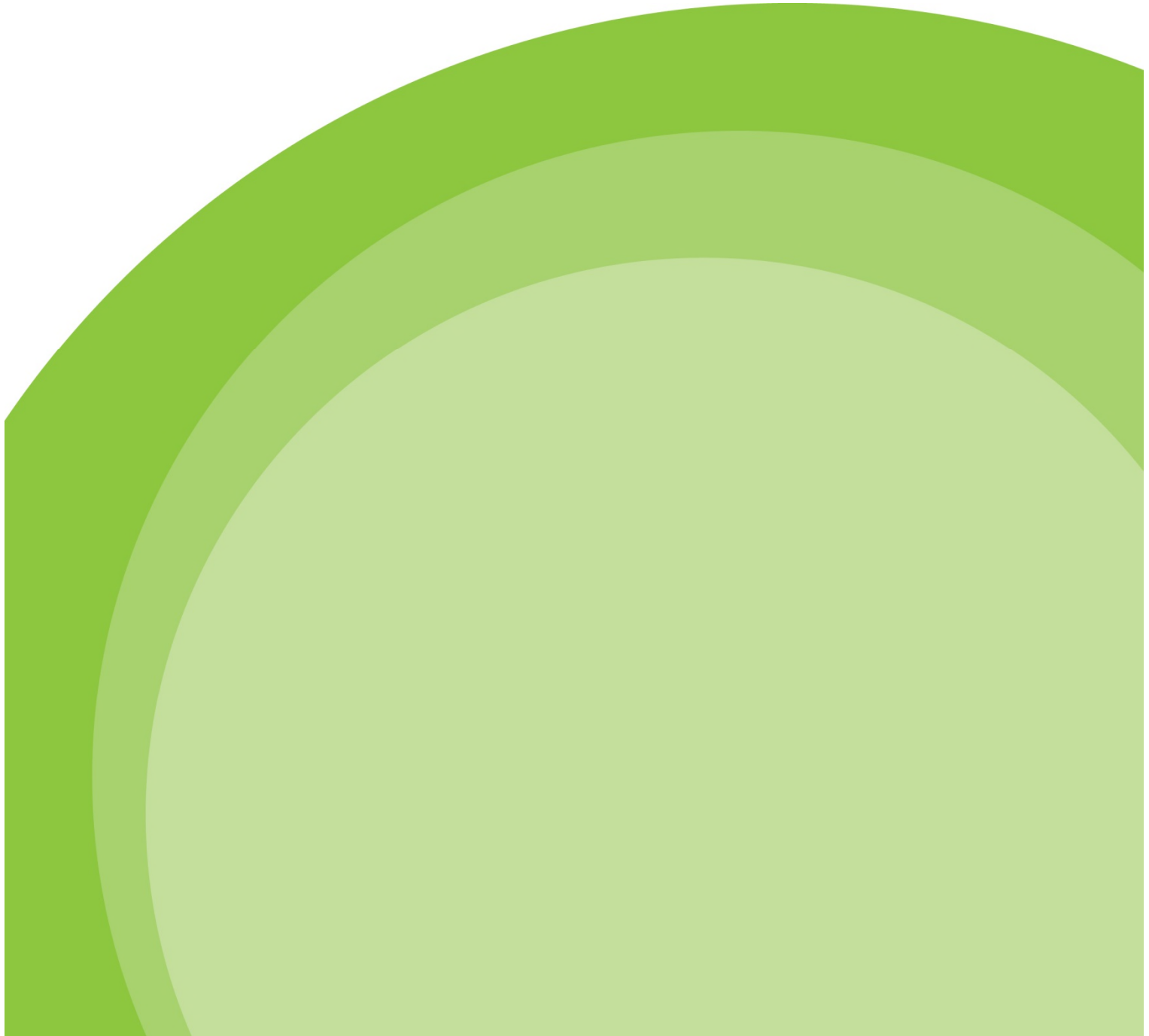


Settlements Capacity: Initial Study

July 2017



Initial Settlement Capacity Study for Central Bedfordshire

1. Introduction

Scope

- 1.1 This study has been prepared as a background paper to Central Bedfordshire's Local Plan 2015-2035. Undertaken by consultants Enfusion, it was commissioned to provide an assessment of the overall sustainability of settlements within Central Bedfordshire. It is important to stress that the study is not driven by a need to identify capacity for a particular level of housing, rather it is an objective study which seeks to determine how much growth could sustainably be accommodated within our existing settlements. Alongside other technical studies it will inform the Council's approach to site allocation in the pre-submission version of the Local Plan.
- 1.2 For this study, capacity refers to physical and quantitative capacities - such as land area and roads/traffic, the presence/absence of certain facilities/services and their capacity; and qualitative capacities - such as landscape and community integration. It is not an Urban Capacity Study which would focus purely on the availability of land, nor an Environmental Capacity Study focused on Ecosystem Services.
- 1.3 Although potential development constraints of land surrounding settlements was taken into account in determining capacity, the study does not factor in the availability of sites when assessing capacity.

Status

- 1.3 Finally, as noted, the study draws on and has been undertaken in parallel with other technical studies, and therefore some information, for example with regard to transport, water and healthcare provision, has not been available. This information will be incorporated and the Study updated as and when it becomes available. Therefore this Study is presented as an Initial Settlement Capacity report for public consultation. Comments made will be taken into account, together with ongoing technical studies, and a final Settlement Capacity Report prepared. This will be submitted for consultation alongside the Pre-Submission Local Plan and other supporting documents in early 2018.

2. Executive Summary and Key Findings

- 2.1 A total of 75 settlements were assessed as part of this Study. Settlements were grouped according to the Council's 4 options for the overall development strategy for the new Plan: Area A; Area B; Area C; and Area D. The Study did not assess all Central Bedfordshire's Settlements, but instead investigated only those settlements with at least a basic range of services or facilities which might make them suitable for accommodating development growth. On this basis 44 hamlets with no services or facilities, and 21 smaller settlements with very limited services and facilities were excluded from assessment.

2.2 Using the available information and professional judgement the Study assigned indicative capacity ratings of ‘High’ (>500 homes), ‘Medium’ (50-500 homes) and ‘Low’ (<50 new homes) to each of the 75 settlement assessed as part of the Study. It should be stressed that whilst a number of settlements were assessed as having medium or high potential for growth, this does not mean that they will ultimately be taken forward within the Local Plan. This information is summarised below:

Area A Settlements:

2.3 Area A is covered by Green Belt designation, and accordingly each settlement has been given two capacity ratings: the first shows potential capacity if Green Belt were to be released, and the second capacity if it was not. It should be stressed that the Study makes no assumptions with regards the performance of Green Belt land, nor any recommendations regarding the desirability of its release in any given location. This information is simply given to distinguish between those settlements which have low potential capacity due to a lack of services and facilities etc, and those which have high potential capacity but for the presence of Green Belt.

2.4 Area A has been identified as having the highest potential capacity if Green Belt were to be released, with the greatest number of High and Medium – High scoring settlements.

Settlement	Initial Capacity Assessment
Amphill	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Aspley Guise	Low (without Green Belt release: Medium - Low)
Aspley Heath	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Barton-le-Clay	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Billington	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Caddington	Low -Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Dunstable	Medium – Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eaton Bray	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eggington	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eversholt (Churchend)	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Flitwick	Medium - High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Harlington	Medium-High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Heath and Reach	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Hockliffe	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Houghton Regis	High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Husborne Crawley	Low - Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Kensworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Leighton Linlade	Medium – High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Linslade	Medium – High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Millbrook	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Milton Bryan	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Ridgmont	Low - Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Slip End	Medium - Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Stanbridge	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Steppingley	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Streatley	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Studham	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)

Tebworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Tilsworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Tingrith	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Toddington	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Totternhoe	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Westoning	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Whipsnade	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Woburn	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)

Area B Settlements:

- 2.5 A number of settlements within Area B have been identified as having High, and Medium – High capacity, with Sandy identified as offering the highest capacity for growth within area B.

Settlement	Capacity
Arlesey	Medium - High
Biggleswade	Medium - High
Dunton	Low
Edworth	Low
Fairfield	Medium
Henlow	Medium - Low
Langford	Medium - Low
Potton	Medium
Sandy	High
Stotfold	Medium - Low
Tempsford	Low
Wrestlingworth	Low

Area C Settlements:

- 2.6 No settlements in Area C were found to have a high capacity for growth. Marston Moretaine is the only settlement located within Area C with medium capacity.

Settlement	Capacity
Cranfield	Low
Houghton Conquest	Low
Lidlington	Low
Lower / Upper Shelton	Low
Marston Moretaine	Medium
Salford	Low

Area D Settlements:

- 2.7 No settlements in Area D have been identified with the potential capacity for high levels of growth.

Settlement	Capacity
Blunham	Low
Campton	Low
Clifton	Low
Clophill	Low
Everton	Low
Flitton & Greenfield	Low
Upper Gravenhurst	Low
Haynes	Low
Lower Stondon	Medium
Maulden	Medium
Meppershall	Medium
Moggerhanger	Low
Northill	Low
Old Warden	Low
Pulloxhill	Low
Shefford	Medium
Shillington	Low
Silsoe	Low
Southill	Low
Upper Caldecote	Low - Medium
Upper Stondon	Low

3. Summary of implications

3.1 The outcomes of the study provide the Council with high level potential capacities for development growth within our settlements. The Study will be updated to reflect emerging technical evidence prepared in support of the Local Plan, as well as comments received during the Regulation 18 consultation. It will then be considered alongside other technical evidence (such as the Luton Housing Market Area Growth Options Study, the North Central Bedfordshire Growth Options Study, transportation modelling, the Green Belt Study, detailed site assessment work and the sustainability appraisal) to inform the allocation of sites in the Plan.

Appendix A

Central Bedfordshire Council Local Plan Initial Settlement Capacity Study

May 2017



CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

SETTLEMENTS CAPACITY: INITIAL STUDY

May 2017

enfusion



Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Settlements Capacity: Initial Study

May 2017

date:	April 2017 Draft May 2017 Final	
prepared for:	Central Bedfordshire Council	
prepared by:	Cheryl Beattie Owen Jeffreys Jim Claydon Barbara Carroll David Payne Andrew Marsh	Enfusion Enfusion Enfusion/JCA Enfusion Cissbury Consulting Central Bedfordshire Council
quality assurance:	Barbara Carroll	Enfusion

enfusion

environmental planning and management for sustainability



Treenwood House
Rowden Lane
Bradford-on-Avon
BA15 2AU
T: 01225 867112
www.enfusion.co.uk

CONTENTS		PAGE
1	INTRODUCTION	4
	Developing the New Local Plan	4
	Consultation & Duty to Cooperate	4
	The Emerging Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire	
	Assessing Settlements & Potential Capacity to Accommodate Growth	6
	Purpose & Overview of the Settlements Study	7
	Aims of the Study	8
	Structure of this Report	8
2	APPROACH & METHODS	9
	General	9
	What do we mean by Capacity?	9
	Methods: Information	10
	Methods: Initial Constraints & Assets Analysis	
	Methods: Capacity Assessment	11
	Assumptions Made, Gaps in Information, & Uncertainties	14
3	SUMMARY INITIAL POTENTIAL SETTLEMENT CAPACITIES	16
	Introduction	
	Area A: South & West, and adjacent Luton/M1 Corridor	16
	Area B: East/A1 Corridor North-South Sandy to Arlesey	18
	Area C: East-West Corridor A421/M1 & East-West Rail to the North	19
	Area D: Central Section	19
4	SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS	20
TABLES		
	3.1 Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Area A	16
	3.2 Settlements in Area A close to mainline rail connections	17
	3.3 Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Area B	18
	3.4 Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Area C	19
	3.5 Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Area D	20
APPENDICES (available as separate documents)		
Ia	Constraints & Assets Analysis – Factors & Thresholds	
Ib	Constraints & Assets Analysis – Summary Findings	
II	Detailed Capacity Assessments: Settlements in Areas A-D	
A-D		

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Developing the New Local Plan

- 1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) launched the development of the new Local Plan in February 2016. The Local Plan will set out a vision for how the area will develop in the future (to 2035) by considering future needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure. It will set out principles and policies to guide future development – including for protection of the environment, adaptation to climate change, and to secure good design.
- 1.2 The new Local Plan is being developed over 2 years (2016-18) in accordance with national legislative planning requirements¹, guidance, and the approved Local Development Scheme. Planning for development in Central Bedfordshire is complex because the area is closely linked with other council areas - sharing job and housing markets with Milton Keynes, Luton, Bedford and Stevenage.
- 1.3 The Plan will be underpinned by a range of technical studies such as economic market assessments, options for development growth, a review of the Green Belt, strategic flood risk, water cycle study, and transport assessments. The emerging elements of the Plan will also be subject to testing through Sustainability Appraisal – a statutory requirement through the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 165 NPPF, 2012)² that integrates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations (2004) with regard to plan-making.

Consultation & Duty to Cooperate

- 1.4 Early, ongoing and effective consultation is an essential component of plan-making and assessment processes. The findings of technical studies and the issues or concerns raised through consultation are considered in the ongoing and iterative processes of decision-making and plan-making. Statutory and advisory consultations are made with the public through the Council's website and community meetings.
- 1.5 The Council also has a legal duty to cooperate with other local planning authorities (LPAs) in accordance with paragraphs 178-181 of the NPPF³. This includes potential joint working to enable local planning authorities to meet development requirements that cannot wholly be met within their own area, and to consider cross-boundary impacts. CBC will continue with its good working relationships with neighbouring areas in the preparation of the new Local Plan.

¹ The Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

³ Ibid

- 1.6 In relation to the need for housing and existing growth restraints within some of the surrounding areas (for example, Luton), there is the potential that Central Bedfordshire may need to accommodate growth from outside the plan area in the future, in order to meet the needs of the wider housing market area.

The Emerging Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire

- 1.7 Development growth can deliver strong opportunities, such as improvements to transport and community services, provision of green infrastructure, and enhancements to townscape character through regeneration. However, there are also constraints limiting the possibilities for accommodating the identified need for housing and employment land with associated infrastructure. Some of these constraints are implemented by international legislation, for example, European designated biodiversity, or by the realities of physical capacity and limited investment costs, such as for the transport network. Other planning constraints, such as the Green Belt designation and the capacity of settlements/communities to accommodate development growth, may be more negotiable.
- 1.8 The characteristics of the CBC area, including constraints and opportunities, define the options for the overall development strategy for the new Plan. The CBC area may be categorised into 4 areas according to different characteristics and indicating the possibilities in broad terms for development growth as follows:
- **Area A South & West adjacent to Luton/M1 Corridor:** constrained by the Chilterns AONB and Green Belt; potential for medium scale growth along the M1, A5 & the railway or large scale growth for sites adjacent to Luton
 - **Area B East/A1 Corridor North-South Sandy to Arlesey:** along the Ivel Valley corridor north of Sandy; potential for large scale growth including new settlements
 - **Area C East-West Corridor A421/M1 & East-West Rail to the North:** potential for large scale growth including new settlements
 - **Area D Central Section:** constrained by rural nature; any growth potential is limited small to medium at suitable settlements with good services & sustainable transport connections
- 1.9 These 4 Areas characterising development constraints and opportunities were presented in a leaflet⁴ *Shaping Central Bedfordshire* on the Council's website in mid-September 2016 until 1 November 2016. Comments were invited from the public, statutory consultees, landowners, developers and their agents. Comments made and concerns raised were taken into account in developing the Growth Locations and Strategic Scenarios for growth that are proposed in the initial Regulation 18 draft of the Local Plan (June/July 2017).

⁴ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/local-plan/shaping-central-beds-consultation.aspx>

- 1.10 Comments received on this draft Local Plan through consultation commencing in June/July 2017 will be taken into account, together with the findings of ongoing technical studies. The next draft will be the Pre-Submission Local Plan for consultation commencing in early 2018. This draft Plan will also include proposed sites allocated for future development to meet with identified needs for housing, including for Gypsies & Travellers, and employment land.
- 1.11 Over 800 site submissions were made by agents, landowners and developers to the two Calls for Sites made in 2014 and 2016. The full list⁵ of submitted sites was published with accompanying parish maps on 25 May 2016 on the Council's website. The Council will not need to allocate the total land that has been submitted to deliver the new homes and employment land needed. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the submitted sites to identify those that are deliverable, best promote the aims of the Plan, and will progress sustainable development. The Council has developed three Sites Assessment criteria-based methods that have also been subject to public consultation.
- 1.12 Potential site options will be assessed and considered through the Sustainability Appraisal process. The suitability of potential sites will depend in part upon the character and capacity of settlements to accommodate development growth. Therefore, it was decided in autumn 2016 to investigate the capacity of settlements to absorb development.

Assessing Settlements & Potential Capacity to Accommodate Growth

- 1.13 Other technical studies⁶ have investigated options for strategic development growth based on the potential sites identified from the call for sites. Sites were screened for primary and secondary constraints. The findings informed the development of the potential Growth Locations and Scenarios for distributing the identified growth needed.
- 1.14 The effects of new growth on settlements may be positive and/or negative, depending upon the nature of the new development and the sensitivity and/or character of the existing settlement. Some factors are tangible and measurable, such as the capacity of a school to take more pupils; other factors are less tangible and qualitative, such as quality of life with the importance attributed to the character and assets of a settlement and its communities. It can be difficult to identify the tipping points⁷ at which the cumulative effects of increasing development become unacceptable – or reach a certain threshold above which additional facilities or services may become economically viable and acceptable. This will vary according to:
- the character of the settlement and its communities
 - associated infrastructure – services & facilities, transport

⁵ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/local-plan/call-for-sites/overview.aspx>

⁶North Central Bedfordshire Growth Options Study; Luton Housing Market Area Growth Options Study (LUC, December 2016)

⁷ "the moment when an idea, trend or social behaviour crosses a threshold, tips and spreads like wildfire" Gladwell (2000) <http://gladwell.com/the-tipping-point/>

- condition, sensitivity & use of environmental resources, including green infrastructure
- 1.15 Settlements in Area A have tended to experience small-scale piecemeal developments within their built-up areas due to the Green Belt constraints. However, such developments have not brought about additions or improvements to facilities and services in these towns and villages. This is a particular characteristic of development in the CBC area that needs to be considered.
- 1.16 Accommodating growth on behalf of neighbouring authorities may have negative effects for effective integration, particularly in consideration of the cultural diversity and density of the surrounding towns in comparison to Central Bedfordshire and its predominantly rural landscape and character. This approach may also increase densities along the CBC administrative boundary (if the extra growth is delivered near settlements in the neighbouring authority).

Purpose & Overview of the Settlements Study

- 1.17 This study aims to investigate – at a strategic level - constraints, assets, opportunities and the capacity to accommodate change with additional development growth for settlements in the CBC area. The Council will use the outputs of this work to both inform the allocation of sites in the Plan and set the context for decisions on individual (windfall) planning applications.
- 1.18 Whilst there is a range of currently available or emerging evidence, this is not generally tailored or set out to clearly demonstrate the development constraints and opportunities at a settlement level. This study sought to avoid duplication but rather complement and inform other studies, whilst using the emerging shared evidence base for the Plan. Only existing information has been used, so there are data gaps and uncertainties have been identified.
- 1.19 For this study, capacity refers to physical and quantitative capacities - such as land area and roads/traffic; it also refers to qualitative capacities - such as landscape and community integration. These capacities are explained further in the following Section 2 on methods. The study has been undertaken in parallel with early plan-making and other technical studies such that key information, particularly with regard to transport, water and other infrastructure, has not been available.
- 1.20 Therefore, this study is presented as an Initial Settlement Capacity Report for consultation with the draft Local Plan and other accompanying technical studies. Comments made will be taken into account, together with ongoing technical studies and community engagement studies when completed in early 2017, and a final Settlements Capacity Report prepared. This will be submitted for consultation with the Pre-Submission Local Plan and other supporting documents in early 2018.

Aims of the Study

- 1.21 The capacity of settlements interacts with other studies and plan-making stages such that there are a number of roles and aims for the study as follows:
- Identify high level potential capacities for development growth in defined settlement areas
 - Help inform the Growth Options Study, the Sites Assessment work, and the subsequent Sustainability Appraisal of settlements. Provide an overview of the characteristics and condition of each settlement, setting out known constraints and likely sensitivities to development growth
 - Carry out a strategic assessment to determine the sensitivity of each settlement to change, trying to identify thresholds and tipping points beyond which adverse effects may occur; identify possibilities for mitigation measures and acknowledging information gaps and uncertainties
 - If possible, identify broad areas in each settlement that have the least sensitivity and therefore greatest capacity to accommodate development; estimate approximate capacity for growth (high, medium, low)
 - Help provide the context for decision-making on individual (windfall) planning applications

Structure of this Report

- 1.22 Following Section 1 (this section) introducing and setting the context for the study, Section 2 describes the approach and methods used. The detailed findings for each settlement investigated are presented in the technical appendices I-II. Section 3 discusses the findings and considers the implications for plan-making and community consultation. The final Section 4 provides a summary, including suggestions for areas with the capacity for development growth.

2.0 APPROACH & METHODS

General

- 2.1 The overall approach is to keep the study at a strategic level – appropriate to these early stages of plan-making – and using the shared evidence base for the Plan. Key technical studies were ongoing at the same time, for example, strategic flood risk and transport assessments, such that gaps and uncertainties were noted. A pragmatic approach was taken to use available and emerging information to investigate the capacity of certain settlements to accommodate change as a result of additional housing development. The methods were developed and refined in an iterative way between the consultants and the Central Bedfordshire Council Officers.

What do we mean by Capacity?

- 2.2 The capacity of each element of the three aspects for sustainable development (economic, social, & environmental) has to be judged according to its own standards and methods. Some limits are agreed through international targets, for example limiting carbon emissions to reduce climate change effects. The capacity of certain factors is clearly technical and quantitative – for example, the numbers of additional pupils at a school, volume/quality of additional wastewater/surface water run-off, additional traffic on the road network, and irreversible loss of a locally important species/habitat.
- 2.3 The capacity of other factors is more qualitative and can be harder to investigate – for example, the cumulative effects of development on landscape/visual impact, amenity, and historic/cultural assets and their values. These quality of life factors vary with the characteristics of a settlement and its communities. Such environmental and social capacities are often determined by political judgment and societal choices that decide what change is acceptable.
- 2.4 It may be possible to avoid, mitigate and/or compensate for potential effects of proposed development and thus increase the capacity of an area. For example, water efficient appliances and sustainable drainage systems can allow for more development to be delivered without unacceptable abstraction of water or flooding risk. The restoration and creation of habitats to strengthen green infrastructure can help to compensate for those lost to development. Screening, choice of materials and careful design of buildings can help make new developments more acceptable to local people. Capacity for development is also increased through investment in infrastructure to accommodate needs and manage/mitigate effects.
- 2.5 Thus the capacity for development growth is identified by considering the sensitivity to change of the receiving settlement (communities, people, infrastructure, and environmental receptors). Generally, sensitivity may be derived from combining judgments on the susceptibility to change and the

value or importance attached to the asset or receiving environment. Susceptibility considers nature, use, robustness and condition; value considers quality/quantity, use, rarity, cultural and recreational importance. It may be possible to change capacity through avoiding or mitigating an adverse effect on a sensitive receptor. This approach draws upon strategic landscape character assessment methods and aligns with the ecosystem approach used for managing natural resources.

Methods: Information

- 2.6 The study is desk based, using existing qualitative and quantitative sources of information held by CBC (such as the Employment & Economic Study, the Landscape Character Assessment, the Green Belt Study, and the Environmental Framework⁸), Defra MAGIC map⁹, Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England, and other organisations such as the Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership.
- 2.7 The settlement audit¹⁰ from CBC provides basic information about the provision of facilities, services and accessibility in each settlement. The Parish Maps with the submitted sites provide locational information including key national designations (Green Belt, Flood Zones 2 & 3, AONB, NNRs, SSSIs, SMs & Historic Parks & Gardens). Further information such as Conservation Areas, agricultural land quality, and aspirations for green infrastructure within the Environmental Network were identified. Key information, such as the capacity of Health Centres/GPs, and from technical studies, such as the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and transport modelling were not available and information from their findings will be incorporated in the updated report. Key information was taken from the Local Transport Plan 3 as this represents the most recent strategic transport planning and provides relevant strategic information.

Methods: Initial Constraints & Assets Analysis

- 2.8 This basic information was considered against a checklist of factors that had been correlated with the Sites Assessment and SA Frameworks, to identify significant likely conditions, constraints and possibilities for each settlement. Incorporating the principle that any potential development would be considered for settlements that already include basic services and facilities, three levels of development constraints analysis were investigated against this checklist of factors as follows:

	Limited or no development constraint
	Moderate development constraint
	Potential major development constraint

- 2.9 Appendix Ia details the criteria and thresholds identified for each factor, together with the information sources used. The absence or presence of

⁸ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/natural/environmental-framework.aspx>

⁹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

¹⁰ CBC (October 2016) Settlement Audit

employment land was not relevant for this initial constraints analysis. Any key employment types identified through the data and internet searching were noted. For some factors, a category for major constraints was not applicable – for example, the absence of a community hall or bank/ATM. For other factors, for example, absence of a primary or secondary school - although a potential constraint to major development might be identified it is possible that development might resolve existing educational capacity issues or help reach a threshold locally that might justify a new school. Certain factors, such as flood risk and nationally designated biodiversity, are driven by other legislation and policy such that the likely significance of negative effects and mitigation possibilities can be more readily aligned with the three categories of constraint.

- 2.10 Appendix Ib is a spreadsheet presenting the summary initial findings with colour coded capacity assessments (orange/amber/green) for each factor and for each settlement investigated. The updated settlement maps by parish include all the mapped constraints and assets identified (available on the Council's website). This is an initial analysis that was used as an easy to look-up resource to inform the subsequent capacity assessment.

Methods: Capacity Assessment

- 2.11 **Overview:** Using the identified information from the initial analysis, the extant evidence base, and professional judgment (including local knowledge from Officers), the assessment considered the sensitivity of key assets/factors and likely impacts from new development to estimate the likely capacity for accommodating additional housing growth for each settlement. The settlement boundary for the purposes of this study is the parish boundary and as published on the Council's website as the Full List of Sites by Parish¹¹.
- 2.14 **Settlement Character & Planning Context:** An estimation of the character of each settlement was made using available information on location, size (population & number of dwellings), any strategic connections, employment/age profiles of residents, services and facilities. Character is also derived from physical and environmental factors – these are dealt with separately and explained in the following paragraphs. Expert advice from specialist Officers at the Council (for example, Planning and Landscape) complemented the desk-based assessment undertaken by consultants.
- 2.15 The intention to develop any Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was noted. The location of Green Belt designation was noted, together with consideration of emerging findings from the Green Belt Study¹². Certain pockets of Green Belt land were identified to be making a weak or relatively weak contribution to all the Green Belt purposes outlined in the NPPF. These relatively small pockets of Green Belt all lie adjacent to the existing urban edges of inset settlements. These could indicate pockets of Green Belt release and increased capacity for development.

¹¹ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/local-plan/call-for-sites/overview.aspx>

¹² LUC for CBC & LBC Central Bedfordshire and Luton Green Belt Study (September 2016)

2.16 This overview of settlement characteristics was used as the baseline against which to estimate the likely sensitivities and aspirations of people and communities to new development. As this has only been derived from published information, the Council will seek to confirm the initial findings through consultation with each settlement, as and when appropriate. It may be noted that community character does not necessarily limit capacity to absorb development growth but rather, can be enhanced by new residents.

2.17 **Potential Effects of New Development:** Effects of new development can be positive and negative. It may be possible to mitigate potential negative effects through avoiding sensitive receptors or reducing impacts by creative design. Typical effects may be summarised as follows:

Negative:

- Potential coalescence, loss of settlement identity & character
- Increased pressures on educational facilities
- Increased congestion on the major road network; increased number of car journeys
- Increased flood risk, or development in areas of existing flood risk
- Loss of best and most versatile agricultural land
- Species / habitat fragmentation and/or disturbance to important biodiversity
- Changes to the setting of designated heritage assets
- Visual impacts on distinctive townscapes and rural landscapes

Positive:

- Revitalisation of communities
- Contributions to enhancement & provision of services & facilities
- Provision of good housing, including affordable & adaptable homes
- Opportunities for expansion and enhancement to existing industrial/employment areas.
- Good connectivity that encourages more sustainable travel, including provision of cycle & walkways promoting healthy lifestyles with positive effects for health & well-being
- New archaeological investigations supporting an increased understanding and knowledge base
- Biodiversity and green infrastructure enhancements

2.18 **Sensitivity, & Capacity Assessment:** Each topic area was investigated according to its own standards and methods of assessment, and considering the initial constraints/assets analysis with available information, as follows:

2.19 *Community Facilities & Services:* This considered the list of factors as set out in the initial constraints/assets analysis: education, health care, retail, village hall, financial, hospitality, leisure, culture & entertainment, and Public Open Space. Absence or presence of facilities or services were noted using available information and internet searching. For education, access to schools was recorded taking into account that pupils from one settlement may be bused to a school in another settlement – using school catchment information and local knowledge to judge capacity.

- 2.20 *Employment*: This study noted any identified employment areas in or nearby to the settlement, with any in-commuting of workers, if found. It also noted the employment demographic from ONS data and sought to estimate type of working and extent of out-commuting.
- 2.21 *Transport & Movement*: Proximity to the primary highway network was noted, together with the presence of any railway station in the settlement. The location and extent of further sustainable transport modes of walking, cycling and buses were considered, including their role in GI networks. As air quality is principally associated with emissions of nitrogen dioxide from road traffic, any issues were considered within this section.
- 2.22 *Landscape & Land Quality*: The location of protected landscapes such as AONB was noted, together with a summary of the landscape character. The extent of surrounding or nearby agricultural land quality was noted, aiming to identify Grade 1- 3a, if possible.
- 2.23 *The Historic Environment*: Assets such as Listed Buildings and their settings were noted, together with designated Conservation Areas, noting their character and relative size, contribution overall to the settlement. Areas of archaeological notification indicated that there could be potential constraints to new development.
- 2.24 *Biodiversity & Green Infrastructure*: National and internationally protected biodiversity is judged to be a major constraint to new development. Locally significant biodiversity is considered in the context of the CBC Environmental Framework, taking into account condition and aspirations for enhancing the GI network.
- 2.25 *Flood Risk & Water Quality*: Flood risk zones are mapped indicating any constraints for new development. The quality of rivers and groundwater was investigated according to progress with meeting objectives from the EU Water Framework Directive and the Environment Agency data. The draft Stage 1 Water Cycle Study (WCS) was available and this indicated the capacity in the waste water treatment catchments in the Anglian Water area but uncertainty remains until information is received from Thames Water (for the Luton area) and the Stage 2 WCS is completed.
- 2.26 Inter-relationships & cumulative effects were investigated for any settlements in close proximity to each other, and an overall summary outlined the estimated areas and potential capacity for new development. Detailed matrices recording the initial findings for each settlement are presented in this report in Appendix II (A-D):

Overview of Settlement Characteristics

Context, Constraints & Assets

- Planning
- People, Community Facilities & Services, including education
- Employment

- Transport & Movement
- Landscape & Land Quality
- Historic Environment
- Biodiversity & Green Infrastructure
- Flood Risk, Water Quality
- Other Infrastructure (Highways & National Grid will be investigated when technical studies are completed)

Sensitivity & Capacity Assessment

- Sensitivity
- Capacity

2.27 **Summary Findings:** Taking into account the character of the settlement, including its facilities, services and activities; and the constraints and assets (together with their sensitivities and potential for mitigation and/or enhancement) - a strategic overview of the potential capacity for development growth was made, for example, capacity to the east but any development towards the west would need major infrastructure requirements.

Assumptions Made, Gaps in Information, & Uncertainties

- 2.28 Certain information was not available, such as capacity of Health Centres/GPs, National Grid, and transport modelling. These factors will be considered when further information and technical studies are completed in 2017. Therefore, there are gaps in information and some uncertainties for the analysis and capacity assessments.
- 2.29 Some hamlets (44) are very small with no services or facilities such that it would be inappropriate to consider them for accommodating development growth. Another 21 smaller settlements were found to have very limited services or facilities such that it would also be inappropriate to consider them further. In the Central Bedfordshire Council area, a total of 75 settlements were identified as having some services and facilities such that these were investigated for their capacity to accommodate growth.
- 2.30 The capacity assessment sought to identify High, Medium & Low according to the available information and using professional judgment. Absence of significant environmental constraints and/or infrastructure indicates the potential for capacity – but this does not allow for the quality of life and acceptability from the local communities. It was assumed that there would be potential capacity for larger scale developments (>500 homes)¹³ at those settlements located within key transport corridors and especially with good access to sustainable transport (such as a mainline railway station). It was assumed that there would be potential capacity for medium growth (50-500 homes) at those settlements with less physical/environmental constraints – but no easy access to sustainable transport. Low capacity (<50 new homes) was assumed for those settlements with a significant lack of services and facilities and suitable land with no significant physical and/or environmental constraints.

¹³ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/local-plan/shaping-central-beds-consultation.aspx>

- 2.31 A key factor in the capacity of a settlement to accommodate growth is the potential changes in quality of life for its residents and visitors – and these can be negative or positive. The capacity of services and facilities can change since new development can make provision depending upon the existing situation and the potential for growth. Some smaller settlements, including those in the Green Belt, that have not benefitted from new development in recent years, may actively encourage growth. This is unknown at this stage and will be identified through consultation, the ongoing community engagement events, and ongoing technical studies to inform the continuing development of the Local Plan.
- 2.32 This Initial Capacity Study is not an Urban Capacity study according to traditional planning tools, nor an Environmental Capacity study focused on Ecosystem Services. It aims to incorporate principles and data from such techniques and use available information to inform plan-making with regard to the characteristics of settlements and their likely relative capacity for development growth.

3.0 SUMMARY INITIAL POTENTIAL SETTLEMENT CAPACITIES

Introduction

- 3.1 The findings of the 75 settlements investigated for potential capacity for development growth are detailed in Appendices II A-D, organised according to the Areas A-D - as consulted upon in the Shaping Central Bedfordshire leaflet. Summary findings are discussed in the following paragraphs and an indication made for those settlements that have potentially High, Medium or Low capacity for growth based on available information to date. Suggestions for a hierarchy of settlements based on indicative capacities, rather than just population size were made, where possible, and using professional judgment with the supporting evidence available to date.

Area A: South & West, and adjacent to Luton/M1 Corridor

- 3.2 The settlements located within Area A and their initial capacity assessments (High, Medium, Low) are summarised in Table 3.1 following:

Table 3.1: Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Area A

Settlement	Initial Capacity Assessment
Ampthill	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Aspley Guise	Low (without Green Belt release: Medium - Low)
Aspley Heath	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Barton-le-Clay	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Billington	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Caddington	Low -Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Dunstable	Medium – Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eaton Bray	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eggington	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Eversholt (Churchend)	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Flitwick	Medium - High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Harlington	Medium-High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Heath and Reach	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Hockliffe	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Houghton Regis	High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Husborne Crawley	Low - Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Kensworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Leighton-Linslade	Medium – High (without Green Belt release: Low)
Millbrook	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Milton Bryan	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Ridgmont	Low - Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Slip End	Medium - Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Stanbridge	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Steppingley	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Streatley	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Studham	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Tebworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)

Tilsworth	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Tingrith	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Toddington	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Totternhoe	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Westoning	Medium (without Green Belt release: Low)
Whipsnade	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)
Woburn	Low (without Green Belt release: Low)

- 3.3 It is acknowledged that increased growth potential in this area should consider the capacity to support the housing needs of Luton as well as the growth of settlements within Central Bedfordshire, including the main urban areas of Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade. However, any development in Area A is constrained by designated Green Belt land, and therefore would be subject to the lifting of Green Belt restrictions.
- 3.4 The study has been informed by the Green Belt Study¹⁴ that identifies those parcels of land that make relatively weak contributions to Green Belt purposes. Subject to the consideration of other development constraints and/or opportunities, settlements with these parcels of land will have the capacity to support higher growth through the lifting of Green Belt. However, the Council has not yet decided which, if any, Green Belt land to release and it may be that the most sustainable locations in all other respects are in the Green Belt land that is performing strongly to such aims. Accordingly, this study records location of settlements in or out of the Green Belt.
- 3.5 Other key factors contribute to the settlements in this area and their potentially capacity for sustainable growth. An important factor for sustainable growth in Central Bedfordshire, considering the high levels of out-commuting and proximity to major employment areas like Milton Keynes, Bedford, Luton and London, is the proximity of settlements to the rail network with sustainable forms of transport that would help mitigate the cumulative negative effects of additional growth on traffic and movement. Therefore, this study considered that settlements with, or nearby to, a mainline railway station (albeit subject to the consideration of whether this is a mainline or a branchline and other development constraints), are likely to provide more capacity for future growth – and these are set out in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2: Settlements in Area A considered in close proximity to mainline rail connections

Settlement	Proximity to rail connection
Ampthill	2 miles
Flitwick	In settlement
Harlington	In settlement
Leighton Linslade	In settlement
Linslade	Less than 1 mile

¹⁴ LUC for Central Bedfordshire Council Growth Options Study (November 2015)

Ridgmont¹⁵	In settlement
Steppingley	1.7 miles
Toddington	2 miles
Westoning	1.5 miles

3.6 Considering these two key factors together (weak Green Belt contributions and good railway connections), along with overall initial capacity assessments, the settlements that appear to offer the relative highest capacity for growth in Area A are as follows:

- Flitwick
- Harlington
- Leighton-Linslade
- Toddington
- Westoning

3.7 Of these settlements both Flitwick and Harlington were found to have the highest capacity for new development. Leighton-Linslade was found to have a medium to high capacity for development, which could include regeneration and intensification in the existing settlements. Toddington and Westoning were found to have the potential for medium-scale growth.

3.8 A number of other settlements in Area A were considered to have a low capacity for development (see previously Table 3.1). This is primarily due to limited sustainable transport connections, a lack of services and facilities that can support sustainable and easy accessibility, and/or significant environmental constraints (e.g. flood risk, sensitive AONB landscape setting, important designated biodiversity, or significant heritage assets and their settings).

Area B: East/A1 Corridor North-South Sandy to Arlesey

3.9 The settlements located within Area B and their initial capacity assessments (High, Medium, Low) are summarised in Table 3.4 following:

Table 3.3: Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Areas B

Settlement	Capacity
Arlesey	Medium - High
Biggleswade	Medium - High
Dunton	Low
Edworth	Low
Fairfield	Medium
Henlow	Low
Langford	Medium - Low
Potton	Medium
Sandy	High
Stotfold	Medium

¹⁵ Although presently on the Bedford – Bletchley branchline, Ridgmont station has been earmarked for redevelopment as a new Transport Interchange/Parkway Station on the new East – West Rail line between Oxford and Cambridge. Providing this station and interchange capacity that supports future demand can therefore have a direct impact on the level of residential and employment growth that the area could sustain.

Tempsford	Low
Wrestlingworth	Low

- 3.10 A number of the settlements located within Area B offer the potential for sustainable development that is well connected to the mainline rail network: Arlesey, Biggleswade, Henlow, Sandy, and Stotfold. Taking into account other factors, Sandy offers the highest capacity for growth, particularly given the existing level of service and facility provisions.
- 3.11 Two of the settlements in Area B, although less well connected to the rail network, do offer the potential capacity for medium levels of growth (Fairfield and Potton). The remaining settlements were found to have a low capacity for growth, this is largely due to the potential for larger scale development to negatively affect settlement identities and rural landscapes, and a lack of services and facilities.

Area C: East-West Corridor A421/M1 & East-West Rail to the North

- 3.12 The settlements located within Area C and their initial capacity assessments (High, Medium, Low) are summarised in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4: Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Areas C

Settlement	Capacity
Cranfield	Low
Houghton Conquest	Low
Lidlington	Low
Lower / Upper Shelton	Low
Marston Moretaine	Medium
Salford	Low
Wharley End	Low

- 3.13 No settlements in Area C were found to have a high capacity for growth. Marston Moretaine is the only settlement located within Area C that is well connected to the rail network with the nearby station at Millbrook. Medium growth at this settlement could also improve service and facility provisions within the settlement.
- 3.14 It is also recognised that the future development of the East-West Rail could increase accessibility in this area with the potential to increase capacity for growth at many of these settlements. However, uncertainties remain as dependent upon progress with the East-West Rail.
- 3.15 The remaining settlements were found to have a low capacity for growth, this is largely due to the potential for larger scale development to negatively affect settlement identities and rural landscapes.

Area D: Central Section

- 3.16 The settlements located within Area D and their initial capacity assessments (High, Medium, Low) are summarised in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5: Initial Capacity Assessment of Settlements in Areas D

Settlement	Capacity
Blunham	Low
Campton	Low
Clifton	Low
Clophill	Low
Everton	Low
Flitton & Greenfield	Low
Upper Gravenhurst	Low
Haynes	Low
Lower Stondon	Medium
Maulden	Medium
Meppershall	Medium
Moggerhanger	Low
Northill	Low
Old Warden	Low
Pulloxhill	Low
Shefford	Medium
Shillington	Low
Silsoe	Low
Southill	Low
Upper Caldecote	Low - Medium
Upper Stondon	Low

- 3.17 No settlements in Area D have been identified with the potential capacity for high levels of growth as few are in close proximity (within 2 miles) of a railway station. However, Everton and Upper Caldecote have the closest rail connections at around 2.5-3 miles to Sandy mainline station. Settlements in Area D are generally less constrained by environmental and physical factors than settlements in Areas A-C, but the area is characterised by small rural dispersed settlements connected by rural roads. It is unlikely that major sustainable transport infrastructure would be supported and thus potential capacities are reduced.

4.0 SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 This initial assessment has suggested the potential capacity (High, Medium, Low) for accommodating development growth in the Central Bedfordshire area settlements categorised in Areas A-D - as defined in the Shaping Central Bedfordshire leaflet. This capacity assessment has been made using available information, professional judgment, and is based on a number of assumptions. The study aims to provide initial indications of potential capacity to inform further studies and the ongoing development of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.
- 4.2 This study is part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and it will be subject to consultation with the Regulation 18 Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan commencing June 2017. Comments made on the study will be taken into account in the revision of the work when more technical studies have been completed and at the next stage of plan-making.