



Milton Keynes City Council
Planning and Building Control
Civic Centre
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Central Milton Keynes
MK9 3EJ

22 December 2025

BY EMAIL

Dear Sir / Madam,

RESPONSE TO THE REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION ON THE MK CITY PLAN 2050 – NORTH MILTON KEYNES

On behalf of Urban&Civic PLC, Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land and The Society of Merchant Venturers (“the Consortium”), Icen Projects is pleased to submit representations to Milton Keynes City Council’s (“MKCC”) Regulation 19 Consultation on the MK City Plan 2050.

The Consortium are jointly promoting land known as North Milton Keynes (“the Site”) for a strategic extension to the city as part of the New Towns programme delivering around 16,000 homes and strategic employment land. The Site covers 1,045ha to the north of Milton Keynes and comprises the land parcels identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (“SHLAA”) (November 2025) under site references 110093, 110097 and 110127.

a. Submission to the Regulation 18 Consultation

Stantec, on behalf of the Consortium, submitted representations to the Regulation 18 Consultation on the MK City Plan 2050 in October 2024. The comments made within these representations, as well as the extensive technical work undertaken to support them, remain and we would refer the Council to these as part of this submission. These representations to the Regulation 19 build on the comments made to the Regulation 18 Consultation.

b. North Milton Keynes as a New Town

Following its manifesto pledge, the Labour government set up the New Towns Taskforce in July 2024. Its commission was to identify a list of specific locations for New Towns as well as making recommendations on how these new communities may be designed and delivered.

The Government sees this new wave of New Towns as a route to unlocking significant economic growth as well as making a substantial contribution towards much needed housing delivery. It sees New Towns as a vehicle towards addressing labour immobility, improving public health and educational prospects, thereby improving economic productivity.

In November 2024, the Taskforce launched a “Call for Evidence” for locations for New Towns. The Consortium submitted North Milton Keynes as a potential location for a New Town, highlighting it as an opportunity for transformational growth of the City. We are pleased that in September 2025, Milton Keynes was identified on the shortlist for a New Town, including the redevelopment of the city centre and expanding the city to the north and east. A further update from the New Towns Task Force is expected in early 2026.

The New Towns Taskforce report to Government in September 2025 clearly highlights the economic benefits which New Towns can bring. Not only helping to address the shortage of housing through

providing a range of housing typologies, sizes and tenures, New Towns are recognised as adding social value and driving innovation, attracting investment and talent to places which are already growing.

The report notes Milton Keynes as a nationally high performer in terms of housebuilding, with the New Towns initiative an opportunity to support increased delivery and to “*reinvigorate an already highly productive local economy*”. It goes on to state that Milton Keynes is a city with an “*entrepreneurial business identity*”. The city’s “*strong economic base*” could help deliver significant job growth, taking advantage of its location along the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.

The report concludes that Milton Keynes City Council is an “*enthusiastic agent*” for the next phase of New Towns.

The Consortium are continuing to engage with relevant stakeholders to bring forward North Milton Keynes as part of the vision for a “Renewed Town”.

North Milton Keynes will deliver a multitude of benefits, including around 16,000 new homes, including up to 40% affordable and strategic employment served by a new motorway junction on the M1. This part of the New Town will connect to the existing community of Milton Keynes through a new Mass Rapid Transit (“MRT”) line and a new landmark bridge to connect Wolverton railway station and the wider city. The new Great Ouse City Park will enable c.45% of the site to be brought forward as green infrastructure, providing a new linear park for the city. North Milton Keynes will also build upon Milton Keynes as an economic area of regional and national importance, delivering strategic employment which will allow the city to take advantage of its location and key transport links.

It is likely that North Milton Keynes will be brought forward outside of the Local Plan process, although the exact route is yet to be confirmed. However, it is essential that the emerging Local Plan, and the policies contained within it, align with both the Council’s and Government’s ambitions for a New Town at Milton Keynes and to ensure that North Milton Keynes can be delivered without impediment.

Milton Keynes has a history and proud heritage as one of the original New Towns in the 1960s, and at the Council meeting of 19th November 2026, the Council resolved to welcome the publication of the New Town Taskforce report which names Milton Keynes as one of the twelve potential sites for the next generation of new towns. MKCC’s enthusiasm to be a fundamental contributor to the next phase should now be articulated within the emerging Local Plan.

It is important that the emerging MK City Plan 2050 reflects paragraph 22 of the NPPF, responding to long term requirements and opportunities, noting that where larger scale developments are proposed (e.g. through national objectives as well as local), policies should be set within a vision which looks at least 30 years ahead. It is important, therefore, that should North Milton Keynes be confirmed as a part of a New Town is recognised as part of the Vision of Milton Keynes as it looks forward to 2050 and beyond. The New Towns Task Force report has recommended that the Government should immediately commit to interim planning policy to protect New Town locations. Given this, it is important that emerging plans do not seek to usurp this recommendation by including planning policies which frustrate this process.

It is within this context which these representations are made and in the knowledge that the current proposed housing allocations are soundly based.

c. Policy GS1 (Our Spatial Strategy) and Policy GS6 (Open Countryside)

As set out above, the Consortium is broadly supportive of the Council’s spatial strategy (Policy GS1: Our Spatial Strategy), on the understanding that North Milton Keynes can come forward outside of this Local Plan process through an alternative consenting regime.

Reference should be included to the potential identification of Milton Keynes as a recommended location for a New Town by the Taskforce, and North Milton Keynes’s role in delivering this. This will ensure alignment between national policies and the development plan. The NPPF at paragraph 11a) requires plans to meet the development needs of their area and align growth and infrastructure. This

“growth” also should take into consideration aspirations of government. On 12 October 2025, Matthew Pennycook MP made a Statement to the House of Commons regarding the next generation of New Towns and reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to increase housing supply through new large settlements. Therefore, it is essential that MKCC recognises this national policy context within the emerging Local Plan.

Similarly, Policy GS6 (Open Countryside) states that land outside of settlement boundaries is designated as Open Countryside, and permission will only be granted where proposals maintain the openness and character of the landscape, in accordance with Policy CEA12 (please refer to the following section for full comments on this policy). The Consortium does not object in principle to Policy GS6, however, we consider that reference should be included to the potential for a New Town which will come forward outside of the existing settlement boundaries. This will ensure consistency between national policy objectives and the development plan.

d. Ouse Valley Special Landscape Area

The Consortium **strongly objects** to Ouse Valley being designated as a Special Landscape Area (“SLA”) within the emerging Local Plan under Policy CEA12 (Conserving and enhancing landscape character / Special Landscape Areas). As set out within the Regulation 18 representations, it is considered that the principal landscape feature which identifies the Ouse Valley Special Landscape Area is the Ouse Valley floor. This is already designated as a Linear Park through the adopted Plan:MK (2019), in which proposals would be subject to robust development management controls that protect its character. Therefore, the inclusion of additional land, which extends much further north, is deemed unnecessary and unjustified.

Whilst paragraphs 20 and 187 of the NPPF require planning policies to contribute to and enhance the natural environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, paragraph 20 also requires strategic policies to make sufficient provision for homes and employment development. Further, paragraph 36 of the NPPF requires plans to be positively prepared (with a strategy which provides for objectively assessed needs as a minimum) and be justified, i.e. based on proportional evidence.

We consider that local landscape designations within the administrative boundaries of MKCC are not required as they do not fully take into account the balance of the requirement to meet need whilst protecting valued landscapes, and are not supported by the appropriate evidence. Character-based approaches to proposals can be utilised effectively to manage landscape change in a sensitive and appropriate manner, in accordance with Policy CEA12 (Conserving and enhancing landscape character/Special Landscape Areas).

Whilst the Consortium is strongly of the position that the Ouse Valley SLA is not justified, if, however, the Council considers that the Ouse Valley SLA is indeed necessary, the portion of the SLA which covers the Site should be removed, and in the vicinity of the Site be consistent with the extent of the River Floodplains Local Character Type (“LCT”) as defined in the MKCC Landscape Character Assessment (2022). A detailed response to the Candidate SLA Evidence Base is set out within Section 8 of the Landscape Visual Assessment (“LVA”), prepared by Stantec, and submitted in support of the representations to the Regulation 18 consultation (and included again here at **Appendix A**). It is considered that the land within the Site exhibits few of the Special Qualities which are attributed to the Ouse Valley SLA. The special landscape qualities of the proposed Ouse Valley SLA relate to the low-lying shallow valley, with the emerging Local Plan evidence base providing no justification for extending the proposed extent into the upper valley slope and wold landscape that characterises the Site.

As demonstrated through the concept masterplan developed by the Consortium to support the promotion of North Milton Keynes, the proposals include the establishment of the Ouse Valley Park, protecting the key landscape feature of the Ouse Valley as identified through the Milton Keynes Review of Local Landscape Designations (2024). The masterplan has also been developed to retain views of locally distinctive features in the landscape, include structural planting along ridgelines and use valleys as blue-green infrastructure corridors to accentuate the legibility of the landform. This sympathetic design response respects the key characteristics and special qualities of the Ouse Valley, recognising it as an important landscape in the context of Milton Keynes and contributing to positive placemaking.

Furthermore, the Government has been clear that local authorities should not seek to inhibit the bringing forward of New Towns through policies within Local Plans. This policy and designation of the Ouse Valley as an SLA relates to the emerging MK City Plan 2025 and the lack of reference and acknowledgement of Milton Keynes as a recommended location for a New Town. It is imperative that the emerging Local Plan is in line with the ambitions of national government and does not inadvertently delay or frustrate the commencement of New Towns. Based upon the evidence, the Consortium believes that in order for Policy CEA12 to be found sound, in terms of being consistent with national policy, positively prepared and evidenced, as a minimum, the extents of the Ouse Valley SLA be refined and restricted to that of the Linear Park.

e. Supporting Economic Prosperity

Objective 12 of the Local Plan sets out the ambition to “*enable better access to...economic opportunities to strengthen our regional and national economic role...*” In aiming to support this objective, Policy GS3 (Strategy for economic prosperity) sets out the locations where the development of employment land will be directed towards and the employment land supply position as of September 2025.

At paragraph 26, the Local Plan identifies Milton Keynes as an “*economic powerhouse*”. However, it goes on to warn at paragraph 30 that whilst the M1 corridor and proximity to large markets in London and Birmingham has meant that Milton Keynes has experienced strong growth in the logistics industry and this demand remains strong, “*opportunities for further growth are diminishing due to the lack of suitable sites to accommodate the specific needs of this section*”.

The level of unmet need will restrict Milton Keynes’ economic growth potential and lead to the leakage of employment activity to other areas. The supporting text to Policy GS3 (Strategy for economic prosperity) highlights that the accompanying evidence base to the Local Plan identifies a shortfall of between 331 to 402ha of industrial and warehousing floorspace¹. A total of 207.5ha of land is proposed as supply through allocations, leaving a shortfall of 124 to 198ha which will not be met through this emerging Local Plan.

The scale of this unmet need identified through the emerging Local Plan is significant and fails to chime with Milton Keynes’ role as an “*economic powerhouse*”. Without an adequate strategy to seek to meet this need, there remains a clear risk of Milton Keynes’ growth and regional position stagnating through this Local Plan. Icen Projects has prepared an Employment Land Issues and Opportunities document, which provides further detail and analysis and is submitted in support of these representations and can be found at **Appendix B**.

Furthermore, this evidence base, perhaps understandably at present, focuses solely on the level of employment required in the context of the housing delivery proposed in the MK City Plan 2050 i.e. without a New Town – although this acknowledges a shortfall in labour supply to meet projected higher levels of growth. Should Milton Keynes come forward as a New Town, this could further compound the unmet need position. This greater emphasises the need to, as a minimum, meet the employment need identified in the Milton Keynes Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment Update 2025.

The NPPF is clear at paragraph 11 that plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development which seeks to meet the development needs of the area and that strategic policies should “*as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses*”. This is echoed at paragraph 20, with paragraph 86 requiring planning policies to “*set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to the national industrial strategy*”.

As the emerging Local Plan fails to meet its identified need for warehousing and logistics floorspace, it cannot be considered positively prepared, effective or consistent with national policy in its current form.

¹ Milton Keynes City Council: Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment 2024 and Update 2025

Notwithstanding, North Milton Keynes has ability to make a very substantial contribution to this need. As previously noted, North Milton Keynes potentially may come forward outside of the Local Plan process in line with the New Towns initiative. However, at present, the consenting regime for New Towns is not confirmed and MKCC needs to ensure that its Local Plan is not inconsistent with the New Towns initiative and delivers against its identified need. The New Towns Task Force report, as part of its recommendations, stated that New Towns should connect people to skills, jobs, services and amenities (Recommendation 10) and that they should provide jobs for residents, enabling businesses to grow – thereby supporting the Government’s economic growth objectives (Recommendation 11). It is important that the emerging Plan takes these recommendations into account.

Whilst, understandably, the main focus has been on housing delivery, the scale and importance of North Milton Keynes means that this strategic employment element of the proposals, alongside the associated infrastructure necessary to deliver it can help plug the severe gap in employment land supply in Milton Keynes. The immediate proximity of Hanslope Park, owned and operated by HMGCC, also provides an immediate and complementary employment base to North Milton Keynes. North Milton Keynes has the potential to deliver a significant amount of employment of at least 30 ha but potentially towards 100 ha or more, effectively largely fulfilling the employment shortfall in the emerging Local Plan. This will help ensure that Milton Keynes remains an economic powerhouse, promoting its regional importance and help sustain ongoing growth and skills for the foreseeable future.

The majority of the built-up area within MKCC lies within the southern portion of its administrative boundaries, i.e. the city of Milton Keynes. The M1 corridor cuts through the authority area, passing north of the current city edge. The area to the north of the district is more rural in nature, made up of small towns and villages connected via A and B roads, making them unsuitable for large-scale employment schemes. The emerging Plan seeks to direct housing and smaller areas of employment to the east, south and west of the city.

The proposed Eastern City Expansion on its south western boundary directly adjoins the M1 extending from the A442/A509 and Newport Pagnell, to the administrative boundary with Central Bedfordshire. Essentially, this allocation means that there are limited opportunities to utilise the M1 corridor and the city’s connection to it in order to meet the future need for industrial and logistics warehousing. Existing allocations, notably Milton Keynes East and Caldecotte, are likely to provide a good level of strategic supply in the early part of the plan period, however, there will remain a substantial gap in the middle and latter years of the plan based on past take up rates. As such, the only reasonable location for delivering the outstanding employment growth which can take full advantage of the M1 corridor is north of the city: at North Milton Keynes.

As a new premium employment location on the UK’s central highway corridor, this part of the development will help to facilitate the delivery of a new junction on the M1 at North Milton Keynes which will in turn enable for the remainder of the North Milton Keynes New Town to come forward for residential-led development. This employment provision will be a prime location for attractive the “best in class” employment occupiers across the industrial, logistics, tech and advance manufacturing sectors. Beyond Milton Keynes East, which is already advanced, there are limited locations for large-scale industrial and logistics warehousing, of the type needed to realise MKCC’s growth potential. North Milton Keynes, therefore, offers the only location for such large-scale development which will help make a significant contribution to the identified shortfall. The provision of a new junction on the M1 will provide resilience in the strategic road network, relieve pressure on the existing junctions and have sub-regional benefits to the wider economy.

With MKCC’s ambition to increase its population to 500,000 by 2050, it will be essential that there are sufficient jobs for these new residents, to increase the city’s economic resilience and reduce outward commuting. Furthermore, with an increased population and significant new development proposed, a new junction will to be required in any event to provide resilience in the strategic road network, relieve pressure on the existing junctions and have sub-regional benefits to the wider economy. A new junction at North Milton Keynes will deliver the additional benefits of significant high quality and sought after employment floorspace as well as future proofing the delivery of Milton Keynes North outside of the Local Plan process.

f. Conclusions

In conclusion, the Consortium **supports the overall direction** of the MK City Plan 2050 but considers that it should acknowledge the Government's New Towns agenda. Explicit recognition of Milton Keynes' role in the next generation of New Towns, and of North Milton Keynes' strategic contribution to housing and employment delivery, will robustly support the Council's formal resolution made on 19th November 2025.

Based on evidence, the Consortium **strongly opposes** the designation of the Ouse Valley Special Landscape Area, and considers that this should be removed in its entirety, or as a minimum, reduced in coverage to exclude land within the land known as North Milton Keynes.

At present, the spatial strategy fails to plan for the significant level of unmet employment need identified. In particular, it fails to provide sufficient allocations for logistics and warehousing, meaning that the Plan cannot take full advantage of Milton Keynes' national location on the Strategic Road Network. North Milton Keynes offers a unique opportunity to plug this gap and help maintain the city's status as a prime location for high quality employment. Therefore, **the Site should be allocated for development**, particularly in recognition of its ability to meet the significant level of unmet employment need or in the alternative not be subject to designations which restrict its ability to come forward outside of the local plan process.

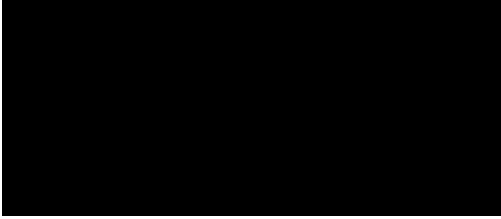
North Milton Keynes offers a transformational opportunity to deliver a new community which supports Milton Keynes' short and long-term growth aspirations as well as national objectives. It will deliver numerous benefits including:

- **Significant housing delivery:** Around 16,000 new homes, including up to 40% affordable housing, making a substantial contribution to meeting local and national housing need.
- **Major economic growth:** Provision of strategic employment land capable of making a substantial contribution to addressing the identified shortfall in logistics, industrial, advanced manufacturing and technology sectors, reinforcing Milton Keynes' role as an economic powerhouse.
- **Strategic infrastructure investment:** Delivery of a new M1 motorway junction, improving connectivity, supporting employment growth and enabling wider development, alongside ensuring enhanced resilience of the local and regional road network.
- **Sustainable transport connections:** Integration with the existing city through provision of a new Mass Rapid Transit line and a landmark bridge linking to Wolverton railway station and the city beyond.
- **High-quality green infrastructure:** Delivery of approximately 45% green and blue infrastructure across the Site, including the creation of the Great Ouse City Park, creating a major new linear park and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and providing public amenity.
- **Placemaking and quality of life:** A well-planned New Town that supports public health, access to jobs and services, and long-term social value through high-quality design and community infrastructure.
- **Alignment with national policy:** Directly supports the Government's New Towns programme, enabling accelerated housing delivery, economic productivity and inward investment in a nationally significant growth location.

The Consortium consider that without the changes proposed through these representations, the Plan risks constraining this transformational growth, failing to meet identified development needs, and undermining Milton Keynes' long-term economic potential.

The Consortium remain committed to engaging positively with the Council through the Local Plan process and reserve the right to attend at the relevant hearing sessions at the Examination in Public of the MK City Plan 2050, once the Plan has been submitted to the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely,



Lucy Morris
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

APPENDIX B – EMPLOYMENT LAND ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES – ICENI PROJECTS

APPENDIX C – LAND CONTROL PLAN



North Milton Keynes

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

On behalf of **Urban & Civic plc, Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land and The Society of Merchant Venturers**

Project Ref: 333101403 | Rev: - | Date: September 2024

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For and on behalf of Stantec UK Limited				

Revision	Date	Description	Prepared	Reviewed	Approved

This report has been prepared by Stantec UK Limited ('Stantec') on behalf of its client to whom this report is addressed ('Client') in connection with the project described in this report and takes into account the Client's particular instructions and requirements. This report was prepared in accordance with the professional services appointment under which Stantec was appointed by its Client. This report is not intended for and should not be relied on by any third party (i.e. parties other than the Client). Stantec accepts no duty or responsibility (including in negligence) to any party other than the Client and disclaims all liability of any nature whatsoever to any such party in respect of this report.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Published Landscape Character Assessment Extracts

1 Introduction

1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 Stantec's specialist Landscape Planning and Design group (Stantec) has been commissioned by Urban & Civic plc, Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land and The Society of Merchant Venturers to provide Landscape and visual advice to inform the potential for primarily residential development ('the Proposed Development') north of Milton Keynes (the 'Site'); and to provide a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of the Proposed Development.
- 1.1.2 The principal elements of the LVA are an analysis of the landscape context of the Site, including landform, vegetation, transport features and settlement pattern; identification and summaries of relevant landscape planning policy; analysis of published landscape character assessments encompassing the Site; an appraisal of the character of the Site itself; and a description of the visual characteristics of the Site in its context in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.1.3 The LVA process has been used to develop a series of landscape development principles based on a robust analysis of the landscape and visual characteristics of the Site and its context, with the aim of avoiding or reducing adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity and optimising beneficial change in the landscape and in views. The methodology used for the LVA is drawn from principles of good practice in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

2 Site Context

2.1 Location

2.1.1 As shown in **Figure 1**, the Site is located on the north-western edge of Milton Keynes, broadly between the M1 motorway to the north-east and the Milton Keynes to Rugby section of the West Coast Main Line to the south-west.

2.2 Topography

2.2.1 As shown in **Figure 2**, the overriding topographical pattern of the local landscape is that of a low-lying, undulating clay plateau, dissected by the course of the meandering River Great Ouse and its tributaries in broad, shallow valleys. The River Great Ouse runs broadly south-west to north-east through the local landscape.

2.2.2 The Site lies between the River Great Ouse (immediately to the south-east) and its tributary, the River Tove (approximately 1 kilometre (km) to the west, and their broad valleys; and traverses a central south-west – north-east ridgeline at between approximately 95-100m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The north-west of the Site is crossed by a smaller, unnamed tributary stream, hereafter referred to as the Tathall Brook.

2.2.3 The broad valley floor of the River Great Ouse lies at an elevation of approximately 60m AOD. Within the valley floor north of Milton Keynes there are several large ponds and lakes formed by gravel extraction.

2.2.4 The landform rises to a broad plateau north of the Site, reaching a height of approximately 115m AOD near Hanslope, a spur of the south-west – north-east orientated Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge.

2.2.5 South of the River Great Ouse, the gentle valley slopes are incised by the tributary valleys of the Loughton Brook and the River Ouzel. Between these valleys is a spur of more elevated land on which the city centre of Milton Keynes is situated, at an elevation of approximately 110m AOD.

2.2.6 Beyond the Site to the west, the landform rises, forming the western valley slopes of the River Tove. Landform also rises beyond the Site to the east, comprising the eastern valley slopes of a meander in the River Great Ouse.

2.3 Transport, Settlement Patterns and Land Use

2.3.1 The M1 extends on a north-west – south-east axis through the area, and the West Coast Mainline railway extends broadly parallel to the M1, along the eastern flank of the Tove Valley. These strong linear transport features, in combination with the north-west – south-east route of Watling Street Roman road and the north-easterly flow of the River Great Ouse, have informed the orientation of the loose grid pattern in which the planned city of Milton Keynes is set.

2.3.2 The very large urban area of Milton Keynes lies immediately south-east of the River Great Ouse. The city of Milton Keynes was established as a new town in 1967. The city centre lies approximately 3.5km south-east of the Site. The city enveloped several small settlements, including industrial towns, coaching towns and smaller villages.

2.3.3 Watercourses passing through the city lie within wide (up to 1km), undeveloped valley floors forming linear parks. The main road network reinforces the grid structure of the settlement, creating blocks in which the grid pattern is followed to a varying degree depending on the land form, land use, development type and density. The main roads are usually wide and typically

lined by trees. Now that the roadside trees have become established, these wide boulevards form a strong vegetated framework and softens views of the city from the wider landscape.

- 2.3.4 To the north-west of the River Great Ouse, land use is predominantly agricultural, including scattered settlements and clusters of properties. At the centre of the plateau to the north-west of the Site, lies the village of Hanslope. To the west of the Site, beyond a further side valley and on the eastern flanks of the valley of the River Tove, lies the village of Castlethorpe. Directly to the north of the Site lies the hamlet of Tathall End. The villages of Little Linford and Haversham (separated into eastern and western parts), as well as sporadic intervening properties, are located at the north-western edge of the River Great Ouse valley floor beyond the south-eastern boundary of the Site. A network of minor roads extends between these smaller settlements. Other built forms in the vicinity of the Site include a small number of isolated properties and farm buildings, some of which have been adapted/extended for small-scale commercial activities.
- 2.3.5 The HM Government Communications Centre (HMGCC) is a substantial complex of offices and infrastructure including some taller modern buildings and communications masts, which has developed around Park House at Hanslope Park, immediately to the north of the Site.

2.4 Vegetation

- 2.4.1 Within the local landscape, more extensive woodland areas tend to be situated on higher ground, including Little Linford Wood within the Site and Gayhurst Wood and The Grove immediately beyond the Site boundaries to the north-east. The Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge, approximately 5km to the north of the Site is heavily wooded, including Salcey Forest and Yardly Chase. Similarly to the west of the Site, on the upper valley slopes of the River Tove, the Whittlewood Forest provides extensive woodland cover. In these areas, collectively, woodland on more elevated land creates wooded skylines. Within the city of Milton Keynes, there is an extensive green infrastructure network, particularly along road corridors. As a result, the city has a well-wooded character, within which only taller buildings, typically in the city centre, appear above the treeline. There is also extensive tree cover along the low-lying valley floors, as well as smaller woodland copses throughout the local landscape.

2.5 Access

- 2.5.1 Numerous public rights of way (PRoW) traverse the Site and the surrounding area, including several waymarked routes, of which the Three Shires Way, Hanslope Circular Ride, Ouse Valley Way and Swan's Way pass through the Site.
- 2.5.2 Little Linford Wood in the northern part of the Site is a publicly accessible Local Nature Reserve (LNR) with a managed path network. The valley floor of the River Great Ouse also includes some areas of publicly accessible open space and comprises part of the Ouse Valley Linear Park.

2.6 Landscape Planning Designations

- 2.6.1 The Draft Local Plan for Milton Keynes (Milton Keynes City Plan (2050)) identifies a Candidate Special Landscape Area (SLA) along the Ouse Valley supported by draft Policy CEA12 Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character/Special Landscape Areas. The extent of this proposed designation is illustrated in **Figure 1** and includes south-eastern parts of the Site.
- 2.6.2 Other relevant designations shown in **Figure 1**, include:
- A Scheduled Monument, Moated site 70m south of Long Plantation, Hanslope Park on the north-western edge of the Site.

- The Moated site, fishponds and associated earthworks 150m south-east of Haversham Manor Scheduled Monument, adjacent to the south-eastern edge of the Site.
- Conservation Areas, including at Castlethorpe and Hanslope;
- Ancient Woodland, including at Little Linford Wood in the centre of the Site and three woodlands bisected by the M1, namely Hoo Wood, Stocking Wood and Gayhurst Wood;
- A Linear Park in the Great Ouse valley to the south-east;
- Two adjacent Registered Parks and Gardens (RPGs) on the eastern side of the M1 at Gayhurst Court (Grade II) and Tyringham (Grade II*). The citations for these two sites on the National Heritage List for England do not reference views in the direction of the Site;
- The Tove Valley SLA lies approximately 1.4km to the west of the Site at its nearest point, within the neighbouring South Northamptonshire District; and
- Listed buildings, concentrated within the local villages but also including a small number of farmhouses within the Site.

3 Landscape Character

3.1.1 Published Landscape Character Assessments at the National and Borough levels have been reviewed, in addition to the Historic Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Buckinghamshire County Council. The extent of relevant character areas at National and District levels is shown in **Figure 3**. Extracts from the National and Borough-level assessments are included in **Appendix A**. Characteristics and guidelines noted in these assessments of relevance to the Site and Proposed Development are summarised below.

3.2 National

3.2.1 The Site lies within National Character Area 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands. The Key Characteristics include the following of relevance:

- *“Gently undulating, lowland plateau divided by shallow river valleys that gradually widen to the east.*
- *Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, particularly on higher ground to the northwest representing remnant ancient deer parks and Royal Hunting Forests.*
- *Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.*
- *A number of historic parklands, designed landscapes and country houses combine with other features to provide a strong sense of history and place.*
- *Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel.*
- *Major transport routes cross the area.”*

3.2.2 With regard to ‘ecosystem services’ it is noted that recreation is a significant service in the NCA and that this is generally low key, close to the main urban populations and associated with features including river valleys. The document notes that positive management offers opportunities to cater for increased demand.

3.2.3 A number of the Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) are relevant to the Proposed Development. These include:

- SEO 1: (among other points) managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats. Examples provided include: active woodland management, including for wood fuel; and management and expansion of traditional orchards.
- SEO 3: (among other points) high-quality green infrastructure to accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Examples provided include: creating new woodland on urban fringes to help screen and integrate new developments; retaining and enhancing the contrast in landscape character between the clay plateau and river valleys, aiming to maintain and enhance the balance between urban and rural landscapes; and providing recreational access.

3.3 County

- 3.3.1 The Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire, Part 1: Landscape Character Assessment (Hyder Consulting, 2000) has been superseded by District level assessment. However, the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Historic Landscape Characterisation (Buckinghamshire County Council, 2006) provides a summary of the historic character of Milton Keynes on page 11, noting that the area is dominated by the new city, including the absorption of pre-existing settlement into the planned settlement pattern; and that built industrial development is concentrated in the new city, particularly in proximity to the M1 and West Coast Main Line, which are themselves significant landscape features.

3.4 Borough

Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment (2022)

- 3.4.1 The 2022 Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment forms part of the evidence base for the Draft Local Plan. The Landscape Character Assessment identified Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) based on those outlined in the former 2016 Landscape Character Assessment. The Site lies across parts of three LCTs: LCT 1: Wooded Wolds; LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes; and LCT 3: River Floodplains. Consequently, the Site lies across parts of three LCAs: LCA 1b: Gayhurst and Stokepark Wooded Wolds; LCA 2a: Ouse Northern Undulating Valley Slopes; and LCA 3c: Ouse Lakes and Parkland Floodplains.

LCT 1: Wooded Wolds

- 3.4.2 More elevated parts of the north of the Site, surrounding Little Linford Wood and Hanslope Park lie within the southernmost extent of LCT 1: Wooded Wolds. The Key Characteristics of LCT 1: Wooded Wolds are as follows:
- *“Gently undulating plateau landscape, between 90m and 120m AOD forming part of a wider plateau to the north. A limestone bedrock with considerable till deposits, gives rise to soils with a high clay content.*
 - *Small streams and springs, which drain into the Ouse and Tove, create topographic interest.*
 - *Large to medium scale broadleaved or mixed woodland blocks, including many ancient or ancient replanted woodlands, The Yardley Chase SSSI extends into this LCA, and contains broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.*
 - *Medium to large arable fields bound by clipped hedges and occasional mature trees with smaller-scale fields and areas of pasture located closer to the settlements.*
 - *A sparsely settled rural landscape crossed by minor roads, although the M1 is locally dominant and audible across the LCT.*
 - *Public Rights of Way cross the landscape, connecting to settlements in the Undulating Valley Slopes (LCT 2) and the wider countryside.*
 - *An open expansive landscape with long panoramic views over valleys to the south, east and west.*

- *The scenic and distinctive woodland backdrop that the LCT provides to adjacent landscape.*
- *A rural landscape, with limited modern influences, and some areas of inaccessible land.”*

3.4.3 Landscape Qualities of LCT 1: Wooded Wolds are as follows:

- *“The ecologically important semi-natural woodlands including extensive areas of ancient woodland and hedgerows that support biodiversity, and provide carbon capture.*
- *Small streams and springs that support biodiversity and provide nutrient and sediment filtration enhancing water quality.*
- *The heritage features of the landscape particularly the connection to the Royal hunting forests and historic field patterns that provide a connection to history, cultural identity, and aesthetic value.*
- *The historic settlement pattern, including the linear village of Hanslope and its satellite 'End' villages, with their high concentration of historic buildings built from local limestone as well as historic farmsteads that provide a connection to history and cultural identity.*
- *The elevated rural and sometimes remote character of the landscape, with a strong sense of openness that contributes to mental well-being and health.*
- *The pattern of hedged fields, woodland areas and panoramic long views across the neighbouring valley landscapes that contribute to a distinctive sense of place.*
- *The scenic and distinctive wooded backdrop that the LCT provides to adjacent landscapes.*
- *The network of PRow, including the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, that connect to the wider countryside and settlements, provide recreational value and contribute to well-being and health.”*

3.4.4 Under Landscape Condition the document states:

“The Wooded Wolds LCT is generally in good condition, with intact hedgerow field boundaries and a strong historic field pattern. There has been some modern amalgamation of fields, and some use of post and wire fencing for horse grazing, particularly on the edge of Hanslope. Semi-natural habitats are in good condition, with a mixed age structure, although woodlands are scattered.”

3.4.5 Development management points outlined in the guidance section for LCT 1: Wooded Wolds, of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development, are as follows:

- *“Conserve the open landscape and avoid the introduction of large-scale elements which would have a visual impact over a wide distance.*

- *Retain views from the elevated plateau across the wider landscape of the borough, and consider the impact on views from the surrounding landscape in relation to any proposed change.*
- *Retain views of local landmarks, including Hanslope church spire.*
- *Conserve the distinctive vernacular of historic buildings and their rural setting, including within Hanslope Conservation Area. Reference the pattern of local building materials and local identity in any new development or boundary treatments.*
- *Integrate new development at Hanslope and Hanslope Park into the landscape through the use of native hedgerows and woodlands.*
- *Where built development is considered appropriate, consider the visual relationship with the wooded skyline in West Northamptonshire.*

...

3.4.6 Northern parts of the Site around Hanslope Park and Little Linford Wood lie in the southern extent of LCA 1b: Gayhurst and Stokepark Wooded Wolds. Unique characteristics of LCA 1b: Gayhurst and Stokepark Wooded Wolds of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development include:

“Woodlands are larger, but less connected than LCA 1a. Stokepark Wood and Little Linford Wood are designated as LWS for their species-rich ancient woodland...

The majority of the land is in use for arable cropping, with smaller areas of pasture. Hedgerows are variable, with some gapping and reinforcement with post and wire.

...

A parkland character remains at Hanslope Park, which was originally a deer park within the Royal Forest of Salcey.

Minor roads connect Hanslope to other settlements both within the borough and north into Northamptonshire. The lanes are generally lined by intact hedgerows, although there has been some replacement with post and rail fencing. The landscape is very well connected by PRow, with a number of long-distance routes including the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, Three Shires Way, Midshires Way and Hanslope Circular Ride.

There are panoramic views from the PRow across the Ouse valley to the south and the Tove valley to the west. The built edge of Milton Keynes city is also visible to the south, although views to the south-east are partly screened by Little Linford Wood and Gayhurst Wood. Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest woodlands within Northamptonshire form a wooded backdrop to the north.

Modern influences on the landscape include new development in Hanslope, office buildings, radio masts, security fencing and floodlighting at Hanslope Park, and a solar farm at Salcey Green. The M1 and west coast mainline railway are intrusive influences on the LCA, reducing tranquillity.

Despite these, the landscape retains a highly rural character, and dark skies are experienced in the north of the LCA and within the larger woodlands.”

LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes.

3.4.7 The more sloping landform in the south and south-west of the Site lies within the south-eastern extent of LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes. The Key Characteristics of this LCT are as follows:

- *Undulating valley slopes, rising from the Ouse and Tove rivers, from 50m to 105m AOD.*
- *A varied bedrock of sandstones, limestones and mudstone result in diverse soils, with well-drained calcareous clays at the top of slopes and seasonally waterlogged loamy soils at the base of slopes.*
- *Secondary valleys of small streams and springs where the landform provides a localised sense of enclosure.*
- *Woodland cover is limited to small copses, some recorded as ancient woodlands and mature parkland trees associated with historic estates.*
- *A mixed field pattern dominated by large-scale arable fields with unclipped hedges. Smaller pasture fields are common on lower slopes with those near settlements often used for horse grazing. There are some surviving areas of ridge and furrow earthworks.*
- *Historic settlement pattern of nucleated villages, with numerous listed buildings and often designated as Conservation Areas. Traditional buildings materials include local limestone and roofs in thatch, slates or red tiles. Isolated farmsteads are located on the narrow rural lanes.*
- *A network of PRoW allows recreational access to the landscape, including the promoted routes Three Shires Way, Ouse Valley Way and Milton Keynes Boundary Walk.*
- *Panoramic views over the meandering valley floodplain, with a wooded backdrop provided by the Wooded Wolds (LCT 1) to the north. Village church towers provide local landmarks.*
- *A rural and peaceful landscape with an experience of dark skies away from larger settlements. However, electricity pylons, wind turbines and busy trunk roads in the east (LCA 2a and 2b) and the west coast mainline in the west (LCA 2c) reduces the sense of remoteness.”*

3.4.8 Landscape Qualities of LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes are as follows:

- *“The tributary streams and small ponds which feed into the Ouse and Tove, that provide freshwater habitats, regulate water quality and water flow.*

- *The semi-natural habitats including woodland copses, mature trees and hedgerows that support biodiversity and provide carbon capture.*
- *The historic field patterns of pre-18th century enclosure and assarts, and surviving ridge and furrow earthworks, which provide time depth to the landscape.*
- *The settlement pattern of historic villages, with numerous listed buildings from the 17th and 18th century constructed from local limestone that provide cultural identity and aesthetic value.*
- *The 18th century landscape parks laid out around country houses, most notably at Gayhurst and Tyringham, that provide a connection to history, cultural identity and aesthetic value.*
- *Panoramic views of the meandering rivers and across the undulating landscape of the valleys, with tall church towers and spires, and clock towers as local landmarks, that contribute to a strong sense of place.*
- *The network of PRow, including the Three Shires Way, Ouse Valley Way and Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, that connect the settlements and wider countryside, and provide recreational value, and contribute to well-being and health.*
- *The pleasing combination of landscape elements, strong sense of tranquillity and experience of dark skies in this rural landscape which contribute to the sense of place.”*

3.4.9 The condition of the landscape in LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes identified in the assessment as the following:

“Generally a landscape in good condition, with a strong rural character. Fragmentation of historic field patterns, and lack of connectivity between woodlands and hedgerow field boundaries reduces the condition in some areas. Modern influences on the landscape include electricity pylons in the east, Petsoe Manor wind farm, and some unsympathetic modern extensions to settlements, including residential and commercial development to the north of Olney.”

3.4.10 Development management points outlined in the guidance section for LCT 2: Undulating Valley Slopes of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development are as follows:

- *“Conserve the nucleated village settlement pattern and restrict built development away from the villages to retain the agricultural and recreational landscape.*
- *Integrate new development and improve the suburban edges of settlements such as Olney through the use of native hedgerows and woodlands.*
- *Conserve the distinctive vernacular of historic buildings and their rural setting, particularly within the numerous Conservation Areas within the LCT and ensure that landscape continues to provide a rural setting to these areas.*

- *Where new development is planned encourage the use of limestone with thatch, slate or red brick roofs, to maintain a strong local identity.*
- *Resist proposals for highway upgrading to retain the rural character of the narrow rural lanes and conserve the grass verges which provide an important biodiversity resource.*
- *Identify, retain and manage key viewpoints to appreciate the undulating valley slopes. Consider the landmark churches and clocktowers and panoramic views across the river floodplains in development both within the LCT and in adjacent LCTs.*
- ...
- *Protect the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment.”*

3.4.11 Parts of the Site lie in the western extent of LCA 2a Ouse Northern Undulating Valley Slopes. Unique characteristics of 2a Ouse Northern Undulating Valley Slopes of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development include:

“This is an open landscape, with fine panoramic views, including to the heavily wooded skyline of Yardley Chase to the north, south-east to the wooded Greensand Ridge (LCA 6a), and over the historic parklands at Gayhurst and Tyringham which lies on the opposite bank of the River Ouse (within LCA 2b).

... Traffic noise from the M1 and West Coast Mainline railway reduce tranquillity, and there are views across the river valley to the Petsoe Manor wind farm.”

LCT 3: River Floodplains

3.4.12 Limited parts of the lower-lying southern edges of the Site lie within LCT 3: River Floodplains. The Key Characteristics of this LCT are as follows:

- *A flat landscape with slow flowing rivers on sinuous valley floors, underlain by a varied bedrock with alluvium deposits.*
- *Riparian woodland lines the meandering river channels, some recorded as priority habitat deciduous woodland and wetland habitats lie on the floodplains, many of which are designated as LWS.*
- *Open pasture fields lie adjacent to the river channel, bound by ditches and post and wire fencing.*
- *Historic and current mineral extraction have impacted the landscape, including the creation of extensive large lakes and ponds.*
- *Heritage assets are limited to historic mills, bridges and occasional isolated farmsteads. Archaeological evidence of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and medieval communities is often designated as Scheduled Monuments.*

- *An open undeveloped floodplain, with restricted settlement, although there are views to villages and towns on adjacent higher ground.*
- *Recreationally important landscape with good access on PRow, parks on former mineral extraction sites, cycling routes and fishing (particularly within LCAs 3c and 3d).*
- *Rural character, away from the urban settlement edges and major transport corridors.”*

3.4.13 Landscape Qualities of LCT 3: River Floodplains are as follows:

- *“The semi-natural habitats including floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows and deciduous riparian woodland that support biodiversity, and provide carbon capture.*
- *The river channels which provide water, and the underlying aquifers which maintain springs and base flows into rivers. The floodplains also regulate water flows, and provide flood protection.*
- *The riverside meadows which provide a connection to the historic land uses and provide a highly scenic quality to the landscape.*
- *The heritage features of the landscape particularly the historic mills and bridges, farmhouses and parklands, and archaeological earthwork features that provide a connection to history, cultural identity and aesthetic value.*
- *The largely undeveloped rural character of the flat low-lying floodplain, with a strong sense of openness, which provides a sense of place.*
- *The expansive, uninterrupted long-distance views across the floodplain which provide a sense of place.*
- *The recreational opportunities provided by PRow including the Ouse Valley Way, cycle routes, country parks, fishing and water sports which connect the settlements and wider countryside, provide recreational value and contribute to well-being and health.”*

3.4.14 The Condition of the landscape in LCT 3: River Floodplains is identified in the assessment as the following:

“The landscape is variable across the River Floodplain LCT, influenced by proximity to Milton Keynes city, and other recent development. The landscape is still largely in agricultural land use, and has a good cover of semi-natural habitats. There has been some fragmentation of hedgerow boundaries, and tranquillity and rural character are influenced by land uses in adjacent LCTs, such as wind turbines at Petsoe Manor, electricity pylons and noise from major road and rail routes.”

3.4.15 Development management points outlined in the guidance section for in LCT3: River Floodplains of relevance to the Ste and the Proposed Development are as follows:

- *Conserve the undeveloped nature of the landscape, to provide a rural floodplain setting to Milton Keynes city.*
- *Consider views from the floodplains landscape when planning development in adjacent landscapes, enhancing the integration of development through native wooded boundaries and mature trees to provide visual screening and to reduce the impact of built development on the floodplain.*
- *Conserve and enhance the historic bridges and mills, and archaeological evidence of earthworks.*
- *Ensure a comprehensive restoration plan is in place for any future mineral extraction, to restore habitats and land cover pattern. This should include wet woodland as part of a mosaic of habitats.*

...

- 3.4.16 Lower-lying southern parts of the Site lie in the central extent of LCA 3c Ouse Lakes and Parkland Floodplains. Unique characteristics of LCA 3c Ouse Lakes and Parkland Floodplains of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development include:

“The former gravel workings have been restored into established recreational areas for walking, riding, cycling and swimming, although most are privately owned with restricted public access. The landscape is crossed by a number of public rights of way, including promoted routes Grafton Way, Ouse Valley Way, and Milton Keynes Boundary Walk and National Cycle Route 6. The Grand Union Canal also crosses the river floodplain. There is greater access to the river in this LCA than the rest of the LCT.

Modern influences on the landscape include recreational facilities including static caravans at Cosgrove Leisure Park, the major transport corridors of the M1, A6 and west coast mainline railway and solar farm north of Newport Pagnell. The road corridors and proximity to Milton Keynes city and Newport Pagnell reduce tranquillity and dark skies.”

4 Policy

4.1 National

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

4.1.1 Paragraphs 131-141 focus on achieving well-designed places and promoting good design of the built environment. Paragraph 135 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a. *Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b. *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c. *Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d. *Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e. *Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f. *Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."*

4.1.2 Paragraph 136 relates to trees and states:

"Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users."

4.1.3 Paragraph 139 is concerned with the quality of design and states:

"Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning

documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a. development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b. outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings...”*

4.1.4 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 180 sets out that:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a. Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b. Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*

...”

4.1.5 Paragraph 181 states:

“Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework⁵⁸; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”

Planning Practice Guidance

4.1.6 To support the policies of the NPPF, the Government has produced Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

4.1.7 Under the heading of Natural Environment, Paragraph 5 of ‘Green infrastructure’, focuses on the way in which natural capital green infrastructure can add to communities including, *“...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes...”*. Paragraph 6 states:

“Green infrastructure can help in:

- Achieving well-designed places;*
- Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change; and*
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.”*

- 4.1.8 Under the sub-heading ‘Landscape’, paragraph 37, PPG supports the use of landscape character assessment as a tool for understanding the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identifying the features that give it a sense of place, as a means to informing, planning and managing change. PPG makes reference to Natural England guidance on landscape character assessment.

4.2 Borough

Plan Milton Keynes 2016-2031 (2019)

- 4.2.1 The Local Plan for Milton Keynes (Plan:MK) was adopted in March 2019 and will remain extant until the Draft Local Plan (Milton Keynes City Plan) is adopted. Plan:MK policies relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development are detailed below.
- 4.2.2 A very small part of the south-east of the Site, south of Hill Farm House, lies within an area designated in the Local Plan as a Linear Park, as shown in **Figure 1**.
- 4.2.3 Policy DS6: Linear Parks, states:
- A. *“The following areas are defined as Linear Parks on the Policies Map:*
1. *The Ouse Valley, from the Borough boundary at Passenham to the M1 motorway.*
 - ...
- B. *Development proposals in the Linear Parks should contribute to achieving the following objectives:*
1. *Protecting and improving the landscape.*
 2. *Protecting and enhancing features of nature conservation value.*
 3. *Retaining and improving public access to land and water areas for countryside recreation.*
 4. *Flood control.*
 5. *Minimising any adverse impact on local residents and agriculture.*
 6. *Protecting and interpreting areas of archaeological interest”*
- 4.2.4 Policy NE4: Green Infrastructure, states;
- A. *“The network of green infrastructure throughout the Borough will be protected, extended and enhanced for its biodiversity, recreational, accessibility, health and landscape value and for the contribution it makes towards combating climate change. This is in accordance with the vision and principles (and the large-scale zone maps of Green Infrastructure Opportunity (39)) set out by the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes NEP.*
- B. *Development proposals will provide new green infrastructure or, if it is not possible, will contribute to the enhancement and strengthening of existing green infrastructure to provide wellbeing benefits to people through access to nature.*
- ...

- D. Green infrastructure protection, improvements and creation must be prioritised in locations where it can deliver most benefits. It should be multi-functional to deliver as many ecosystem services as the Site requires, for example flood mitigation, access to nature (wellbeing benefits), plants for pollinators, carbon sequestration, and habitat for wildlife.*
- E. The existing network of linear parks and linked parks and green spaces will be extended into the urban extensions and along the Ouse and Ouzel Valleys to the north to provide a well connected network of green infrastructure that:*
- 1. Is strategically planned*
 - 2. Is attractive and enhances the surrounding landscape.*
 - 3. Is safe and well used for recreation.*
 - 4. Meets the needs of existing and future residents.*
 - 5. Is designed to provide a range of ecosystem services eg. Manage flood risk or provide flower rich habitats that supports a diverse range of pollinators.*
 - 6. Is designed to support mitigation and adaptation to climate change e.g. through vegetation for carbon uptake (carbon sequestration).*
 - 7. Achieves a net gain in biodiversity.*
 - 8. Is managed into the long-term.*
 - 9. Where possible improves connectivity with other green infrastructure networks e.g. by linkages to the urban parks.*
 - 10. Where appropriate explores economic opportunities that will support the network's sustainability—for example in conservation, agriculture, renewable energy or outdoor environmental education or recreation; such activity must not result in a negative impact to the integrity of the network, the ecosystem services provided or on biodiversity.*
- F. Where green infrastructure is provided outside the linear parks system, applicants should detail how it will address the above requirements.”*

4.2.5 Policy NE5: Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character, states:

- A. “Where development in the open countryside is acceptable in principle under other policies in this plan, it will need to be undertaken in a manner that respects the particular character of the surrounding landscape.*
- B. In particular, development proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures:*

1. *The locally distinctive natural and man-made features that contribute towards the landscape character and its quality.*
 2. *The historic setting and structure of the villages and hamlets.*
 3. *Important views e.g. of local landmarks.*
 4. *Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
- C. *Development proposals should take into account the findings of the Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment (2016) and any other relevant landscape and visual assessments or studies. Where appropriate a site specific landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) will be required as part of a planning application and it must be demonstrated that the development proposal has been informed by a LVIA written in accordance with the standard method, Guidance for LVIA version 3 from the Landscape Institute.”*

4.2.6 Policy SD1: Place-making Principles for Development, states:

“Proposals for new strategic urban extensions, strategic scale development and, where relevant, other development within or adjoining the Milton Keynes urban area should demonstrate that the following place-making principles have been considered:

1. *Development promotes good physical and mental health, with places and routes that are safe and perceived to be safe by creating passive surveillance and active frontages.*
2. *Development integrates well with the surrounding built and natural environments to enable a high degree of connectivity with them, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists and for access to connected green infrastructure for people and wildlife.*
3. *The structure and layout of development within or adjoining the urban area of Milton Keynes is based on the principles that have shaped the original city, especially the grid road system, redways, linear parks and strategic, integrated flood management with employment incorporated as part of the development or located nearby.*
4. *Development relates well to the surrounding area in terms of density, scale and materials, with positive Site features, views and vistas incorporated into and used to structure the new development.*
5. *...Existing natural assets including green infrastructure features connections and functions should be identified prior to development; and enhanced, extended, protected and connected appropriately – i.e. designed and planned for so it provides multiple benefits to the environment and wildlife, also to the health and wellbeing of residents and to supporting the local economy.*
6. *Development takes a strategic, integrated and sustainable approach to water resource management (including SUDS and flood risk mitigation).*
7. *Development enhances the character of the area within which it is located. Where existing discernible or positive characteristics are lacking, new development creates positive character and identity*

through high quality and forward looking architecture and urban design to avoid nondescript and 'anywhere' development.

...

10. *Housing is generally arranged according to perimeter block principles so that the fronts of houses overlook streets and other public spaces, and private spaces are located securely within the block.*
11. *Where appropriate, different character areas are created through the use of varied densities, high quality landscaping, block and building layouts, architecture and the framing and treatment of open spaces and the public realm as informed by the surrounding context.*
12. *...Developments must identify existing green infrastructure assets and the benefits they provide and could provide for future needs, and build in the need to protect, enhance, improve and connect green infrastructure for multiple benefits to biodiversity and wildlife, access, health and well-being as a necessary component of sustainable place-making.*

..."

4.2.7 Although the Site is not within a strategic urban extension area, it is of a strategic scale, and therefore principals of Policy SD1 are of relevance to the Proposed Development.

4.2.8 Policy SD9: General Principles for Strategic Urban Extensions, states the following of relevance to landscape and visual considerations:

"Proposals for Strategic Urban Extensions, and the documents required under SD10 to guide their development, should be prepared in accordance with the principles set out below. This policy will also be applied to any planning application(s) for unallocated strategic development sites.

...

2. *To provide the necessary social, grey and green infrastructure ...*
3. *To be supported by or incorporate:*

...

- v. *A green infrastructure and open space strategy to improve biodiversity, provide advanced structural planting, extend the "forest city" concept, create green road and street scenes, and incorporate public art and leisure and recreation facilities.*
- vi. *A management and maintenance strategy for open space and landscaping, outlining details of the owner, the responsible maintenance body, and how long term maintenance will be funded.*

..."

4.2.9 Chapter 15 of the Local Plan includes design-related policies of which the following are relevant to landscape and visual considerations.

4.2.10 Policy D1: Designing A High Quality Place, states:

- A. *“Development proposals will be permitted if they meet the following objectives/principles:*
1. *The development proposals as a whole respond appropriately to the site and surrounding context.*
 - ...
 5. *Soft and hard landscaping that continues the verdant and green character of Milton Keynes...*
 6. *Landscape and boundary treatments integrate with and/or enhance those of the surrounding area.*
 - ...

4.2.11 Policy D2: Creating A Positive Character, states:

- A. *“Development proposals will be permitted if they meet the following objectives/principles:*
1. *The layout, massing/scale, boundary treatments and landscaping of a development and appearance of buildings exhibit a positive character or sense of place for a development.*
 2. *The character of the development is locally inspired where appropriate (for example in or adjacent to conservation areas, or in existing areas with a strong positive character).*
 3. *Where there is no positive built form character on the site or surrounding area, new development is designed to create its own distinctive character or sense of place using existing site features, the layout of the development and the appearance of buildings.*
 - ...

Supplementary Planning Documents

Milton Keynes New Residential Development Design Guide

4.2.12 The Milton Keynes New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted 2012) sets out guidance on high quality development. Section 2.2 Context Appraisal states:

“The character of the new development should also be developed from an understanding of the context of the surrounding built and natural forms.”

4.2.13 Under 2.6, Design Aspirations, Vision the following is stated:

“As a general rule, a limited palette of materials is believed to lead to the creation of a stronger character for a development.

...

The landscape framework must provide a structuring element and framework for the entire development;”

4.2.14 Section 3.5, Landscape, Public Space and Biodiversity, states:

- *“The masterplanning of new developments particularly on the periphery of the city must ensure that where appropriate and achievable, existing linear open space corridors are extended into new developments. Where these do not occur, large new developments in particular should be structured around open space corridors that serve to integrate development rather than divide them and that accommodate the multifunctional uses required of modern development;*
- *The retention and use of existing landscape assets as part of new developments should be a guiding principle. This not only enhances the biodiversity where the long established features are often the richest assets, but provides a sense of maturity to developments. Using elements of former landscape character and land use helps to integrate new development within their locality;*
- *Good landscape design can help legibility, create focal and reference points, enhance biodiversity and enhance the overall quality of the external environment. The form, texture and colour of plant material can complement and enhance new and existing building materials. To help establish identity for a new neighbourhood, a palette of tree species which are predominantly native or of local provenance should be established at the design code stage of the process. Non-native species, where used, should be selected for known wildlife value;*
- *Developers should integrate landscape within the built development, rather than viewing it as a separate entity confined solely to areas of public open space. The green character of the city can be reinforced in a variety of other ways, including street trees, verges, green front gardens, green roofs and green walls;”*

Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)

- 4.2.15 The Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy is in part informed by the work of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership, which sets out Strategic Green Infrastructure Priorities in Figure 5 on page 29, as shown in **Image 1** below. This includes parts of the Site as part of the broad landscape scale opportunity areas 6. Great River Ouse Corridor.

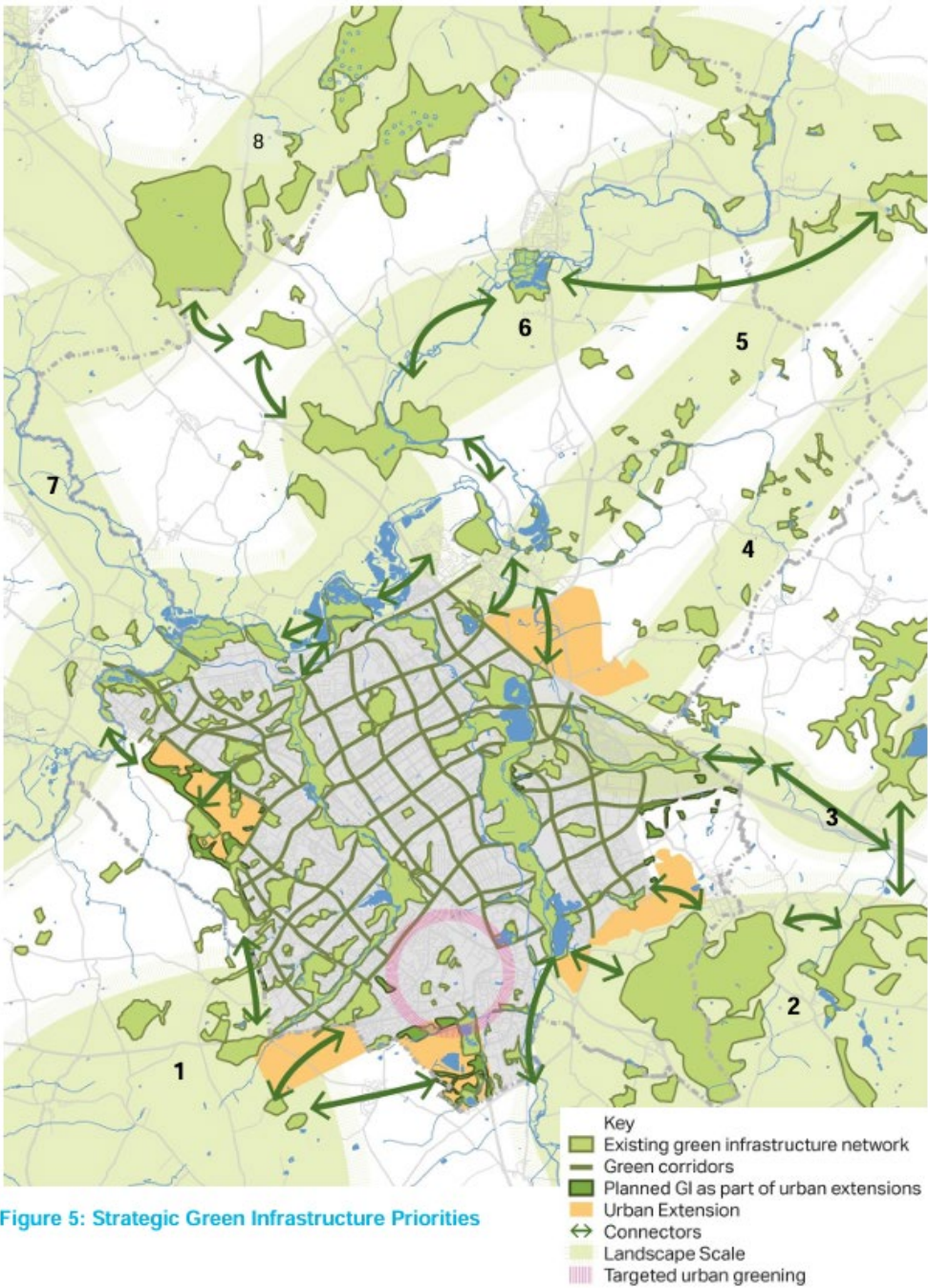


Figure 5: Strategic Green Infrastructure Priorities

Image 1: Extract of Figure 5 of the Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018).

4.2.16 Under 8.4 Protecting Landscape Value, the following is stated:

“...there is a need to protect the qualities that contribute to the rural landscape character in MK. The Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment³³ highlights the extensive views over the valleys from the clay plateau farmland in the north, the tranquil character of the rural river valley, to the open agricultural landscape of the clay lowland farmland to the south east that provides a ‘visually important setting for the Greensand Ridge’. ...

Meeting the need: Protect the tranquil and open nature of the rural landscape. Identify opportunities for historic restoration and GI enhancement. Improve access to the countryside and maintain the existing

paths, cycle and bridle ways, as well as identifying potential for strategic open spaces.”

4.2.17 These landscape-scale opportunity areas are set out as areas to focus GI growth. Under 9.4, ‘Preparing for longer term growth’, the following is stated: about the landscape-scale GI opportunity area:

4.2.18 6: Great River Ouse Corridor

“The Great River Ouse flows down from Bedfordshire and meanders through the Borough and past Emberton Country Park from which the river valley widens and flows into the city. This area includes some areas of high quality habitat including calcareous grassland and grazing marsh, although overall habitat diversity could be enhanced. Enhancement of the corridor could provide an important water management function, helping store water upstream to reduce downstream flood risk, and help reduce the nitrification resulting from surface water flowin [sic] off agricultural land. Although there are a number of riverside walks that can be accessed from Stoney Stratford access to the river for recreation could be improved. Linking existing habitats and restoring riverine habitats could provide the opportunity for the creation of a large scale ecological reserve of national significance. This area would be primarily for ecological benefit, but could also attract visitors to the area for eco-tourism.”

“...All new development in MK should also demonstrate how it provides a net gain in green infrastructure to support a net gain in biodiversity, manage drainage and improve movement. Furthermore GI in the urban extensions will have an important role to play in transitioning from the strong post-war urban GI character of the city into the rural and frequently historic countryside beyond. They will also provide opportunities for enhancing connections between existing GI assets.’

Technical studies and background documents for Plan:MK

Landscape Sensitivity Study to Residential Development in the Borough of Milton Keynes and Adjoining Areas (2016)

4.2.19 The Landscape Sensitivity Study to Residential Development in the Borough of Milton Keynes and Adjoining Areas assessment seeks to consider the sensitivity of landscape areas within and adjacent to the Borough of Milton Keynes for residential development. The assessment considers sensitivity to residential development at a density of 35 dwellings per hectare, typically 2-storey, with some 2.5-storey buildings. The assessment identifies the Site to fall across parts of two different landscape areas identified in this assessment, namely 27: Castlethorpe and 28: Haversham Plateau.

4.2.20 A very small amount of the Site lies within the eastern edge of the landscape sensitivity study assessment area 27: Castlethorpe, which surrounds the village of Castlethorpe. The part of the assessment area within the Site is on the eastern edge, near the course of the brook. Overall, this area’s sensitivity is considered ‘medium’ to residential development. Landscape attributes with a greater sensitivity rating include the intervisibility, which states:

“A river valley landscape, with intermittent views across the river valley to the opposite valley slopes, more open to the south of the area where the river valley opens up around Cosgrove Leisure Park. The incised valleys to the east are visually contained, but there are extensive views to the built edge of Milton Keynes/Wolverton across the floodplain landscape of the Ouse River from higher ground.”

4.2.21 The perception/experience attribute also has a higher sensitivity rating and states:

“Despite its proximity to Milton Keynes, and the modern intrusion of the busy West Coast main line, the land area has a strong sense of tranquillity and a sense of separation from Milton Keynes because of the peaceful river valley landscape that meanders around it.”

- 4.2.22 Overall relating to capacity, the assessment of area 27 states the following of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development:

“A small scale extension of Castlethorpe village may be possible without a significant adverse change in landscape character. However, the historic village is vulnerable to change from development in this area as extensive residential development has the potential to affect the setting of the village. Large scale development in this area would be constrained by the potential impact on the landscape character of the Tove and Ouse River valleys and also on the setting of Cosgrove. The village is vulnerable to change from development to the north because of the potential for coalescence with the village of Hanslope. The more open and relatively flat landscape to the south east of Castlethorpe is more suitable for development.”

- 4.2.23 The assessment area 28: Haversham Plateau encompasses most of the Site. The following commentary was provided regarding the susceptibility to residential development of area 28 was provided for each of the landscape attributes as follows:

- 4.2.24 Scale was concluded to be ‘medium sensitivity’, stating:

“A large scale regular landscape on the south east facing slopes falling to the Ouse river valley. Smaller and more irregular to the north and west.”

- 4.2.25 Enclosure was concluded to be ‘medium sensitivity’, stating:

“A strong sense of openness within the land area. There is boundary containment from the higher plateau to the north and woodland block along the M1 and to the north. The southern periphery is partially contained by the heavily wooded river valley.”

- 4.2.26 Landform was concluded to be ‘low sensitivity’, stating:

“Valley slopes of the River Great Ouse rise to a flatter plateau around Little Linford Wood.”

- 4.2.27 Landcover pattern was concluded to be ‘low sensitivity’, stating:

“Largely open arable fields with some larger woodland block such as Little Linford Wood.”

- 4.2.28 Built Environment was concluded to be ‘medium sensitivity’, stating:

“Along the southern boundary, the settlement edges of the small villages of Haversham and Little Linford are well integrated with the surrounding landscape. The isolated 20th century development of Haversham off the Wolverton Road adds a more suburban element. Milton Keynes/Wolverton, including new residential areas on the settlement edge, are visible across the river valley floodplain.”

- 4.2.29 Historic landscape character was concluded to be ‘low sensitivity’, stating:

“There are areas of Ancient Woodland at Little Linford Wood, Hoo Wood and Dairy Farm. Small area of ridge and furrow near the Hanslope Circular Ride.”

- 4.2.30 Intervisibility was concluded to be ‘low sensitivity’, stating:

“There are local views over the wooded river valley. There are some longer views over the river valley to the residential areas and industrial buildings on the settlement edge of Wolverton/Milton Keynes to the south.”

4.2.31 Perception/ experience was concluded to be ‘medium sensitivity’, stating:

“The land area retain a tranquil rural character despite its proximity to Milton Keynes. However, views across the river valley towards Milton Keynes, introduces an urban influence although this is indirect from settlement edges outside the land area. The M1 to the east, is an aural intrusion although it is largely hidden by a woodland corridor.”

4.2.32 Landscape Value was concluded to be ‘medium sensitivity’, stating:

“Recreational value from long distance paths in including Hanslope Circular Ride, Swan’s Way, Midshire’s Way. Area of Attractive Landscape (MK) along the Ouse valley. and Open Countryside (MK)”

4.2.33 Overall, based on the sensitivity of the above attributes, the assessment concluded that the area has ‘medium sensitivity’ to residential development.

4.2.34 Under the heading ‘capacity’ the assessment concluded the following for area 28:

“There are likely to be opportunities to accommodate residential development without a significant adverse change in landscape character. This land area is separated from adjoining areas by strong boundaries created by the M1 and the wooded river valley of the River Great Ouse. The relatively flat topography on the lower south east facing slopes and the wooded areas north of the River Great Ouse reduces the visibility of the landscape area. Despite the sparsely settled landscape, the landscape is influenced by the urban edge of Wolverton which is visible across the floodplain landscape of the Ouse.

Development should be located on the lower slopes facing Milton Keynes, and adjacent to the 20th century settlement edge of Haversham. Development should enhance integration of this area of Haversham with the surrounding landscape.

Avoid development on the higher plateau landscape which has more intervisibility with the surrounding landscape and contains a network of PRow, and ancient woodland. Maintain existing green corridors to woodland along the M1 corridor. The closer grained landscape along the Ouse tributary to the west of the land area is more sensitive to residential development.

Avoid development to the south of the High Street, which could impact the setting of the Ouse River Valley and the Linford Lakes Linear Park, where existing woodland provides screening for the river valley. The old village of Haversham and the hamlet of Little Linford are vulnerable to change from development through coalescence ”

4.2.35 A medium sensitivity rating is defined in Table 2 of the assessment as:

“Medium sensitivity

There are likely to be opportunities to accommodate residential development without a significant adverse change in landscape character. However there are likely to be key sensitivities or values that must be respected in relation to development. Proposals must follow the guidance on siting, and cumulative impacts.”

Draft Milton Keynes City Plan: Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation (2024)

4.2.36 The draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050 will form the new Local Plan for Milton Keynes, replacing Plan:MK (2019). The draft Local Plan is currently in the 'Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation' stage, and the final draft will be consulted upon in early 2025. Draft policies of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development are set out below.

4.2.37 Draft Policy CEA8: Provision and protection of accessible open space, states:

- A. *"All new development proposals, where appropriate, must maintain and enhance the quality and connectivity of access networks, integrating with active travel routes and recreation routes, into the wider nature, green and blue infrastructure network.*
- B. *New residential development proposals must provide new open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches and/or provide contributions towards improving existing open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches...*
- C. *The provision, management and maintenance of open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches must be an integral part of the new residential development proposals where provision is required...*

...

Development within Linear Parks

- H. *Development for leisure and recreation uses, or related ancillary uses, within Linear Parks will be supported unless they would:*
 - 1. *Lead to an unacceptable visual impact;*
 - 2. *Detract from the principal use of the Linear Park as publicly accessible open space;*
 - 3. *Be incompatible with any existing use of lakes or other water areas;*
 - 4. *Have an adverse impact on the flood plain; or*
 - 5. *Undermine opportunities to link wildlife areas and provide for biodiversity corridors."*

4.2.38 Draft Policy CEA11: Urban greening, trees and woodland, states:

- A. *"All new development proposals must meet the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) standard to achieve or assist in maintaining or reaching an average green cover of 40% in the applicable residential neighbourhood.*
- B. *All new development proposals must not result in the net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods.*
- C. *All new major development proposals must meet the core Urban Greening Factor (UGF) Target Score outlined in the Urban Greening Factor Standard...*

Urban tree canopy cover

- D. *All new residential and commercial development proposals within defined settlement boundaries must meet the urban tree canopy cover standard of at least 19%.*
- E. *Development proposals resulting in the creation of new residential or commercial floorspace, or hard surfaces, must seek to retain existing landscape features and trees unless it can be demonstrated that replacement tree planting elsewhere on the site would be preferable.*

Protection and creation of woodland

- F. *All new development proposals must protect and, where possible, enhance existing woodland within the site.*
- G. *Major residential development proposals must contribute to meeting the Woodland Trust's Woodlands Access Standard in line with the Milton Keynes Nature, Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, through either provision on site or offsite contributions that:*
 - 1. *Increases the provision of accessible woodland that is greater than two hectares in size within 500 metres of the proposed development site; and/or*
 - 2. *Increases provision of accessible woodland that is greater than 0 hectares in size within 4 kilometres of the proposed development site."*

4.2.39 Draft Policy CEA12: Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character/Special Landscape Areas, states:

"Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character

- A. *"Development proposals must demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and, where possible, enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures. Proposals should take into account:*
 - i. *The key natural and man-made characteristics and features that contribute towards the landscape character and its quality;*
 - ii. *The historic setting and structure of the villages and hamlets;*
 - iii. *Important views, including local landmarks; and*
 - iv. *The tranquillity of the area and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
- B. *Where a site-specific landscape and visual impact assessment is required as part of a planning application, this must be prepared in accordance with the standard method set out in Landscape Institute guidance."*

Special Landscape Areas

- A. *"Development affecting Special Landscape Areas, as defined on the Policies Map, will only be permitted where it:*

1. *Conserves and, where possible, enhances the special character and key landscape qualities of the area;*
2. *Safeguards important views, features and landmarks;*
3. *Safeguards the tranquillity of the area; and*
4. *Retains and, where possible, improves public access to the countryside.*

B. Development proposals will be expected to incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate landscape and visual impacts. Proposals should have regard to the Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment and the Statements of Significance for each of the Special Landscape Areas, and any other relevant landscape and visual assessments or studies.

C. A site-specific landscape and visual impact assessment will be required for development within Special Landscape Areas to show how the proposed change will conserve and enhance the special character and qualities of the landscape, including conservation and protection of valued views.”

4.2.40 The evidence base for the Draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050 includes a green and blue infrastructure study and a review of valued landscape designations, as detailed below. The updated landscape character assessment also forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and is referenced in the landscape character section of this report.

Technical studies and background documents for Milton Keynes City Plan

Milton Keynes Nature Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023)

4.2.41 Section 20, identifies the Location of Future Country Parks, and states that land in the vicinity of the Site is a potential option for a future Country Park:

‘To the north west of Newport Pagnell there exists a large area (approximately 67ha) of broadleaved and mixed woodland including Gayhurst Wood and Bunsty Wood. Longland’s Wood is also connected to the north west.

The entire woodland is Ancient Woodland. This woodland is also designated as a Biological Notification Site (BMERC). The northern boundary meets a road linking the villages of Gayhurst with Tathall End. Part of the southern boundary meets the M1 motorway. A PRoW (footpath) runs adjacent to the southern boundary of the woodland. This area of woodland is located within 2km from residential development, notably the villages of Gayhurst to the east and Tathall End to the west.’

4.2.42 Appendix D: The context for Green Infrastructure in Milton Keynes states that:

“the original landscape design policy, devised in 1971, had four objectives:

- *To achieve a visual character consistent with the vegetation of lowland UK*
- *To create species zones in the city to create a sense of place and for zones to have comprehensible boundaries aiding navigation through the zones*
- *To achieve a plant mixture within each zone which is capable of responding to the full range of situations that might arise, as envisaged at the time*

- *To make it possible to forecast plant requirements with reasonable accuracy for years to come.*

4.2.43 The appendix also states that *“the city aspires to be a unique ‘City in a Forest’ with 40% green space and more biodiversity in the modern city than was found in the agricultural land it replaced”*.

Valued Landscapes Policy Review (2022)

4.2.44 The Valued Landscapes Policy review was conducted in 2022 to “review the effectiveness of current landscape policy in relation to valued landscapes within the borough, and to provide recommendations towards new policies which would allow for the protection of these valued landscapes.” Local landscape designations were first recognised in 1995 by Milton Keynes Local Plan as ‘Areas of Attractive Landscape’ (AAL). They were supported in Local Plan policy until the designation was dropped in the 2019 Local Plan. The Review of Local Landscape Designations (2024) states the following regarding the Council’s decision not to retain the AAL Policy in the 2019 Local Plan:

“This was in line with government guidance at the time, which directed local authorities away from using local landscape designations to protect landscape towards a criteria-based approach to the assessment of the impact of development on landscape character (see para 2.1 above). MKC decided that the updated 2016 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)5 could provide sufficient evidence by which development could be assessed. However, the 2016 LCA did not set out landscape qualities for each of the identified Landscape Character Types as part of the evaluation stage of the assessment, as suggested in later LI guidance published in 2021 (see para 1.4). This has subsequently been addressed in the current Milton Keynes LCA (2022).”

4.2.45 The review drew upon previous planning decisions to assess the effectiveness of the former AAL designation in upholding Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011 Policy S11 VS the landscape character approach in upholding Policy NE5L Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character, of Plan: MK (2016-2031). From this, recommendations were made on the council's future approach to local landscape designations.

4.2.46 It should, however, be noted that conclusions drawn in several of the cases note the effectiveness of the local landscape designation in ‘protecting the landscape from development’. Whilst in these cases, the SLA designation prevented development, protecting the landscape from development was not mentioned in the relevant Policy S11 of the Milton Keynes Local Plan (2016) in place at that time, which stated:

“Within these areas, development should:

- 7. Not damage the special character of the areas*
- 8. Enhance important landscape features where possible*
- 9. Protect and enhance features of nature conservation value*
- 10. Retain and improve public access and opportunities for countryside recreation.”*

4.2.47 The policy does not state that development should not take place within an AAL; therefore, the fact that a Site was not developed cannot be used to conclude the effectiveness of the policy.

4.2.48 The recommended option to the council was *“creating a new local landscape designation broadly based on the existing evidence from the 1999 LDA study. This should be developed with reference to the 2022 landscape character assessment”*. The review also gave input to

the suggested policy wording to be included in the Milton Keynes Local Plan. The wording used in the Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation (2024) is not the same as the suggested wording, but does reflect its principles.

Milton Keynes Review of Local Landscape Designations (2024)

4.2.49 LUC undertook a review of the existing local landscape designations in 2024. The scope of the assessment sought to provide recommendations on landscapes that could merit local landscape designation. The merit of each LCA identified in the 2022 LCA was considered against the following local landscape designation criteria: natural heritage, cultural heritage, recreation, landscape quality (condition and intactness), local distinctiveness, perceptual and scenic and functional.

4.2.50 The following extract from the Review of Local Landscape Designations states the following outlines how LCA 1b: Gayhurst and Stokepark Wooded Wolds perform against the local landscape designation criteria, where relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development:

- *“Natural heritage: Ancient woodlands are concentrated in the east, with Stokepark Wood and Little Linford Wood designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). These woodlands and hedgerow boundaries provide some evidence of ecological interest which contribute positively to landscape character.*
- *Cultural heritage: A landscape with important cultural features. Historically the LCA formed part of Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest which provides cultural time depth. The Royal Forest was incorporated into the parkland character of Hanslope Park, originally a deer park within Salcey Forest. There is a strong historic field pattern with assarts and pre-18th century co-axial enclosure. Historic features are clustered at Hanslope, which has a designated Conservation Area and includes the Grade I listed St James the Great, which has the tallest church spire in Buckinghamshire. These features all contribute to the cultural interest of the landscape. There are no known associations with notable people, events or the arts.*
- *Recreation: The LCA has excellent recreational access, with a number of long-distance routes including the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, Three Shires Way, Midshires Way and Hanslope Circular Ride.*
- *Landscape quality (condition and intactness): The parkland character at Hanslope Park has been negatively impacted by 20th century development, including floodlighting and security gates. Major transport routes and a solar farm, and the variable condition of hedgerows, also detract from landscape quality.*
- *Local distinctiveness: The strong elevated plateau landform and wooded backdrop are distinctive features, and relatively rare within Milton Keynes district, contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place. The landscape provides an important rural setting to Hanslope village.*
- *Perceptual and scenic: Views to woodland within the LCA and to the north, and long views over adjacent river valleys results in a strong visual character. The contrast between enclosure within woodlands and openness in the arable fields contributes to the scenic quality of the landscape. Overall, this is a strongly*