

# Growing Spaces: Countryside and Growth

...sustaining our new communities



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*Our natural environment is essential to our wellbeing, and it can be better looked after than it has been. Habitats that have been degraded can be restored. Species that have been isolated can be reconnected. Green Belt land that has been depleted of diversity can be refilled by nature – and opened to people to experience it, to the benefit of body and soul.*

**Rt Hon Greg Clark MP (Foreword to the NPPF).**

## 7.1 What are Growing Spaces?

Growing Spaces are growth areas; those areas of Central Bedfordshire that are expanding and having to deal with the challenges of growth and development generally. This growth includes new areas of housing, employment and all associated infrastructure including greenspaces and access routes.

### 7.1.1 The Development Strategy

The Development Strategy is the main planning document for Central Bedfordshire sets out the overarching spatial strategy and development principles for the area. It sets out the strategic objectives for the area and identifies the scale of new employment, housing and retail provision and the location of large scale development sites The Strategy also identifies the new infrastructure required to support this development, and identify the key environmental constraints and opportunities.

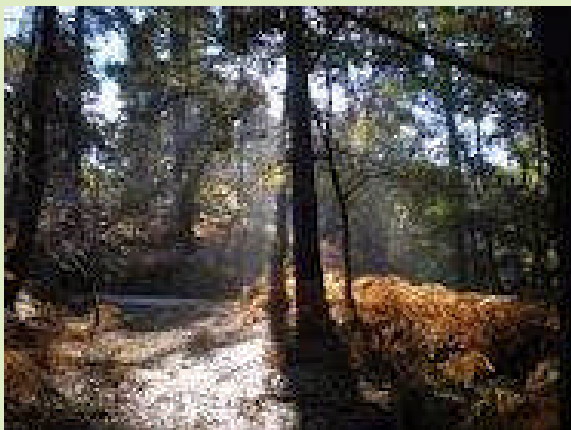
With increased mobility and more people participating in sporting and recreational activities in their leisure time, the provision of accessible open space, recreation and leisure facilities is assuming greater importance. At the same time, large numbers of new houses are proposed to be built across Central Bedfordshire during the Plan period. The residents of these new homes will create additional demand for, and pressures on, open space and countryside access.

This OAIP covers a wide range of sites and facilities which fit into a hierarchy of open space provision, ranging from local green spaces to community woodlands through to country parks. The council recognises the value that people place on the

countryside and will protect the open countryside for its own intrinsic value and for the wider benefits it provides. It will also safeguard landscapes against inappropriate development and strive to ensure new development works with the landscape.

The enhancement of the open space network, as the population of Central Bedfordshire and surrounding areas grows, is an important factor in maintaining residents' quality of life. The council will therefore protect existing green space and provide new green space accessible to the public. The maintenance of the existing and new open space provision is also important and the council will seek contributions to secure the long term management of sites. The policy relating to the quality and quantity standards of open space, that needs to be provided through growth and development, will be set out in the council's Leisure Strategy. Planners and developers have seen the benefits of incorporating green space within residential developments for many years. It has recently been demonstrated that properties close to green space command a premium of between 5 -15%<sup>67</sup>.

## CASE STUDY – RUSHMERE COUNTRY PARK



In 2009 Central Bedfordshire Council and the Greensand Trust formed a partnership to purchase Rushmere Park, using funding from a variety of sources including a grant of £573,000 from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Rushmere Park - 85 hectares (210 acres), was a privately owned estate,

located adjacent to Stockgrove Country Park and Oak Wood, already owned by the council and Greensand Trust respectively. The purchase facilitated the creation of a 162 hectare (400 acre) public open space for future generations to enjoy; **Rushmere Country Park** is an exciting and diverse site with a mix of landscapes, habitats and opportunities for people explore. Since 2009 extensive planning work has been carried out and works include the creation of new facilities, routes, biodiversity enhancements and a sculpture trail.

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<sup>67</sup> Green Infrastructure by Design - a guide for sustainable communities in Milton Keynes and South Midlands (2010) – original date provided by Natural England.

### **7.1.2 Minerals and Waste**

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan, due to be adopted Summer 2013, will comprise a joint policy document covering Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton. The Plan sets out strategic objectives for minerals and waste issues within the Plan area and identifies strategic sites for both mineral extraction and waste management (including waste disposal and waste recovery capacity) for the period up to 2028. It includes policies which will be used to determine planning applications for mineral extraction and waste management development. The plan seeks improvements in terms of biodiversity, green infrastructure and countryside access and therefore is strategically important to the aims and objectives of the OAIP.

Whilst during the operational life of mineral extraction and waste disposal sites there is often a dramatic impact on countryside access and disruption for users of the rights of way network due the need to introduce temporary diversions or closures which may last a number of years, the established policy approach is to at least reinstate the pre-existing access arrangements once a site is restored and, whenever possible, provide enhanced access opportunities. Minerals and waste sites provide opportunities to add significantly to the greenspace network. In some sites it is possible to reinstate paths during phased working and this practice should be promoted.

The OAIP will look to inform the minerals and waste planning process and influence the design and delivery of restoration schemes in order to improve access to the countryside. The council will produce design standards and specifications which will shape how restoration schemes provide enhanced countryside access opportunities.

### **7.1.3 Provision of Infrastructure**

Infrastructure means the facilities and services that help us live our everyday lives. It can range from strategic provision, such as a new roads or schools, to the creation of new parks, woodlands and access routes. Providing the appropriate level of environmental infrastructure is crucial to delivering healthy and sustainable communities.

#### **7.1.4 Community Infrastructure Levy**

The development industry will be funding a substantial proportion of the new infrastructure, outdoor access and greenspace. This will occur through either the usual agreements made in the course of individual planning applications (known as S106 Planning Agreements) or the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a tariff based charge.

The council is working on its CIL charging schedule, which will propose the rate that it intends to charge for residential and commercial development. Once the charge is adopted the council will produce a list of infrastructure items on which CIL revenues will be spent. This list will be based on the infrastructure schedule in the Development Strategy which includes greenspaces needed as part of the infrastructure required to support new development. There will be further opportunities to strengthen links with local council's through the CIL process.

#### **7.1.5 The Leisure Strategy**

The emerging Leisure Strategy will address the current mismatch of leisure provision. This work will include an audit of built facilities and open space provision across Central Bedfordshire. Through the audits and assessments, individual Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) will be developed for Chapters 1 to 3. These will identify locally specific standards which, once adopted, will be used to deliver leisure and open space facilities in new developments once adopted. It will also be used to inform and update S106 and CIL contributions. The emerging Leisure Strategy SPD will have regard to the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan and Local Green Infrastructure Plans.

The Leisure Strategy will comprise the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Leisure Facilities Strategy, focusing on indoor sport and leisure centres, comprising a range of sport and leisure facilities
- Chapter 2: Recreation and Open Space Strategy, focusing on a defined range of green spaces, providing formal and informal recreational and play facilities
- Chapter 3: Playing Pitch Strategy, focusing on outdoor formal, grass and artificially-surfaced sports playing pitches
- Chapter 4: Physical Activity Strategy, focusing on all types of physical activity - classes, sports, exercise, walking etc. and will include an activity programme

There will be an overarching Leisure Strategy document to provide an overview of the detailed information contained within the four chapters and will identify linkages between the chapters, partner organisations' work and the council's strategic approach to leisure.

### 7.1.6 Green Infrastructure

#### BOX 5 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FUNCTIONS

GI performs a variety of functions at all spatial scales, from individual sites within urban centres through to the landscape scale in the wider countryside. GI can deliver a wide range of benefits for society through the range of functions or services it can fulfil, such as:

- Landscape setting and context for development
- Habitat provision and access to nature
- Access, recreation, movement and leisure
- Energy production and conservation
- Food production and productive landscapes
- Flood attenuation and water resource management
- Countering the 'heat island' effect of urban areas

Source: Adapted from Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England (2009)

Designing Green Infrastructure into new developments means that the new development becomes an attractive, sustainable place. The GI network includes publicly accessible green spaces that are highly valued by local communities and visitors. The Leisure Strategy will define a hierarchy of publicly accessible green spaces. The council will protect these sites and take

opportunities to promote their improvement through, for instance, proper management. This will be achieved through the invaluable work of local groups and communities and additional funding will be sought through planning obligations, where it is required, to ensure GI is delivered. Whilst development in the GI priority areas may be expected it, should not fragment the existing or proposed GI network or build over key GI opportunity sites.

The council will promote the Design Guide requirement that GI is considered from the earliest preparatory phases of the (development) masterplanning process<sup>68</sup>, rather than as an afterthought or add on. Ideally, this should happen as part of the initial strategic thinking and research carried out by a developer to define needs, objectives and the key parameters for the development.

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<sup>68</sup> A separate process to Greenspace Masterplanning as referred to elsewhere in the OAIP

Incorporating GI into the masterplan at the start allows the developer / design team to think about what type, and how much GI, is actually required, how it compliments and relates to the existing GI and how it can be integrated to create multi-functionality. This early consideration of GI allows the developer to meet many of the statutory requirements within a development scheme whilst benefiting many other social, economic and environmental objectives.<sup>69</sup>

### **7.1.7 Local Green Space**

The National Planning Policy Framework introduced a new landscape designation known as Local Green Space. The designation, which can be made through Neighbourhood Plans and reviews of the Development Strategy, will allow protection of valued local areas from new development other than in exceptional circumstances. The land to be designated must be demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and must be local in scale and in reasonably close proximity to the community. However, it will normally be located beyond the Settlement Envelope because valuable open space within the settlement will be designated as Important Open Space.

Local Green Space, once designated, is subject to the same strong development restrictions as Green Belt. Because of this the council would not normally expect Local Green Space to be designated within the Green Belt.

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<sup>69</sup> G.I. Design Guide 2010

## 7.2 Why are Growing Spaces Important?

Greenspace and access provision should be an integral aspect of, and can add value to, the 'place-making' and development process<sup>70</sup>. The incorporation of high quality, sustainable and multifunctional greenspace can provide a range of economic, environmental and social functions (or services) that are essential in creating and sustaining well-designed places for living, work and play. This applies equally to regeneration of urban areas and new sustainable urban extensions.

Greenspaces and countryside sites perform a variety of functions from individual small greenspaces within urban centres through to the landscape scale in the wider countryside.

There is increasing evidence to support the economic case for greenspaces which demonstrates that investment in them makes good business sense for developers.

High-quality green space has a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres<sup>71</sup>. The presence of good parks and greenspaces offers a vital economic lever to first attract and then retain new businesses.

Attractive green space also offers very clear benefits to the local economy in terms of stimulating increased house prices, since house-buyers are willing to pay a premium to be near green space.

Many areas are also now seeing that the redevelopment of high-quality public green spaces aids the regeneration of an area, with commercial and residential property prices increasing in those locations. A study in the North West of England showed proximity to city parks was found to augment property prices by nearly 20% for a detached property<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Chris Blandford Associates (March 2010). MKSM Green Infrastructure by Design: A guide for sustainable communities in Milton Keynes South Midlands

<sup>71</sup> Blue Sky Green Space (2010) Understanding the Contribution Parks and Green Spaces can make to Improving People's Lives.

<sup>72</sup> Neill Dunse (2007). Urban parks, open space and residential property values, RICS.



## 7.3 Growing Spaces: The Next 10 Years

### **Leisure Strategy**

The OAIP will support the Leisure Strategy for the Central Bedfordshire area which will develop open space quality and quantity standards.

In support of the delivery of the Leisure Strategy, the council will monitor planning applications to ensure that the quality and quantity of green space provision meets agreed standards.

New countryside sites in areas identified in the Leisure Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Plan will be developed to meet deficits in the location and types of sites available.

Sites will be categorised and a clear vision developed for the standards of management and future development of each site. This is linked to supporting the implementation of the Leisure Strategy.

### **Planning for Outdoor Access**

The council will ensure that individual development proposals and planning policy continue to offer protection of and enhancements to outdoor access.

Outdoor access will need to be considered in a wide range of applications from individual homeowner applications, minerals and waste applications and major housing developments. All types of applications should seek net enhancements to public access to the countryside.

Outdoor access principles should continue to be a key influence on wider masterplanning and 'Place Making' exercises that the council is undertaking. Early inclusion in the planning process is a key factor in ensuring countryside access is an integral part of any sustainable development.

The council will formulate planning policies, which relate to Countryside Access, Rights of Way and Green Space including Neighbourhood Plans.

The council will seek enhancements to the existing greenspace and rights of way network from development applications and proposals.

The council will work with local communities on the development of Greenspace, Access and Neighbourhood Plans.

## **Research**

Studies will be undertaken with an academic partner into the development of a model that can predict the expected use of countryside facilities from new development.

## **Improving Sites and Facilities**

A review of council and partnership landholdings will be undertaken to identify adjacent land that could be justifiably acquired to consolidate existing landholdings, and widen the activities that each site can offer.

The council will enhance existing and create new facilities on site, e.g. trails, litter/waste bins, toilets, play facilities, car parking, visitor centres to cater for increased use in line with Leisure strategy standards and user / non user demands.

## **Supporting Strategic Projects and Initiatives**

The council will continue to support those projects which require a multi agency partnership approach to facilitate the delivery.

One such strategic project is The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (B&MKW). The B&MKW Trust was established in 1995 to promote the development of a broad waterway which will link the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes to the river Great Ouse in Bedford through a series of Waterway Parks. The Trust works with some 26 partners drawn from national and regional authorities and voluntary organisations.

## **7.4 Action Plan Summary for Growing Spaces**

The main Aim and Outcome of the Action Plan for Growing Spaces is detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

### **Aim 13 – The quantity and quality of rights of way and greenspaces meet the needs of current and future communities**

Outcome – We will understand the needs of users and non users and the role that the site and access routes play in the green infrastructure network. This will steer our future management and site development.

Outcome – New sites will be established and existing sites enhanced to meet the demands of increased housing

## 7.5 Policies for Growing Spaces

The policies for Growing Spaces will support the delivery plan but also ensure that the council, its partners and the wider community deliver outdoor and countryside access in line with agreed principles.

### **OAIP - Policy Statement 18 – Planning**

The council will seek to ensure that new development proposals and planning policies should reflect the aims of the OAIP and Leisure Strategy, ensuring that development proposals deliver OAIP aims and outcomes in the Action Plan.

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals enhance the rights of way and access network and contributions will be sought towards developing the network.

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals enhance the network of countryside sites and greenspaces and contributions will be sought towards the safeguarding and enhancement of existing greenspaces

The council will seek to ensure that new Minerals and Waste policies and proposals reflect the aims of the OAIP and specifically the projects and programmes identified in the action plan.

The council will provide design guidance and specifications for access routes and greenspace and will seek to ensure that the relevant guidance is applied to development proposals – including minerals and waste schemes.

### **OAIP - Policy Statement 19 – Green Infrastructure**

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals deliver access and greenspace proposals identified within Green Infrastructure Plans and work within the Green Infrastructure priority network to enhance the network of rights of way, access and greenspace.