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Neighbourhood Plan  
2016-2026

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**Fairfield**  
Parish Council

The Fairfield Neighbourhood Plan is supported by:

- Fairfield Design Statement
- Fairfield Green Infrastructure Plan
- Fairfield Consultation Statement
- Fairfield Parish Plan
- Fairfield Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Fairfield Basic Conditions Statement



“A big thank you to everyone who played a part!”

## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that took part in the initial consultation process, and also to those that completed the questionnaire.

This was the essential part of the Parish and Neighbourhood Plan process allowing it to be a true reflection of the Parish's concerns and priorities for the future.

### We would also like to thank...

The contribution of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, in particular Mike Fayers and Cliff Andrews for their continued advice and support.

Present and past members of the Fairfield Parish and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group:

Phil Mitchinson, Chris Titmus, Silke Gruner, Barrie Dack, Sharon Jones, Linda Manktelow, Penny Daffarn, Viv Batten, Tony Little and Jane Fanghanel for all their efforts.

Neighbourhood Plan Design: Now Studio.

# Welcome to the Neighbourhood Plan

In 2011, the Localism Act introduced a new opportunity for local communities to shape their future formally as part of the planning system. Neighbourhood Plans can be produced by Parish Councils and when they have gone through all the required steps and processes, they become part of the development plan for the area. This means that any planning applications will have to take account of policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan. It also provides local people with a say on, among other things, protecting open spaces and retaining local character.

Fairfield Parish Council was formed in 2013 and for the first 9 months all energies were concentrated on putting in place bureaucracy and systems necessary to ensure the smooth running of the Parish Council. When that initial dust had settled they took a long hard look at what they actually wanted to achieve as a Parish Council from then on. What were the main issues for this young community, what were the priorities and how could they best be addressed?

“The Plan will  
improve Fairfield  
for everyone!”





## The Next Steps...

It was then that they decided to ask the residents and ultimately to produce two documents:

1. A Parish Plan that is a plan of actions to be taken to address the identified issues over the next five years.
2. A Neighbourhood Plan that would set out the planning policies to guide the development of Fairfield over a ten year period.

“Residents want to keep the look and feel of Fairfield!”



## Defining the Plans for Fairfield

It was clear from the start that residents wanted to retain the unique character of Fairfield, the ‘look and feel’ of the development.

This Neighbourhood Plan sets out policies that will help to ensure that the ‘look and feel’ is retained both within the existing development and on any future development at Fairfield.

The Parish Plan and Neighbourhood plans have been developed in tandem as the survey of the residents was designed to inform both documents. The Parish Plan was then completed and distributed to all residents in October 2015. The Neighbourhood Plan now follows.

It has been compiled by a Parish and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group consisting of members of the Parish Council, Fairfield Hall Management Company, Fairfield Park Residents Association and resident volunteers. Additional help has been received from officers of Central Bedfordshire Council and Beds Rural Communities Charity.

Input from Fairfield residents has been crucial to ensure that this represents a true reflection of the community’s concerns and priorities for the future.



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# 1. Introduction to Fairfield

Fairfield is a rural Parish with one settlement in the South East corner of Central Bedfordshire. This settlement comprises of the restoration of the former Fairfield Hospital buildings and a new housing development that was developed between 2004 and 2012 to enable the restoration of the Hospital buildings. It has a unique character in that all of the design of the new development has been inspired by the features and character of the existing buildings.

## About the Parish of Fairfield

The settlement has a population of 3000 people all of whom have moved to the area within the last 12 years. Survey results indicate that 79% of the population live as 2,3 or 4 person households with an average of 2.7 persons per household.

Those results also indicated that people chose Fairfield as their home mainly because it was a pleasant rural location and the quality of the design. Local amenities include a lower school, community hall and a small shopping area.



“Fairfield is a great place to live so let’s keep it that way!”



## 2. What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

In 2011, National Government established a new tier of planning at a very local level, the Localism Act 2011, which enables organisations such as Fairfield Parish Council to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Such a plan can cover development and environment issues including new development, for a period of around 10 years.

### Adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan

When adopted, such plans have legal weight and have to be used to help determine planning applications for the area. It can also cover land use issues. Fairfield Neighbourhood Plan does not address land use as yet. The plan period is for 10 years from 2016 to 2026. However, a review in 5 years time may be considered to allow inclusion of further land use issues or allocations. In addition having a Neighbourhood Plan gives the Community the right to receive and spend a proportion of community infrastructure levy funds on the local facilities identified in the Plan.

Fairfield Parish became a designated Neighbourhood Area in October 2014, allowing the Parish Council to produce a Neighbourhood Plan.

“The map displays the Neighbourhood and Parish boundary of Fairfield”



### 3. Why Should Fairfield Have a Neighbourhood Plan?

The four purposes for which Fairfield Parish Council took on the challenge of producing a Neighbourhood Plan are to ensure that in the short term the following is covered.

- 1 | New development is sympathetic to the unique character of Fairfield.
- 2 | Extensions and infill development retain the character of the existing dwellings.
- 3 | The existing green spaces are maintained and retained as such into the future.
- 4 | To enhance the green infrastructure in line with the priorities identified by the community.

### 4. Planning Context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out policies on land use matters and is the overarching planning document for the whole country. It aims to achieve sustainable development through three dimensions of the planning system: economic, social and environmental.

It requires that Local Plans produced by local authorities, such as Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) conform to the guidance set out in the NPPF and that Neighbourhood Plans are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan for the area. Accordingly, Neighbourhood Plans are a planning tool for Parish Councils to guide new building and interpret planning policy locally.

National Planning Practice Guidance published in March 2014 provides advice on the neighbourhood planning system introduced by the Localism Act including key stages, the process and decisions. There is some clarity provided including confirmation that Neighbourhood Plans can pass examination stage prior to adoption of the local authority's Local Plan. This is particularly relevant as the CBC Local Plan is currently being reconsidered having been withdrawn following inspection.



## 5. Community Involvement

In November 2013 a potential Steering Group consisting of members of the Parish Council, Fairfield Hall Management Company, Fairfield Hall Residents Association, Fairfield Park Residents Association and the community in general met to discuss the Neighbourhood and Parish Plan process informed by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC).

### Addressing the Key Issues

The Steering Group Constitution, roles and responsibilities and timetable of events was approved by Fairfield Parish Council, who would fund the process, in February 2013. In March and April 2014 the community were invited to 'Have Your Say' by returning an initial flyer by hard copy or online or attending two open days hosted by BRCC in the community hall. Over 100 people responded in these events and the key issues for the community were identified.

In May 2014 working groups were set up lead by the Steering Group to review the responses with certain overarching sections and to prepare questions for a survey to be sent to all households. The draft survey was tested by volunteers to ensure understanding of the questions and the ease of

responding. BRCC and CBC were asked to comment to ensure all questions were worded fairly and covered all the issues. The questionnaire was distributed to all households in November 2014 and responses were requested either on hard copy or online. 226 questionnaires were submitted online and 324 by hard copy. The 550 responses gave an approximate return of 52% of households. The results of the hard copies were input onto the SurveyMonkey software and the results were announced at the March 2015 Parish Council AGM.

### Circulating Fairfield's Parish Plan

Further volunteers were recruited to the Steering Group and working parties set up in April 2015 to analyse the results and identify the actions needed in response.

"Working with  
our community for  
a brighter future"



The draft Plan was designed and circulated to CBC, BRCC and the Steering Group for consideration and the final approved Plan was distributed to all households in October 2015.

Meanwhile in September 2015 FPC, aware of the content of the emerging Parish Plan, appointed BRCC to prepare a Green Infrastructure Plan. This involved three public workshops from September to November 2015 hosted by BRCC.

## 6. Fairfield's Character

The unique character or 'look and feel' of Fairfield as is quoted by so many residents is entirely due to the presence of Fairfield Hospital. To understand its relevance then a brief history is appropriate.

### The History of Fairfield Hall

Originally known as The Stotfold Three Counties Asylum, building of the hospital commenced in 1856 on a 253 acre site between Letchworth, Arlesey and Stotfold. The new hospital was to replace the Bedford Lunatic Asylum in Amphill Road in Bedford, which had been built in 1812.

The Fairfield Hospital was designed by architect George Fowler Jones. The clay for its bricks came from the nearby Arlesey Pits. The hospital opened on 8 March 1860 with the transfer of 6 male and 6 female patients from Bedford Lunatic Asylum, and catered for patients from Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Huntingdonshire. The Asylum had its own chapel, farm, laundry, railway station and fire brigade.



“The unique character is what makes Fairfield the place it is today!”

## The Three Counties Hospital

By 1861 the number of patients had expanded to 460, with 248 female and 212 male patients. At this time the Asylum employed about 256 local people from the surrounding villages, including 66 men in its garden and small farm, where produce for the Asylum's kitchen was grown, and 33 women in the laundry and wash house. The Chapel and cemetery were added in 1879, with the East stained-glass window being added in 1920 in memory of the Asylum's staff and former inmates who lost their lives in the First World War. During and after that War the Asylum treated male and female patients suffering from shell shock.

The Mental Treatment Act of 1930 changed the use of the term 'Asylum' to 'Hospital', so The Three Counties Asylum became known as The Three Counties Hospital. At its height in 1936 Fairfield Hospital catered for 1,100 patients, with the grounds of the hospital having increased to 410 acres through the purchase of additional farm land. Of these 410 acres 385 were cultivated. In 1948 The Three Counties Hospital became part of the National Health Service, and, in 1960, it was renamed Fairfield Hospital.



In 1981 the Conservative Government published its 'Care in the Community' report. Its aim was a more liberal way of helping people with mental health problems, by removing them from impersonal, often Victorian institutions, such as Fairfield Hospital, and caring for them in their own homes. Also, better drugs became available so that patients could be treated at home. It was also meant to reduce the cost of institutionalising so many mentally ill people. This Act led to the closure of many hospitals including Fairfield Hospital, which finally closed in 1999.

## The Future and Fairfield Hall

The hospital was the subject of a preservation order in 1985 by English Heritage who declared it a Grade II listed building. Restoration of the main building commenced in February 2002. The façade has been restored and its interior has been converted into flats and a health club and renamed Fairfield Hall. The outbuildings and farmhouse have also been restored and converted for residential use and are now named Middlemarch.

In order to facilitate the restoration residential development was permitted on the surrounding land. The preservation order however also covered the grounds and thanks to this it has meant that the architects have had to keep the Victorian charm to streets and house frontages as well as incorporating the mature woodland and shrubs that existed. The whole redevelopment of the hospital site and grounds constitutes what is known as Fairfield Park.

The development and surrounding areas of Fairfield became a Parish in its own right in 2013.

"The buildings and surroundings are truly spectacular!"



## 7. Visions and Objectives

The vision of the Fairfield Parish and the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan are clearly outlined here.



“Let’s keep Fairfield a great place to live for years to come!”

1

To ensure that all new development shall be of a high quality of design that complements and enhances the unique local character of Fairfield.

2

To ensure that all extensions to existing dwellings maintain the unique design and use of materials that currently exist.

3

To ensure that the existing green spaces within Fairfield are retained in perpetuity and maintained to a high standard.

4

To ensure that the development of the priorities itemised in the Green Infrastructure Plan are given full consideration when future development is proposed.



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## **The Neighbourhood Plan Policies**

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The subsequent pages identify our proposed local policies to achieve our objectives. Once the Plan is 'made' it will form part of the statutory development plan for Fairfield and will have significant weight in the determination of planning applications along with the development policies within in the forthcoming CBC Local Plan Framework and the National Planning Policy Framework.

## 8. Design and Character

During the Parish and Neighbourhood Plan process one of the recurring concerns identified in the early consultation was the ability to maintain the 'unique look and feel' of Fairfield. This 'unique look and feel' had been achieved by the strict adherence of the Planning Authority and all developers to the Urban Design Strategy adopted in 2002.



"The character of Fairfield is truly unparalleled!"

### Policy 1. Retaining the 'Look and Feel'

The Parish Council were informed in early discussions with the current Planning Authority, Central Bedfordshire Council, that the 'Urban Design Strategy' was no longer considered current planning guidance given that Fairfield had now been completed. It would not be used as planning guidance when planning applications for new developments and extensions were considered.

Further on, during the Plan process, the Questionnaire in response to these initial concerns, asked the question whether new developments should be:

- Built to retain the look and character of Fairfield, in their styles and materials.
- Be built to look different from the current styles.
- No opinion.

The results were an overwhelming 95% of responses felt that the existing look and character of Fairfield should be retained.

The Design Statement proposed in this Neighbourhood Plan sets out to try and ensure that this wish becomes reality over the plan period.

### Policy 1. Design and Character

- 1a) The build form strategy for all new developments shall be in keeping with the design language described in the Fairfield Design Statement.
- 1b) The public realm elements of any new developments shall be in keeping with the existing public realm elements and materials described in the Fairfield Design Statement.
- 1c) All property extensions and infill development shall be in character and proportion with the existing development and its setting.
- 1d) All property extensions and infill developments shall be constructed of materials that match those existing or be similar approved.
- 1e) Particular regard will be had to the effect of any new development on the setting of the historic former hospital buildings and those within its curtilage which are closely related to them.




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## 9. The Environment

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Once again during the early consultation process the need to maintain the 'unique look and feel' of Fairfield led residents to be concerned about retaining and adequately maintaining the green spaces that the development master plan had provided.



"We are very lucky indeed to have such lovely green spaces"

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### Policy 2. Retaining the Green Spaces

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The questionnaire asked for residents' opinion on how they valued the environment and open spaces around Fairfield. We asked what areas should be maintained as they are, what improvements could be made and which could be developed.

The results of the survey showed that 98% of residents consider that both landscaping and the open spaces together with the Orchards are important to them.

95% felt that the Orchards should be protected from any future development.

In order to develop the detail of the residents' wishes further, the Parish have instigated the preparation of a Green

Infrastructure Plan. The plan has been prepared by Beds Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) as an independent consultant with proven expertise of the process and local consultation methodology needed to produce the document.

The plan has identified the following objectives that the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address in the policies.

- To protect and where possible enhance the landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment.
- To improve access and links for people and wildlife.
- To provide a multi functional green infrastructure network.

All proposals will be in line with the Central Beds Landscape Character Assessment and Outdoor Access Improvement Plan.


### Policy 2. Improving Green Infrastructure

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- 2a. Development Proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they protect and where appropriate enhance existing green infrastructure assets affected by the development.
- 2b. Green infrastructure enhancements should be in accordance with the priorities identified in the Green Infrastructure Plan existing or be similar approved.
- Protect and enhance the West and East Orchards.
  - Create community greenspace to include allotments, football pitch, skate-park, trim trail/outdoor gym and barbecue area
  - Create multi-user right of way parallel to Hitchin Road on west side of the hedge.

## 10. Designating Local Green Spaces

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. A new designation to protect local green areas of particular importance to local communities has been introduced. The Local Green Space designation will allow communities to identify and protect areas from development that are of value to the community through local and neighbourhood plans.



"It's important that we protect the green space we've got!"

### Policy 3. Designating Green Spaces

The Local Green Space designation should only be used:

- Where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- Where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- Where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

In addition to the prioritisation of the individual aspirations, a further priority agreed at the workshop was the Local Green Space (LGS) designation of the following sites:

#### 1 West Orchard

A designated county wildlife site close to the centre of Fairfield that has historically served the Fairfield Hospital for years. It will be maintained and enhanced by the 'Friends of the Orchards' group of local residents. It will continue to provide an area of peace and tranquility for the residents of Fairfield.

#### 2 East Orchard

A designated county wildlife site close to the centre of Fairfield that has historically served the Fairfield Hospital for years. It will be maintained and enhanced by the 'Friends of the Orchards' group of local residents. It will continue to provide an area of peace and tranquility for the residents of Fairfield.

#### 3 Old Hospital Cemetery

The site of the cemetery used to bury the patients of the former hospital. It lies close to the former hospital and together with an area of land adjacent where an unknown number of additional bodies are reportedly buried forms part of the North West boundary of the parish. This is an area of historical significance.

#### 4a Cricket Club and Surrounding Areas

#### 4b Bowls Club and Surrounding Areas

These areas of land are in the heart of Fairfield and provide the local community with recreational facilities and have done so for years, being part of the original hospital facilities.

5 Land to the Rear of the Community Hall

This area of land was originally planned as a junior football pitch but as yet has not been developed as such. It has been used for community events such as the "apple day" and local residents barbecue.

6 Urban Park

This is a more formal green area in the centre of Fairfield that has been used for "Fairfield Alive" and choir singing events. Further enhancements are planned to allow greater community use of this area.

7 Land to the Central Urban North/South Play Areas

8 Land to the North of Bronte Avenue

This includes the crescent of trees East and West play areas.

9 Land Around/Including Figure of Eight Play Area

10 Land North of Charlotte Avenue

11 Land Around/Including the Western Play Area

12 Land Around St Lukes Chapel

An area of tranquility around the original St Lukes Chapel that is the habitat of a large variety of flora and fauna.

13 Land West of Hitchin Road

Please Note: 7,8,9,10 and 11 are all large green areas of public open space with the majority having Local Equipped Areas of Play within them.

"The map shows the designated green areas that are outlined in the Neighbourhood Plan"



## 10. Designating Local Green Spaces

The table below displays the scoring matrix for the local green sites. In the absence of any official guidelines our own scoring assumptions have been made and are noted.



No.	Designated Green Space Site Identity	Proximity	Natural Beauty	Historical Significance	Recreational Value	Wildlife	Tranquility	Total
1	West Orchard	2	2	2	1	2	2	11
2	East Orchard	2	2	2	1	2	2	11
3	Hospital Cemetery	2	1	2	1	1	2	9
4	Cricket Club and Bowls Club	2	1	1	2	0	0	6
5	Land To Rear of Community Hall	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
6	Urban Park	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
7	Land Around the Central Urban North and South Play Areas	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
8	Land To The North of Bronte Avenue Inc. Crescent and Play Areas	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
9	Land Around and Including the Figure of Eight Play Area	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
10	Land North of Charlotte Avenue	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
11	Land Around and Including the Western Play Area	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
12	Land Around St. Lukes Chapel	2	1	0	1	1	1	6
13	Land West of Hitchin Road	2	1	0	0	1	1	5

Scoring Assumptions: Proximity / 2 = Land within the Parish Boundary / 1 = Land Adjacent to the Parish Boundary / 0 = Land Beyond the Parish Boundary / All others / 2 = High / 1 = Low / 0 = None



### Policy 3. Designating Local Green Spaces

- 3a) The sites that are identified on the map as sites 1 to 13 are designated Local Green Spaces.
- 3b) Development both to the defined sites, and close to, will only be permitted where it does not erode their beauty, attractiveness, visual amenity and richness of wildlife.
- 3c) So far as is consistent with their predominantly open and undeveloped character, opportunities to improve public access and recreational use in these areas will be encouraged for the benefit of the wider community.
- 3d) Development proposals that offer the conservation, enhancement and restoration of their biodiversity will be supported.



“Let’s keep Fairfield how it is and protect the green spaces!”





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