

Sundon & Streatley Chiltern Arc

Access & Green Space Vision Plan - 2013



Forword

The Sundon and Streatley – Area Vision Plan, has been developed by Central Bedfordshire Council's Countryside Access Service, in partnership with the Groundwork Trust, National Trust, The Chilterns Conservation Board and the Local communities surrounding the area.

The Vision for this plan is to: provide a structured, informed and shared vision for the future management and development of project landscape area.

Aims:

- Providing landscapes for people to enjoy 'on their doorstep',
- Maintaining and increasing access to high quality greenspace and countryside access,
- Developing community ownership and increasing volunteer engagement,
- Reviewing, managing and seeking to enhance ecology and heritage features
- Providing opportunities for exercise and physical activity close to where people live,
- Creating a cohesive plan which can be committed to by multiple parties.

In the development of this plan 75 people attended workshops and 20 online questionnaires were returned – this shows a high level of support and interest in the future of the Sundon

and Streatley Countryside Area.

This area vision plan is developed to sit in a suite of plans that are designed to support and deliver improvements to the development of Green Infrastructure and towards the management, development and accessibility of Green Spaces.



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Abbreviations

Area Outstanding Natural Beauty	AONB
Central Bedfordshire Council	CBC
Countryside Access Service	CAS
Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	CAONB
Chilterns Conservation Board	CCB

Appendices

1. AONB Management Plan extracts
2. SSSI citations
3. Information on 'Chalk Arc' from Luton and southern Bedfordshire GI plan
4. Extracts from 'Strategic Multi-functional Greenspace in Luton and Southern Bedfordshire' (2009) by Kit Campbell Associates
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6. 'Landscape Character Assessment - Extracts from the Southern Bedfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment and Chalk Arc Landscape Character Assessment
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Executive Summary

This vision plan has been developed by Groundwork Luton & Bedfordshire for Central Bedfordshire Council's (CBC) Countryside Access Service (CAS). The study has been guided by a steering group made up of representatives from Central Bedfordshire Council and The National Trust in partnership with the Chilterns Conservation Board.

The aim of the study is to produce a holistic vision for various sites and visitor planning in the Sundon and Streatley Chiltern Arc area. The vision seeks to identify opportunities to improve connectivity of green spaces and access routes to provide better connecting amenities for people now and in the future.

The project area contains a unique collection of nationally and locally important historical features and wildlife sites and a network of linear and open access sites providing an important resource for residents and visitors. The area is also subject to proposals for housing growth to the North of Luton. Although at the early stages, the future development proposals will need to plan for an increase in visitor numbers. This issue has been considered within this study and it is intended that the study can be used to help guide

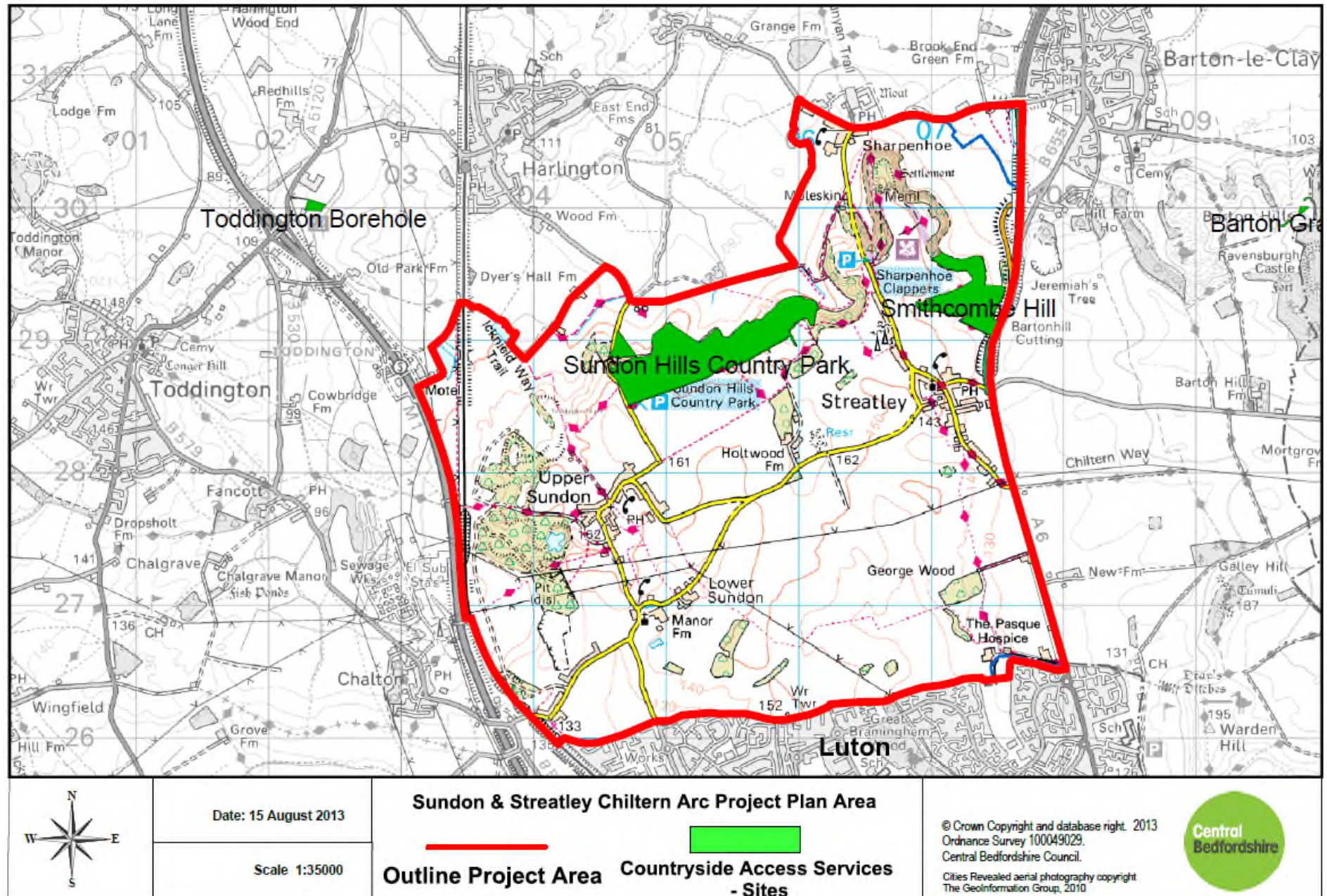
and inform how the Framework Plan for the area deals with access routes and strategic greenspaces.

Consultation has been undertaken with a number of stakeholders who represent the interests of landowners, statutory bodies and site users.

Issues and opportunities were identified and were grouped into specific themes of biodiversity; access; public use and engagement; landscape and heritage; and geology. Proposals were then developed with an overall vision to enhance the project area by improving access to it for both the enjoyment and education of visitors whilst conserving the diversity of the intrinsically valuable and unique area. The vision will be used as a framework to guide protection of important sites and networks as part of development proposals in the future.

A number of recommendations have been developed to work towards the aims, objectives and visitor standards for the project area. These recommendations seek to address the issues and fulfil the opportunities which the project area offers. An action plan to progress the project and potential funding opportunities to achieve this have also been identified.

Access and Green Spaces Vision Plan, Project Area Plan - Figure 1



1 Introduction

1.1 In January 2012, Groundwork Luton & Bedfordshire was commissioned by Central Bedfordshire Council's Countryside Access Service to produce a vision plan for the chalk landscape and access routes north of Luton between the M1 and A6.

1.2 The vision plan encompasses countryside contained within the boundary of the parish of Sundon, much of Streatley and small parts of the parishes of Barton, Chalton, Harlington and Toddington. It contains a unique collection of nationally and locally important historical features and wildlife sites and a network of linear and open access sites providing an important resource for residents and visitors. The majority of project area is in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (CAONB), is a key component of the local Green Infrastructure network with links to a number of sites to the north of Luton. The site location can be seen in Figure 1 (page 5).

1.3 The aim of the project, as defined by Central Bedfordshire Council in the project brief, is to “take a holistic approach to countryside / greenspace site and visitor planning in the Sundon and Streatley Chiltern Arc, seeking to improve connectivity of landscape and green infrastructure networks

to ensure that access routes and spaces are fit purpose for the numbers of visitors both current and in the future. Also that the impact of visitors has a managed and minimal effect on this high value landscape and its biodiversity, wildlife conservation and heritage.”

1.4 The project has been guided by a core group made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- Central Bedfordshire Council – Countryside Access Service
- Chilterns Conservation Board
- The National Trust

A number of stakeholder partners have been engaged through direct consultations. These organisations include English Heritage, Natural England, Streatley Parish Council, Sundon Parish Council and the Wildlife Trust.



Village green in Upper Sundon.



View south across agricultural fields, towards the rolling chalk

2 The Project Area

2.1 Location

2.1.1 The project area, which is approximately 1554 hectares in size, encompasses the countryside contained within the boundary of the parishes of Streatley and Sundon along with small parts of the parishes of Barton, Chalton, Harlington and Toddington. The project area is bordered by Luton to the south, the Midland Mainline Railway and M1 to the west, the A6 to the east and by open countryside to the north.

2.1.2 The project area also forms part of the Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC) – strategic district plan. The plan is aimed at improving Environmental & Strategic Opportunities, including the Landscape Character, Historic Environment, Biodiversity, Accessible Greenspaces and Access Routes.

2.2 Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.2.1 The chalk escarpment of the Chilterns are a dominant geological and landscape feature which rises steeply from the Vale of Aylesbury to 275 metres above mean sea level. The scarp faces are largely wooded in character, interspersed with areas of unimproved chalk downland and scrub on thin rendzina soils, but the northern end of the Chilterns are more open.

The habitats of the Chilterns that are of importance for nature conservation comprise chalk downland and scrub, ancient semi-natural and secondary woodlands, and species-rich hedgerows with small areas of acid grassland on the Commons. The Chilterns contain extensive areas of native beech woodland in England, which cover the full range of native beech woodland types. Chalk grassland is the other key habitat in the Natural Area. Associated with some areas of chalk grassland is a nationally important bryophyte and lichen community. The Chilterns are also a valuable area for a large number of rare and scarce plants, including arable weeds and lichens.

The Chilterns AONB covers an area of 833 square kilometres. It was designated for the natural beauty of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage, particularly to protect its special qualities including steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes and a rich historic environment. The section of the Chilterns AONB covered by the project area includes the following areas

- Sundon Country Park
- Moleskin Hill
- Sharpenhoe Clappers

- Smithcombe Hills
- Sundon Landfill site
- Sundon Chalk quarry (disused)

2.2.2 The Chilterns AONB is close to Luton in this area. The town forms a hard urban edge to the project area and is also close to the Chilterns AONB boundary, as shown in Figure 2 (page 11). This has led to urbanisation, illegal activities such as fly-tipping and problems for landowners who wish to continue commercial farming.

2.2.3 The landscape of the Chilterns is dominated by farmland and woodland and changes in these land uses have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area. The reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and the introduction of new agri-environment schemes in the UK are affecting farming, with a greater emphasis on wildlife conservation. Commercial influences on agriculture impact on management practices in the countryside and therefore habitats and landscape character.

2.2.4 The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is an independent statutory body established to manage the AONB. It is the duty of a conservation board, in the exercise of their

functions, to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty, (see Section 87 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

2.2.5 The CCB is required to produce a management plan for the AONB; the current plan “The Framework for Action 2008-2013” includes broad aims for management of the AONB plus more detailed policies and actions (see <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html> and [appendix 1](#)).

The current plan is being reviewed and new updated plan will be consulted on in September 2013 this will be for the period 2014 – 2019.

2.3 Site Ownership and Management

2.3.1. There are a large number of landowners across the area including Central Bedfordshire Council. Large sections of the area are under arable cultivation by tenant farmers.

2.3.2 The National Trust owns or manages on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council the majority of the publicly accessible

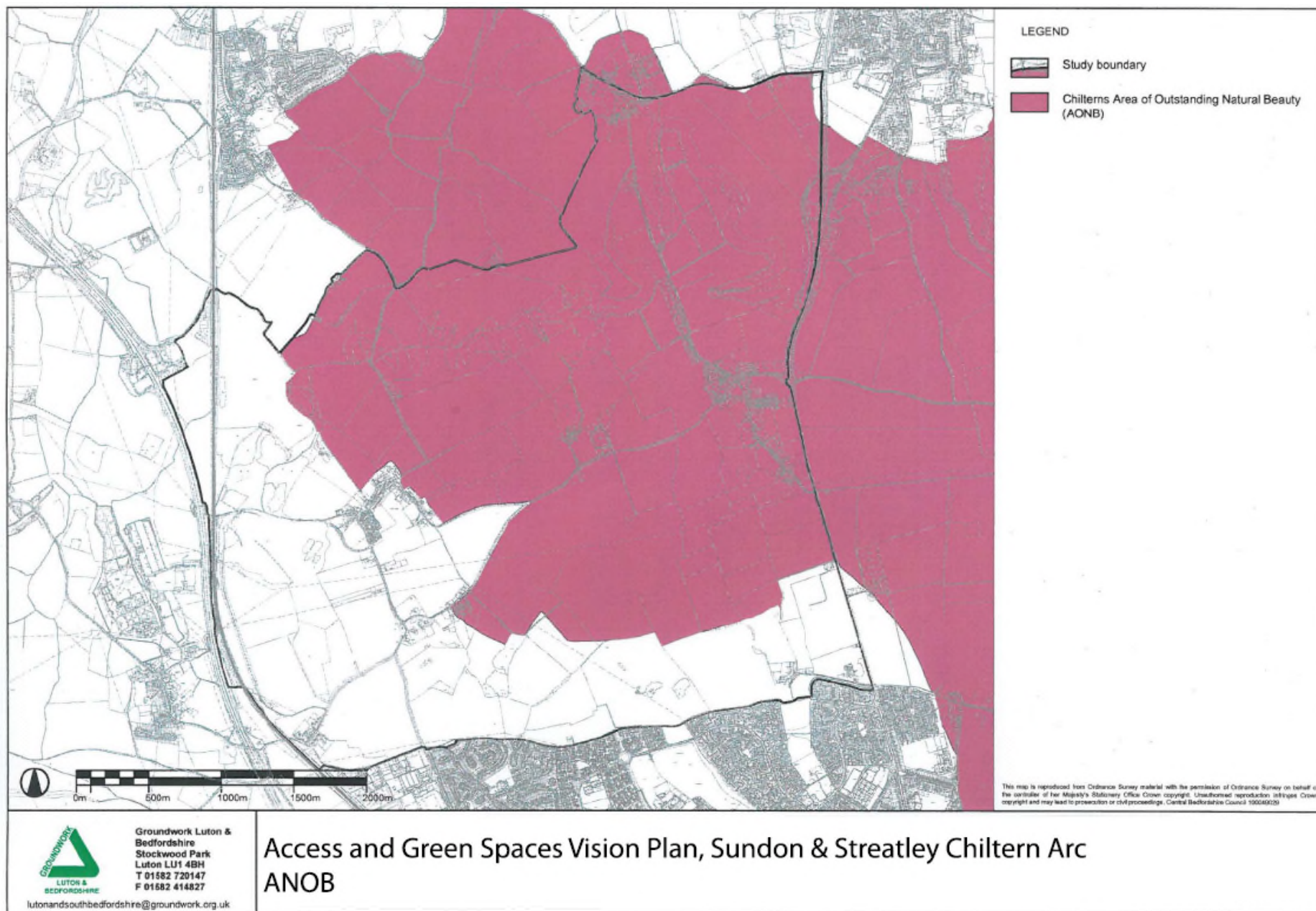
parts of the project area, including Sundon Hills Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers. These parts of the site are managed for the benefit of biodiversity, heritage and visitors addressing the conflicts which inevitably arise between the three.

2.3.3 Approximately 60% of land within the project area is entered into agri-environment schemes as shown in Figure 3 (page 33) The majority being in entry level with some parts entered into the higher level or organic schemes. The majority of the project area is within the Chilterns and East Anglian Chalk Higher Level Stewardship target area.

2.3.4 The majority of the project area is in private ownership and currently not open to public access. Sundon Chalk Quarry is in private ownership, but has Open Access Land with existing rights as defined in The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, thereby allowing public access to the whole of the site.

2.3.5 The Sundon former landfill site is owned by Central Bedfordshire Council and is currently being restored as publically accessible space.

AONB Area – Figure 2



2.4 Geology

2.4.1 The project area sits on chalk, the underlying rock of much of Southern Bedfordshire. It is this geology which has ultimately shaped the area's landscape, wildlife, settlement and industry. The area includes the disused complex of chalk pits at Sundon Chalk Quarry.

2.4.2 There is also the Local Geological site designated at Smithcombe, Sharpenhoe and Sundon Hills. This is an excellent example of a chalk scarp and dip slope sloping gently to the southeast. The escarpment is dissected by many dry valleys known as coombes including Smithcombe Valley and Watergutter Hole.

2.5 Biodiversity

2.5.1 The underlying chalk has resulted in the development of a network of highly valuable habitats including that of chalk grassland and associated wildlife across the project area. Other important habitats include ancient woodland, river valleys with chalk rivers, ancient hedgerow and other farmland habitats. There are a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, County Wildlife Sites and Ancient Woodlands within the area many of which are managed to maintain and enhance this biodiversity. The extent of these

areas can be seen in Figure 3 (page 33). Chalk downland is among the habitats that have been greatly reduced in extent and quality through changes in agricultural and forestry practices.

2.5.2 The National Trust is active in the area through site management and seeks to extend the land under their management with the aim of creating linkages and buffering important habitats to support and enhance the populations of key species.

2.5.3 The project area includes two Sites of Special Scientific Interest – Smithcombe, Sharpenhoe & Sundon Hills (notified in 1970) and Sundon Chalk Quarry (notified in 1989). The citations can be found in appendix 2.

2.5.4 Smithcombe, Sharpenhoe & Sundon Hills SSSI is 86.14 hectares in size. The main habitat is lowland unimproved calcareous grassland, and the majority of the SSSI is classified as unfavourable recovering condition, with nearly 7% as being favourable.

2.5.5 Sundon Chalk Quarry SSSI is 26.17 hectares in size and has a range of habitats including small areas of fen, lakes, chalk grassland, species-rich scrub and developing

woodland. The site has developed as one of the most important invertebrate sites in the county. The SSSI is classified as favourable in condition.

2.5.6 To the north east of the project area is the National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest of Barton Hills. The reserve is predominantly chalk grassland with areas of Chilterns beech woodland and ash-maple woodland. There is a large population of the rare pasque flower and other rare downland plants including greater pignut and fleawort.

2.5.7 To the south east of the project area is the Local Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest of Galley and Warden Hills. The site supports areas of unimproved neutral and calcareous grassland with structural variety provided by scattered and dense scrub.

2.5.8 To the west of the project area is the Site of Special Scientific Interest of Fancott Woods and Meadows. The meadows are mainly ancient ridge and furrow, species rich unimproved neutral grassland. There is also a strip of semi-natural woodland providing shelter to the meadow.

2.5.9 There are three Ancient Woodlands in the project area, George Wood, Holt Wood and Sundon Wood, all of which are also designated as County Wildlife Sites. There are also a number of Ancient Woodlands near to the project area, including Great Bramingham Wood to the south.

2.5.10 There is a network of field margins and hedgerows which bring significant biodiversity interest to the area supporting a diverse range of arable flora and farmland bird species.

2.6 Heritage and Landscape

2.6.1 The project area has a rich heritage, the remains of which are clearly visible on the landscape to this day. There is evidence of numerous Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and medieval finds and features across the area indicating a long history of human activity and occupation.

2.6.2 The area contains two scheduled monuments, Sharpenhoe Clappers and Dray's Ditches. Sharpenhoe Clappers is an Iron Age promontory fort, medieval warren and associated medieval cultivation earthworks. The fort forms part of a series of defended sites established along the Chiltern Ridge but it is the only regional example that relies primarily

on the strength of its topographical location for its defence. Dray's Ditches located on the south-eastern corner of the project area is an Iron Age linear earthwork overlaying bronze age occupation which extends east towards Warden Hill. It is also on the Heritage at Risk register.

2.6.3 To the north of the project area is another scheduled monument, Moated site at Bury Farm, Sharpenhoe which includes a moated site that dates back to the medieval period.

2.6.4 The area also contains one Conservation Area to the centre of Streatley. The extent of the Conservation Area and the scheduled monuments can be seen in Figure 4 (page 40) .

2.6.5 At Lower Sundon there are earthworks indicating features associated with the former Sundon House. The earthworks are very overgrown, but indicate hollow ways, close boundaries and house sites along with landscape features around the house. However, it is known to be locally significant and may even be of national significance. The adjacent Lower Sundon Park is the site of a medieval deerpark with boundary earthworks and is very important distinctive parkland.

2.6.6 At Upper Sundon there are earthwork remains of a shrunken village. This is a medieval site with well-preserved earthworks including hollow ways, property boundaries, ridge and furrow, headlands and field boundaries and the site is significant in area.

2.6.7 The Theedway, alternatively known as Thiodweg, is an ancient routeway and was significant in Saxon Bedfordshire. It became a prominent feature in the landscape and its line is the northern limit of Luton. The historic boundary of Luton was further north and the associated hedgerow is protected as an important hedgerow under the Hedgerow Regulations.

2.6.8 To the northern part of the project site much of the area was anciently enclosed, with open fields occupying small pockets. The field boundaries are characterised by short flailed, gappy hedges. Old hedgerow lines are marked in places by surviving hedgerow trees. To the south of the scarp, the rolling chalk farmland does have some small enclosures near to settlements but is dominated by arable cropping within large geometric parliamentary enclosure fields. Again the field boundaries are characterised by short flailed, gappy hedges.

2.7 Access Routes

- 2.7.1 The project area contains a network of public rights of way including footpaths and bridleways plus one Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT), see Figure 5 (page 35). There are a number of rights of way running east west but there is a poorer network running north south through the area. The Theedway on the southern boundary of the project area consists of a variety of rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways and a BOAT.
- 2.7.2 The project area includes a number of open access sites as designated under the CROW Act 2000. The sites include land at Sundon Chalk Quarry, Sundon Hills Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers.
- 2.7.3 The project area includes permissive access sites and routes. Permissive open access to Smithcombe, Sharpenhoe Clappers and Sundon Hills SSSI has been created through the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme, with the access agreement ending 31 August 2019. There is also a permissive bridleway running alongside the SSSI creating a circular route in combination with the public right of way. This access agreement ends 31 October 2018.
- 2.7.4 A number of long distance and circular routes pass through the area. The circular Chilterns Cycleway runs through the area on minor roads. The nearest traffic free cycle routes are to the south of the project area, in the Luton conurbation. Also traversing the project area are the Icknield Way Trail, a multi-user route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders based on the Icknield Way Path, and the Chiltern Way, a 134 mile circular walking route set up and maintained by volunteers from the Chiltern Society. The John Bunyan Trail starts at Sundon Hills Country Park and finishes 45 miles away at Elstow.
- 2.7.5 The rights of way network in the area offers users a variety of unofficial circular routes of varying lengths, suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Information on circular routes is currently available on the 'Let's Go!' website (www.lets-go.org.uk), including Walks on the 'Wildside' No 1 Sundon a 4.5 mile route, Chilterns Country - Walk like the Clappers at Harlington (linking to the railway station), a 6 mile route.
- 2.8 Visitor Facilities and other recreational sites**
- 2.8.1 Designated car parking for visitors to the area is provided at Sundon Hills Country Park and at Sharpenhoe Clappers.

Both sites are under the management of the National Trust. The car parks however are subject to antisocial activities.

- 2.8.2 There is no visitor centre within the area and there are no public toilets. Barton Hills National Nature Reserve is to the northeast of the project area. Again, there are no visitor facilities here, and it is acknowledged that this site is at capacity for visitor numbers. The nearest larger scale visitor facilities to the site are available at Dunstable Downs where there are toilets, a café, shop and organised activities. These facilities are at capacity at peak times.
- 2.8.3 The National Trust is proposing to install fitness equipment at Sundon Country Park. This will provide an outdoor green gym facility, funded by Central Bedfordshire Council.
- 2.8.4 The Sundon former landfill site is currently being restored to a condition suitable for public recreation with a footpath network. The restoration works will be phased and it is anticipated that they will be completed by approximately 2016.
- 2.8.5 There are a number of parks and other open spaces adjacent to the project area. Great Bramingham Park is a

district park to the north of Luton and forms an important link between the urban development and the countryside to the north. Bramingham Wood and Northwell are also important sites with links between Luton and the project area. To the south east of the project area is the South Beds Golf Club which provides important links between the project area and the protected Galley and Warden Hills site.

2.9 Site Users and Non-Users

- 2.9.1 A survey of users of Sundon Hills Country Park was undertaken during February 2012 by Michael Baldwin Associates on behalf of CBC. The most popular activity of the users was walking (51.4%) followed by walking the dog (32%). The users also rated the facilities with over 90% of votes being recorded as satisfactory or better. The main facilities being recorded as poor were facilities for disabled and visually impaired followed by paths for buggies and wheelchairs. The National Trust has appointed a Community Ranger for the whole of Bedfordshire and part of their remit is to look at visitor issues at the National Trust sites including those in this study area. It is acknowledged that the size of the two carparks at Sundon Hills Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers regulates the numbers of visitors to the key sites within the area.

2.9.2 As part of this study, consultation has been undertaken with a number of stakeholders, to identify the key aspects of use and issues to the project area and wider links.

- Chiltern Society
- Streatley Parish Council
- Sundon Town Council
- Lea and Icknield Ramblers Group
- CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club)
- British Horse Society
- Keech Hospice

2.9.3 The key issues that were identified were:

- A lack of good footpath links especially north south,
- Condition of some of the routes,
- A lack of bridleways and links,
- Lack of off road cycle routes,
- Conflicts between different users, ie walkers, horseriders and cyclists,
- Lack of access to woodlands in private ownership,
- Volume of traffic to the A6 making it hazardous to users,
- Volume of heavy goods traffic between M1 and A6 making it dangerous to walk and cycle along the minor road network.

2.9.4 Sundon Chalk Quarry is a site that has been used for unauthorised activities.

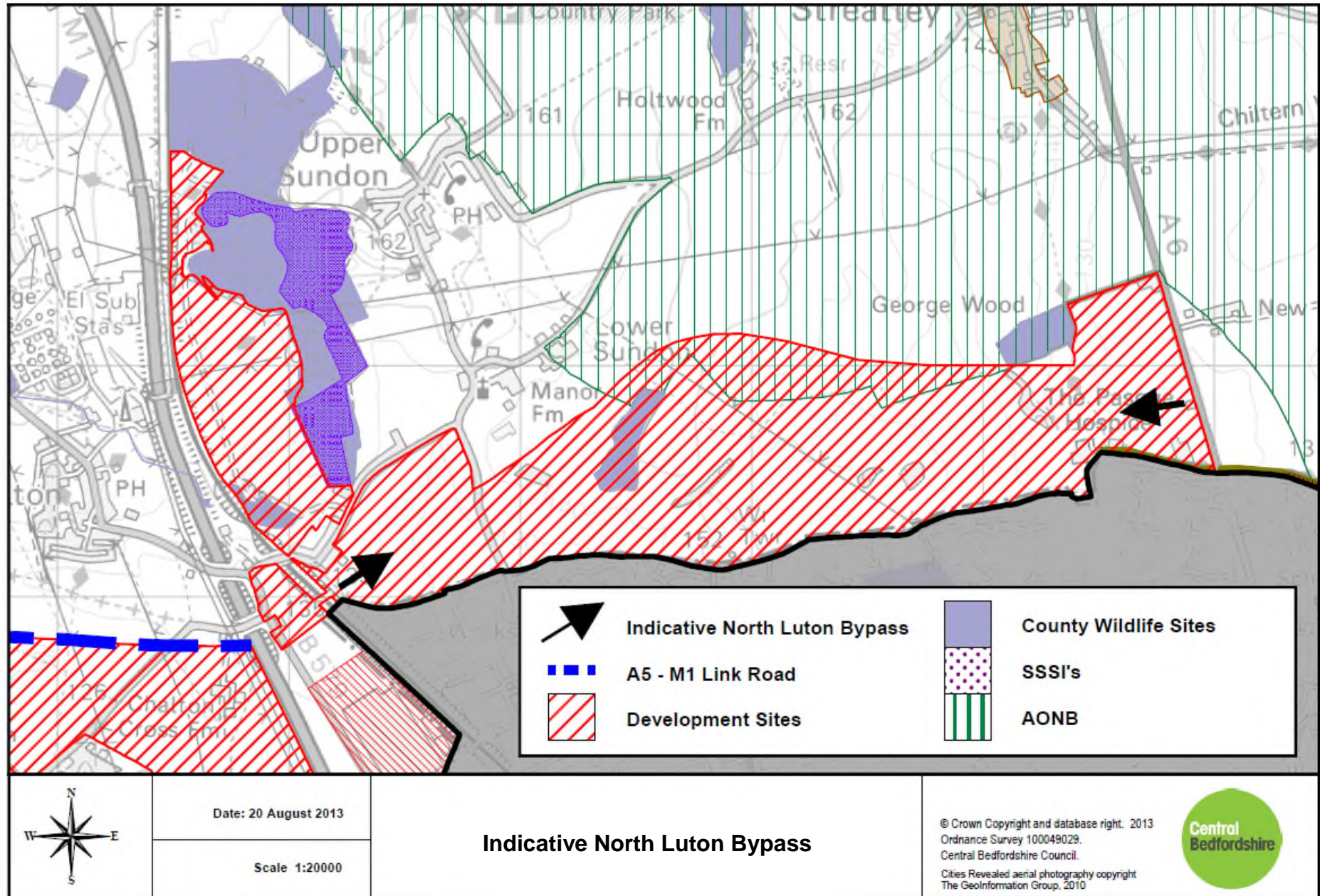
2.10 Development

2.10.1 There is a proposed strategic allocation for the sustainable urban extension to the north of Luton; North Luton SA. The land has the capacity to accommodate at least 4,000 dwellings, 20 hectares of employment land, and community facilities and green infrastructure. Green infrastructure will be integrated into the masterplan. Opportunities include the possible creation of new multifunctional green spaces and linkages between existing spaces within and the surrounding project area.

2.10.2 There is a proposed strategic allocation of land for the Sundon Rail Freight Interchange (RFI). The allocated site is adjacent to Sundon Chalk Quarry and alongside the Midland Mainline railway and M1 Motorway with a road link off the proposed Junction 11a. The development of the RFI offers an opportunity to enhance and manage the Sundon Chalk Quarry as both sites are in the same landownership. There are also proposals for the widening of the railway, alongside and with ingress in Sundon former landfill site.

2.10.3 A vision for development for Manor Farm, Lower Sundon was produced in July 2006 on behalf of Connolly Homes. The vision incorporates the restoration of Sundon Park as a key element of proposed new green infrastructure in north Luton. These proposals are integrated with the masterplan produced on behalf of North Luton Development Corporation, AXA and Connolly Homes Land Consortium with the northerly bypass option. The proposals should be considered in context with the masterplanning work north of Houghton Regis and the green infrastructure connectivity of the areas.

Strategic Development Area / Indicative North Luton Bypass – Figure 6



3 Policy Context

3.1 Planning Policy Framework and Development Strategy

3.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27th March 2012. A Development Strategy is being prepared to provide planning policy for the whole Central Bedfordshire area and aimed at improving quality of accessibility to green spaces and to restrict conflict and increase benefit to the area. Formal adoption of the Development Strategy is anticipated in early 2014.

3.1.2 Chilterns AONB – Management Plan

The designation of AONB is for landscapes of the highest quality which are of national importance - the primary purpose of which is conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape. As one of the nation's finest landscapes, the Chilterns are considered to be a strategic priority. The AONB is managed in line with its statutory Management Plan which provides a framework within which the local authorities, government bodies and the AONB Conservation Board operate. The continued integrated management of the visual, ecological and historic dimension of the AONB provides an opportunity to

demonstrate exemplary approaches to landscape conservation management. Land adjacent to the AONB is also of significance in terms of the potential to protect and enhance the setting of the AONB. The juxtaposition of the AONB, existing communities, and the future growth area north of Luton is a major issue for green infrastructure planning.

3.1.3 The draft Development Strategy outlines the provision of 28,750 dwellings and 27,000 jobs in the area between 2011 and 2031. In order to meet these targets, new urban extensions are allocated in Central Bedfordshire including one north of Luton which will include a new relief road linking the M1 and A6. The indicative extent of the strategic allocation and the potential line of the relief road in the project area can be seen in Figure 6 (page 19).

3.1.4 The sustainable urban extension to the north of Luton is proposed between the current extent of Luton between the M1 and the A6. The extension is bounded by the Chilterns AONB to the north with some incursion to the AONB. The new development provides scope for mitigation and enhancement and an improved setting for the AONB which is currently affected by the very hard urban edge of Luton. New green infrastructure will be provided to buffer the

development and link existing and new green spaces within the urban area and to the countryside beyond to enable greatly improved accessibility and enjoyment of the area's rich and historic natural environment. This document will help inform the identification of opportunities for GI and access as the more detailed planning of the area is taken forward.

3.2 Natural Environment White paper

- 3.2.1 The Natural Environment White paper "The Natural Choice – securing the value of nature", published in 2011, outlines the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years. The paper sets a number of ambitions, including facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature and strengthening the connections between people and nature and the benefit to both.
- 3.2.2 The White paper follows the Lawton Report, Making Space for Nature, published in 2010 which found that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to new pressures such as climate and demographic change. The review sought to improve the quality of current wildlife sites by better habitat management; increase the size of existing wildlife sites; enhance

connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones'; create new sites; and reduce the pressure on wildlife by improving the wider environment.

3.3 Bedfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan

- 3.3.1 The Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group has been developing and maintaining the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) including the individual plans for species and habitats since 2001. Habitat action plans are available for a range of habitats including arable field margins, hedgerows, woodland and lowland calcareous grassland.
- 3.3.2 The BAP was reviewed in 2010, to assess progress in meeting habitat targets. The targets for arable margins have been exceeded, largely through agri-environment schemes and the work of agencies like the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. However, BAP chalk grassland targets are in the process of being updated and implemented in 2013. The outcome of this plan is to increase/improve on target levels for creation and restoration.

3.4 North Chilterns Chalk Living Landscape

3.4.1 The North Chilterns Chalk Living Landscape scheme is being championed by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. A Living Landscape is a recovery plan for nature, and is a new way of thinking about how to manage land to do more for wildlife, people and the economy. The Wildlife Trust is working with people and communities to:

- restore damaged and fragmented blocks of habitat,
- recreate habitats and natural corridors in the landscape,
- reconnect these habitats, linking them to the green space in our cities, towns and villages and rebuilding nature in our midst so that we can all benefit from the essential services it provides.

3.4.2 This scheme is about creating an extensive landscape, based on the chalk geology, which is rich in wildlife and provides a variety of quiet recreation opportunities for local people. It involves bringing all the remaining calcareous grassland sites into a favourable management regime, creating new grasslands to join fragments which are close together and encouraging wildlife friendly practices across the landscape. A major consideration in the project area is managing visitor pressure so that people are able to experience nature without degrading or destroying it.

3.5 Green Infrastructure (GI)

3.5.1 The Bedfordshire and Luton GI Consortium is a partnership of local authorities, government agencies and voluntary and community sector groups whose role is to promote GI, co-ordinate GI planning and delivery. The Consortium has recently been awarded Local Nature Partnership (LNP) status. The NPPF requires local planning authorities to work collaborative with LNP's on strategic planning priorities to enable delivery of sustainable development.

3.5.2 The Bedfordshire and Luton GI Consortium has defined GI as 'a strategically planned and managed network of accessible greenspace and access routes, landscapes, biodiversity and heritage which will meet the needs of existing and new communities by providing:

- an essential environmental foundation and support system;
- a healthy and rich environment;
- attractive places to live and visit and a good quality of life;
- a sustainable future.

3.5.3 The GI Consortium has developed a series of GI plans for Bedfordshire, these include the strategic, 'Bedfordshire and

Luton Green Infrastructure Plan' (2007) which identifies broad priorities across Bedfordshire and the more detailed 'Luton and Southern Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan' (2009) which provides more detailed information on the opportunities and priorities for GI.

3.5.4 The project area falls within "The Chalk Arc" corridor or "network area", identified in the Luton and Bedfordshire GI Plan as an area where investment and project delivery can make the most impact in securing multi-functional Green Infrastructure. The plan identifies priority projects for each network area; projects in "The Chalk Arc" include works relating to the project area eg Sundon Hills Enhancement.

3.5.5 Landscape opportunities have also been identified by Landscape Character Area. Landscape priority potential projects for the North Luton Urban Fringe area include the creation of a green corridor to Theedway and establish landscaped links between Bramingham Wood and Sundon Wood. Potential projects for the North Luton Chiltern area include chalk grassland initiatives to buffer escarpments and hedgerow reinstatement and management. Further information can be found in appendix 4.

3.6 The Chalk Arc

3.6.1 The Chalk Arc corridor extends in a broad arc around the north of the Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis conurbation, extending to incorporate Barton-le-Clay; it includes the whole of the project area. The area is expected to receive major housing growth.

3.6.2 The Chalk Arc Initiative was established with funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to focus on securing GI in and around the Chalk Arc area in order to contribute to the quality of life of existing and new communities.

3.6.3 The Chalk Arc Initiative funded a number of projects in the Initiative area which have enhanced and secured GI assets. Projects near to the study area included a Management Plan and biodiversity works to Great Bramingham Park and The Creation of Five Green Corridors from Galley and Warden Hills. Further information on the Chalk Arc and funded projects can be found on the website www.bedsandlutongreeninfrastructure.org.

3.7 Multi Functional Green Space (MFGS) Scoping Report

- 3.7.1 In 2009 the Chalk Arc Initiative commissioned the production of a scoping report to identify options for the delivery and financing of at least 60 hectares of new, strategic, multi-functional green space in the Luton and southern Bedfordshire area.
- 3.7.2 The report 'Strategic Multi-functional Greenspace in Luton and Southern Bedfordshire' (2009) produced by Kit Campbell Associates, identifies 11 sites in the area which could potentially delivery strategic multi-functional greenspace. Three of the identified sites fall within the project area – "Sundon Quarry and landfill site", "Sundon House", "Sundon to Sharpenhoe Connection" and are all within Opportunity Area B.
- 3.7.3 Each of the 11 identified sites was reviewed against a range of objective criteria in order to evaluate the potential benefits to existing and new communities. "Sundon Quarry and landfill site" scored 1 out of the 8 criteria; "Sundon House" scored 2 whilst "Sundon to Sharpenhoe Connection" scored 0 out of the 8.

- 3.7.4 One of the key conclusions is that in principle, Sundon House does offer worthwhile opportunities, but it is quite small compared with the other sites. The main sites recommended for new strategic multi-functional green space should be close to Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis, to make the new sites as accessible to the main concentration of population, especially the most deprived communities in the area. The best locations seem to be Houghton Quarry and Chalton Cross Farm flood plain as well as perhaps Galley and Warden Hills area. A summary of the findings can be found in appendix 3 and 4.

3.8 Chalk Arc Living Network

- 3.8.1 The Chalk Arc Initiative has previously funded the development of a series of GI Plans for parishes in the Chalk Arc area. In 2007 'Living Network' plans were produced for parishes including Streatley, Sundon, Harlington and Charlton through consultation with local residents, led by the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity.
- 3.8.2 The 'Living Network' plans were developed through a two stage process of reviewing existing GI mapping for the area followed by the identification of aspirational enhancements to existing GI and aspirational new GI. The process resulted

in an agreed action plan for each parish, to be taken forward by the Parish Council and local residents

3.8.3 'Streatley Living Network' plan proposals include

- Creation of links from footpaths to Holt Wood, Fernhill Wood and Sundon Wood
- Creation of new PROW to link Streatley and Barton
- Creation of safe crossing for new multi-user route
- Creation of safe crossing of A6 for Icknield Way
- Extend existing woodlands

3.8.4 'Sundon Living Network' plan proposals include

- Create semi restricted public access linking landfill site to country park
- Link Sundon Wood to parkland to west
- Upgrade footpath to bridleway/cycleway, including provision of safe crossing of railway
- Secure grassland areas to buffer SSSI and areas of archaeological interest

3.8.5 'Harlington Living Network' plan proposals include:

- Monitor restoration of Sundon Chalk Quarry
- Create buffer to Sundon Hills SSSI
- Conserve and create woodlands

- Improve PROW and permissive routes.

Further details of the action plans can be found in appendix 5.

3.9 Landscape Character Assessment

South Bedfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment

3.9.1 In 2006 a district-wide Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken of southern Bedfordshire at a scale of 1:25,000. The report explains that Landscape Character Assessment is a method for understanding what the landscape is like today, how it came to be like that, and how it might change in the future. The project area falls within three character areas, 5B – Barton-le-Clay Clay Vale, 9C – The Clappers Chalk Escarpment, 10B – Houghton Regis – North Luton.

3.9.2 The overall strategy for landscape character area 5B – Barton-le-Clay Clay Vale is to enhance/renew the landscape by restoring and repairing elements that have been lost or degraded such as the hedgerow network. In addition, there is scope for introducing new landscape elements such as woodland creation particularly aligning the main transport corridors.

- 3.9.3 The overall strategy for landscape character area 9C – The Clappers Chalk Escarpment is to conserve and enhance the landscape. This is through conserving the dramatic landform and prominent views, the wealth of important historic and biodiversity features and its value as a recreational resource, through appropriate management.
- 3.9.4 The overall strategy for landscape character area 10B – Houghton Regis – North Luton is to enhance and reinforce the landscape of the chalk dip slope and its role as the setting to the chalk scarp and the adjacent urban area. There are particular opportunities for strengthening tree and hedgerow planting in relation to the transport corridors and larger scale woodland creation to provide a framework for the urban edge.
- 3.9.5 The landscape character sensitivity has been classed as moderate for both Barton-le-Clay Vale and Houghton Regis – North Luton Rolling Chalk Farmland, with a high classification for The Clappers Chalk Escarpment. Similar classifications have been given for visual sensitivity. Further information on all three landscape character areas can be found in appendix 6.

- 3.9.6 Further detailed mapping is given at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/natural-environment/natural-environment-landscape-character-assessment.aspx>

Chalk Arc Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.9.7 In 2007 a 'finer grain' Landscape Character Assessment of the Chalk Arc area was produced, informed by the Southern Bedfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment. The study focused on the urban fringe areas on the northern edge of the Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis conurbation and includes most of the project area outside of the AONB.
- 3.9.8 For rural areas the study identified subdivisions of the landscape character areas outlined in the Southern Bedfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment at a scale of 1:10,000. Urban areas not included in the district level plan were also identified. Each area is evaluated with reference to quality/condition, sensitivity, landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity.
- 3.9.9 The project area includes all or part of the following landscape character areas identified in the Chalk Arc Landscape Character Assessment:

- 19 Charlton Vale Village
- 29 Upper-Lower Sundon Chalk Farmland Slopes
- 30 Sundon Chalk Pit
- 31 Lower Sundon Chalk Farmland Village
- 32 Sundon Park Road – Luton Road Low-lying Farmland (part)
- 34 Sundon Wood Chalk Farmland Slopes
- 37 Sundon Water Tower Elevated chalk Farmland
- 38 Whitehorse Vale Low- lying Farmland
- 41 George Wood Elevated Farmland
- 45 Barton Road Low-lying Farmland (part).

3.9.10 Details of the evaluation of each of the areas listed above can be found in appendix 6.

3.9.11 3.10 Your Countryside - An Outdoor Access Improvement Plan

3.10.1 Published in 2013, the Outdoor Access Improvement

Plan (2013-31) ¹programme of activity to improve access to the countryside to meet the current and future needs of the residents of Central Bedfordshire and visitors to the area. The plan incorporates and expands upon the legal requirements of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Further information can be found in appendix 4.

3.10.2 The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan includes an action plan structured into five themes, each of which has relevance to the Totternhoe Countryside project:

- Connecting Spaces – Rights of Way
- Breathing Spaces – Countryside Sites
- Local Spaces – Community Involvement and Participation
- Healthy Spaces – Health and Wellbeing
- Growing Spaces – Countryside and Growth

3.10.3 Although the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan is a long programme of activity, the action plan only covers the initial 10 year period and will be updated and reviewed every 5 years.

¹ Further details on 'Your Countryside' can be found at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/countryside

3.11 Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy

3.11.1 Central Bedfordshire Council published its first Sustainable Community Strategy in 2010. Developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (the Local Strategic Partnership), the strategy sets out the higher level actions the authority will take to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and the people who live there.

3.11.2 The strategy sets out eight priorities and associated actions, of which the following have direct relevance to the aims of this project:

Priority - Nurturing a sense of pride and belonging

- Enrich people's lives by encouraging participation in regular volunteering, sport and physical activity, and in the arts and cultural activities.
- Promote active community engagement by providing opportunities for everyone to take part in community life, and developing and supporting a thriving voluntary and community sector.
- Build a sense of identity and belonging by enabling more people to influence decisions in their locality if they wish, and empowering and supporting people to manage their local facilities.

Priority - Getting around and caring for a green and clean environment

- Continue to tackle fly-tipping and reduce environmental crime.
- Deliver a road to rail freight facility.
- Improve and increase access to our countryside and recreation activities and extend green space alongside our sites of housing growth.
- Find new viable uses for our listed buildings and sites of historical interest to keep our heritage and culture alive.
- Support residents to reduce their energy costs and live more sustainable and active lives.
- Protect, enhance and raise awareness of our biodiversity, landscape, historic environment, green spaces and paths.

Priority - Promoting health and reducing health inequalities

- Support more people to be more active and eat healthily.

3.12 More People Cycling: A Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

3.12.1 'More People Cycling' forms the Cycle Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and sits within a framework of documents

which comprise the third Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the area covered by Central Bedfordshire Council.

3.12.2 The vision of the Strategy reflects that of Cycling England, the national champions for cycling across the country by “Encouraging people to cycle, to cycle safely, and to cycle more often”.

3.12.3 ‘More People Cycling’ sets out a series of objectives devised to represent the range of areas through which it will be achieve its overall vision:

- Headline Objective: Increase the number of people cycling
- Improve the quality of the cycling environment
- Improve the safety and perceived safety of cycling
- Increase awareness of the benefits of cycling
- Increase access to a bicycle

3.12.4 The strategy highlights the importance of having infrastructure in place which provides a dedicated, comprehensive and coherent cycle network in order to encourage more people to cycle, safely and more often.

3.13 More People Walking: A Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

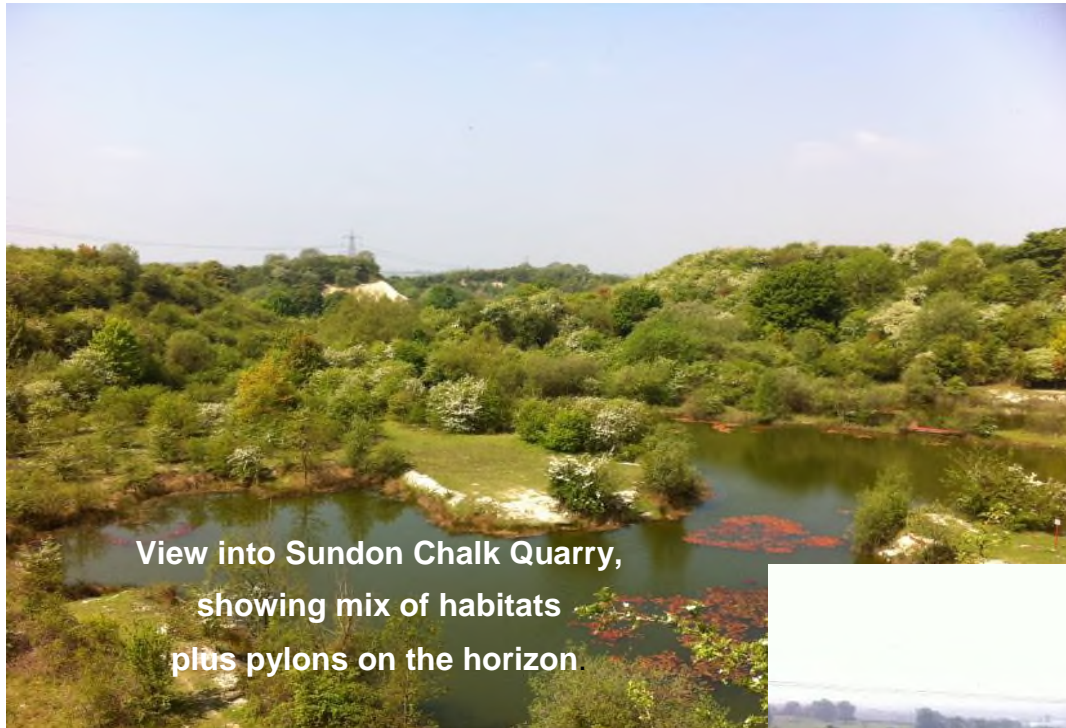
3.13.1 ‘More People Walking’ forms the Walking Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and sits within a framework of documents which comprise the third Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the area covered by Central Bedfordshire Council.

3.13.2 The vision of the Strategy is to “Encourage people to walk, to walk safely, and to walk more often”.

3.13.3 ‘More People Walking’ sets out a series of objectives devised to represent the range of areas through which it will achieve its overall vision:

- Headline Objective: Increase the number of people walking
- Improve the quality of the pedestrian environment
- Improve the safety of pedestrians
- Increase awareness of the benefits of walking

3.13.4 The Strategy addresses all issues relevant to pedestrians across Central Bedfordshire, and draws linkages between increasing walking and wider transport, environmental, economic and health benefits.



View into Sundon Chalk Quarry,
showing mix of habitats
plus pylons on the horizon.



View from Sundon Chalk Quarry, showing scrub
regeneration,

4. Issues and Opportunities

4.1 Method

4.1.1 The following section outlines a comprehensive list of the issues and opportunities identified in the project area. Due to the extensive amount of research and survey work carried out previously in the area (as outlined in sections 2 and 3), much of the list was compiled from existing sources for example the Streatley Living Network (GI Plan) and the Landscape Character Assessments.

4.1.2 In order to ensure up-to-date information and the inclusion of partners and stakeholders, some additional research was also carried out. Key stakeholders were consulted with either in person or by teleconference. A SWOT analysis was carried out following the stakeholder engagement exercise – the results of which can be found in appendix 8. A full list of partners and stakeholders can be found in appendix 9.

4.1.3 Many of the issues and opportunities identified through the research are of relevance across the project area, however some are only applicable to specific parts of the site. For this reason, and due to the number and diversity of the issues and opportunities identified, for the purposes of this

report the issues and opportunities have been grouped into the following specific themes:

- **Biodiversity**
- **Access**
- **Public use and engagement**
- **Landscape, heritage and geology**

There are of course areas of cross-over, with some issues and opportunities linking to two or more themes.

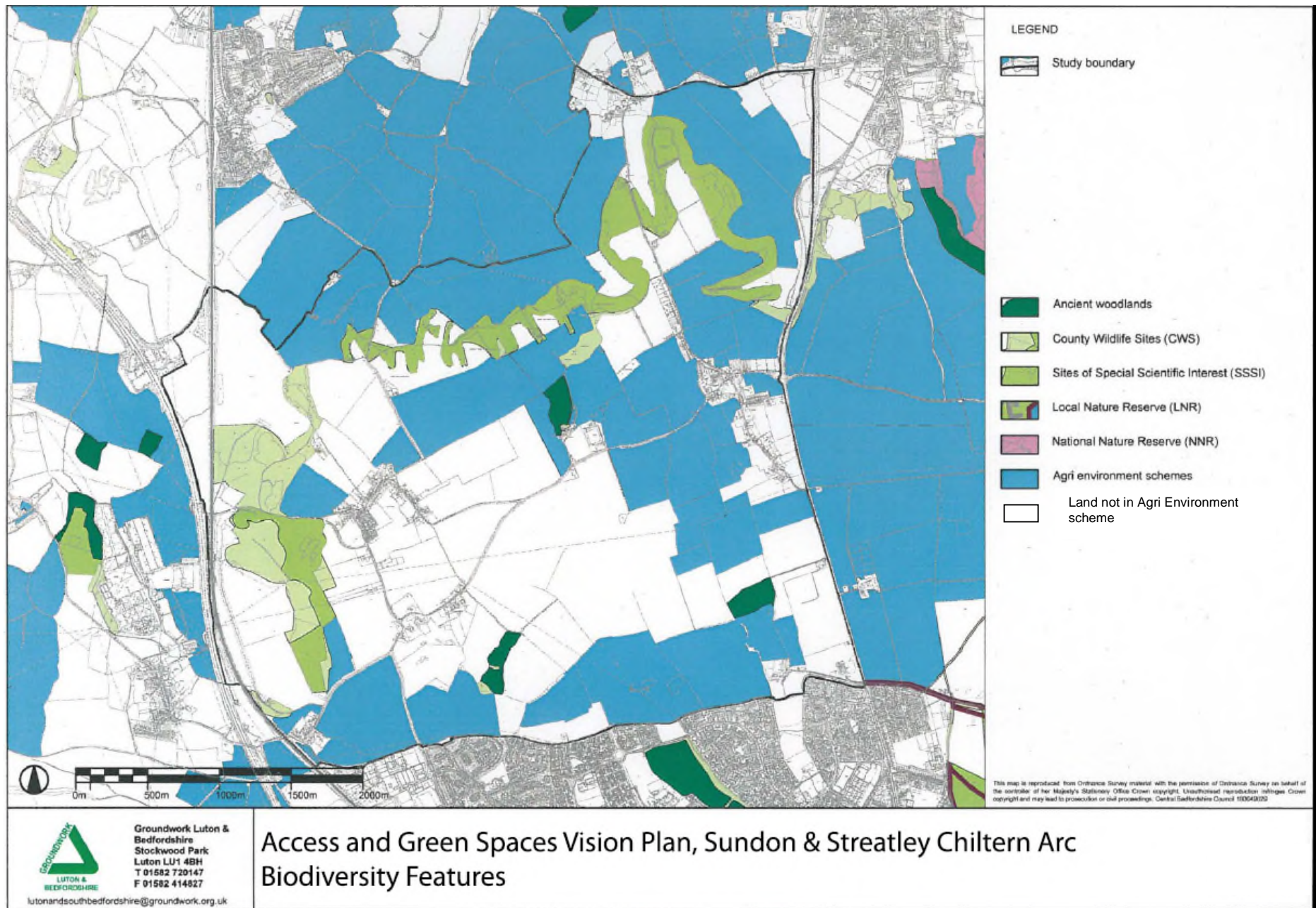
4.2 Biodiversity issues and opportunities (Figure 3 – Existing Biodiversity Features)

1. **Fragility of habitats** – the area's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), County Wildlife Sites, and other valuable habitats are vulnerable to damage and degradation for example through public use (both legitimate and illegal) and insufficient or inappropriate management. The area's SSSIs are in varying conditions and require appropriate, ongoing management in order to reach and maintain 'favourable' classification.
2. **Fragmentation of habitats** – some of the area's most valuable habitats are small in size and isolated from other important habitats both within the project area and beyond making them and the species they support

vulnerable to even small amounts of damage or degradation. The main transport corridors also reduce the connectivity of habitats and ability of species to move through the countryside. Links between existing habitats need to be reinforced and enhanced so they can be more robust to accommodate pressure from development in the future. Buffer zones around existing habitats also need to be created for the protection and enhancement for current and future pressures.

3. **Ancient Woodland and Hedgerows** - the project area contains a number of ancient woodland and important hedgerows. Many of these features are in private ownership and are protected by legislation.
4. **Agri-environment schemes** – a large proportion of the land within the area is under agri-environment schemes however there are sections which are not currently under a scheme and there is little co-ordination to ensure a consistent focus or common priorities across the area.
5. **Sundon Chalk Quarry** – the site for the proposed Sundon Rail Freight Interchange is adjacent to Sundon Chalk Quarry. Both sites are in the same land

ownership, and there are aspirations that the management of the quarry could be improved as part of the development, for the benefit of biodiversity, geodiversity and access.



4.3 Access issues and opportunities

1. **Access into and out of site** – there are limited access points into the project area particularly due to the proximity of the M1, railway and A6. New and improved crossing points to enable safe access over the main transport routes would be beneficial to users. There are long distance routes running through the project area. These links provide an opportunity to encourage visitors to access the site by means other than by car.
2. **Links to other sites** – the area has poor access links to other countryside sites, including the nearby Barton Hills and Galley and Warden Hill sites. There are a number of sites on the northern edge of the Luton conurbation where links could be strengthened.
3. **Rights of Way network** – there is a right of way network which provides stronger east west routes than north south routes. The area between Sundon and Streatley is particularly lacking in rights of way. A number of rights of way have also been extinguished due to previous development and leaves spurs that are unconnected. The rights of way network is vulnerable due to pressure of future development. Additional rights of way and upgrade of existing routes to bridleways or cycleways to improve connectivity and make circular routes and would benefit users.
4. **Maintenance of Rights of Way** – there is concern over the condition of the existing rights of way network.
5. **Theedway** – there is an opportunity to promote this important historic route and enhance the corridor it is located within. This could reduce the pressure caused by increased populations living in close proximity to it, when there is an expansion of the urban area northwards. This may also help minimize impact of increased users on Dray's Ditches, although no surfacing works would be undertaken.
6. **Proposed North Luton Bypass** – the proposed road would cut through the existing rights of way as well as the landscape and habitats. The networks would need to be reconnected through appropriate measures.
7. **Vehicular traffic conflicts** – the volume of heavy goods vehicles to the country roads reduces the quality of experience for other site users.

Rights of Way – Figure 5



4.4 Public use and engagement issues and opportunities

1. **Lack of visitor facilities** – the project area does not include any dedicated visitor facilities except the car park and picnic area at Sundon Hills Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers. There are few benches, litter bins or dog bins in the area and no visitor centre or public toilets. Although in some ways a weakness, this lack of facilities does help to maintain the undeveloped, rural feel of the area and offers a contrasting visitor experience to the centre at Dunstable Downs and Rushmere Park.
2. Dunstable Downs gateway centre is 7 miles from the northwest of Luton. Access times to this facility will be affected when road and other development is undertaken to the north of Luton. It is reported by National Trust (operators) of Dunstable Downs that the centre is at operating/nearing full capacity with the current population, any future growth expansion will have a detrimental impact on the facility and the surrounding grounds.
3. Rushmere Park visitor centre is 12 miles away, the visitor centre has already experienced expansion phases 1 and 2 to its visitor facilities to meet existing demand, again this excludes the proposed additional demand that

is expected from the proposed growth expansion to the east of Leighton Buzzard

4. To help reduce pressure on the surrounding sites, it is anticipated that the development of a visitor centre in this area will have a two level outcome:
 - Reduce pressure on other sites
 - Increase awareness / promotion of Sundon & Streatley.

A decision on any future possible visitor facility needs to be considered in the wider context of the North Chilterns Partnership / Barton Hills National Nature reserve and connectivity to green spaces to the east of the project area.
5. **Lack of public participation in site** – there is currently little public involvement in the area however there are significant opportunities to increase this for example through practical volunteering, the development of a ‘friends of’ type group and organised events. Keech Hospice uses the project area for countryside and recreational activities as well as the nearby Great Bramingham Park.
6. **Lack of education and interpretation** – there is little interpretation relating to the project area either on or off site. The area’s unique combination of heritage, geology, biodiversity, landscape and access provides

huge opportunities for formal and informal education and interpretation.

- 7. Anti-social activities** - the two car parks at Sundon Hills Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers have suffered from anti-social activities undertaken by those who drive from nearby urban areas in the evening.
- 8. On site staff presence** – the National Trust has a presence in the area with staff carrying out site ranger type duties and running occasional volunteer tasks. The National Trust has appointed a Community Ranger who will have a limited presence on the site and will undertake work to determine visitor usage of the sites.
- 9. Dog use** – as with many countryside sites, there are issues with uncontrolled dogs in the area which can affect the viability of grazing, impact on nesting birds and deter other visitors from using the area. There is also an issue with dog mess which increases fertility of the soil which impacts on the biodiversity of the site.
- 10. Visitor levels and impact** – there is no information regarding visitor numbers for the area, however the National Trust Community Ranger will be looking at visitor levels to their sites. Any increased promotion of the area and the proposed housing development to the north of Luton is likely to result in an increase in the

number of visitors; this impact will need to be managed, particularly for more sensitive areas.

- 11. Health and well-being** – the area provides significant opportunities for visitors to improve their health. Opportunities can be informal or promoted activities such as health walks that can improve health and reduce diabetes and obesity. Green space also can have a beneficial impact on mental well-being.
- 12. Sundon former landfill site** – the site is currently being restored with public access recreation opportunities. Although no visitor facilities are planned this may be a suitable site for such development.
- 13. Sundon Chalk Quarry** – there is pressure to use the quarry for activities that could impact on the biodiversity and geodiversity of the site.

4.5 **Landscape, heritage and geology issues and opportunities**

The chalk escarpment of Sundon Hills is a dominant geological and landscape feature, the scarp face is largely wooded with scrub in character, interspersed with areas of unimproved chalk downland.

The habitats of the project area that are of importance for

nature conservation comprise chalk downland and scrub, ancient semi-natural and secondary woodlands, and species-rich hedgerows with small areas of acid grassland, with some areas of chalk grassland is a nationally important bryophyte and lichen community. The area is also valuable for a large number of rare and scarce plants, including arable weeds and lichens. Figure 4 (page 40)

1. **AONB** – much of the project area is in the AONB and therefore the natural beauty and characteristics of the area are to be conserved and enhanced. Full account should be taken of the likely effects of any development within the setting of the AONB in order to ensure that the nationally designated landscape is afforded the greatest degree of protection.
2. **Rich heritage** – the area has a long history of human use and settlement reflected in the landscape and the wealth of heritage features, including two scheduled monuments and the undesignated significant sites at Upper and Lower Sundon, all of which offer opportunities for public involvement, education and interpretation.
3. **Fragility of heritage features** – the area's heritage features, including the scheduled monuments, are vulnerable to damage and degradation for example

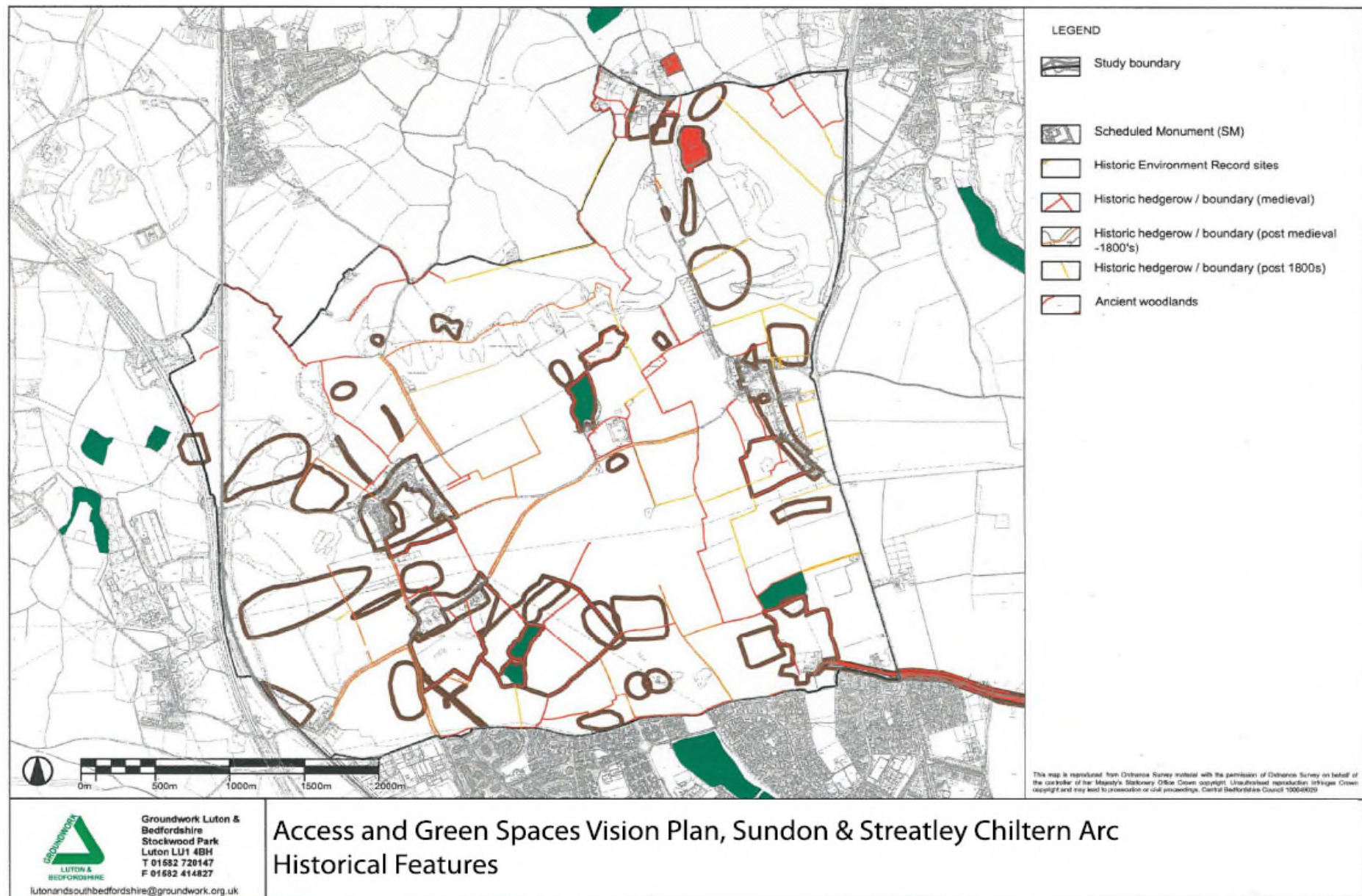
through inappropriate management, misuse by the public, erosion by visitors and development.

4. **Agriculture** – the high levels of agricultural activity in the project area offer opportunities to engage and inform the public about farming and issues such as food production, farming and the environment, and locally produced food. There is little evidence of keeping horses within the project area which would alter the visual characteristics of the agricultural landscape.
5. **Landscape and visual character**– the majority of the project area has been assessed as moderate fragility but the chalk escarpment as high.
6. **Views into and out of site** – the project area includes a number of sites which form significant features in the landscape particularly the chalk escarpment. Views out of the site link it to other landmarks in the surrounds including the Greensands Ridge to the north and Galley and Warden Hills to the south east. Views into and out of the site need to be identified and maintained through management and interpretation opportunities.
7. **Peace and quiet** – the project area offers tranquility to visitors despite its proximity to the Luton conurbation. This feature is important to visitors and needs to be conserved.

- 8. Power lines** – overhead power lines traverse the project area. These impact on the visual quality of the landscape reducing the naturalness of the area. To improve the quality of the landscape and its attractiveness to potential users, it would be beneficial to seek undergrounding of the power lines as part of any comprehensive development in the area. Conversely, the current opportunity for development to that section is reduced increasing habitat and recreational opportunities.
- 9. Future development** – Any future development within the project area could have a range of impacts.

10. Tree lines and hedgerows – a number of the hedgerows and tree lines in the area are identified as important features of the landscape requiring protection and in some case enhancement through planting and improved management. The trees to the scarp to Sharpenhoe Clappers are at an age and condition where management decisions are required to determine a replanting and public education strategy. Hedgerows are particularly important in providing habitat links.

Historical Features – Figure 4



5 Aims and Objectives

The following aims and objectives have been compiled to address issues identified during the consultations and SWOT analysis. They are intended to provide an overarching framework for future work in the project area and a set of targets against which the impact of this work can be assessed.

(Vision Plan)

5.1 Overall Vision

To enhance the project area by improving access and facilities for visitors now and in the future whilst conserving the diversity of the intrinsically valuable and unique area. To ensure a robust framework to withstand increased pressure when development is undertaken.

5.2 Key Aims for the project area

- To promote the area as The Sundon & Streatley Bedfordshire Chiltern Arc.
- To preserve, enhance and promote the area's unique landscape, biodiversity and heritage.
- To provide a robust network of access routes and accessible visitor sites for current and future demands.
- To enhance the rural, undeveloped, natural character of the area, particularly of the AONB.

- To maximise the health, cultural and educational benefits of the area to meet the needs of local communities.

5.3 Objectives for the project area

5.3.1 Biodiversity objectives

1. Maintain the extent and, where appropriate, improve the ecological condition of all sites of biodiversity importance within the area, including Ancient Woodlands and Important Hedgerows.
2. Expand, buffer and link those sites to form a coherent ecological network capable of sustaining those significant habitats and species present in the project area.
3. Identify key networks to be safeguarded in the future.
4. Where possible the ecological network should be linked to nearby sites beyond the project area, such as Barton Hills and Galley and Warden Hills.
5. Improve physical and intellectual access to, and involvement in, the conservation of this network.

5.3.2 Access objectives

1. Provide a well maintained, easy to use, coherent network of access routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders throughout the project area which link to the wider rights of way network.

2. Increase routes to provide greater connectivity for all users.
3. Provide 'access for all' opportunities where possible and appropriate.
4. Improve the main entrance points to the project area.
5. Improve ease of access from adjacent urban areas and reduce illegal, anti-social access.
6. Develop underused sites for appropriate public use.

5.3.3 Public use and engagement objectives

1. Provide well maintained facilities for visitors, sensitive to the rural, undeveloped nature of the area.
2. Enhance the range, quality and availability of information relating to the area.
3. Provide opportunities for visitors to understand, influence and be actively involved in the management of the area.
4. Promote opportunities for visitors to undertake activities that will benefit their health and well-being.
5. Seek the establishment of a "Friends of" group and identify and provide volunteer opportunities.
6. Integrate with existing user groups including Keech Hospice.

5.3.4 Landscape and heritage objectives

1. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty and characteristics of the AONB.
2. Preserve, protect and manage the area's two scheduled monuments and other heritage features.
3. Undertake detailed assessment of the important sites at Upper and Lower Sundon and develop a strategy for their management.
4. Increase visitors understanding of the area's heritage, its value and significance.
5. Undertake a visual assessment to identify key views. Maintain views into and out of the area.
6. Enhance links to neighbouring sites, including Greensands Ridge and Galley and Warden Hill.
7. Enhance integration between the edges of the project area and the surrounding urban areas, particularly the urban / rural fringe.

5.3.5 Geodiversity objectives

1. Promote the importance of the area's geodiversity and demonstrate the influence it has on all other aspects of the site including biodiversity, landscape and heritage.
2. Provide opportunities for the public to understand better the role of the underlying chalk in the area and the unique scenery it create in Bedfordshire.

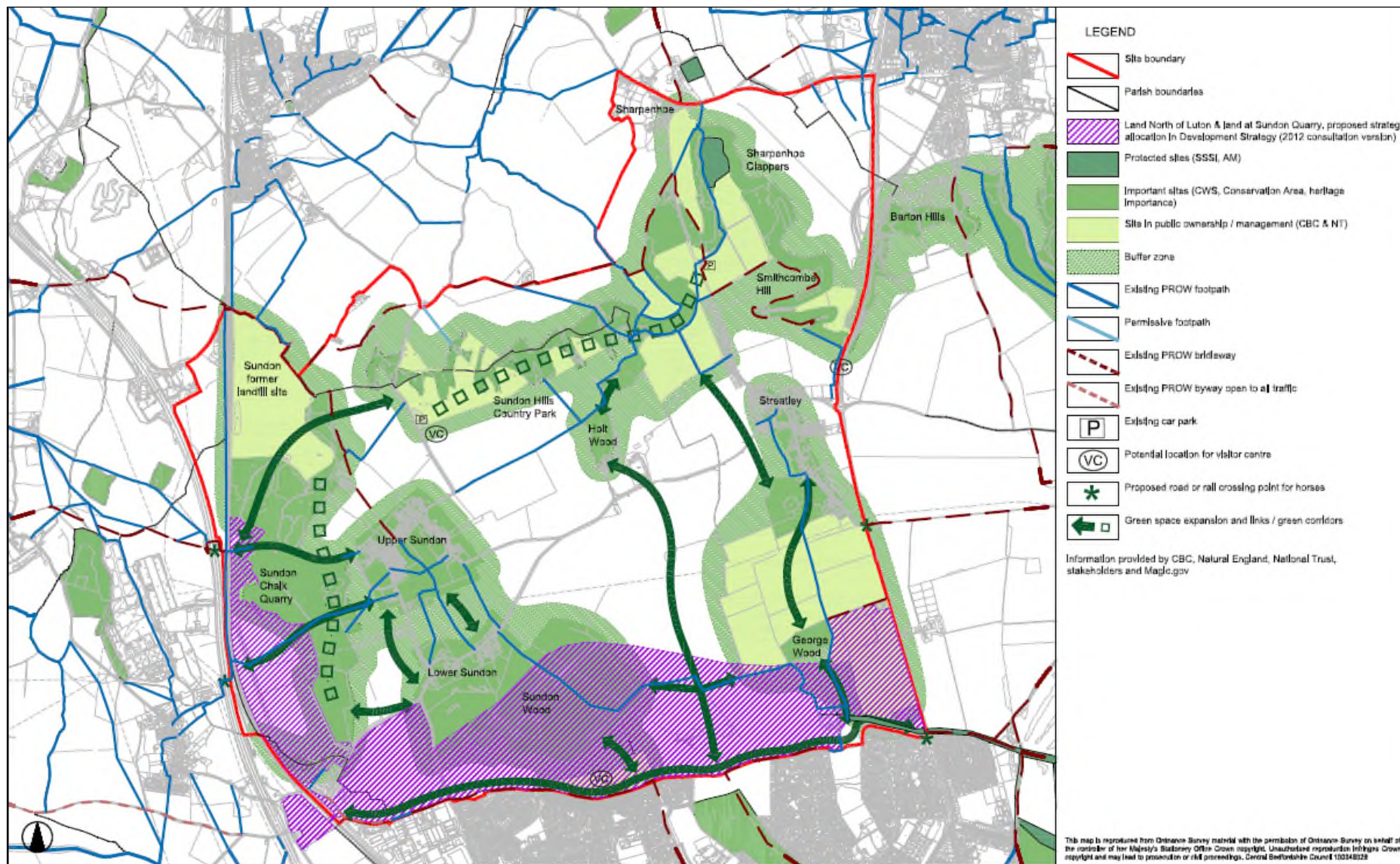
5.4 Visitor standards


5.4.1 There are a number of nationally recognised quality standards for green space and countryside sites which can provide site managers with a framework against which to monitor the visitor experience. The project area as a whole would not be suitable for submission to such awards as it is not one site but rather a large network of areas with a variety of landowners and managers. However, such schemes can provide an indication of the standards which site owners and managers in the area should be aiming to achieve. It should be noted that these criteria could be applied to the development of a potential visitor centre in the future.

5.4.2 The following recommended visitor standards for the project area are based on two national standards - Green Flag Award and the Country Parks Accreditation Scheme – and are also developed with the aim of addressing the issues and fulfilling the opportunities which the project area offers, as set out above. These standards could usefully be used in the future to assess the visitor experience.

5.4.3 All visitors using the project area, regardless of gender, age, background or ability should:

- Feel welcome, be safe and feel safe
- Feel a sense of ownership
- Have the opportunity to influence and/or be actively involved in its management
- Be consulted on works which will impact on their use or enjoyment
- Be clear about where and how to access it
- Be clear about where they can go in the project area and what is required of them
- Find well maintained facilities appropriate to both their needs and the character of the area
- Have the opportunity to access information about the site, its management, biodiversity, heritage, landscape and geology
- Be able to take part in a range of activities, appropriate to the character of the area, to benefit their health and well-being





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Access and Green Space Vision Plan, Sundon & Streatley Chiltern Arc

VISION PLAN

6 Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The following recommendations have been developed to work towards the aims, objectives and visitor standards for the project area as set out above. In doing so the recommendations seek to address the issues and fulfil the opportunities which the project area offers.

6.1.2 These recommendations have been developed through a process of consultation with partners, stakeholders and site users.

6.2 Biodiversity recommendations

6.2.1 6.2.2 Work to put in place management plans for all designated sites in the area – SSSIs and County Wildlife Sites. This will require an assessment of existing management plans and the development of new plans as required. Liaison with private landowners will also be required, to encourage appropriate management (objective 5.3.1.1).

6.2.3 Work with landowners to land in habitat buffer zones to bring into appropriate management to protect the sensitive nature of the area and increase area of biodiversity value. The

opportunity to purchase land from private landowners to be investigated as appropriate (objective 5.3.1.2).

6.2.4 Work with landowners of the land along identified habitat links to bring into appropriate management to enhance biodiversity value and create habitat corridors between designated sites. The habitat corridors are to include links to sites outside of the project area, and can be seen in Figure 7 (page 44). Links between sites are important as corridors for flora and fauna such as bat feeding corridors. The corridors are also important to enable features to flow through the landscape rather than following harsh manmade features (objectives 5.3.1.1 & 5.3.1.2).

6.2.5 Protect and extend ancient woodlands and historical hedgerows, to conserve habitats and reinstate to original size (objective 5.3.1.1).

6.2.6 Provide opportunities for members of the community to be involved in surveying, recording and protecting the area's key biodiversity features (objective 5.3.1.5).

6.2.7 Support landowners to increase the total amount of land within the area which is covered by agri-environment schemes and increase the amount of land entered into

higher level scheme. Where possible there should be coordination between submissions in the area to work towards identified priorities and targets (objective 5.3.1.1).

- 6.2.8 Restore Sundon former landfill site to develop a site suitable for public recreational use and include a range of habitats (objective 5.3.1.2).

6.3 Access recommendations

Rights of way network

- 6.3.1 Promote Theedway as a valuable route and develop as a green corridor. Work with adjacent landowners to widen landscape corridor but not increasing surfaced area (objective 5.3.2.1).
- 6.3.2 Create new multi user routes with safe crossing points, providing good access networks for all users. Include short circular routes from existing communities and future development sites (objectives 5.3.2.2 & 5.3.2.3).
- 6.3.3 Provide a safe crossing point on the A6 for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders using the Icknield Way (objective 5.3.2.1).
- 6.3.4 Upgrade existing footpaths to bridleway / cycleway; including footpath network around Streatley. Also upgrade footpaths across Sundon Chalk Quarry and alongside railway line plus the crossing point of the railway (objectives 5.3.2.2 & 5.3.2.3).
- 6.3.5 Create new footpaths to link with existing network, and provide increased routes north-south. Work with landowners to provide additional access routes and upgrade footpaths with permissive access to formal right of way. Develop a network of routes to link from Sundon Chalk Quarry to the Sundon former landfill site when restored and on to Sundon Hills (objective 5.3.2.2).
- 6.3.6 Promote open access sites including Sundon Chalk Quarry. Develop links with the landowner, and encourage promotion of appropriate access routes through the site (objective 5.3.2.5).
- 6.3.7 Develop access network as part of restoration plan for Sundon former landfill site. Link to existing public rights of way as included in the development plan (objectives 5.3.2.2 & 5.3.2.6).

- 6.3.8 Install signage at the points where visitors join each right of way indicating which users are permitted to use the route. Signs should be made of timber to fit with the rural nature of the area and clearly indicate each permitted user group e.g. a bridleway should have a sign showing a walker, a cyclist and a horse rider (objective 5.3.2.1 & 5.3.3.2).

6.4 Public use and engagement recommendations

Facilities

- 6.4.1 Develop a new visitor centre to provide recreation opportunities that balance public use within the project area with the sensitive nature of protected and important sites and habitats. Facilities should be robust for the extent of current development and accommodate future development with increased pressure on the area (objective 5.3.3.1).
- 6.4.2 Continue to maintain the facilities at Sundon Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers car park by ensuring picnic benches are available and in good condition, vandalised features are replaced promptly and vegetation around the area is maintained at a low level to maintain views and minimise hiding places (objective 5.3.3.1).

- 6.4.3 Undertake surveys to assess visitor numbers and requirements. Build on the survey work undertaken by Michael Baldwin Associates and link with surveys undertaken by the national Trust. Incorporate findings into provision of facilities (objective 5.3.3.1).

- 6.4.4 Health and well-being - promote opportunities for visitors to undertake activities, such as health walks, that will benefit their health and well-being (objective 5.3.3.4).

- 6.4.5 Provide dog bins at entrance points to the site, particularly at the car parks. Provide information to educate dog walkers as to the issues of dog waste on valuable habitats (objectives 5.3.3.1 & 5.3.3.2).

Information and interpretation

- 6.4.6 Promote the area Sundon & Streatley Chiltern Arc (objective 5.3.3.3).
- 6.4.7 Provide interpretation information at gateways and points of interest throughout the area. Information should be presented in a consistent style across the area and using low key materials and designs in keeping with the undeveloped, rural character of the area (objective 5.3.3.2).

6.4.8 Provide information and interpretation possibly using electronic formats. All information and interpretation located in the area should also be available to access via the internet. Where possible this information should be suitable for use on portable devices such as smart phones. Interpretation material to be part of the North Chilterns Chalk promotion (objective 5.3.3.2).

6.4.9 Develop a self guided audio tour of the area and its key features available to download from the internet to be used on portable devices such as smart phones or mp3 players (objective 5.3.3.2).

Circular and promoted routes

6.4.10 Develop a series of circular routes in the area for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The route(s) should include shorter family friendly routes and longer options. Route maps should be available for downloading online and, funding permitting, should be available as printed leaflets in local outlets such as libraries and council offices (objective 5.3.3.2).

6.4.11 Work with the Chiltern Society to ensure the route and signage of the Chiltern Way is maintained and enhanced

where it passes through the project area (objectives 5.3.3.1 & 5.3.3.2).

Engaging with the local community

6.4.12 Sundon former landfill site could be the focus for a 'friends of' group. The group could be involved in community events during the restoration phase such as tree planting, and then use and promote the site in the future for further volunteer activities and community events. Although some support to establish the group is likely to be required, there should be an aspiration to have a self-sustaining group within a year of establishment. If agreeable by members, the group should become constituted to enable access to funding (objective 5.3.3.5).

6.4.13 Develop links with existing groups outside of the project area, partly to extend their area of interest and also to utilise their expertise and enthusiasm (objective 5.3.3.6).

6.4.14 Provide opportunities for Keech Hospice to use sites in the project area, and provide safe links between the sites (objectives 5.3.3.4 & 5.3.3.6).

6.4.15 Promote the existing conservation volunteer opportunities and offer additional opportunities for the local community to be involved in the practical management of the area and the wider North Chilterns Chalk initiative. (objectives 5.3.3.3 & 5.3.3.4).

6.4.16 Develop and coordinate a programme of public events for the area which include a variety of activities and themes to appeal to a broad range of visitors. Events and activities should link to the main themes of the site including heritage, biodiversity and geodiversity and where possible encourage exploration of less heavily used areas and routes (objective 5.3.3.3).

6.5 Landscape and Heritage recommendations

Scheduled Monuments

6.5.1 Continue the implementation of the current management plan for Sharpenhoe Clappers scheduled monument. Determine how to manage the beech woodland in the future (objective 5.3.4.1).

6.5.2 Develop and implement a Conservation Management Plan for Lower Sundon and Upper Sundon. This could be achieved through working with the landowners to submit sites in an agri-environment scheme (objective 5.3.4.2).

6.5.3 Develop and implement a Conservation Management Plan for other important archaeological sites in the area. (objective 5.3.4.1).

Community involvement and education

6.5.4 Provide interpretation on the area's heritage and landscape features. Interpretation should cover the historic landscape, conservation areas and historic use as well as the two scheduled monuments and other important sites (objective 5.3.4.3).

6.5.5 Develop opportunities for education of visitors regarding agriculture and food production. The agricultural activity in the area is important for the economy and characteristics of the area. An education programme for visitors can be combined with an agribusiness diversification opportunity (objective 5.3.3.3).

6.5.6 Provide opportunities for members of the community to be involved in surveying, recording and protecting the area's key heritage features (objective 5.3.3.3).

Landscape features

- 6.5.7 Maintain and enhance the hedgerows and historic boundaries in the area and extend along new access routes. Work with landowners and site managers to produce management guidelines for existing hedgerows and identify opportunities for restocking or establishment of new hedgerows (objective 5.3.4.7).
- 6.5.8 Promote the Theedway as a green corridor widening the existing historic route to provide a significant landscape feature. The green corridor will provide a backbone to an improved green network on the edge of the existing development and any future development (objective 5.3.4.7).
- 6.5.9 Establish corridors between existing landscape features linking existing woodlands and other sites within the project area and also sites outside the boundary (objective 5.3.4.5).
- 6.5.10 Maintain the character of the area. Identify key views to be maintained, and ensure that the tranquillity of the area is not reduced (objective 5.3.4.4).

6.6 Geodiversity recommendations

- 6.6.1 Preserve the statutory SSSI designation of Sundon Chalk Quarry. Develop links with the landowner, and encourage the development of a management plan for the site. The geodiversity of the chalk quarry should be maintained and enhanced, and uses of the site that impact on this should be restricted (objective 5.3.1.1).
- 6.6.2 Ensure interpretation materials highlight the influence of the underlying geology on other site themes. For example the influence of chalk on the area's biodiversity (objectives 5.3.5.1 & 5.3.5.2).



View along the A6 showing eastern boundary to the study area, restructuring linkages to adjacent sites.



View across the chalk scarp at Sundon Hills Country Park, showing management of the grassland by grazing.

7 Action Plan

This Action Plan is an initial programme of activity to improve access to the Sundon and Streatley Countryside Area, predominately steering the work of the Countryside Access Service and a core steering group partnership of Conservation Trusts operating and owning land in the area.

The Countryside Access Service will manage a steering group which will convene at least twice a year to review progress against this action plans objectives and to steer future collaborative projects.

The Action Plan has been structured with resourcing as a fundamental consideration. The Action Plan will look to provide value for money, high quality results whilst being realistic about what can be achieved over the timeframe, given the resourcing constraints. However, the plan is not limited to what can be achieved with the resources that are currently available, but will also look at what can be achieved by developing new ways of working and exploring new and creative funding streams.

The Action Plan will highlight the timescales for the particular work streams, outputs and projects (collectively referred to as 'proposals') and will identify the required level of resourcing. Resources cover both staff allocation and delivery costs of the actions and have been

based on revenue and capital allocation available at the time of writing.

The timescales for delivery will be divided as follows:

Short Term = 's 0 – 5 years, Medium Term = 's 5 – 10 years, Long Term = 's 10 years +

Projects will be started within the delivery timescales and, in most instances, completed within the 5 year periods to tie in with the 5 year cycle of the action plans. There will be instances where projects are started and fall over a number of action plan reporting periods – particularly in relation to long term projects.

The Action Plan identifies the level of resourcing required for each project or activity in the following manner:

Key	Resource Level	Resource Implications
£	Level 1	Projects that can be delivered within existing resources (both staffing and budgets).
££	Level 2	Projects requiring small levels of extra resourcing – including staffing, financial, or increased partnership working.
£££	Level 3	Projects that can only be delivered through finding and securing of significant new resources.

Proposal	Lead Organisation(s)	Priority	Timescale	Cost
BIODIVERSITY				
Work to put in place management plans for all designated sites in the area (issue / opportunity 4.4.1).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Work with landowners to create habitat buffer zones (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Secure land north of Common Lane, Sundon, as grassland buffer to adjacent SSSI and CWS (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Work with landowners to the land along identified habitat links to bring into appropriate management (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Protect and extend ancient woodlands and historical hedgerows (issue / opportunity 4.4.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Create linking corridor along PROW FP5 and Parish Boundary, to link to Sundon Wood (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Link existing GI sites to Galley and Warden Hills and Stopsley Common (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	££
Extend George Wood northwards to cover area historically covered by Streatley Wood (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Create Community Woodland on land south of Slate Hall, Sundon (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Link Sundon Wood to parkland to west (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££

Provide opportunities for members of the community to be involved in surveying, recording and protecting the area's key biodiversity features (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Support landowners to increase the total amount of land within the area which is covered by agri-environment schemes (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Restore Sundon former landfill site and create links to adjacent sites (issue / opportunity 4.2.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	£££
ACCESS				
Promote Theedway as a valuable route and develop as a green corridor (issue / opportunity 4.3.5).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Create new multi user routes with safe crossing points (issue / opportunity 4.3.1 & 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	£££
Create new multi user route with safe crossing point to Sundon Road, Streatley (issue / opportunity 4.3.1 & 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Provide safe crossing point for Ickneild Way on A6 (issue / opportunity 4.3.1).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Upgrade existing footpaths to bridleway / cycleway and crossing points of the railway (issue / opportunity 4.3.1).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Upgrade Footpath FP1 to bridleway / cycleway and provide safe crossing of railway and M1 (issue / opportunity 4.3.1).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££

Create bridleway to north of Sundon Hills / Sharpenhoe Clappers to link to existing bridleway and provide circular route (issue / opportunity 4.3.3)	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Create new footpaths, and upgrade permissive paths to formal rights of way (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	£
Create link from footpath FP4 into Holt Wood and Fernhill Wood (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Create new PROW along farm track / field margin to link Streatley and Barton, via Jeremiah's Tree (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	££
Reinstate old footpath to link between Stanley Road, Streatley and A6 (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Promote open access sites (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Develop access network as part of Sundon former landfill site restoration (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Audit gateways (issue / opportunity 4.3.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Implement work at gateways as required (issue / opportunity 4.3.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
PUBLIC USE & ENGAGEMENT				
Promote the area Sundon & Streatley Chiltern Arc.	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£

Develop new visitor and recreation centre (issue / opportunity 4.4.1).	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Continue to maintain the facilities at Sundon Country Park and Sharpenhoe Clappers car parks (issue / opportunity 4.4.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Undertake surveys to assess visitor numbers and requirements (issue / opportunity 4.4.7).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Promote opportunities for activities that benefit health and well-being (issue / opportunity 4.4.8).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Provide dog bins at entrance points (issue / opportunity 4.4.6).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Provide interpretation information at gateways and points of interest throughout the area (issue / opportunity 4.4.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Provide information and interpretation possibly using electronic formats (issue / opportunity 4.4.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Develop a self guided audio tour of the area and its key features (issue / opportunity 4.4.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Develop a series of family friendly circular routes in the area for walkers, cyclists and horse riders (issue / opportunity 4.3.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Ensure the route and signage of the long distance routes is maintained (issue / opportunity 4.3.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
Create a “friends of” group focused on Sundon former landfill site (issue / opportunity 4.4.9).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£

Provide opportunities for Keech Hospice to use sites and provide safe access routes (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	£
Promote the existing conservation volunteer opportunities and offer additional opportunities (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Develop and co-ordinate a programme of public events for the area (issue / opportunity 4.4.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
HERITAGE FEATURES				
Continue the implementation of the current agreed management plan for Sharpenhoe Clappers scheduled monument (issue / opportunity 4.5.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Determine how to maintain the beech woodland to Sharpenhoe Clappers and include education of the public (issue / opportunity 4.5.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Develop and implement a Conservation Management Plan for Lower Sundon and Upper Sundon (issue / opportunity 4.5.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Develop and implement Conservation Management Plans for other important archaeological sites in the area. (issue / opportunity 4.5.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Provide interpretation on the areas heritage and landscape features. (issue / opportunity	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Develop opportunities for education regarding agriculture and food production (issue / opportunity 4.5.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Provide opportunities for agri business diversification (issue / opportunity 4.5.4).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££

Provide opportunities for members of the community to be involved in surveying, recording and protecting the areas key heritage features (issue / opportunity 4.5.2).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
LANDSCAPE FEATURES				
Maintain and enhance the hedgerows and historic boundaries (issue / opportunity 4.5.10).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Develop the Theedway as a green corridor. (issue / opportunity 4.3.5)	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	££
Establish corridors between existing landscape features (issue / opportunity 4.5.10)	CBC / Core Steering group	Long Term	2026+	£££
Maintain character of the area, identify key views to be maintained (issue / opportunity 4.5.1, 4.5.5, 4.5.6, 4.5.7)	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£
GEODIVERSITY				
Preserve the statutory designation of Sundon Chalk Quarry (issue / opportunity 4.2.5).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Restrict uses of Sundon Chalk Quarry that impact on geodiversity of quarry (issue / opportunity 4.2.5).	CBC / Core Steering group	Medium Term	2017-2026	££
Provide interpretation materials highlighting the importance of the geology on the area's biodiversity (issue / opportunity 4.4.3).	CBC / Core Steering group	Short Term	2013-2017	£

8 Progressing the plan

8.1 Funding

This section seeks to outline potential funding opportunities for the priorities and actions listed in section 7 above. This plan essentially provides a long term vision to steer staffing resources and focus in this area. There continues to be limited funding available from Central Bedfordshire Council and its strategic partner in the area the National Trust, but these finite revenue and capital resources need to be geared against external grants.

Those familiar with fundraising will appreciate that it is an ever-changing environment, and the suggestions made within this section are intended as a guide only at this stage.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) –Your Heritage

Grants of £3,000-£100,000 are awarded under HLF's Your Heritage scheme for projects that relate to the local, regional or national heritage of the UK and help people to learn about, look after and celebrate heritage in a fun and enjoyable way. Projects must:

- help people to learn about their own and other peoples heritage; and either

- conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy; or
- help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about heritage.

Your Heritage is a rolling funding programme and there are no deadlines for applications. Decisions regarding applications are normally received within 10 weeks from submission of a fully filled-in application. It is recommended that an online pre-application enquiry form is submitted. The full application is also submitted on-line.

However, the Your Heritage scheme will be closing in 2013. The final date for submitting an application under the Your Heritage programme is 31 January 2013. Decisions will be made by 1 April 2013. It will be replaced by two other programmes; Our Heritage and Sharing Heritage.

Natural England - Paths for Communities

A funding scheme set up to develop and enhance the network of Public Rights of Way (PROW) in England in order to deliver benefits to predominantly rural areas. Local community partnerships are eligible to bid to the Path for Communities scheme.

The aim of the scheme is to encourage and support local communities to work with land owners to make improvements to the network of Public Rights of Way. In all cases projects must include some element of new Public Right of Way creation. In most cases projects will include an element of new Bridleway creation but projects that include Footpath creation alone will also be considered where community and economic benefit can be demonstrated.

The Paths for Communities scheme is operating over a two year period, ending in May 2014.

Natural England – Heritage Management Plans

This Natural England fund provides grants to fund 50% of costs of preparing Heritage Management Plans (HMPs) that deliver integrated sustainable management of outstanding land already designated or in the process of designation as conditionally exempt from inheritance tax. To be eligible for this funding, land must be of outstanding historic, scenic or scientific interest already designated or in the process of achieving designation.

The fund can provide a grant to cover consultant's fees in producing a Heritage Management Plan devised in accordance with Natural England's criteria, and any other related survey work involved. Match funding of 50% would be required to secure a grant from the Heritage Management Plans fund. The fund is open from 1 April – 31 March each year, and has a budget of £30k to distribute to eligible projects.

This funding could help shape a management plan for the future direction and protection of the area north of Luton, and therefore be a valuable tool in continuing to manage the designated and sensitive sites in the area by identifying and planning long term objectives for the area as a whole.

Natural England – Entry Level Stewardship

This funding could be utilised if key local, neighbouring county and private farmers/landowners were agreeable to recommendations made in this report with regard to buffering zones to ease the impact on sensitive areas. The Entry Level Stewardship fund provides a straight forward approach to delivering simple and effective environmental management across the whole farm, complementing existing farming operation, and allowing for the creation of a practical environmental management programme.

Funding is granted to bids judged against a points system dependent on the area of land managed, and includes criteria such as enhanced hedgerow management, grassland management and the creation of buffer strips parallel with agricultural land.

It should be noted however that the fund will be changing on 1 January 2013, with an increased in assessed criteria to improve the schemes delivery against key environmental outcomes.

Forestry Commission – English Woodland Grant Scheme

Funding could be obtained from this Grant Scheme to help establish and manage woodlands including; Woodland Creation Grant, Woodland Management Grant and Farm Woodland Payments. The grant provides funds towards the establishment of either a broadleaf or conifer woodland, and the geographical size dictates the amount of funding available.

As well as the creation of woodland, grants also seek to address other priorities, including:-

- Buffer areas for wildlife, linking woodland habitats or other natural area

- Provision of access and recreation
- Use by the public, particularly within or near to the urban fringe

Forestry Commission - Big Tree Plant

The Big Tree Plant grant aims to provide funding to increase the number of trees in areas where people live and work. Funding is available annually (usually in August) for planting taking place that winter.

Any group or organisation applying for funding must be non-governmental, non-profit distributing organisation that can represent the interests of the local community. Emphasis is very much focused on the involvement of community volunteers at all stages, including in planting the trees.

The Big Tree Plant will distribute grants of £4m in total during the period April 2011 – March 2015. Funding for individual projects is based on an average unit cost of £4 per tree/whip. High cost trees may need to show a greater level of match funding in order for a bid to be successful.

Chilterns Conservation Board – Small Grants Fund

The Small Grants Fund supports projects that bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It aims to develop and test new methods of achieving a more sustainable way of life in this area of great beauty and diversity. Projects must work towards meeting the Fund's five objectives:

- **Practical works** to conserve and enhance commons – e.g. clearing scrub to restore grassland, restoring ponds, haloing veteran trees.
- **Tools and Equipment** for local groups – e.g. hand tools, a brushcutter, trays and nets for pond surveys, a laser level for surveying boundary banks and ditches
- **Specialist training courses** for volunteers – e.g. using brushcutters, species identification, first aid.
- **Support to local groups** organising local events.
- **Publications and maps** for survey and research projects.

Please refer to www.chilternsaonb.org for further information

Funding applications are welcome from a wide range of applicants including voluntary / community organisations, local businesses and individuals

8.2 Developer contributions/CIL/Section 106

Given the expected development in the area surrounding the Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis conurbation, including within the project area itself, developer contributions are likely to be a potential source of funding for the implementation of actions within this plan. In view of declining public funding, the importance of developers and the proximity of proposed development, these contributions are becoming increasingly important. Any development that takes place in this area will need to accord with policies in the emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire which identifies the need for a range of infrastructure requirements including GI, the enhancement and linking of existing biodiversity, landscape, heritage, accessibility and open space features and ensuring that the setting of the AONB is maintained. Contributions will be sought in line with the adopted Planning Obligations Strategy or CIL (once in place) to deliver requirements.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy introduced under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and the amended Regulations 2011. The levy allows the local authority to raise funds from developers to fund

infrastructure needed as a result of the development, including provision of green infrastructure, park improvements and green spaces.

8.3 Use of the plan

8.3.1 It is recommended that one organisation, most probably Central Bedfordshire Council as the commissioners of the vision plan, takes the lead in progressing the aims, objectives and proposals outlined in this document. This organisation should communicate with partners and stakeholders to ensure all organisations working in the north of Luton area are familiar with and buy-into the vision plan. It should also seek to coordinate any significant activity such as funding applications, implementation of works, or further community consultation.

It is also suggested that this organisation identify a project lead to champion the vision plan. This person should be the key contact for other organisations or local authority departments operating in the north of Luton area to ensure a co-ordinated overview of all developments associated with the vision plan. This person should also provide advice on linkages and be able to identify potential conflicts that may arise.

8.4 Use of the vision plan

8.4.1 This vision plan provides a comprehensive summary of the issues and opportunities facing access and green spaces to the north of Luton. The vision plan should act as a framework for all organisations working in the area and support the securing of funding to take forward the outlined proposals.

8.5 Monitoring and updating the vision plan

8.5.1 It is recommended that the core steering group established during the development of this document remains, both as a way to continue to the information sharing encouraged by the project and as a way to coordinate the progression of the proposals outlined in the plan. The project lead should report to and coordinate the regularity of meetings of the core steering group. It is however suggested that the group meet annually to share information on work programmes and priorities for the year ahead.

It is further recommended that the continuing core steering group meetings review work and development in the north of Luton area against the aims, objectives and proposals outlined in the vision plan. It may be that the members of the core steering group alter in the future due to the

expansion of identified issues within this document, but it is imperative that a strong representation of local green infrastructure partners is retained. Regular meetings will also give the group the opportunity to amend the aims, objectives or action plans should the situation in the project area change over time.

A more thorough five year review of the vision plan should also be scheduled to ensure that it is as appropriate as possible, particularly given the development proposals within the north of Luton area.



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