

Central Bedfordshire Council Local Plan (2015-2035)

**Important Countryside Gaps Study
(January 2018)**

Table of Contents

1) Introduction	3
1.1 Context.....	3
1.2 Purpose of Important Countryside Gaps.....	3
2) Policy Context	4
2.1 Previous Important Countryside Gaps	4
2.2 Local Plan Policy.....	4
3) Technical Site Assessment	5
3.1 Technical Site Assessment Procedure	5
3.2 Assessing Sites.....	5
4) Existing Allocations	6
4.1 Existing Important Countryside Gaps.....	6
5) Allocating Important Countryside Gaps.....	7
5.1 Methodology	7
5.2 Site Boundaries.....	8
6) Results	9
6.1 Site Identification.....	9
6.2 Proposed Sites.....	9
6.3 Site Assessments	11
7) Appendices	12
7.1 Land between Wixams and Houghton Conquest (CG1)	13
7.2 Land South of Sutton (CG2).....	14
7.3 Land North West of Dunton (CG3).....	15

7.4	<i>Land North of Sandy (CG4)</i>	16
7.5	<i>Land North and South of Cranfield (CG5)</i>	17
7.6	<i>Land West of Salford Road, Aspley Guise (CG6)</i>	18
7.7	<i>Land South of Stotfold (CG7)</i>	19
7.8	<i>Land between Maulden Main Village and Maulden Green End (CG8)</i>	20
7.9	<i>Land between Maulden Green End and Maulden Hall End (CG9)</i>	21
7.10	<i>Land East of Woodmer End, Shillington (CG10)</i>	22
7.11	<i>Land between Upper and Lower Shelton (CG11)</i>	23
7.12	<i>Land between Astwick and Stotfold (CG12)</i>	24
7.13	<i>Land between Clifton and Henlow (CG13)</i>	25
7.14	<i>Land between Shefford and Clifton (CG14)</i>	26
7.15	<i>Land between Northill and Ickwell (CG15)</i>	27
7.16	<i>Land between Flitton and Greenfield (CG16)</i>	28
7.17	<i>Land between Flitton and Wardhedges (CG17)</i>	29
7.18	<i>Land North of Biggleswade (CG18)</i>	30
7.19	<i>Land at Tempsford (CG19)</i>	31
7.20	<i>Land West of Pottton (CG20)</i>	32

1) Introduction

1.1 Context

- 1.1.1 Central Bedfordshire is an area of growth and it is important that this growth is managed in a way which is complimentary and in keeping with the existing character and identity of the many town and villages which make up this diverse area.
- 1.1.2 As a result, there are increasing pressures for development in the countryside. The Council is conscious that there are a number of relatively sensitive and narrow 'gaps' of undeveloped countryside between some of Central Bedfordshire's settlements.
- 1.1.3 With the increased pressure for the delivery of new homes within Central Bedfordshire, the need to protect settlements from coalescence and identify areas which are at risk has also increased.
- 1.1.4 This study will seek to identify areas outside of the Green Belt where there is risk of coalescence between settlements.

1.2 Purpose of Important Countryside Gaps

- 1.2.1 Important Countryside Gaps are implemented in order retain the separation of towns and villages so that their individual identities are maintained.
- 1.2.2 They are also used to prevent the reductions and narrowing of undeveloped breaks that are seen and experienced when travelling between settlements.
- 1.2.3 Important Countryside Gaps are not identified in the south of the authority as this is predominately designated as Green Belt.

2) Policy Context

2.1 Previous Important Countryside Gaps

- 2.1.1 The Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (2005) Policy CS21 'Important Countryside Gaps' set out to define sensitive gaps and resist development that would 'promote the visual or physical coalescence of nearby settlements.
- 2.1.2 Important Countryside gaps have therefore been successfully used to protect towns and villages from coalescence in the former Mid Bedfordshire district. This policy is a 'saved' policy from the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan 2005.

2.2 Local Plan Policy

- 2.3.1 The Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan sets out to review the Important Countryside Gap policy. Policy SP5 'Preventing Coalescence and Important Countryside Gaps' sets out how Important Countryside Gaps will be defined on the proposals map and that the Council will not grant permission or unallocated development that would promote the visual or physical coalescence of nearby settlements

3) Technical Site Assessment

3.1 Technical Site Assessment Procedure

- 3.1.1 Approximately 850 sites were submitted to the council under the Call for Sites exercise. These have all been assessed for their suitability for development and as a result of this assessment, approximately 200 sites are being considered further for potential allocation, which is included within the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

3.2 Assessing Sites

- 3.2.1 The assessment process involved evaluating sites against a number of criteria, one these being whether the site would promote the coalescence between settlements.
- 3.2.2 Those which were found to have a strong potential to coalesce were eliminated. Additionally, sites may have been located within an existing countryside gap and these have also been eliminated from the assessment process.

4) Existing Allocations

4.1 Existing Important Countryside Gaps

4.1.1 As part of the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan 2005, four Important Countryside Gaps were identified to protect those settlements from coalescence, these being:

- Clifton – Henlow
- Shefford – Clifton
- Flitton – Wardhedges
- Ickwell - Northill

4.1.2 The existing Important Countryside Gaps will need to reviewed and amended where necessary to reflect any changes to these settlements in regard to planning applications since the Mid Beds Local Plan, 2005.

5) Allocating Important Countryside Gaps

5.1 Methodology

5.1.1 The sites that are included within this study reflect where areas are at significant risk from coalescence. However, there may be separate reasons as to why there are concerns regarding coalescence within the area. As a result, the sites have been separated into four different categories, each category representing a cause for inclusion within this study. These being:

- Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence between existing settlements and the identified Location for Future Growth;
- Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence as a result of strategic cross boundary proposals;
- Land where development has the potential to cause the coalescence of 'ends' within a settlement;
- Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence between existing settlements

5.1.2 Whilst the existing Important Countryside Gaps will be retained, it is also important to identify other settlements which are under threat from coalescence taking into account the impact of new and committed development. This will require the identification of:

- Newly delivered development
- Land with planning permission for development
- Land proposed for development through the new Local Plan, and
- Land which is identified in other technical studies related to the new Local Plan.

5.1.3 Aside from the SHLAA and sites allocated within this, land may also be allocated for other purposes in the new Local Plan. Therefore, this study will need to take into consideration:

- Land that is included within the Settlement Envelope Review, and;
- Land that is allocated for Employment uses

5.1.4 The sites that are chosen to become a countryside gap are allocated by using a combination of desk top studies and site visits to assess where countryside gaps are most appropriate

- 5.1.5 Potential sites for the implementation of countryside gaps were identified using desk top studies which included reviewing recent planning applications with permission that may be impinging on land separating different settlements. Desk top studies also involved highlighting areas that have are currently vulnerable to potential coalescence as a result of development pressures.
- 5.1.6 In addition, the results of the SHLAA were also considered. Whereby the potential sites for allocation for development were reviewed in order to ensure that any Countryside Gaps allocated as part of the Plan do not overlap with draft site allocations.
- 5.1.7 Furthermore, sites that have failed the SHLAA process based on their potential to cause coalescence between settlements or 'ends' have also been reviewed. As these sites provided early indicators of where settlements were at risk of coalescence.

5.2 Site Boundaries

- 5.2.1 Once areas have been identified as potential for Countryside Gaps, they were then drawn using GIS software and desktop studies. Where possible the Countryside Gaps have been drawn to reflect where the potential for coalescence and the loss of the countryside character is most likely to occur.
- 5.2.2 To achieve this, the boundaries of these allocated sites reflect existing defensible boundaries where appropriate. This can include: field boundaries, hedgerows, roads, settlement envelope boundaries, parish boundaries and rivers.
- 5.2.3 If a defensible boundary cannot be located in an appropriate area then an assumption is made on where the boundary would be most appropriate in protecting the settlement from coalescence.
- 5.2.4 In some cases there may also be existing small scale development in the countryside such as sewage treatment works, hamlets, large farms etc. and these have not been included within the Important Countryside Gap.
- 5.2.5 Areas that have planning permission have also not been included within an Important Countryside Gap as in many cases, these areas with permission may result in the re-positioning of the settlement envelope.

6) Results

6.1 Site Identification

- 6.1.1 The results of the study identify fourteen sites in addition to the existing four that were allocated in the previous plan.
- 6.1.2 Each site has been allocated an I.D, from CG1 to CG20. This is to help reference individual sites.

6.2 Proposed Sites

- 6.2.1 The following tables identify the twenty proposed sites that will be allocated as an Important Countryside Gap. These have been separated into the four categories mentioned previously:
- 6.2.2 Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence between existing settlements and the identified Location for Future Growth;

Site I.D	Site Location
CG1	Land between Wixams and Houghton Conquest
CG2	Land South of Sutton
CG3	Land North West of Dunton
CG4	Land North of Sandy
CG19	Land at Tempsford

6.2.3 Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence as a result of strategic cross boundary proposals;

Site I.D	Site Location
CG5	Land North and South of Cranfield
CG6	Land West of Salford Road, Aspley Guise
CG7	Land South of Stotfold

6.2.4 Land where development has the potential to cause the coalescence of 'ends' within a settlement;

Site I.D	Site Location
CG8	Land between Maulden Main Village and Maulden Green End
CG9	Land between Maulden Green End and Maulden Hall End
CG10	Land East of Woodmer End, Shillington

6.2.5 Land where development has the potential to cause coalescence between existing settlements;

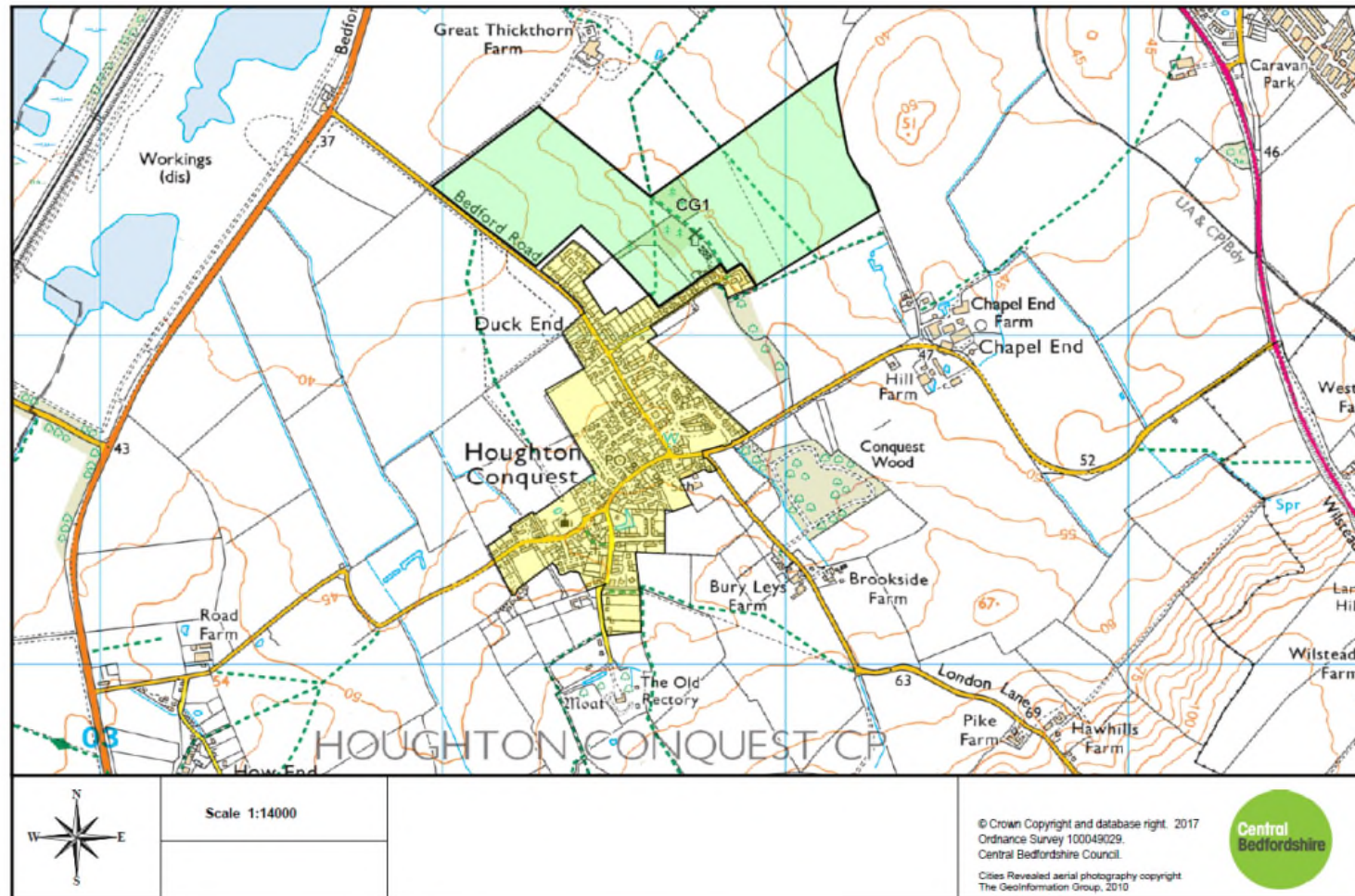
Site I.D	Site Location
CG11	Land between Upper Shelton and Lower Shelton
CG12	Land between Astwick and Stotfold
CG13	Land between Clifton and Henlow
CG14	Land between Shefford and Clifton
CG15	Land between Northill and Ickwell
CG16	Land between Flitton and Greenfield
CG17	Land between Flitton and Wardhedges
CG18	Land North of Biggleswade
CG20	Land West of Potton

6.3 Site Assessments

- 6.3.1 For each site, an assessment has been created to indicate the reasons why that specific site is being included along with a map of the location. These will be included as an appendix to the Local Plan.

7) Appendices

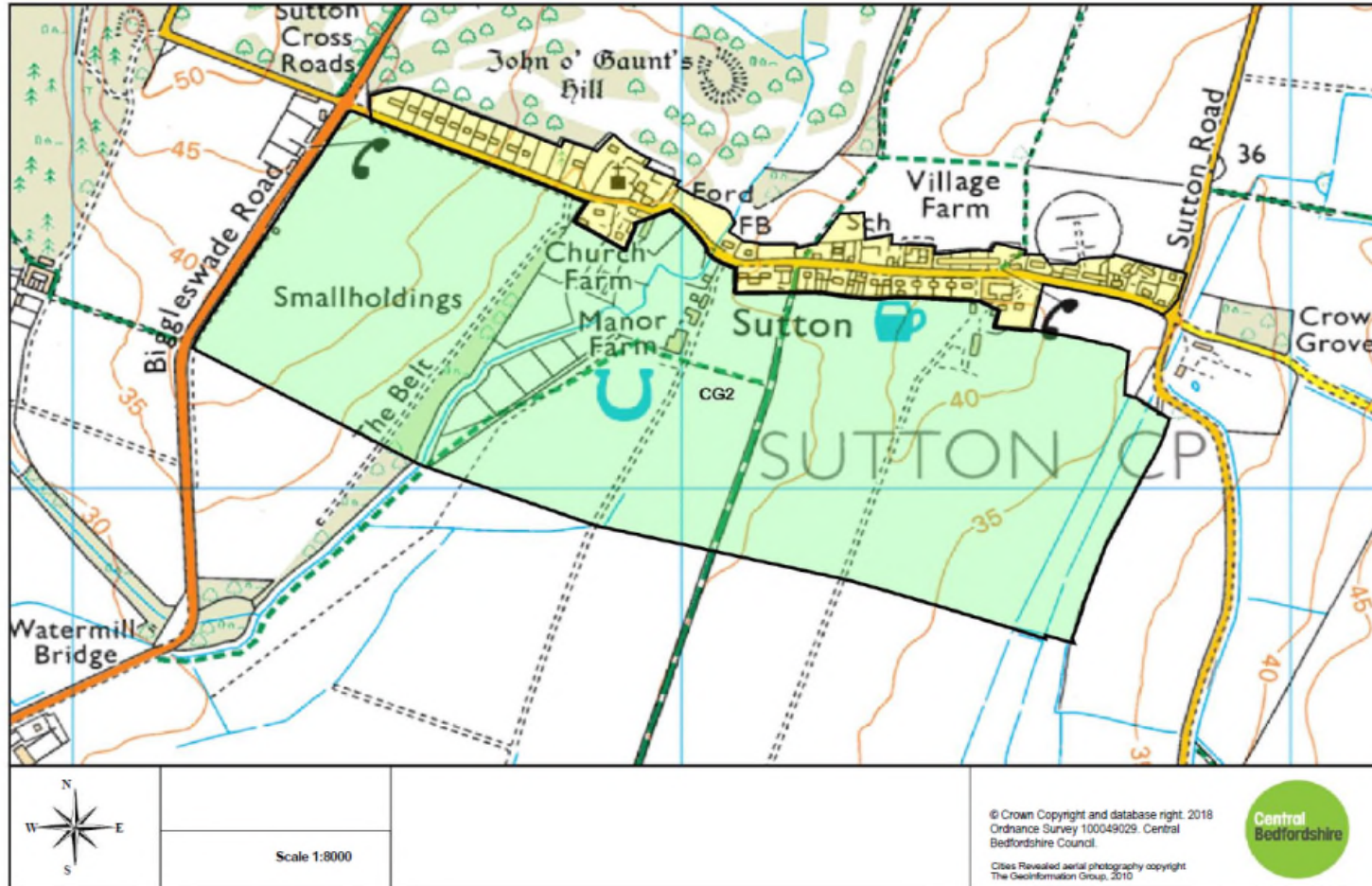
7.1 Land between Wixams and Houghton Conquest (CG1)



Description:

The site is located to the north of Houghton Conquest. This area consists of agricultural land and is very visible from the elevated Greensand Ridge to the south. The area has seen significant growth to the north as part of the Wixams development, which has been located within Bedford Borough but is now entering CBC. It is important to implement an Important Countryside Gap in this location in order to protect the separation between Houghton Conquest and future Wixams developments as there is a risk that the two may coalesce and cause cross boundary coalescence.

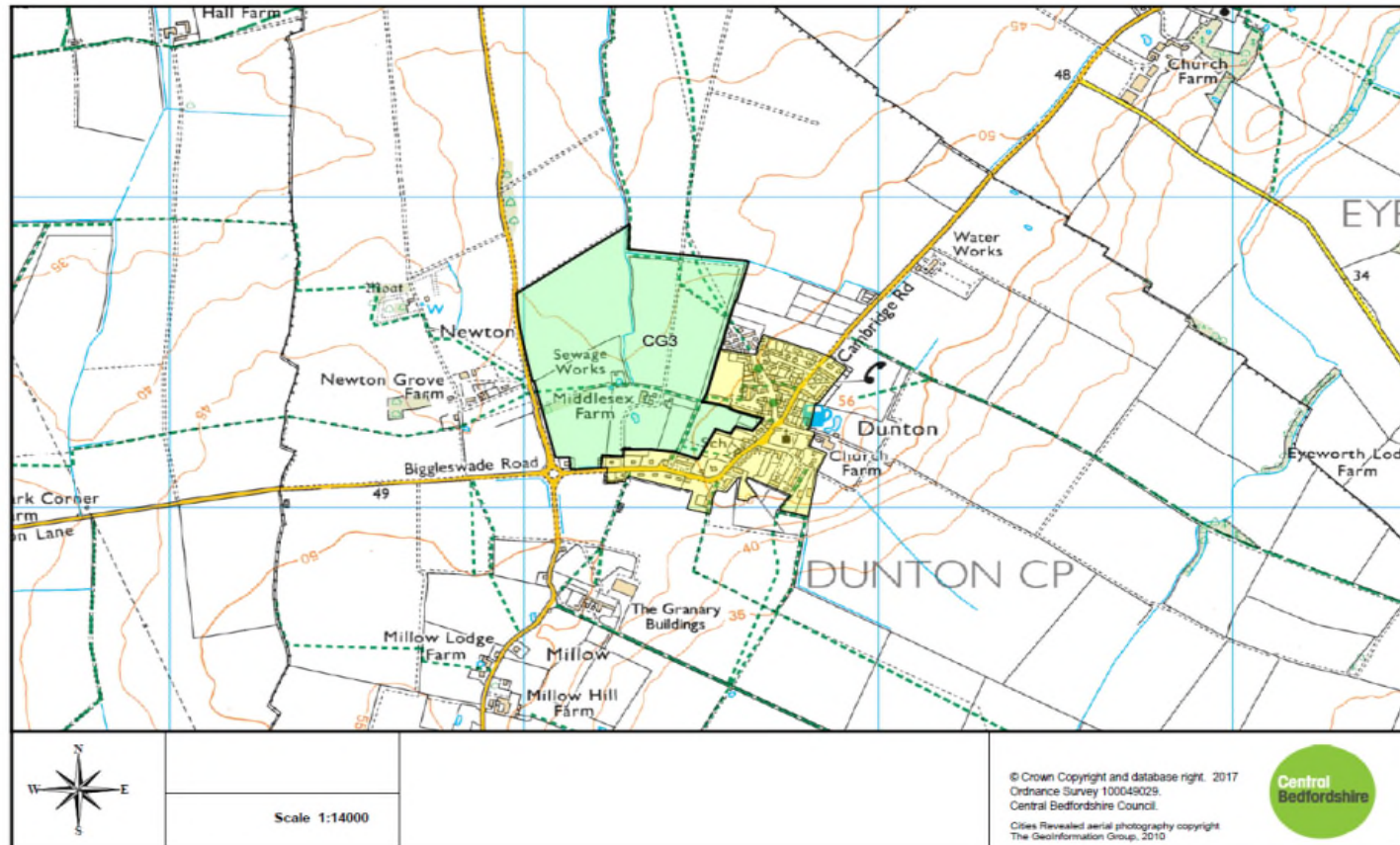
7.2 Land South of Sutton (CG2)



Description:

The site is located to the south of Sutton; it mostly comprises of agricultural land but also includes ROW and a water course. The land surrounding the village is quite open and allows for long ranging views, which provides part of the character of the village. This is particularly true for the setting of Sutton Ford. Therefore this gap is needed in order to prevent physical and visual coalescence between Sutton and the future growth east of Biggleswade that is identified within the Local Plan.

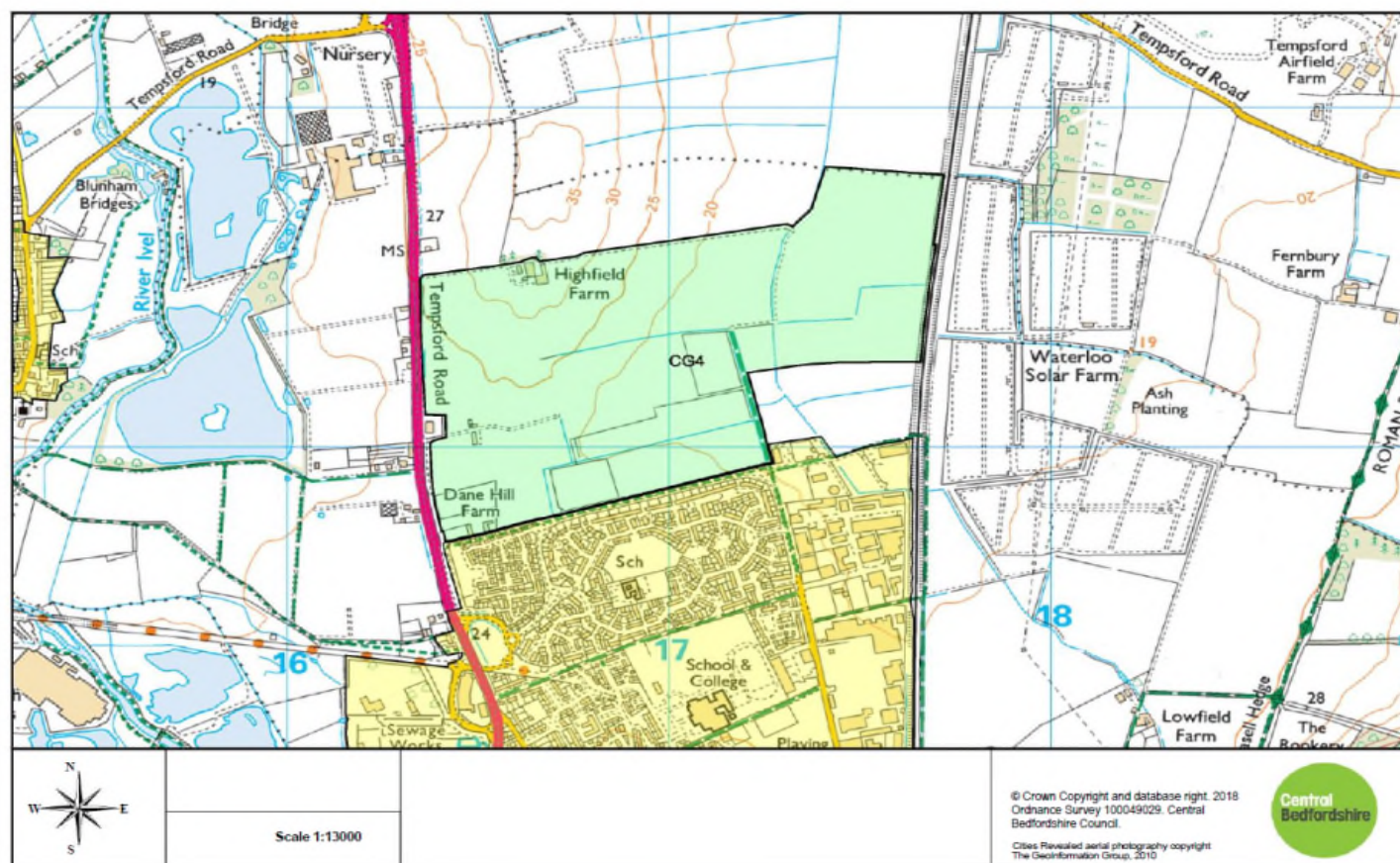
7.3 Land North West of Dunton (CG3)



Description:

The site is located to the north west of Dunton, between the village and Sutton Lane. The land here is agricultural in nature with a ROW intersecting the site. The land here is very open and provides long ranging views towards Biggleswade and Sutton. The gap is necessary to prevent the coalescence that may arise from future growth east of Biggleswade which may extend north and west of Newton Grove Farm.

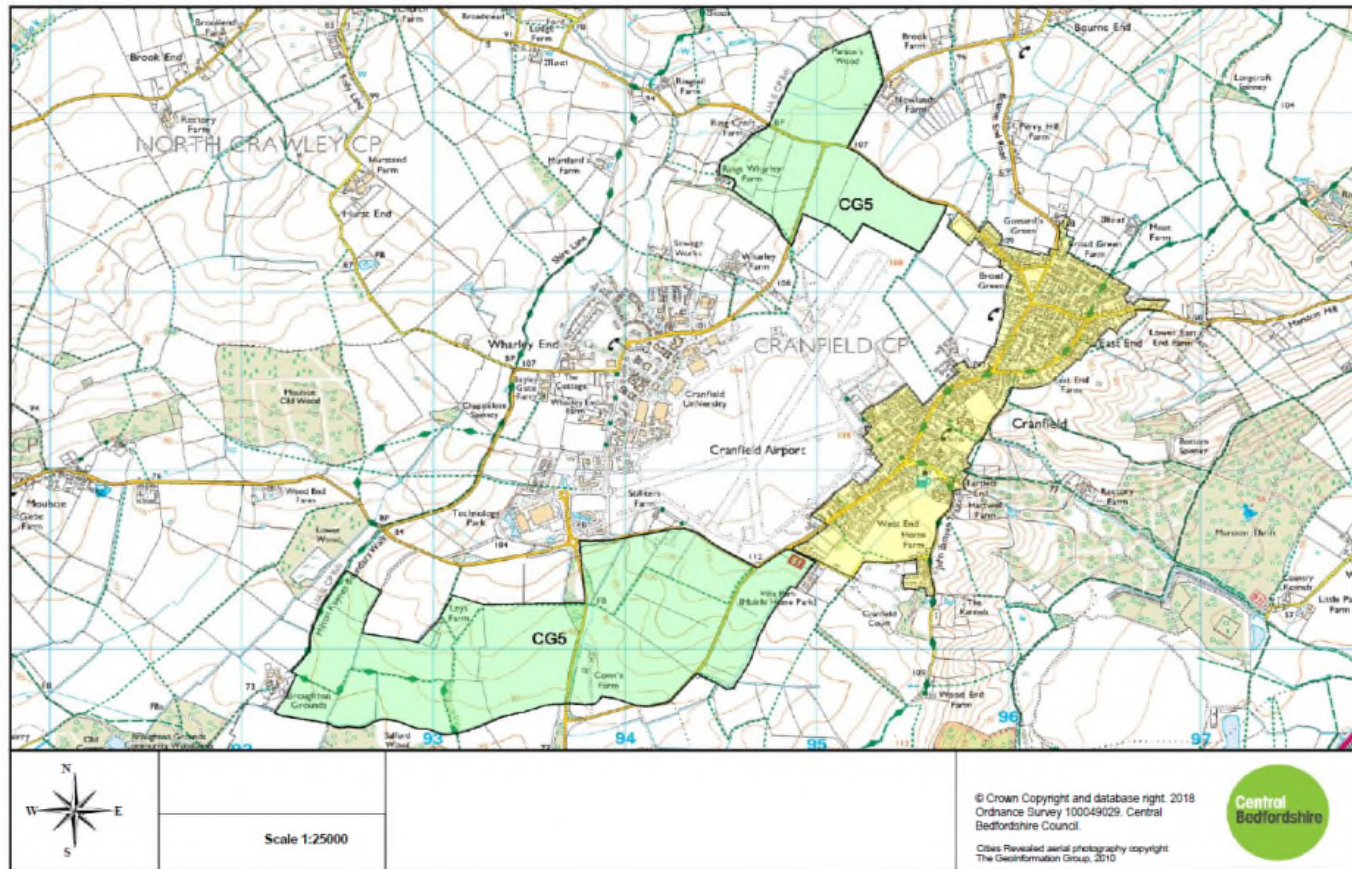
7.4 Land North of Sandy (CG4)



Description:

The site is located north of Sandy, between the A1 to the east and the railway line to the west. The land is primarily agricultural and is very open in its character. The land rises to the north allowing for open views towards Tempsford and Sandy. A gap is being introduced to reduce coalescence between Sandy and any future growth that may come forward around Tempsford as part of the Local Plan.

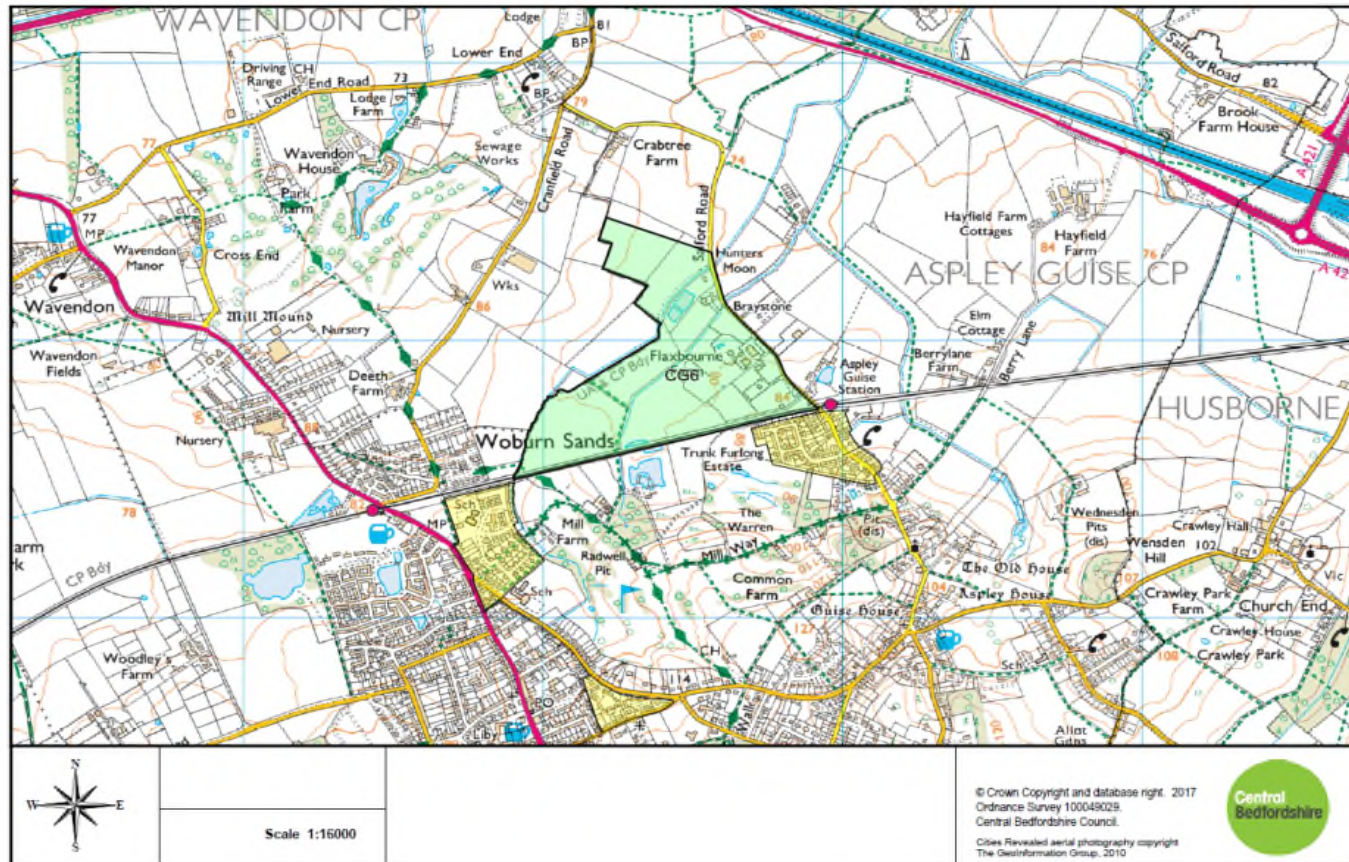
7.5 Land North and South of Cranfield (CG5)



Description:

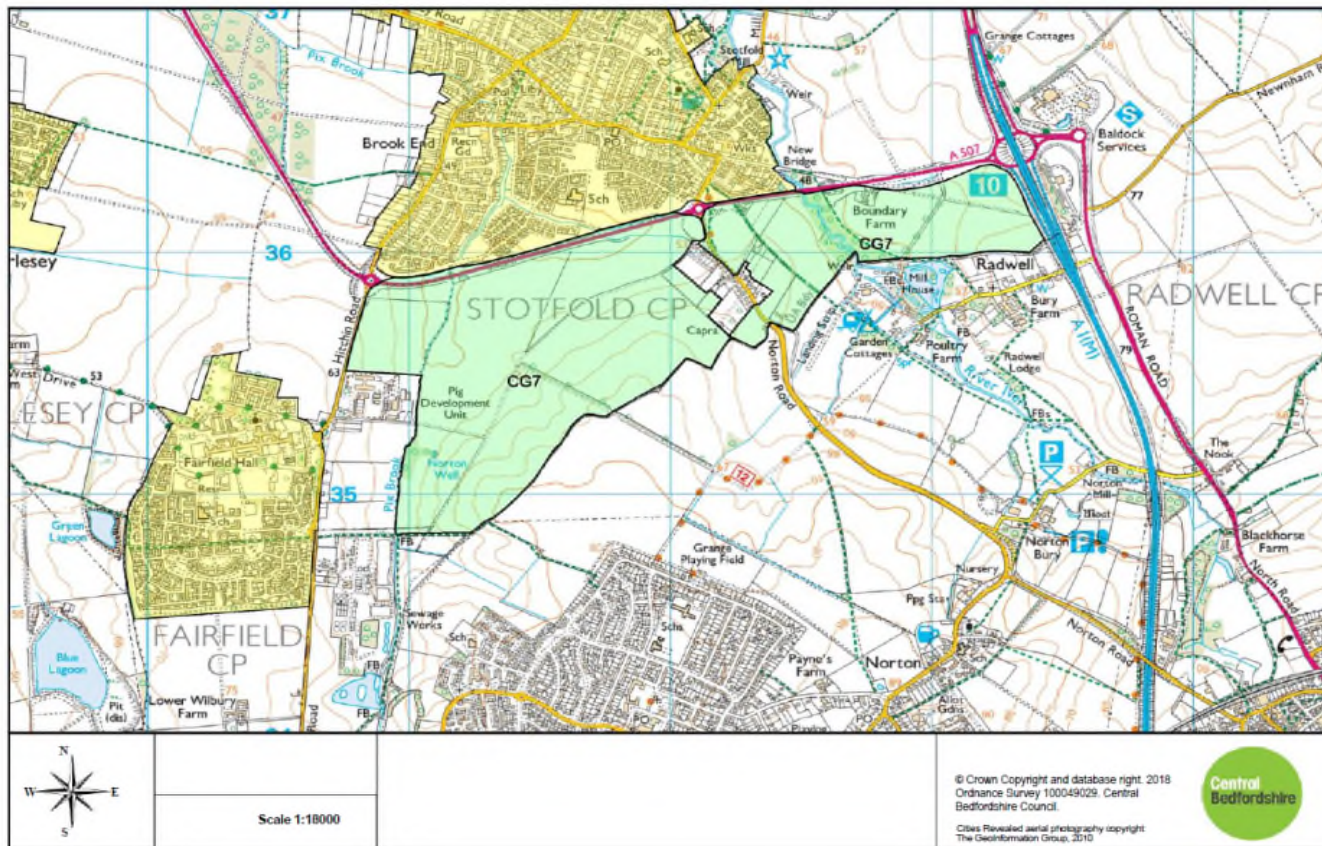
The site is separated into two; one is north of the airfield and south of Crawley Road. The other is south of the airfield and south of Cranfield Road. The land agricultural in use but very open and elevated to allow for long ranging views. These proposals are suggested to protect Cranfield from any future growth from Milton Keynes that may be proposed to the west of Cranfield University. However it is important to ensure that Cranfield University still has opportunities for future expansion.

7.6 Land West of Salford Road, Aspley Guise (CG6)

**Description:**

The site lies to the north of Aspley Guise and also to the north of the railway line. The land is agricultural in nature and abuts the Milton Keynes boundary. This is being proposed as an Important Countryside Gap to reduce coalescence issues with the existing and on-going developments within Milton Keynes' authority, where growth is being proposed adjacent to the border with CBC and would cause coalescence with the northern part of Aspley Guise. The Important Countryside Gap will also prevent coalescence between the northern part of Aspley Guise and the identified location for growth.

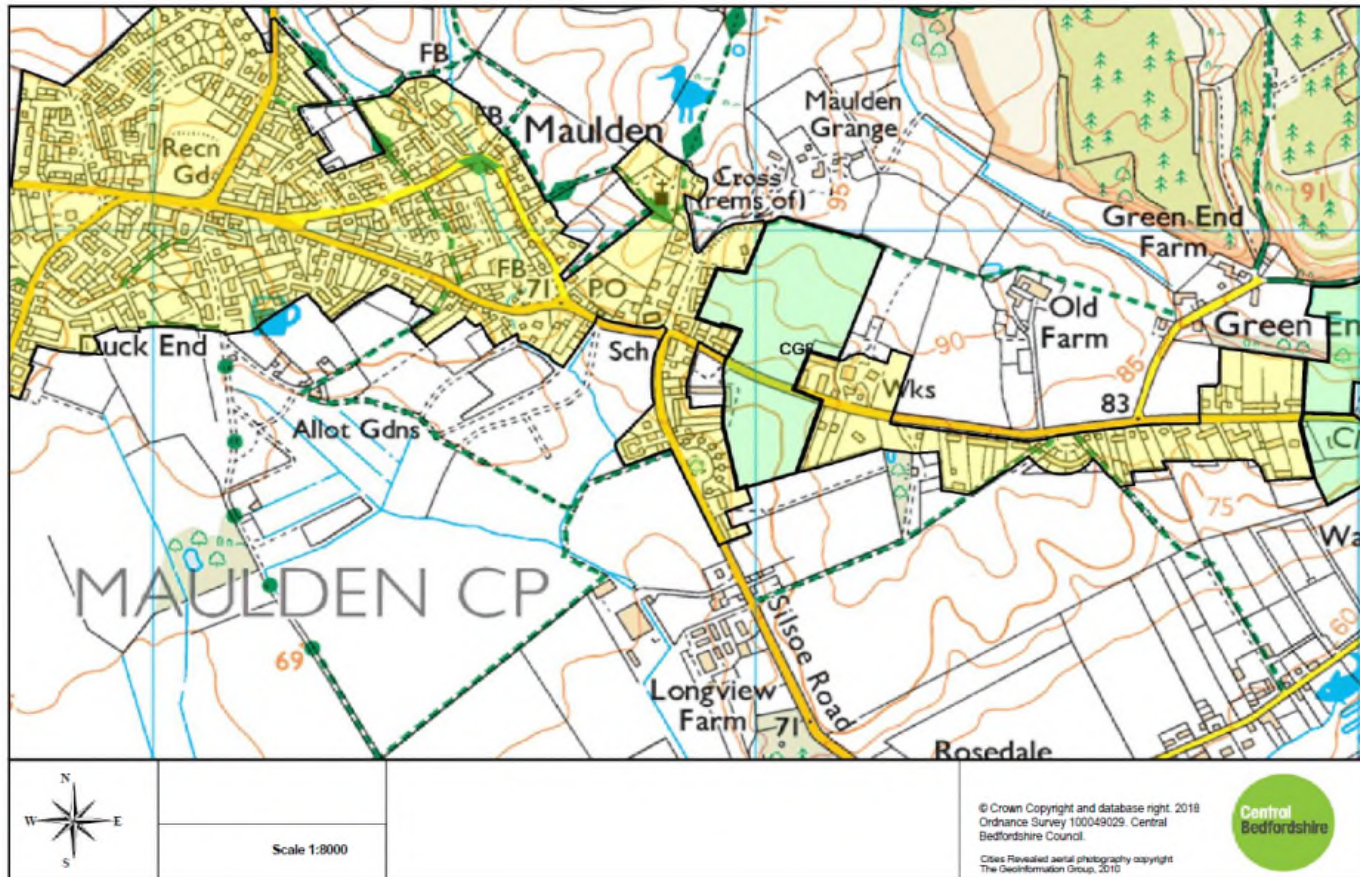
7.7 Land South of Stotfold (CG7)



Description:

The area of land being considered is located to the south of Stotfold and to the east of Fairfield. Further south lies the boundary to North Hertfordshire and Letchworth Garden City. The purpose of implementing an Important Countryside Gap in this area is to protect the countryside that is currently providing a buffer between Stotfold, Fairfield and North Herts. Recent development in east of Fairfield have slowly encroached on this gap and it is important to ensure that growth in Stotfold does not extend beyond the south side of the A507, causing coalescence with Fairfield and Letchworth.

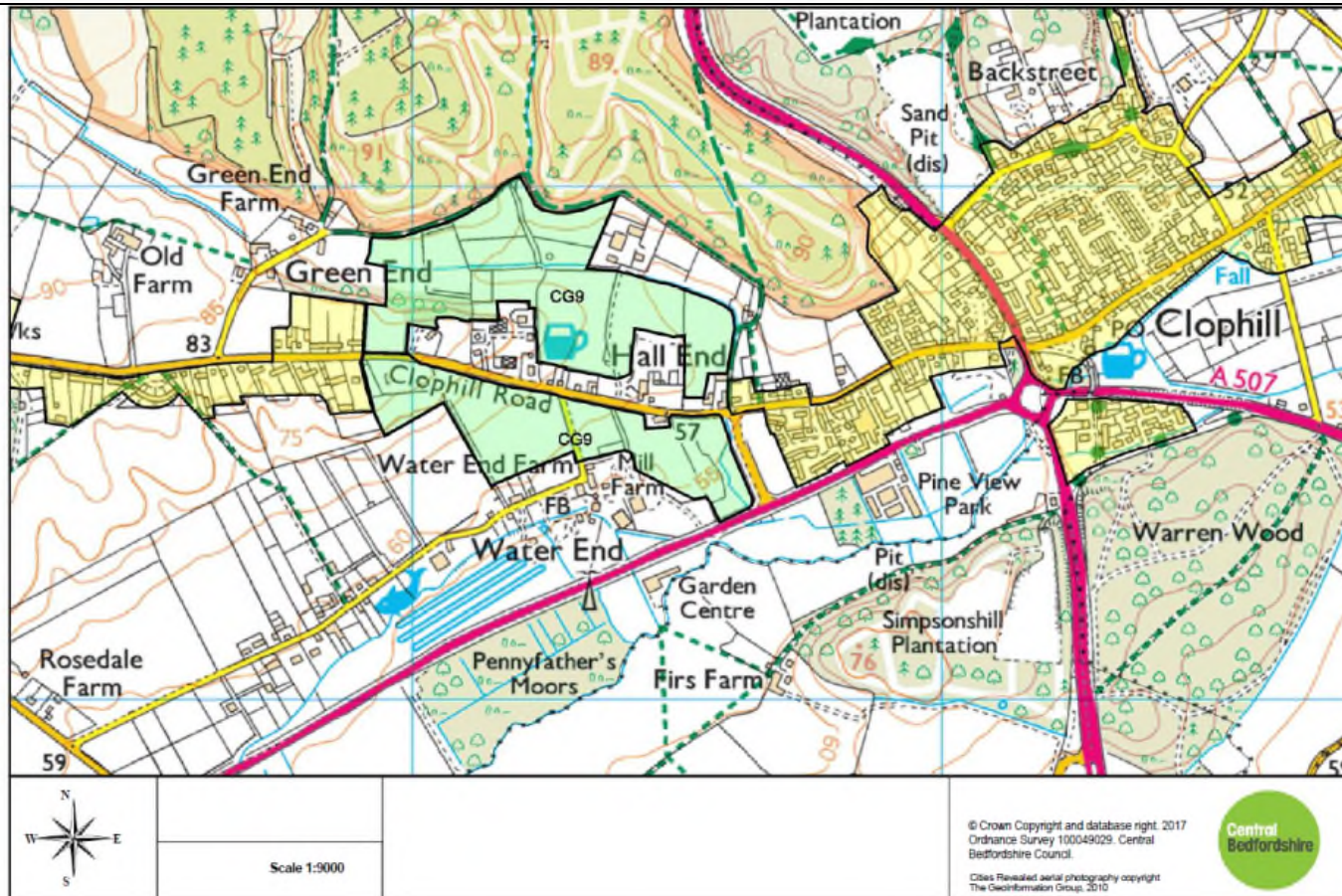
7.8 Land between Maulden Main Village and Maulden Green End (CG8)



Description:

The land is located within Maulden and is situated east of the main village and west of the 'Green End' section. As Maulden's settlement envelope is separated into the main village and two 'ends', it is important to retain the character of these ends and retain the existing features of the village. As Maulden is considered a large village in the settlement hierarchy there is scope for development, therefore it is essential to prevent coalescence where future growth may bridge the gap between the village and its' ends.

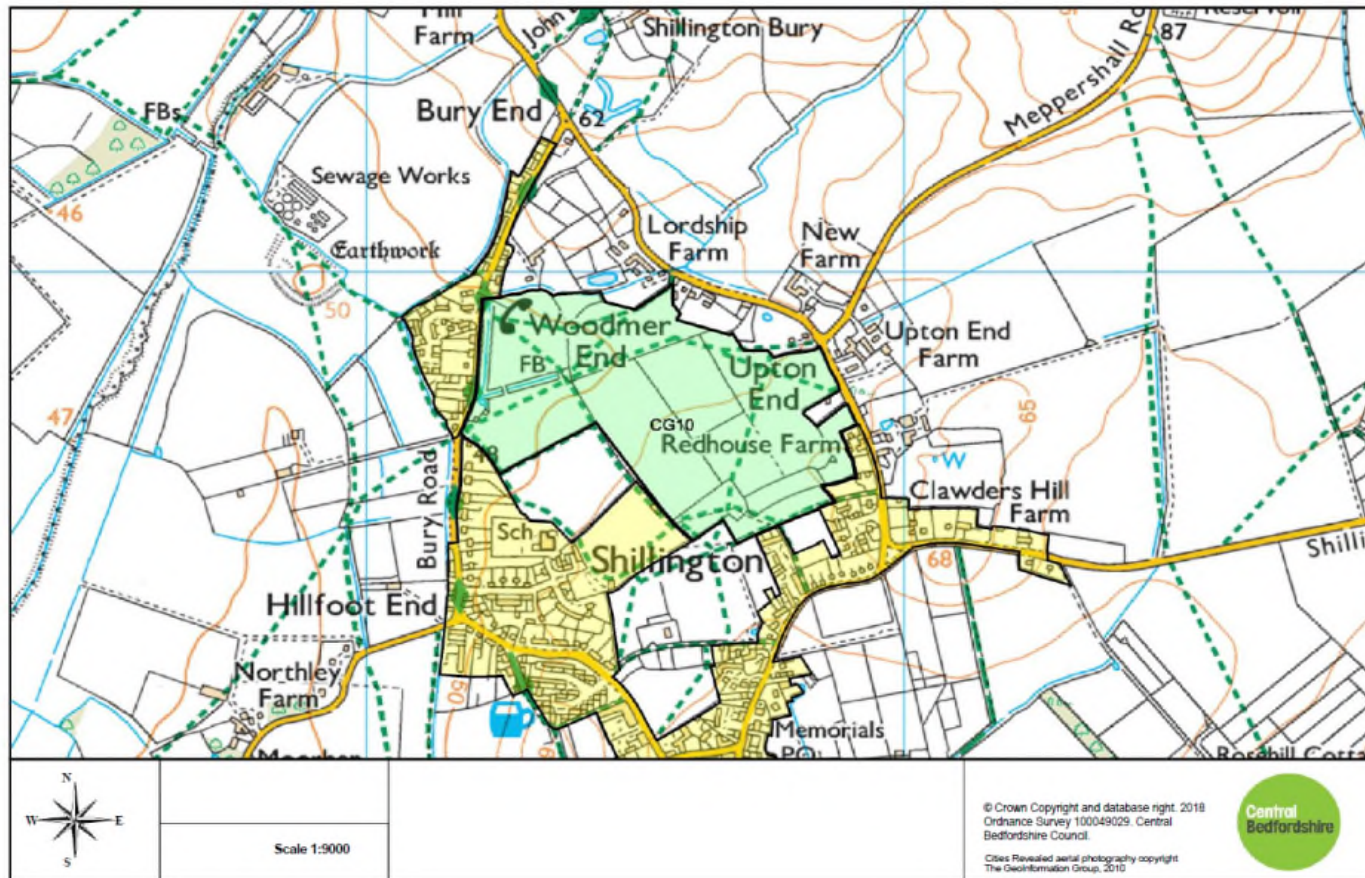
7.9 Land between Maulden Green End and Maulden Hall End (CG9)



Description:

The site is located to the east of 'Green End' Maulden and west of 'Hall End' Maulden. The village is separated with the main village and two ends that follow Clophill Road towards the A6. The land here is pastoral with a number paddocks, it is also quite elevated, allowing for wide views over the A507. The 'ends' that exist in Maulden have their own identity and it is important to retain this. Therefore a gap is being introduced to prevent the coalescence of Green End and Hall End whilst also protecting the elevated and open character. Existing residential development is on the north side of the road but this is low in density.

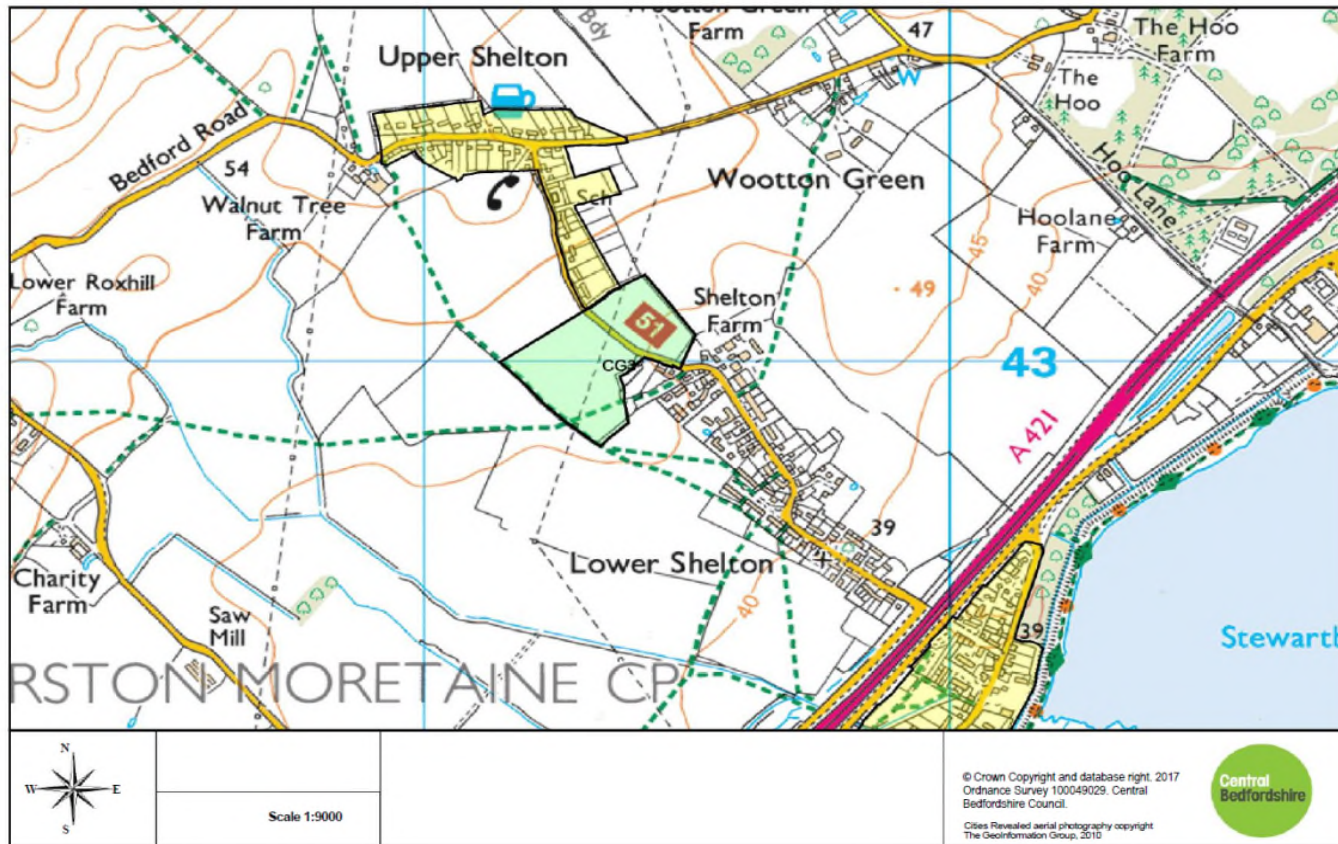
7.10 Land East of Woodmer End, Shillington (CG10)



Description:

The site is located to the north of central Shillington and located between Woodmer End and Upton End. The land here consists of agricultural and pastoral land with quite a few ROW intersecting the site. These ROW connect Upton and Woodmer End together in a rural setting, development in this location would remove this feature of the village. This area of land is also enclosed to the north by Upton End Road. It is important to retain this area of open countryside to prevent coalescence between Upton End, Woodmer End and the main village whilst also protecting the open character in this part of Shillington.

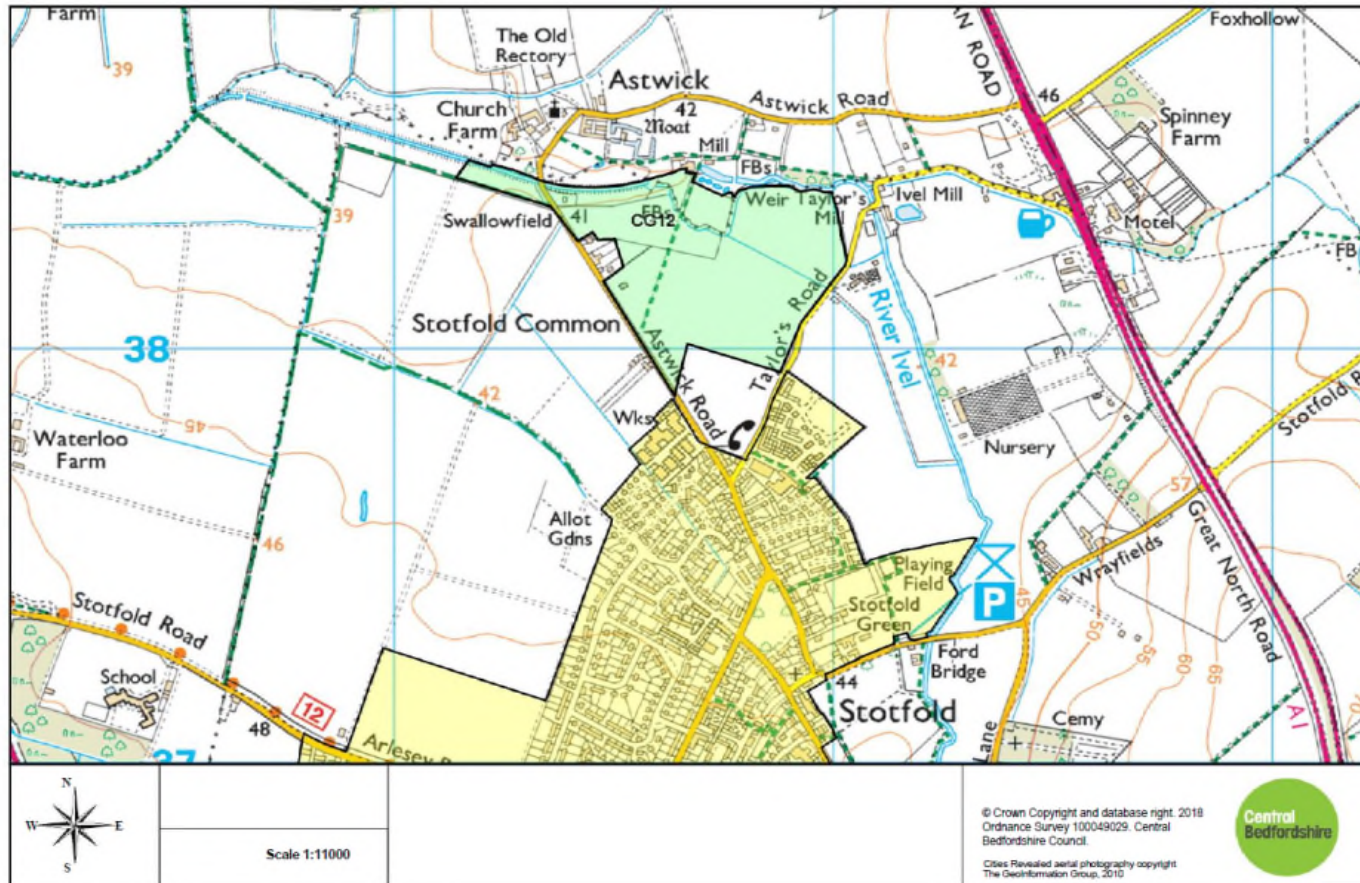
7.11 Land between Upper and Lower Shelton (CG11)



Description:

The site includes the area of land that separates Upper and Lower Shelton. The boundaries of the two settlements are relatively close to each other already, but Upper Shelton is designated as a 'Small Village' in the Settlement Hierarchy for the Local Plan and therefore some small scale development may possibly occur there in the future. Thus it is important to retain the existing separation to ensure any potential future growth does not harm the character of both settlements and the land between.

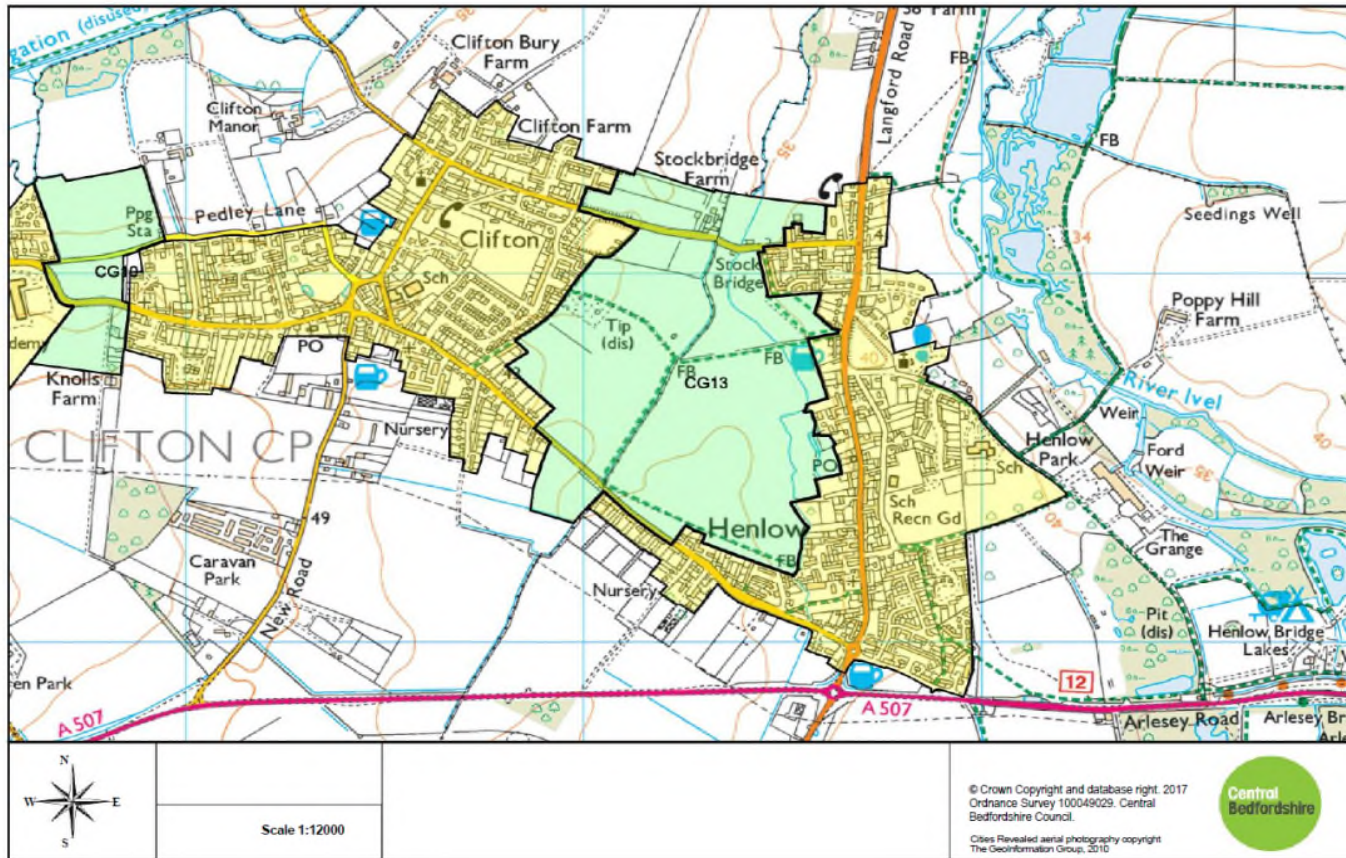
7.12 Land between Astwick and Stotfold (CG12)



Description:

The site is located to the north of Stotfold and south of the village of Astwick. The land here is agricultural with the River Ivel bordering the north of the site. Stotfold has recently seen significant growth, whilst this has been centred elsewhere in the town; there is the potential for future development to be located in the north. Therefore it is important to retain this area of countryside to prevent coalescence between the two settlements whilst also protecting the natural character of the River Ivel.

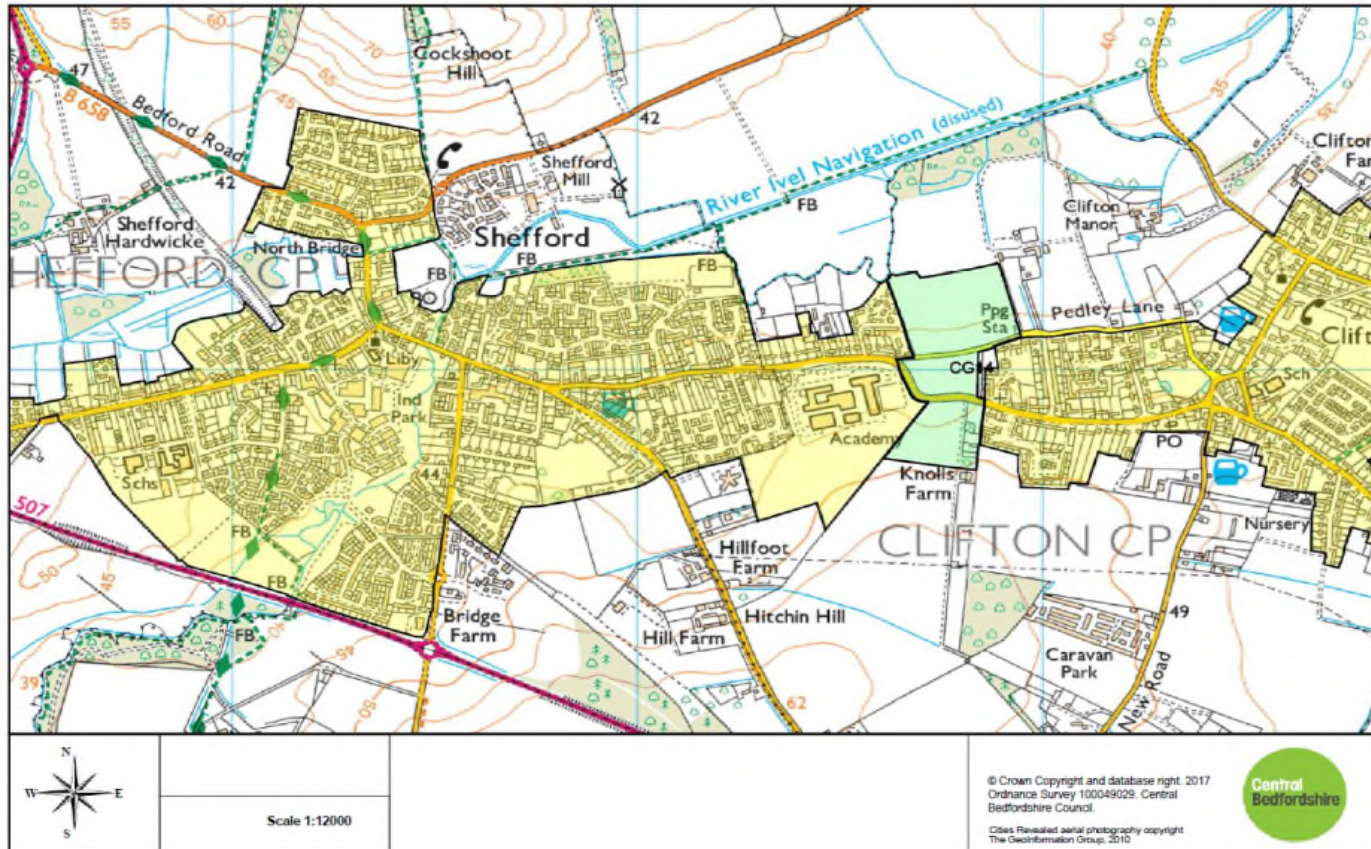
7.13 Land between Clifton and Henlow (CG13)



Description:

The site is located between Clifton and Henlow; The existing character of this land is agricultural and is an existing Important Countryside Gap. Similarly to site CG14 it is essential to retain this existing Important Countryside Gap to protect both settlements from future coalescence and to direct growth to areas where there will be no harm to the identity of either village.

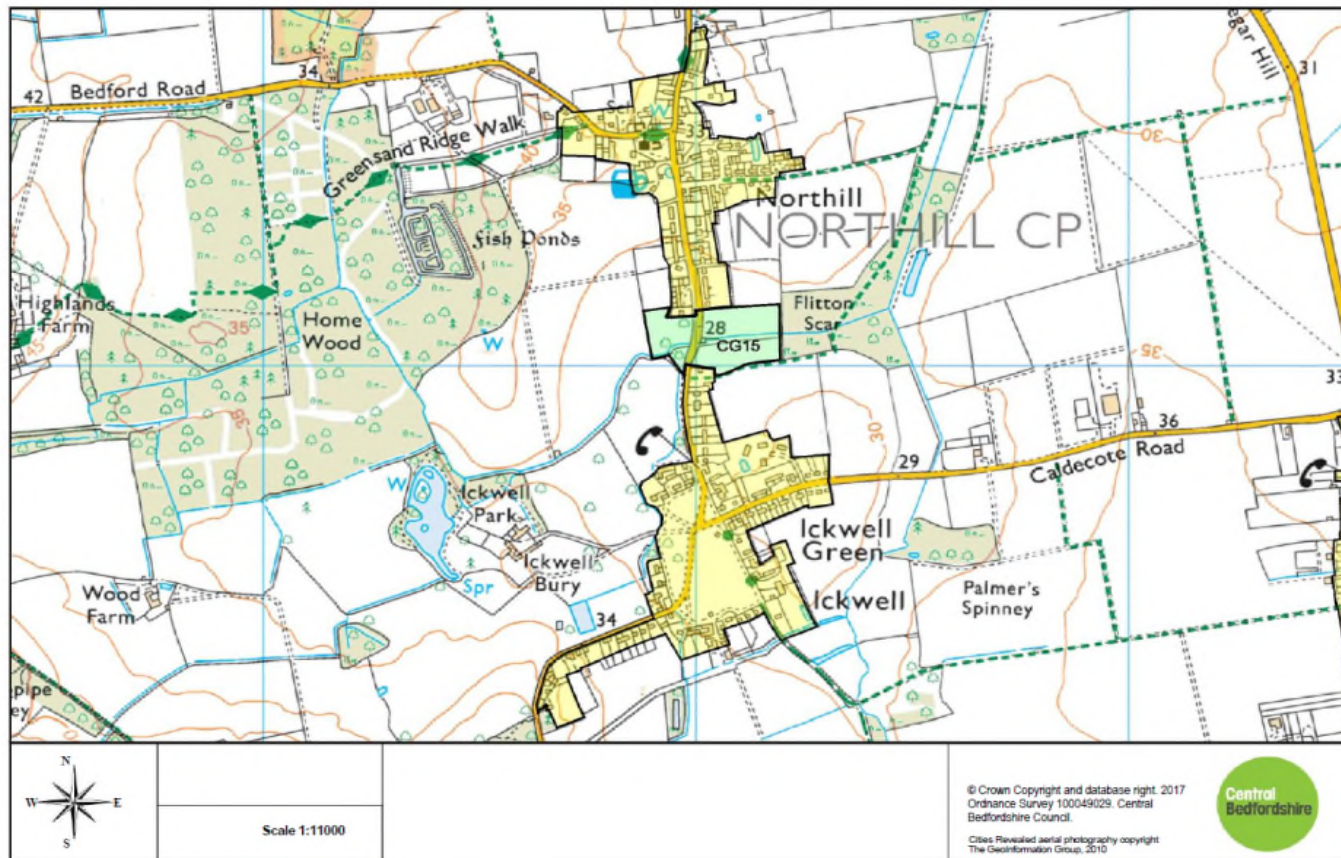
7.14 Land between Shefford and Clifton (CG14)



Description:

The site is situated between Clifton and Shefford within a narrow parcel of land that is an existing Important Countryside Gap. Given the recent growth within Clifton and Shefford and specifically, a recent planning permission on the western edge of Clifton, it has become increasingly more important to ensure this existing Important Countryside Gap remains to protect the identity of both villages.

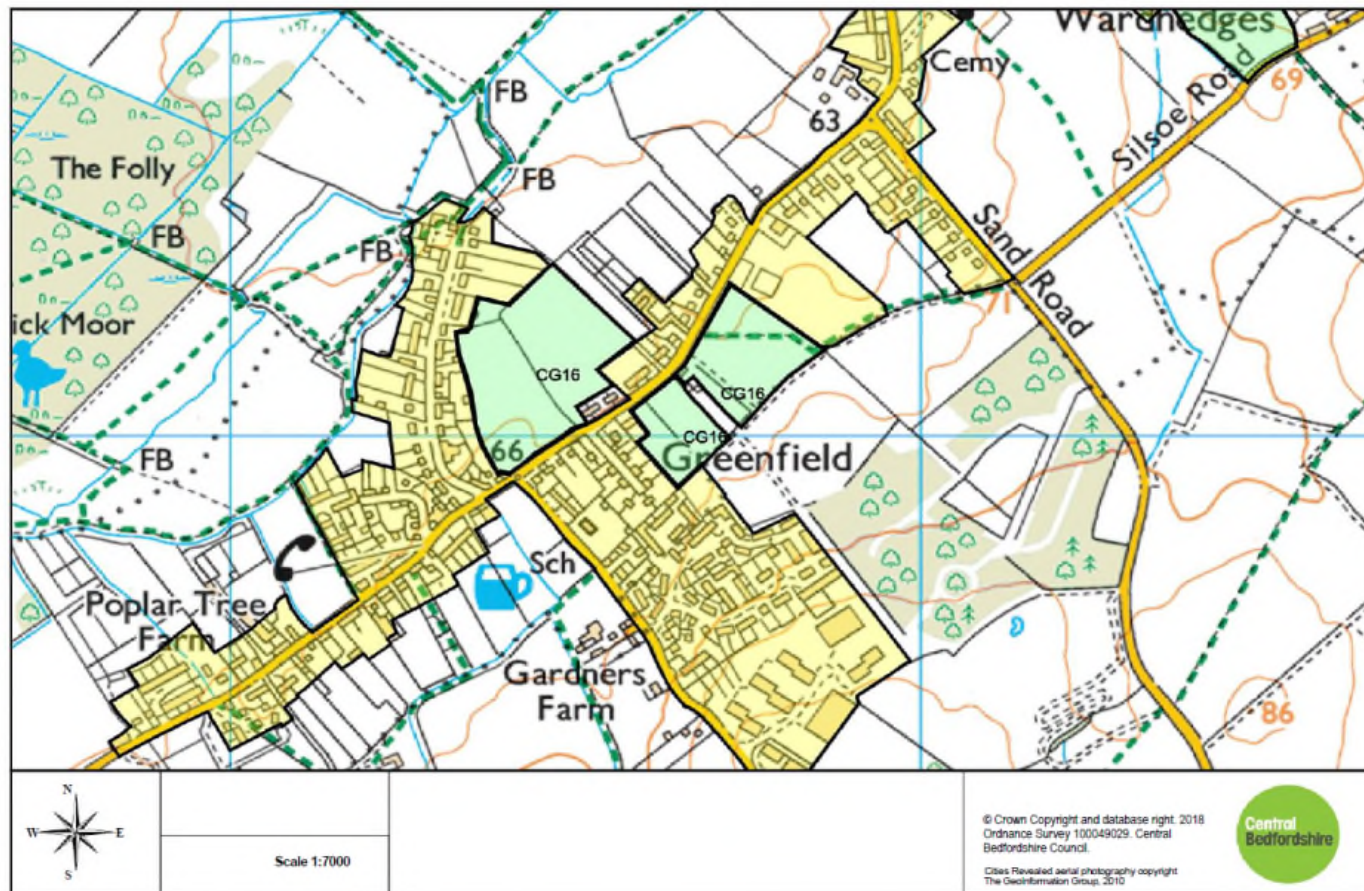
7.15 Land between Northhill and Ickwell (CG15)



Description:

The site is located between Northhill and Ickwell. It is an existing Important Countryside Gap which will be retained so it can continue to protect the character of the countryside in this area, as this area is already a relatively narrow gap it is essential to protect both villages from coalescence in the future.

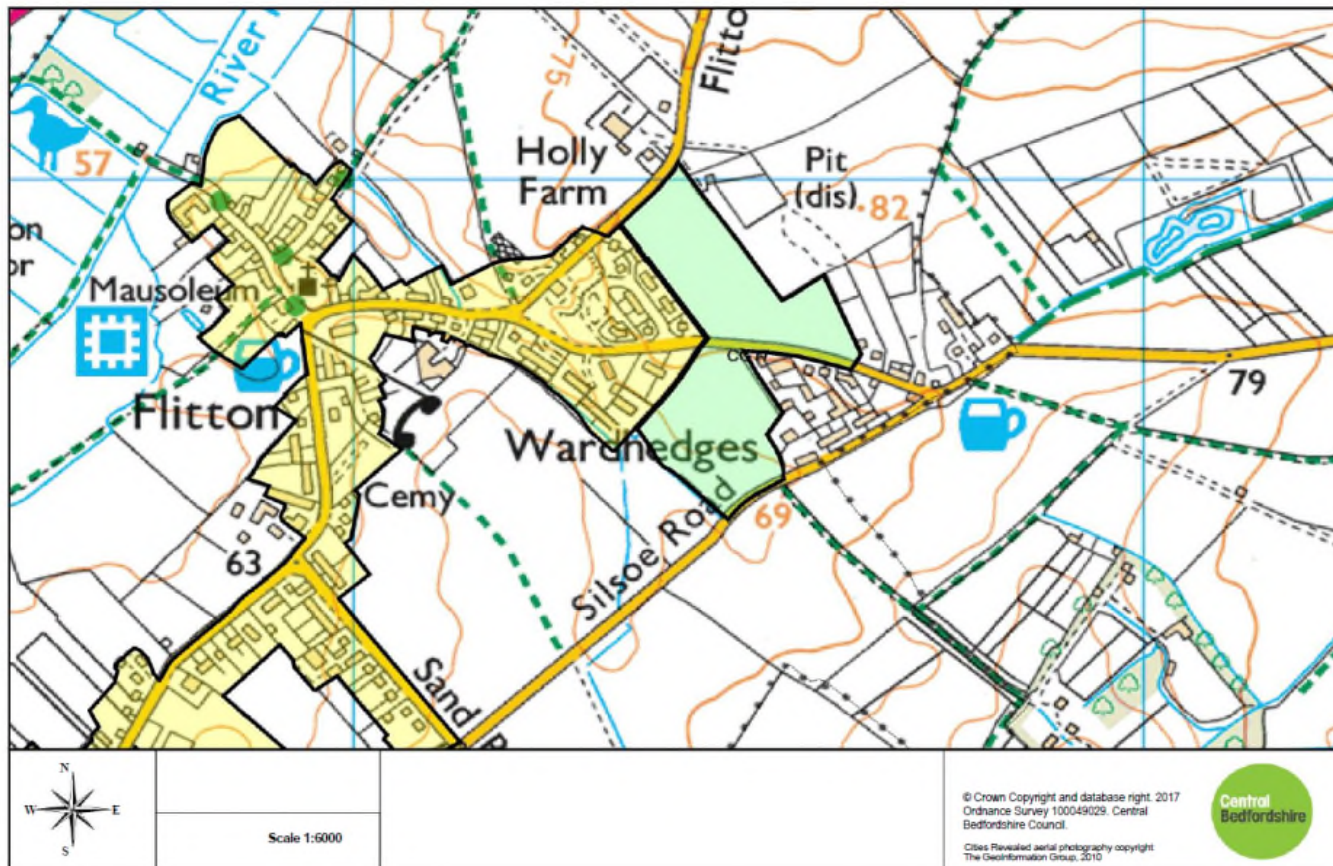
7.16 Land between Flitton and Greenfield (CG16)



Description:

The land being included within the Important Countryside Gap is located south of Flitton and east of Greenfield.. It is noted that this area is sensitive to coalescence issues, as Flitton and Greenfield are already connected on the north side of the road and Pulloxhill is located to the south. Therefore a gap is needed south of the road to prevent coalescence between the two villages. A recent planning permission (CB/17/02957/RM) for four dwellings splits the Countryside Gap in half and it is imperative to retain the existing open countryside surrounding this permission to prevent further reduction of the gap.

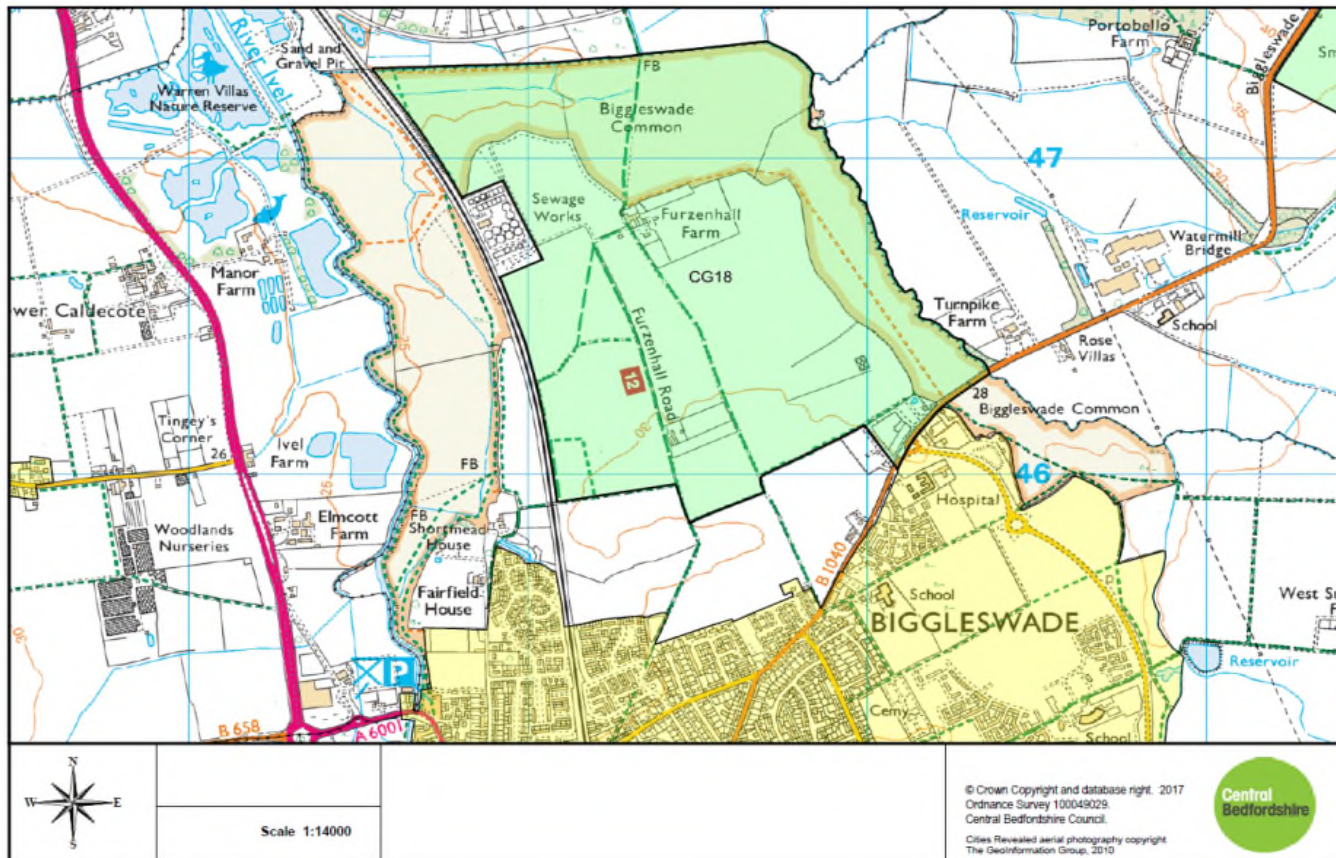
7.17 Land between Flitton and Wardhedges (CG17)



Description:

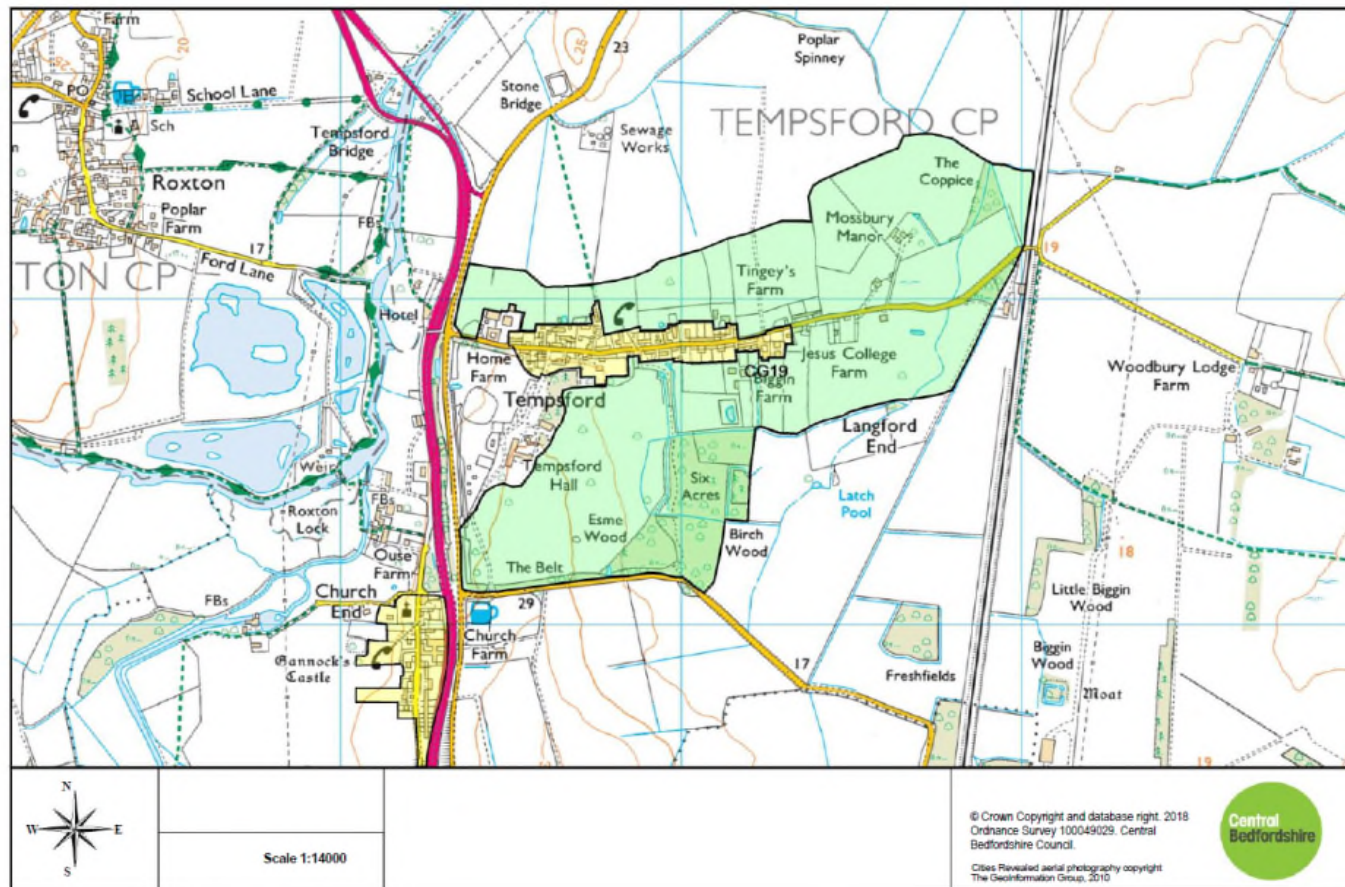
The land is situated to the east of Flitton and west of Wardhedges. An Important Countryside Gap is being highlighted here to prevent coalescence between Flitton and Wardhedges. As this area is sensitive to coalescence issues between various villages it is important to retain the existing character of the countryside where possible as this is already a narrow but distinctive gap. The land is predominantly farmland on either side of the road with hedgerows and mature trees lining the route, adding to the rural character of the area. This site will also help direct any future growth in Flitton away from the sensitive area around Wardhedges.

7.18 Land North of Biggleswade (CG18)



The land is located north of Biggleswade and includes a large portion of the Biggleswade Common. The land to the south of the site has been developed and is also being proposed within this Local Plan. Therefore it is necessary to introduce an Important Countryside Gap in this location to prevent further growth of Biggleswade from continuing northwards, causing visual coalescence with Sandy. The land west of the railway has not been included because existing constraints such as Flood Zones 2 and 3 which covers the entire area, will protect the area from development northwards. Similarly the same applies to the section of the Common south of Potton Road which is also in Flood Zones 2 and 3

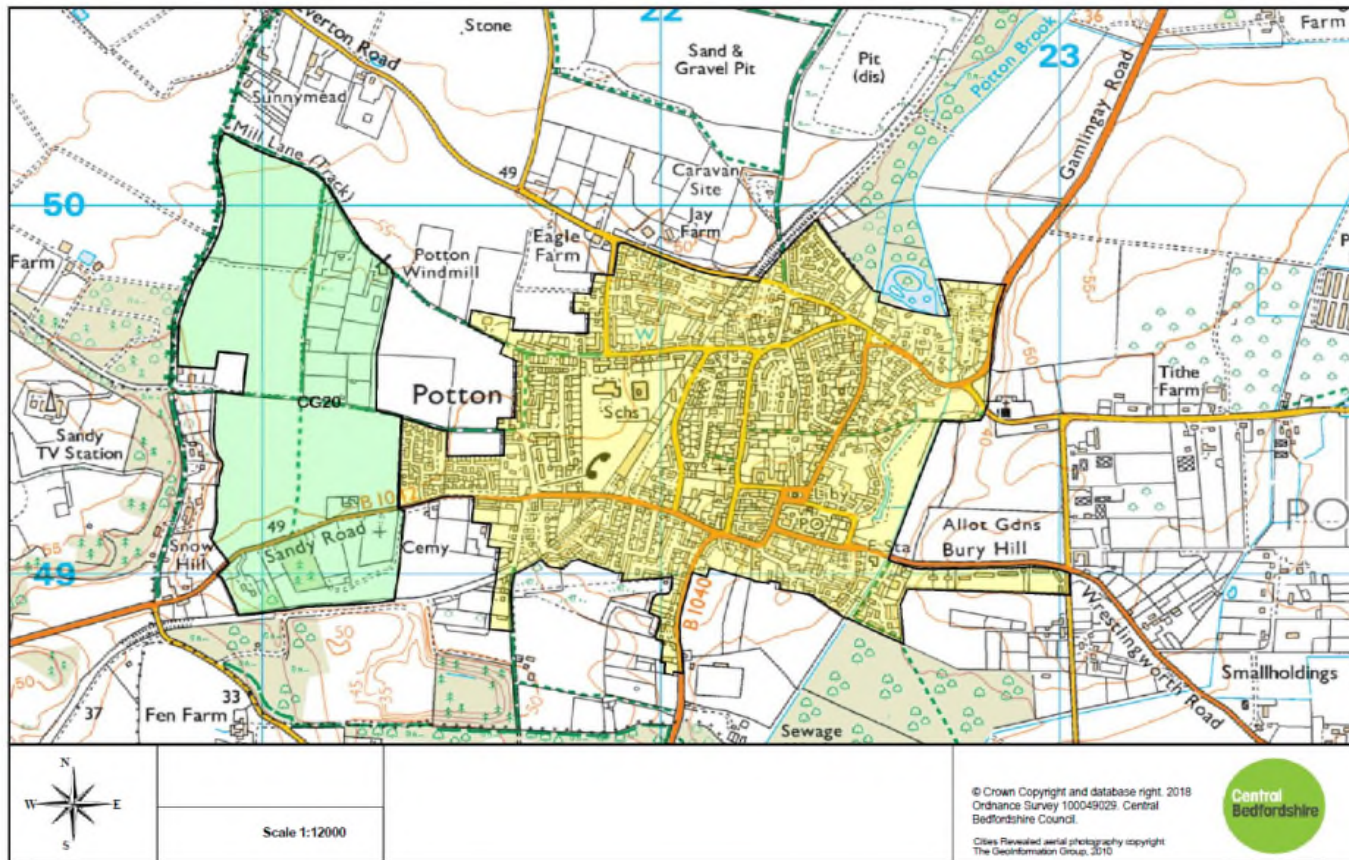
7.19 Land at Tempsford (CG19)



Description:

The site is located on land surrounding the main village of Tempsford to the north, east and south. This area consists of agricultural land and the 'Six Acres' woodland. This area around Tempsford is very open and provides very wide ranging views across the landscape towards sandy to the south and elsewhere. It is important to retain this open character around the village and to protect the village's identity from any future growth in this area proposed as part of the Local Plan.

7.20 Land West of Potton (CG20)



Description:

The site lies to the west of Potton, adjacent to the settlement of Deepdale to the west and Potton's settlement envelope to the east. The land is agricultural in its use but provides an important characteristic of both Deepdale and Potton. Whereby the landscape is very open, rural in character and rises in elevation from Sandy Road northwards. The wider area is also very elevated and it is important to retain these long ranging views towards Potton that are available. Additionally, Potton has seen substantial growth and it is essential to prevent coalescence between Potton and Deepdale.