

STOKE HAMMOND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SCOPING SESSION REPORT

MARCH 2022

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Stoke Hammond Parish Council (SHPC) has begun the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) covering the whole of the Parish. The Neighbourhood Area has been designated by the local planning authority, Bucks Council, an initial community survey has been undertaken and SHPC is in the process of expanding the membership of the Project Steering Group (PSG) to manage the project on a day to day basis on behalf of SHPC.

1.2 SHPC has appointed specialist consultants ONeill Homer (OH) to provide support to the project and they advised that a scoping session be held to discuss the project context, the initial evidence base and the survey outcome. This would begin to identify the types of planning policy ideas that will meet the community's expectations of the NP and that will address the opportunities and challenges presented by national, sub-regional and local planning policy.

1.3 This report is a summary of what was discussed at the session (held on 26 January 2022) and contains OH thoughts since on that discussion. It makes a series of recommendations to the PSG in the form of an initial set of policy ideas to explore and actions for doing so. The report now sets the starting brief for the next stage of the project. The slide pack used to inform the session is published separately though some key information in it is included in this report.

2. Key Discussion Points

2.1 The Parish contains not just the village of Stoke Hammond on its SE boundary but also the new housing area of Newton Leys on its northern boundary, and area that extends into the Parish from a much larger housing area in Milton Keynes.

2.2 As a modern development, Newton Leys has been planned. Whilst it is likely this means little needs to be done there as it is a significant part of the overall Parish this needs to be confirmed. Although smaller (approx. 400 population in this Parish) than the village (approx. 800 population) its community will have a vote at the referendum at the end of the project.

2.3 The survey has a reasonable response – sufficient to inform this early stage of the project (but notably skewed towards 45+ age persons of couple households) – and its key insights are:

- A strong desire that the identity of the village is maintained going forward
- A keenness to protect local biodiversity, landscape character and heritage
- An interest in enhancing community facilities that have been overlooked by piecemeal but significant growth in recent years
- Tackling the increasing harmful effects of road traffic

- Possible support for new housing and commercial development but very dependent on type and location and in any event of a small scale suited to the rural character of the village and its surroundings

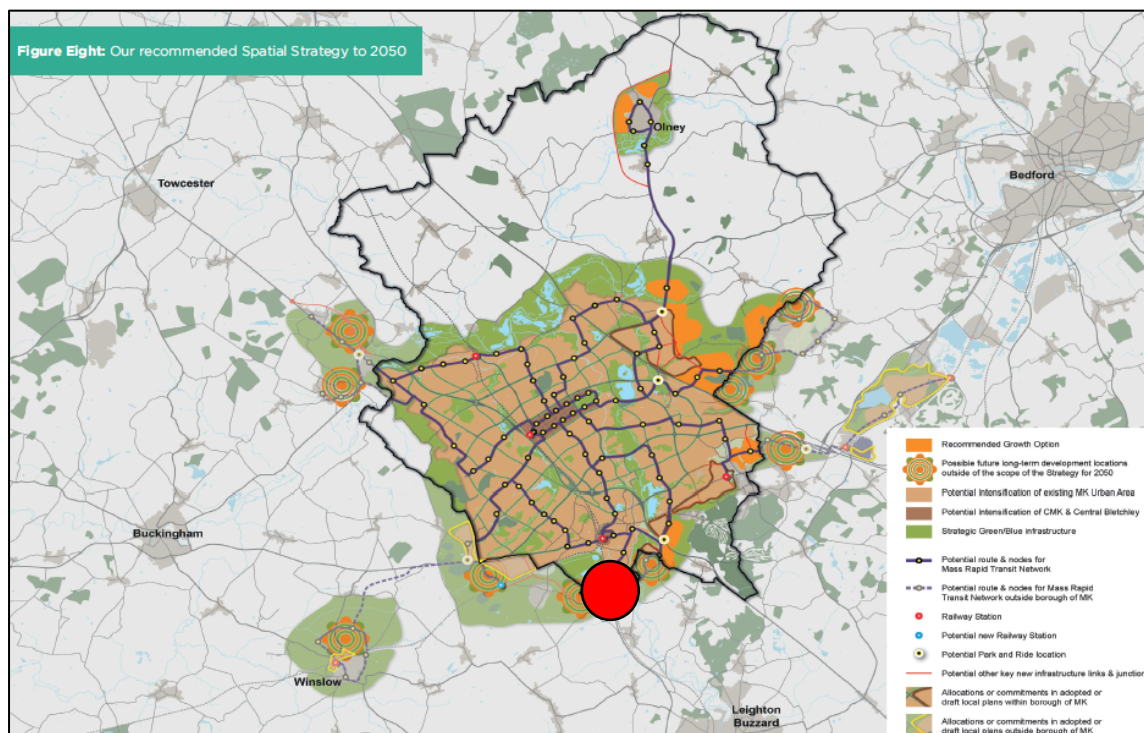
2.4 The general view of the session was that recent housing schemes have fitted into the village reasonably well in terms of location, size and design but have been primarily larger (3+ bed), relatively expensive market houses

2.5 The Census 2021 data will show a higher village population and likely an increase in family households, although the village has no primary school – it was noted that there are other housing schemes approved but not yet built in the village – notably at Fenny Road (64 homes)

2.6 The recently (2021) adopted Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) defines the village as ‘medium’ and requires no further land allocated in its plan period to 2033; it also identifies the eastern half of the Parish (part of the Ouzel floodplain) as an Area of Attractive Landscape.

2.7 Bucks will be bringing forward its first Local Plan (to replace VALP and to cover the period to 2040) by early 2025, with evidence work already underway.

2.8 Plan:MK contains Newton Leys within the approved scheme boundaries along Drayton Road (but not as far as Stoke Road) to 2031; the non-statutory MK 2050 document (2021) identifies the open land to Stoke Road as part of a wider potential post 2050 growth area stretching towards Newton Longville (see plan extract below).



2.9 The Bucks Minerals & Waste Plan identifies large parts of the Parish as a Minerals Safeguarding Area. There is a designated Conservation Area covering part of the village (within which almost all the Parish listed buildings are located) but there is no full character appraisal. Large parts of the village lie within areas of mapped (Environment Agency) surface/ground water flood risk.

2.10 There remains considerable landowner/developer interest around the edges of the village and on the remaining open fields adjoining Newton Leys (per the 2017 SHLAA document).

2.11 Given the location and current status of the village in the settlement hierarchy, it was considered likely that Bucks will continue to see it as a potentially sustainable location for further housing growth from 2025 – 2040, although any such growth would be in proportion to its status (say 40-50 homes derived from new sites and infill/change of use within the village). It may also be that some of that growth will include homes approved in the period since VALP was examined and before the NP is made.

2.12 Securing a new primary school for the village to make it more self-sustaining and less reliant on its neighbours would require significantly greater population growth (approx. 500 homes) to make it viable to deliver and operate – it does not appear from the survey that demand for a new school is that strong to warrant further investigation, and there is a new school at Newton Leys, although the survey demographic may be unrepresentative of families.

2.13 The community facilities (hall, preschool, sports pitches etc) at Bragenham Side are popular but there have been past ideas to improve them further; SHPC acquired the land to the E of the Hall some years ago with this in mind and has debated if the NP is now the right time to revisit those ideas.

2.14 The survey sought views on post Covid trends like access to some form of rural business hub (to support home workers and nurture new businesses) and to open spaces and walking/cycling routes – there was very clear interest in the latter and some interest in the former but it was very much caveated (what? where?), again perhaps reflecting the profile of the survey response?

3. Observations

3.1 There are essentially two options for the scope of the NP:

- an easier (quicker) plan that focuses on development management policies only (essentially on design and environmental matters), leaving future site allocation decisions to the Bucks Local Plan with SHPC making its representations and making its case separately from the NP
- a more challenging (longer) plan that contains the same development management policies but also allocates land for housing and other types of development (Bragenham Side community facilities, rural hub etc) rather than hoping Bucks makes the right decisions (and that speculative

development proposals in the meantime – at least three years – do not undermine the NP)

3.2 These are very common options for NPs in this context; there is no right or wrong answer, it is both a judgement on managing risk (technical and political) and a reflection of the nature of the opportunities that new development may create. The technical risk is that leaving the future growth of the village to the Local Plan could mean that a) the wrong land is allocated (in the view of a majority of the community) or b) that Bucks won't have the time or expertise to realise innovative development ideas (i.e. just about finding the least worst housing sites to meet a target). This risk is managed by using OH expertise and experience, and liaising with Bucks, to anticipate future 'top down' policy influence from the emerging Local Plan and to follow the proper processes (for site assessment and strategic environmental assessment).

3.3 The political risk is there may not be enough local support for the NP taking the longer route (because the community either doesn't think any more growth is necessary or likely or because it doesn't think the 'prize' of securing investment in the village outweighs a perceived 'cost' of more houses). This risk is managed by positive and consistent community engagement to inform and seek feedback, especially from those households that may not have responded to the survey the first time around.

3.4 In practise, the decision on which route to take rests on whether or not to rule out the challenging route now - it is much easier to start by pursuing that route but deciding to switch to the other route later on (if the political risk becomes too high) than it is to start on the easier route and switch later – the beauty of NPs is they are voluntary and the choice of route and policy is only for SHPC.

3.5 Following its consideration of this report the PSG has chosen to proceed with Route 2, but the contents of Route 1 are still relevant and so are set out in section 4 below.

4. Route 1

4.1 If this route had been taken, then the following conventional NP policy ideas could be pursued to address the feedback from the survey:

1. **Settlement Boundaries** – to define the extent of the village and Newton Leys (to distinguish between settlement and countryside policies – almost all NPs in the former AVDC area have this)
2. **Design Guidance/Coding** – to set out the different characteristics and design principles (for infill, extensions etc) for not just the Conservation Area but all other parts of the village and Newton Leys
3. **Local Heritage Assets** – to identify buildings and structures that are not of national importance but of local importance (architecture or history) for some degree of protection above the norm
4. **Green Infrastructure** – defining a network of natural assets throughout the Parish for protection and improvement – might also include designating Local Green Spaces within the village or Newton Leys for extra protection from development

5. **Sustainable Travel** – to define a network of footpaths, cycleways and bridleways for protection and potential extension/better connections
6. **Housing Mix** – to set out the required mix of housing types (i.e. sizes) and tenures (i.e. market/affordable) for all housing schemes (say 5+ homes) – might also set criteria for where outside the Settlement Boundaries is appropriate for First Homes Exception Sites (a new national policy allowing small housing schemes for low cost homes for first time buyers)
7. **PassivHaus Standard** – to require all new buildings (homes etc) to be zero carbon using this international standard or if not practical to pass a ‘post occupancy evaluation’ test to show excellent performance (in advance of Bucks or national standards)
8. **Traffic Management** – to require all new development schemes (above a certain size?) to contribute to traffic management measures in the village

4.2 Other ideas may emerge, but these are likely to be the core of the scope. Others, like biodiversity and landscape, are already well covered by national and VALP policies, so do not need repetition.

4.3 This route would not require a parallel strategic environmental assessment (SEA) process. It may benefit from a housing needs assessment (HNA) to evidence the housing mix policy (which can be obtained for free via Locality). The remaining evidence is reasonably simple for the PSG to pull together, with OH support, and comprises mostly mapping (using primarily public sources of online information).

5. Route 2

5.1 This route includes all of the Route 1 policy ideas but also one or more policies allocating land for development. This will require a site assessment process that will incorporate a ‘call for sites’ from landowners and necessary SEA of reasonable alternative sites. OH has a templated site assessment process and the PSG can also secure the SEA work for free via Locality.

5.2 It is advised that the PSG arranges an informal engagement exercise before the formal draft NP stage. This provides the opportunity to test community opinion on the available sites so the PSG can blend the technical assessments with a ‘political’ assessment to inform its site choice. This cannot be done at the formal consultation stage. The PSG may also want to test opinion on its other emerging policy ideas so the project doesn’t appear dominated by site decisions.

5.3 This route will take time for the site assessment process to be completed, including the additional community engagement exercise. The first step will be completing some of the evidence base for the other policy ideas that should provide the PSG with enough information to prepare a brief to landowners in the ‘Call for Sites’. The brief sets out what types of development the PSG is looking to assess and the features that will be prioritised in site selection. This approach greatly simplifies the process from the outset and places the PSG firmly in control. Thereafter, the PSG follows the templated process with OH managing it, preparing the sites report and overseeing the SEA work.

5.4 The PSG is advised to set up task teams: one to oversee the sites work with OH, one to focus on the other policies, and one to devise, deliver and monitor a simple communications plan. This acknowledges these are different work streams and some PSG members (and others in the community) may be more interested and willing to participate in one task team than with the broader work. If teams are set up then they normally need to meet three or four times up the end of stage two and need to report back to the PSG on their progress every month. It is best for each team to be chaired by a PSG member who is responsible for this reporting back. The advantage of the communications team is its ability to co-ordinate all of the online and offline publicity, engagement and consultation activities.

5.5 OH estimates that this route will reach the draft NP consultation stage early in 2023, with the earlier informal engagement exercise either just before or after the summer break. If that milestone is met then the project should be completed in June 2023.

6. Resourcing

6.1 As noted above, the PSG will have access to free technical support packages on application to Locality. Its contractor, AECOM, works to a standard brief, which OH normally provides and manages on behalf of its NP clients. Applications for these packages can be made at any time.

6.2 There is also the grant that is being used to pay OH. PSG should be able to secure the additional £8k to make a full grant of £18k. In which case, OH fees should be covered in full by the grant. The PSG must first spend its 2021/22 grant by 31 March, then apply for the remainder of the initial £10k grant when the grant application window reopens in May. It can apply again for the extra £8k later in the year prior to exhausting that sum.

6.3 OH will provide the PSG with a clear steer on all the necessary tasks in both routes and will produce the key documents using its templates. It will help project manage by maintaining a simple project plan and by providing the PSG with forward agendas through 2022. It is recommended that the PSG meets monthly (with interim task teams if used). The main focus of the PSG's time and energy is on collating and analysing the evidence (with OH guidance), engaging with the community and making informed policy choices.

7. Next Steps

7.1 With the decision to proceed with Route 2, OH will now prepare an action plan including a project plan timetable, and forward PSG agendas to see the project through to the end of stage two, i.e. the publication of the formal draft NP.