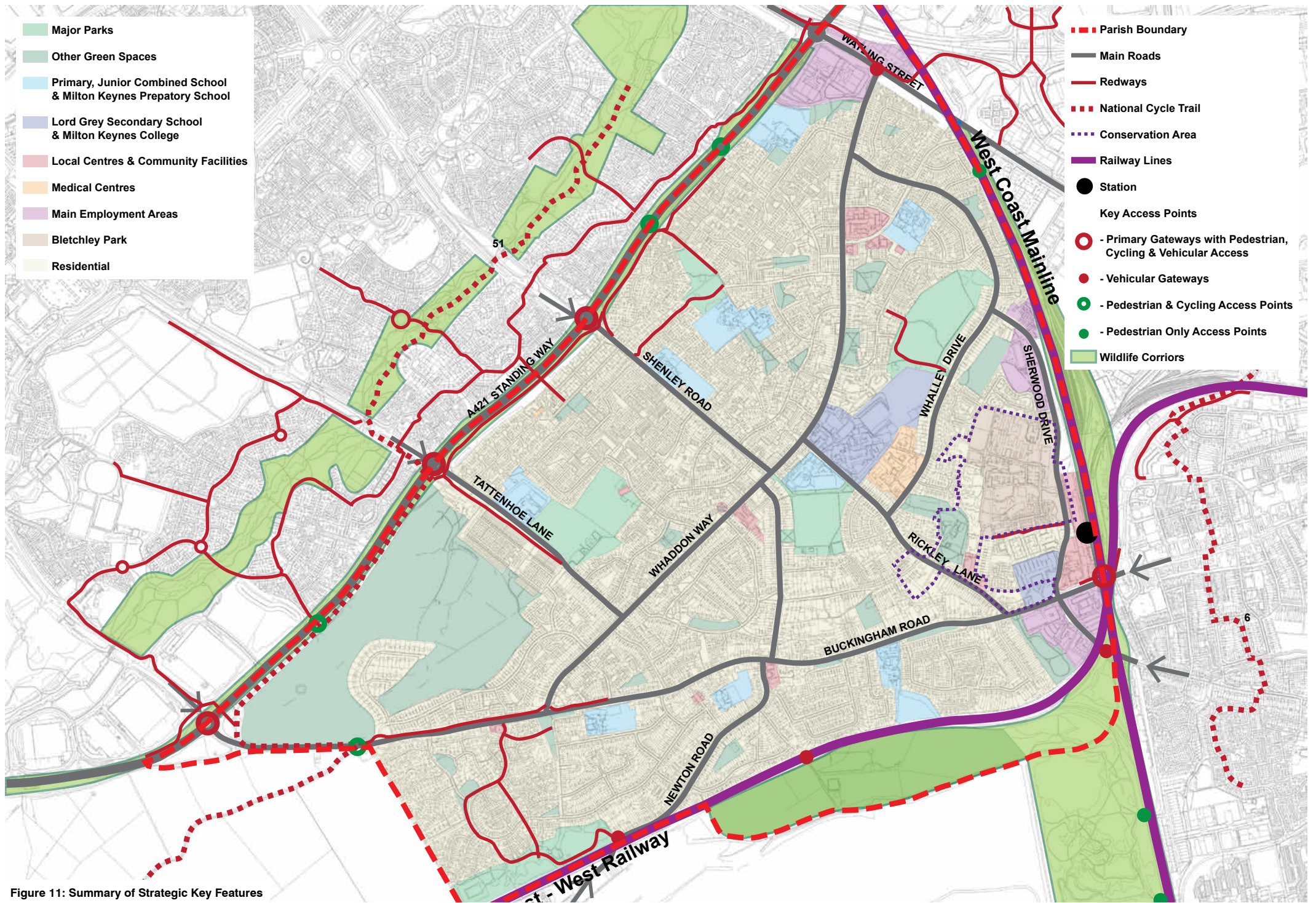


Figure 11: Summary of Strategic Key Features