

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Development Plan

Environmental Report

September 2020

Quality information

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Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group

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Non-Technical Summary

Background

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Development Plan (SNDP).

The SNDP is being prepared by a Steering Group in the context of the Bedford Borough Local Plan, which was adopted by the Borough Council on 15 January 2020. Once 'made' the SNDP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the Bedford Borough Local Plan.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. Central to the SEA process is publication of an Environmental Report alongside the draft plan that presents certain required information. The aim is to inform the consultation and, in turn, plan finalisation.

Preparing the Environmental Report essentially involves answering three questions:

1) What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point?**

- including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SEA findings **at this stage?**

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next**

Structure of this report

This report is the Environmental Report for the SNDP, hence the three questions are answered in turn. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question: *What's the scope of the SEA?*

What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment. The SEA framework is presented below:

The SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity	Protect and enhance all biodiversity, including seeking a net gain where possible.
Climate change	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan Area; Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan Area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding
Historic environment	Protect and enhance the significance of the historic environment, heritage assets (both designated and non-designated) and their settings.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Land, soil and water	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Population and communities	Cater for existing and future residents' needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community services and facilities for current and future residents. Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate
Economy and employment	Support the current and future economic vitality of the Neighbourhood Plan area
Health	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel, whilst maintaining and improving transport infrastructure where possible.

Plan making/SEA up to this point

An important element of the required SEA process involves assessing 'reasonable alternatives' in time to inform development of the draft plan, and then publishing assessment findings in the Environmental Report.

As such, Part 1 of this Environmental Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing, or **growth scenarios**.

Specifically, the following two growth scenarios are assessed:

- Growth Scenario 1: Allocation of Site 901 (Hill Farm, Mill Rd)
- Growth Scenario 2: Allocation of Sites 527 and 620 (Land adj. to School Approach, and Land east of Odell Rd).

The assessment concludes that Scenario 1 performs most strongly in relation to four of the SEA topics ('Biodiversity', 'Historic Environment', 'Landscape' and 'Transport') whilst Scenario 2 performs most strongly in relation to one of the SEA themes ('Population and Communities'). In short, the assessment finds both scenarios to be associated with pros and cons, and it is for the Parish Council to "weigh-up" these pros and cons in order to select a preferred option.

Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the pre-submission version of the SNDP. Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the SEA framework.

Overall the assessment identifies the potential for significant positive effects in relation to the 'Population and community' SEA topic, on the basis that it has potential to deliver in full the ambitious housing target of around 500 dwellings set by Bedford Borough Council. The assessment does not predict significant negative effects in respect of any SEA topic, though the potential for minor negative effects is identified in terms of 'Landscape', and 'Land, soil and water resources'.

Specific findings are:

- In relation to landscape, a key concern is the extent to which proposed development will alter the landscape setting and context of the village. The plan will direct around 500 dwellings to a greenfield site which appears peripheral to the village and is perceptually severed from the village centre by the presence of the Midland railway line. However, the policies as applied to the proposed site allocation are likely to have some effect in mitigating potential harm to landscape character, by ensuring boundary treatment and landscaping softens the site's visual impact whilst seeking to enhance connectivity with the village centre to bring it perceptually 'closer' to the main settlement.
- In relation to land, soil and water resources the key concern is that the proposals of the Neighbourhood Plan will result in the loss of 38ha of land which is largely in productive agricultural use. The site is underlain by Grade 3 quality land, which has potential to be 'best and most versatile' (BMV), though it has not been subdivided into Grade 3a (i.e. BMV) and 3b (i.e. poorer quality).
- The potential for significant positive effects has been identified in relation to population and communities on the basis that the plan proposes to meet and modestly exceed the 450 dwelling housing target for Sharnbrook with associated positive effects in relation to access to a broad range of types and tenures of housing, delivery of new community facilities and enhanced walking and cycling accessibility within the village.
- Minor positive effects are anticipated in relation to the biodiversity, historic environment, health and wellbeing and transport SEA themes.
- Neutral effects are anticipated in relation to the 'climate change' and 'economy and employment' themes.

Next steps

This Environmental Report accompanies the pre-Submission version of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan for Regulation 14 consultation. Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, when finalising the plan for submission.

The 'Submission' version of the plan will then be submitted to Bedford Borough Council (alongside an Updated Environmental Report, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will then be published for further consultation, and then submitted for an Independent Examination.

At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Bedford Borough Local Plan.

If the subsequent Independent Examination is favourable, the SNDP will be subject to a referendum, organised by Bedford Borough Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the SNDP will become part of the Development Plan for Bedford Borough.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Development Plan (SNDP).
- 1.1.2 The SNDP is being prepared by a Steering Group in the context of the Bedford Borough Local Plan, which was adopted by the Borough Council on 15 January 2020. Once 'made' the SNDP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the Bedford Borough Local Plan.
- 1.1.3 SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the SNDP is a legal requirement.¹

1.2 SEA explained

- 1.2.1 It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in-line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on SEA.
- 1.2.2 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the **Environmental Report**) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*".² The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.2.3 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
 - 1) What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point**?
 - including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
 - 2) What are the SEA findings **at this stage**?
 - i.e. in relation to the draft plan.
 - 3) What happens **next**?

1.3 This Environmental Report

- 1.3.1 This report is the Environmental Report for the SNDP. It is published alongside the draft – 'pre-submission' – version of the plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.3.2 This report essentially answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information.³ Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.3.3 However, before answering Q1, two initial questions are answered to further set the scene:
 - What is the plan seeking to achieve?
 - What is the scope of the SEA?

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The SNDP was subject to formal screening in 2019, at which time it was determined that SEA is required.

² Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

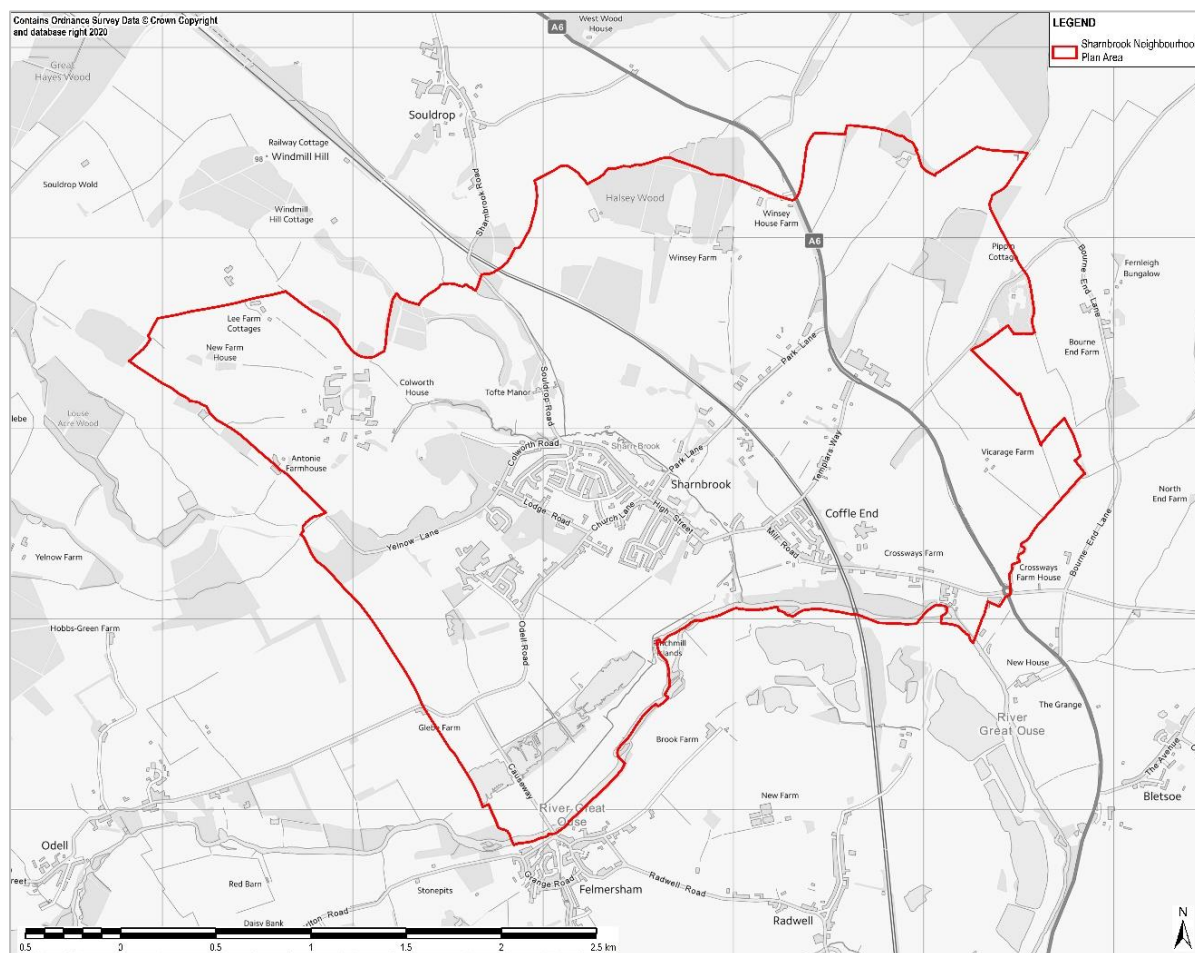
³ See **Appendix I** for further explanation of the regulatory basis for answering certain questions within the Environmental Report, and a 'checklist' explaining more precisely the regulatory basis for presenting certain information.

2 What is the plan seeking to achieve?

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section considers the strategic planning policy context provided by the Bedford Borough Local Plan, before then presenting the SNDP vision and objectives. Figure 2.1 presents the plan area:

Figure 2.1: The Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan area



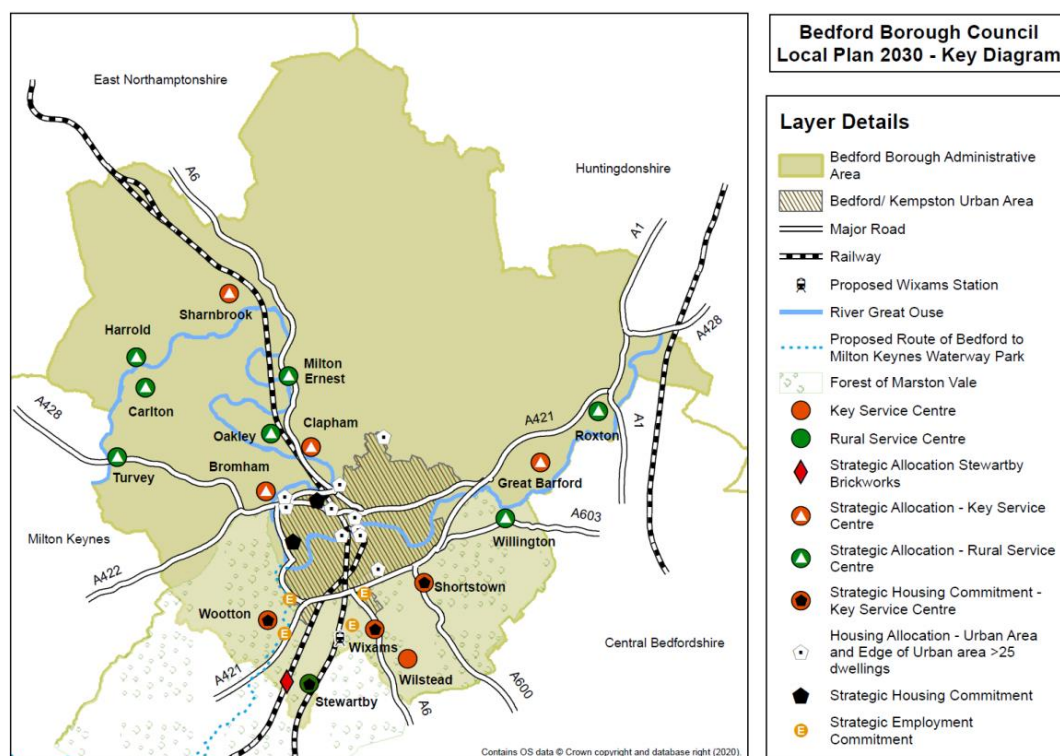
2.2 Relationship with the Bedford Borough Local Plan

2.2.1 NDPs are required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. In this way it is intended for the Local Plan to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Bedford Borough, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the NDPs where appropriate.

2.2.2 Figure 2.2 presents the key diagram from the recently adopted Local Plan, highlighting Sharnbrook as a key service centre with a 'strategic allocation'. What this means is that the village is allocated a number of homes through Policy 4S (Amount and distribution of housing development) which, in turn, must be provided for through the SNDP. Specifically, the SNDP must provide for a net increase of 500 homes.

2.2.3 Further strategic direction provided by the Local Plan is discussed below, within Section 5.2.

Figure 2.2: Bedford Borough Local Plan Key Diagram



2.3 Vision and objectives of the SNDP

- 2.3.1 The vision for Sharnbrook is: *“In 2030, Sharnbrook will be a thriving and sustainable Parish, which has adapted to the changing needs of the community through the provision of new housing and appropriate infrastructure. Development will respect the local historic built form and will ensure that Sharnbrook village retains and enhances key attributes such as open spaces & views, heritage, health & well-being and a sense of community..”*
- 2.3.2 Five strategic plan objectives have been developed, aligned with the vision set out above, in order to guide the development of policies (N.B. the plan document also presents a series of more detailed objectives):
- 1) Provide **housing** which meets the needs of the diverse and growing community and to influence the location, density, scale, design and type of new housing to ensure that it fits with the distinctive character of Sharnbrook’s built heritage and meets identified local housing needs.
 - 2) Promote the **infrastructure and access** improvements (such as improve traffic management, car parking, pedestrian and cycle routes) needed to support new development and to encourage safe and accessible movement for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and public transport.
 - 3) Protect the place defining **characteristics** of Sharnbrook’s heritage environment and enriched countryside, including the existing Village Open Spaces, and to ensure that new development creates new space and contributes to the open space needs of the local community, including the preservation of the natural features in the distinctive landscape.
 - 4) Protect and strengthen the **economic benefits** of Sharnbrook as a Key Service Centre and to encourage and support local business and local measures to improve employment prospects in the village.
 - 5) Maintain and improve **local facilities, amenities and services** which provide a community focus and help to sustain the vitality, health and quality of life for all residents.

3 What is the scope of the SEA?

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e. the sustainability topics and issues / objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the plan and reasonable alternatives. Further information is presented in **Appendix II**.

Consultation

- 3.1.2 The SEA Regulations require that “when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England.⁴ As such, these authorities were consulted in summer 2020.⁵

3.2 The SEA framework

- 3.2.1 The SEA scope is summarised in a list of topics, objectives, issues and questions, known as the SEA framework. Table 3.1 presents a summary.

Table 3.1: The SEA framework (summary)

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity	Protect and enhance all biodiversity, including seeking a net gain where possible.
Climate change	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan Area; Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan Area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding
Historic environment	Protect and enhance the significance of the historic environment, heritage assets (both designated and non-designated) and their settings.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Land, soil and water	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Population and communities	Cater for existing and future residents' needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community services and facilities for current and future residents. Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate
Economy and employment	Support the current and future economic vitality of the Neighbourhood Plan area
Health	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel, whilst maintaining and improving transport infrastructure where possible.

⁴ These consultation bodies were selected “by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

⁵ The SEA Scoping Report is available on the Neighbourhood Plan website.

Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point?

4 Introduction to Part 1

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 Whilst work on the SNDP has been underway for several years, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and assess **reasonable alternatives** in 2020.
- 4.1.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan, namely the allocation of land for housing, or **growth scenarios**.

Why focus on growth scenarios?

- 4.1.3 The decision was taken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives in relation to the matter of allocating land for housing, or growth scenarios, in light of the SNDP objectives (see para 2.3.2),⁶ on the basis that housing growth is known to be a matter of key interest amongst local residents and other stakeholders, and on the basis that a choice exists where there is the likelihood of being able to differentiate between the merits of alternatives in respect of 'significant effects'. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects.

Who's responsibility?

- 4.1.4 It is important to be clear that:
- **Establishing** growth scenarios - is ultimately the responsibility of the plan-maker, although the SEA consultant (AECOM) is well placed to advise.
 - **Assessing** growth scenarios - is the responsibility of the SEA consultant.
 - **Selecting** the preferred option - is the responsibility of the plan-maker.

4.2 Structure of this part of the report

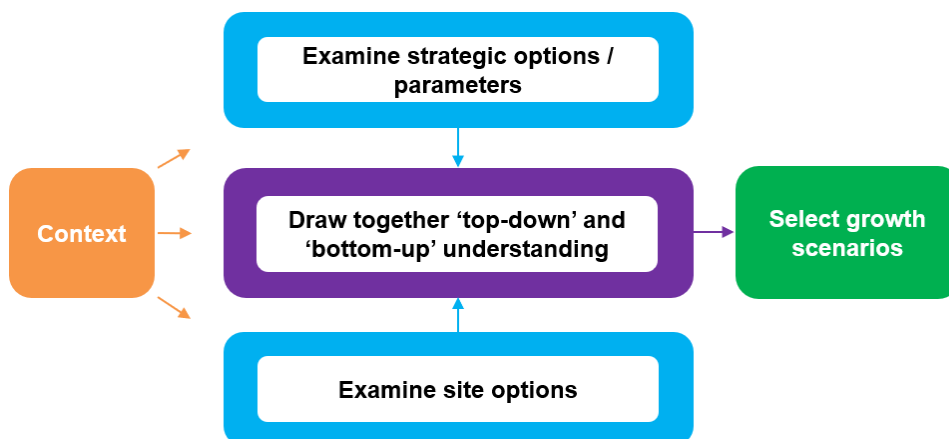
- 4.2.1 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5** - explains the process of establishing growth scenarios;
 - **Chapter 6** - presents the outcomes of appraising growth scenarios;
 - **Chapter 7** - explains reasons for selecting the preferred option, in light of the assessment.

⁶ The SEA Regulations (Article 12(2)) are clear that reasonable alternatives must be established taking into account the objectives of the plan in question.

5 Establishing growth scenarios

- 5.1.1 The aim here is to explain a process that led to the establishment of growth scenarios, and thereby present “an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with”.⁷
- 5.1.2 Specifically, there is a need to: **1)** explain strategic options/parameters with a bearing on the establishment of growth scenarios; **2)** discuss work completed to examine site options (i.e. sites potentially in contention for allocation); and then **3)** explain how the ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ understanding generated was drawn together in order to arrive at growth scenarios for assessment.

Figure 5.1: Establishing the growth scenarios



5.2 Strategic options / parameters

- 5.2.1 As discussed, Policy 4S of the adopted Local Plan allocates 500 homes to Sharnbrook, to be provided for through the SNDP. However, since the plan was finalised, and this allocation confirmed, one site has gained outline planning permission for approximately 50 homes. On the assumption that this site does come forward as anticipated, the residual requirement for the SNDP is approximately **450 homes**.
- 5.2.2 A second point to note is the following strategic spatial guidance provided by Local Plan:
- Policy 3S (Spatial strategy) – envisages “*strategic residential development in key service centres in association with expanded education provision where necessary.*” This point was also discussed by the Local Plan Inspector, within her report on the soundness of the Local plan. In particular, paragraph 53 refers to a need to “ensure necessary provision of school places” as a factor that underpins the Local Plan approach of allocating 500 homes to Sharnbrook (as well as three other key service centres).
 - Policy 4S (Amount and distribution of housing development) states that allocations made through Neighbourhood Plans, including the SNDP, should be “*generally in and around defined Settlement Policy Area boundaries.*” Also, the supporting text to Policy 4S states: “*Growth in the key service centres will provide primarily new homes but also services for the local community.*”
 - Other policies – a range of other policies within the Local Plan serve as an important strategic input to the establishment of growth scenarios. For example, Policy 2S (Healthy communities) recognises the importance of delivering and protecting a network of health facilities; and Policy 28S (Place-making) highlights the importance of allocations promoting local distinctiveness, integrating well with and complementing the character of the area, contributing to provision of green infrastructure, enhancing the landscape, reflecting a proactive approach to the historic environment, avoiding adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity assets including, but not limited to, Natura 2000 sites, and responding to the unique character and importance of the River Great Ouse and its setting.

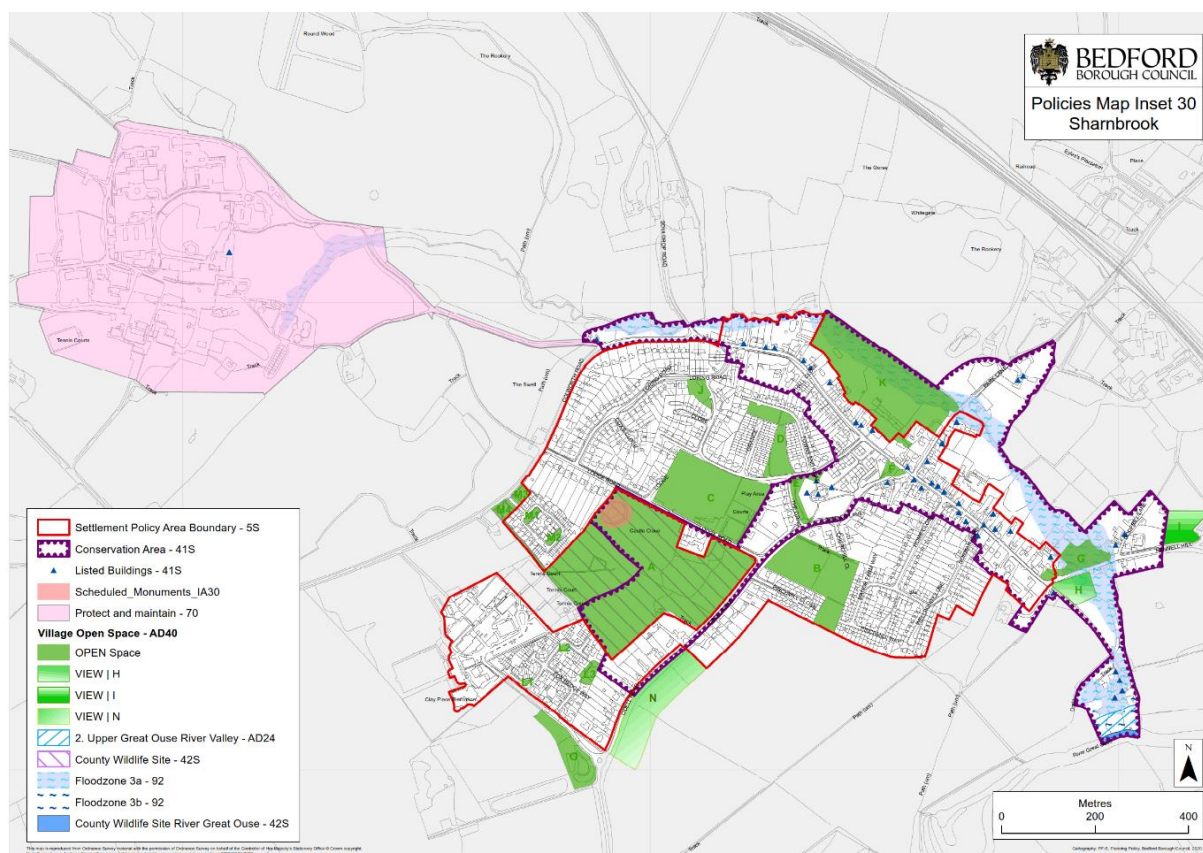
⁷ Schedule 2(8) of the SEA Regulations.

5.2.3 In respect of strategic guidance provided by the Local Plan, it is also important to note the designations shown on the Policies map, as well as the extent of the defined Settlement Policy Area Boundary. The Local Plan Policies Map for Sharnbrook is shown below as Figure 5.2.

5.2.4 Finally, there is a need to consider the local context, in respect of strategic spatial priorities that have a bearing on the selection of growth scenarios. The emerging SNDP document presents a list of 'key issues' including in respect of:

- Housing – in addition to delivering the housing target (450 homes) there is a need to ensure a good mix of homes, to include affordable housing, housing for older and young people and family housing.
- Traffic and parking – this is considered to be a key issue locally, with particular issues relating to speeding through the village, HGV traffic, schools traffic, safe routes for school children, parking associated with the GP surgery and safe movement by pedestrians, cyclists and the mobility impaired.
- Environment and heritage – particular issues locally include: the need to respect the character of the River Great Ouse valley and its role as an ecological corridor, noting the proximity of Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI; and the need to protect the designated Conservation Area, along with its landscape setting, and noting key component features including the historic high street and the village green. Other issues and sensitivities are understood from the Sharnbrook Landscape and Built Heritage Assessment (2018).
- Employment and business – in addition to businesses clustered in the village centre and rural businesses, there is a need to recognise nearby Colworth Science Park, which is designated as a Key Employment Site by the Local Plan and, at a smaller scale, Stoke Mill Industrial Estate on Mill Road, near the A6.
- Local facilities – there is a strong support locally for protecting and improving access to services and facilities, including safe and convenient access by non-car modes.

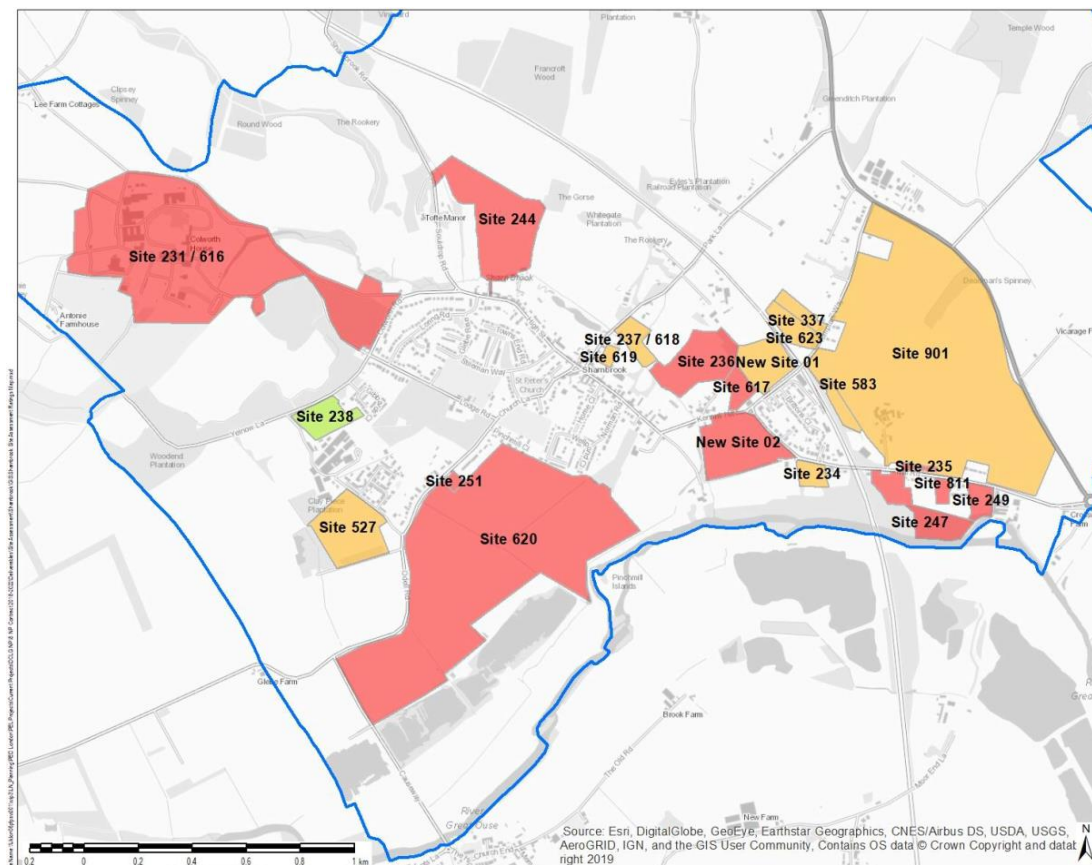
Figure 5.2: The Local Plan Policies Map for Sharnbrook



5.3 Site options

5.3.1 A starting point for the examination of site options is the SNDP Site Options Assessment (SOA; May 2020), which examined 21 non-committed site options,⁸ finding that nine of these stand-out as better performing. These are the nine sites shown as amber in Figure 5.3

Figure 5.3: Sites assessed within the SOA report (2020)



5.3.2 An immediate stand-out site is **Site 901**, on the basis that this is a larger site, such that development would achieve the economies of scale necessary to fund the delivery of new and upgraded community infrastructure, which is a strategic priority, as discussed above. This site is being actively promoted, with the proposal to deliver a new primary school, hence there is a clear argument for exploring this site further through the assessment of growth scenarios. As such, this site is discussed further within **Section 5.4**.

5.3.3 The next sites to consider are sites 231/616 and 620, as the two other stand-out large sites:

- **Site 231/616** comprises the Colworth Science Park, and also notably forms part of a wider site (622) that was screened out by the SOA (see Appendix A), but which was considered closely as a potential location for a new settlement by Bedford Borough Council when preparing the Local Plan.⁹ Focusing on Site 231/616, the SOA assigns this site a 'red' rating for quite clear-cut reasons, hence it is fair to rule-out the option of allocation through the SNDP as 'unreasonable', and it is not considered further.
- As for **Site 620**, the SOA assigns a 'red' rating, but for less clear-cut reasons. Compared to Sites 901 and 231/616 the site does relate well to the existing village, in that it abuts the settlement boundary. The site was promoted to Bedford Borough Council when preparing the Local Plan,⁹ and further information on scheme proposals has been submitted directly to the Parish Council, with proposals seeking to address the constraints to development. One proposal involves delivery of Site 620 in combination with **Site 527**, which is under the same ownership. In light of these points, and given the potential to deliver a strategic-scale scheme, Sites 620 and 527 are considered further within **Section 5.4**

⁸ The SOA also examined one site that has planning permission for 51 homes, namely site 238.

⁹ See <https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/PlanningBrowse.aspx?id=%2fsLFaobqvWzZF9eJkmJGzQ%3d%3d>

- 5.3.4 The next site to consider is **Site 244**, on the basis that it is a larger site. However, the SOA assigns a 'red' rating for clear cut reasons, and there would be no potential to deliver a new primary school onsite. As such, this site is not considered further.
- 5.3.5 The final sites to consider, from Figure 5.3, form a loose cluster to the east of the settlement boundary, and in the vicinity of the railway:
- Attention focuses on adjacent **Sites 01, 02, 236 and 617**, which might potentially deliver a scheme that serves to link the existing development known as the "railway triangle" - which was developed in the 1990s and includes the village GP surgery as well as a small employment area on the site of the former railway station - to the main village. However, there is a constraint to growth here given that the landscape gap separating the village and the "railway triangle" comprises the valley of the Sharn Brook, with landscape and heritage value (also potentially biodiversity value).¹⁰ As such, the option of assembling land / delivering sites in combination to achieve a strategic scale of growth in this area is not considered further.
 - There is also a need to consider the possibility of allocating one or more of the small amber-rated sites, namely **Sites 01, 234, 237/618, 337, 583, 619 and 623**. The view of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group is that certain of these sites are potentially suitable for development, whilst others are not; however, an overriding consideration is that piecemeal development of small sites is not in accordance with a key strategic objective driving preparation of the SNDP, namely the need to deliver new and upgraded infrastructure, including community infrastructure. On this basis, and because there is not thought to be any likelihood of allocating a small site in addition to a large site (given the housing target), these small amber-rated sites are not considered further.
- 5.3.6 Finally, there is a need to consider one site screened out (or 'rejected') by the SOA, namely **622 Lee Farm New Settlement**. Lee Farm New Settlement was proposed in 2017 as a strategic allocation in the Local Plan 2035 (as it was at the time) but was subsequently rejected as not deliverable during the plan period as the plan period has now been shortened to 2030 (with a lower housing requirement accordingly). Subsequently, information was provided to the Parish Council, explaining that the site is now promoted for 500 dwellings on the area of land south west of Colworth Park and north east of Yelow Lane. This smaller new settlement could deliver in the plan period; however, the site is not suitable as the location is not in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Bedford Local Plan 2030. Specifically, the site is not "generally in and around" or "well related to" the defined Settlement Policy Area for Sharnbrook or Small Settlement boundary at Sharnbrook Coffle End, being located approximately 1km from Sharnbrook SPA via a lane with no footpath. Community buildings, including a potential primary school, would be located in a location that is not accessible via sustainable transport modes. The site is distant from Sharnbrook SPA and Sharnbrook Coffle End Small Settlement and existing facilities there. The site is not capable of meeting Policy 4S or 7S requirements. The site is therefore not considered further.

5.4 Growth scenarios

- 5.4.1 The discussion above serves to identify a shortlist of three sites reasonably in contention for allocation through, namely 527, 620 and 901. These are the 'building blocks' for establishing growth scenarios.
- 5.4.2 A first port of call is **Site 901**. Specifically, the preferred approach (as supported by both the landowner and Steering Group), would involve allocation of the majority of the site for 500 homes – see Figure 5.4. Information on the full site previously submitted through the Local Plan Call for Sites process can be found here: edrms.bedford.gov.uk/PlanningBrowse.aspx?id=7ZGBY2c1IMXgNH0ohbVEBw%3d%3d.
- 5.4.3 The scheme supported by the landowner and Steering Group would involve delivery of a small community hub, to include a 2FE primary school, as well as a new link road and junction onto the A6, sports pitches and areas of open space / green infrastructure.
- 5.4.4 The number of homes delivered would be in excess of the 450 homes target,¹¹ but only by a fairly modest amount, i.e. an amount that might be considered an appropriate 'buffer' against the risk of delays to delivery. In light of these points, **Growth Scenario 1** is defined as involving allocation of Site 901 only.

¹⁰ The Sharnbrook Conservation Area extending across the western part of this gap, and the Local Plan designating an additional small part of the gap as a Village Open Space / View (see Figure 5.3). There are also several footpaths.

¹¹ Another consideration is the possibility of the site being expanded, to take in fields adjacent to the north (to the west of the proposed new junction) and southeast (west of the railway) and west (small field adjacent to the railway).

5.4.5 With regards to **Sites 527 and 620**, there is a need to deliver both of these sites in combination, if the housing target is to be achieved. This is because of a need to maintain the southern part of Site 620 as open space, to buffer the river corridor and associated SSSI. This is the approach favoured by the site promoters (Figure 5.5), who propose: “circa 500 dwellings across the 2 land parcels... a dedicated drop-off facility for the existing Sharnbrook Academy, a new primary school, local centre with retail and community facilities and an extensive green space network providing areas of public open space, amenity space, extensive areas for ecology and a Riverside Park.” This is **Growth Scenario 2**.

5.4.6 In summary, two reasonable growth scenarios are taken forward for assessment in Section 6:

- Growth Scenario 1: Allocation of Site 901
- Growth Scenario 2: Allocation of Sites 527 and 620

Figure 5.4: Growth scenario 1

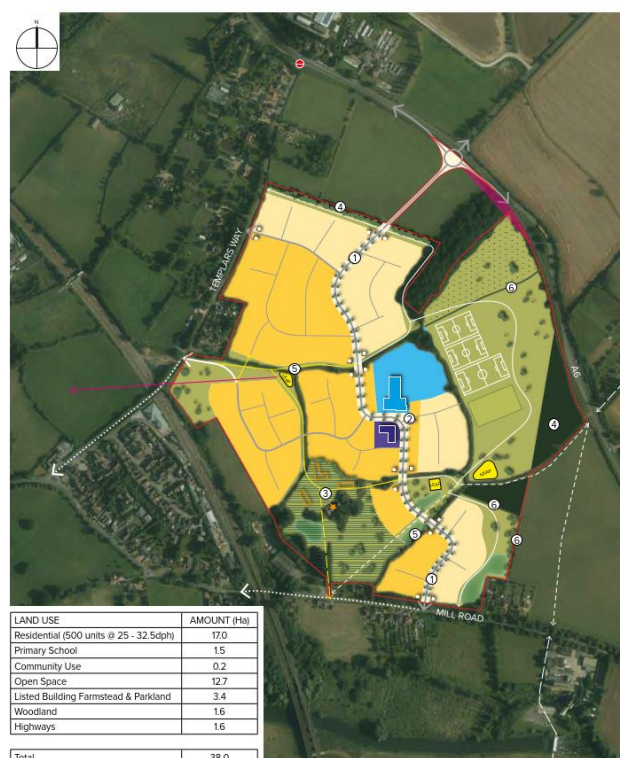


Figure 5.5: Growth scenario 2



6 Assessing growth scenarios

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The aim of this section is to present assessment findings in relation to the two growth scenarios.

6.2 Assessment findings

6.2.1 The first section below presents summary assessment findings in relation to the two growth scenarios, with a more detailed discussion then presented under subsequent headings.

6.2.2 With regards to methodology:

For each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework the assessment both: **A)** categorises the performance of each scenario in terms of 'significant effects' on the baseline (using red / green); and **B)** ranks the scenarios in order of performance. Also, '=' is used to denote instances where the scenarios perform on a par (i.e. it not possible to differentiate).

Summary assessment findings

Table 6.1: Growth scenarios assessment findings

Topic	Scenario 1 Site 901	Scenario 2 Sites 527 and 620
Biodiversity	★1	2
Climate change	=	=
Historic environment	★1	2
Landscape	★1	2
Land, soil and water resources	=	=
Population and communities	2	★1
Economy and employment	=	=
Health	=	=
Transport	★1	2
Overview discussion The assessment finds that Scenario 1 performs most strongly in relation to four of the SEA themes, whilst Scenario 2 performs most strongly in relation to one of the SEA themes. It was not possible to meaningfully differentiate between the two scenarios in relation to four of the SEA themes. With regards to significant effects, significant negative effects are predicted for both scenarios in respect of two topic headings, and significant positive effects are predicted for both scenarios in respect of one topic. In short, therefore, it is not possible to differentiate the scenarios in terms of significant effects. In short, the assessment finds both scenarios to be associated with pros and cons. It is for the Parish Council to "weigh-up" these pros and cons in order to select a preferred option. It is important to note that it is not the role of this assessment to indicate a preferred option, as the topic headings are not assigned any particular weight/importance, nor are they assumed to have equal weight/importance.		

Biodiversity

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
	2

- 6.2.3 Scenario 1 directs growth to Site 901 which appears to have low underlying sensitivity in relation to biodiversity. There are no local, national or international designated sites in or adjacent to the site, and although the site is within a SSSI impact risk zone, the nature of development proposed means it would not trigger the need for consultation with Natural England.
- 6.2.4 By contrast, Scenario 2 is notable for directing growth to a location with substantial biodiversity sensitivity by virtue of its location immediately adjacent to the Felmersham Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Although it is noted that the site promoter has proposed incorporating a buffer area of open space between the SSSI and the built area of the site, in practice it is likely that impact pathways would extend from the SSSI to the new development given the proximity between the two, and there could be potential for harm from additional recreational pressure and trampling.
- 6.2.5 In light of the above, it is considered that Scenario 1 is notably more strongly performing in relation to biodiversity.

Climate change

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
=	=

- 6.2.6 In terms of climate change adaptation, growth under either scenario would be directed away from areas of fluvial and surface water flood risk, performing equally well in this regard. In terms of climate change mitigation, both scenarios offer broadly similar opportunities to reduce emissions by promoting walking and cycling, whilst the comparable scale of growth proposed under each option would likely give rise to similar opportunities to seek to minimise emissions from the built environment through seeking energy efficiency in new homes. It is therefore not possible to meaningfully differentiate between the two growth scenarios in relation to climate change.

Historic environment

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
	2

- 6.2.7 Scenario 2 stands out by virtue of directing growth to Site 620 which is adjacent to the Sharnbrook conservation area at Odell Road. The conservation area appraisal notes that the substantial historic dwellings to the north west of Odell Road are “so prominent in approaches to Sharnbrook along the Ouse valley from the west”, whilst the openness of the site contributes to the historic character of the conservation area by preserving its rural backdrop and outlook. The adopted Bedford Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013) finds the site’s open views make an important contribution to Sharnbrook’s historic identity, helping “retain its form and reflect past history”.¹² The openness of the site is also therefore considered to contribute to the wider setting and context of the Castle Close scheduled monument, though the magnitude of this contribution is limited.
- 6.2.8 Scenario 1 would direct growth away from the historic core of the village and its direct effects on the overall historic character of Sharnbrook are therefore likely to be more limited. However, the site does include the Grade II-listed former farmhouse at Hill Farm whose significance and setting would likely be adversely impacted by encircling development.

¹² bedford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy-its-purpose/development-plan-documents/allocations-and-designations/

- 6.2.9 On balance, it is considered that there is greater potential for broader adverse effects on the settlement's historic character from development under Scenario 2, whilst Scenario 1 performs more strongly and by virtue of directing growth away from the most sensitive areas of historic character in the village centre.

Landscape

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
	2

- 6.2.10 Both growth scenarios would deliver significant growth on largely greenfield land and landscape impacts under either scenario are considered inevitable.
- 6.2.11 First, it is notable that development under Scenario 1 would be directed to a site outside the existing extent of the village area on the far - i.e. eastern – side of the Midland railway line from the village. The railway imparts substantial severance in character terms, placing Site 901 firmly outside the perceptual extent of the village. Development could therefore have potential to present as dislocated from the existing village rather than as a coherent and cohesive extension to it. Additionally, the proposed boundaries of site 901 are notable in that they leave pockets of undeveloped space to the north of the site and the to the east. In both instances these pockets of space are small and are bounded by durable boundary features in the form of existing roads and therefore appear vulnerable to future piecemeal infill development. The site is open and rural, contributing to the landscape setting of the Sharnbrook on the approach to the village from the A6. The effect of development at Site 901, and the theoretical potential for piecemeal future expansion of the site, is considered likely to transform the rural character of the east of the Parish. It is recognised that the 2018 Sharnbrook Landscape Character and Built Environment Assessment finds that 'sub-area 8', which includes Site 901, does not have a truly tranquil and unspoilt character because of the intrusiveness of traffic noise from the A6. However, in visual terms, the area is currently overwhelmingly undeveloped and this would be altered significantly by growth under Scenario 1.
- 6.2.12 In relation to Scenario 2, it is notable that Site 620 supports long range views in and out of the village to the south, towards the attractive rural landscape beyond. The site makes a strong contribution to the village's setting, and development of the scale proposed, even with boundary treatment, would represent a significant departure from the established rural-fringe character of the area along Odell Road. This is underlined by the 2018 Landscape Character and Built Environment Assessment, which identifies the *"importance of long views across the river valley and beyond from Odell Road"*, designating this outlook as a 'Key View'. This underlying landscape sensitivity is further reflected by site 620's designation under Policy AD40 of the adopted Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013) as a protected view, where *"development will not be permitted"* unless it can be demonstrated that *"material considerations outweigh the need to retain the Village Open Space or View undeveloped"*. In this context it is considered that the principle of development at Site 620, is inappropriate in landscape terms.
- 6.2.13 On balance, it is considered that development under either scenario would significantly urbanise the current rural undeveloped character of each development location and could have potential to transform the character and landscape setting of Sharnbrook as a whole. Whilst it is recognised that growth under both scenarios could incorporate boundary treatment and landscaping to soften the visual impact of development, it is inevitable that the open and rural landscape character of the east of the village, under Scenario 1, and the south of the village, under Scenario 2, would be substantially altered by development of around 500 dwellings.
- 6.2.14 It is therefore considered that growth under either scenario could potentially lead to significant adverse effects in relation to landscape as the way in which the settlement is perceived within the landscape could be fundamentally altered under either scenario. However, the magnitude of these effects is considered likely to be greatest under Scenario 2, and it is considered that whilst both scenarios have potential for significant effects, Scenario 2 performs most weakly in relation to landscape.

Land, soil and water resources

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
=	=

- 6.2.15 Both growth scenarios would direct development to sites underlain by Grade 3 agricultural land, giving it some potential to be 'best and most versatile' (BMV). However, it is not clear whether the land in question is Grade 3a, i.e. BMV, or Grade 3b which is of poorer quality. Nevertheless, sites under each scenario are in productive agricultural use and development would lead to the loss of this use. The scale of this loss is considered to give rise to the potential for significant adverse effects. However, it is not considered possible to meaningfully differentiate between effects under either scenario and they are considered to perform broadly on a par with each other.

Population and communities

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
2	1 

- 6.2.16 Development under both growth scenarios would exceed the housing target of around 450 dwellings set by the Local Plan which is a significant positive. Providing for a figure in excess of the target is appropriate from a perspective of wishing to put in place an appropriate 'buffer' to mitigate for the risk of unforeseen delays to deliver. Also, given the scale of growth proposed, both scenarios should deliver a broad range of types and tenures of housing including on-site affordable housing.
- 6.2.17 There is also a need to consider the location of housing growth, and in this respect there could be potential to differentiate between the scenarios. Scenario 1 delivers growth at a location more distant from the existing services in the village centre, though it is noted that enhanced walking and cycling connectivity are proposed to link the site and the village core. Scenario 2 delivers growth at a location nearer the high street, the village hall and the Sharnbrook Academy and sports centre and the allotments and may therefore be marginally more likely to support accessibility to some key village services. However, it is noted that on-site provision of local retail and a new primary school under either scenario could reduce the need to travel into the village centre for some needs, whilst securing major new community infrastructure for the village.
- 6.2.18 Overall, it is recognised that both scenarios propose delivery of around the same number of new homes and offer opportunities to deliver new and enhanced community infrastructure within the village, including a new school, new equipped areas of play, sports pitches, local retail, new cycle and pedestrian links as well as a range of housing types and tenures. Significant positive effects are anticipated under both scenarios. However, on balance Scenario 2 is considered to perform marginally more strongly on the basis of directing growth closer to the village's existing range of community services and facilities.

Economy and employment

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
=	=

- 6.2.19 Both growth scenarios could offer some limited potential to incorporate localised employment floorspace, consistent with a local centre, on site. Additionally, both growth scenarios would direct growth to locations in close proximity to the employment sites of Colworth Park and Stoke Mill. It is considered that both scenarios perform broadly on a par with each other and significant effects are not anticipated under either.

Health

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
=	=

- 6.2.20 A key dimension of the health and wellbeing SEA theme is the extent to which new development will support walking and cycling as viable, attractive, convenient modes of travel to meet local needs, whilst also ensuring that existing transport infrastructure is not adversely affected by growth.
- 6.2.21 Both growth scenarios offer opportunities to deliver walking and cycling links within the development site, though more importantly they each have potential to deliver enhanced walking and cycling infrastructure within the village more broadly. This is particularly important in relation to Scenario 1 given its additional distance from the village centre. The scale of growth proposed suggest there could be good potential to secure financial contributions towards new walking and cycle paths, and it is noted that the developers' proposals for each scenario include new active travel routes within the village.
- 6.2.22 Both growth scenarios propose new sports pitches and outdoor recreation space. Whilst this is likely to lead to positive results in relation to health and wellbeing, it does not help differentiate between the options.
- 6.2.23 Additionally, it is noted that the village medical centre is in closest proximity to development proposed under Scenario 1, though in practice it is a short distance from the sites proposed under Scenario 2 as well. Overall, it is considered that it is not possible to meaningfully differentiate between the two growth scenarios in relation to health and wellbeing.

Transport

Scenario 1 (Site 901)	Scenario 2 (Sites 527 and 620)
	2

- 6.2.24 The scale of growth proposed under either scenario is sufficient to give rise to effects on the local road network and these effects are considered first.
- 6.2.25 Site 901, proposed under Scenario 1, has the least traffic impact on High Street/Centre of village in the draft Sharnbrook Transport Study (November 2019) conducted by Origin Transport Consultants. However, the study also found that development of around 500 dwellings at Site 901 could potentially have a significant effect on the Mill Road/A6/Thurleigh Road roundabout which is currently operating above practical capacity in the peak hours. However, for the purposes of the SEA findings it is understood that that Scenario 1 would help enable a new roundabout on the A6 with new link road connecting to the site itself. This could help alleviate the identified capacity issues.
- 6.2.26 Under Scenario 2, Site 620 was found by the Sharnbrook Transport Study to have potential for adverse traffic impact on the High Street and the centre of the village, whilst 527 was found likely to have the same adverse effect in the village centre. Additionally, site 527 was found likely to significantly increase congestion at the Odell Road / School Approach roundabout, pushing the roundabout above capacity at peak hours.
- 6.2.27 In terms of active travel, both growth scenarios seek to promote walking and cycling as attractive options by which to meet a range of day to day needs within the village and both propose delivery of enhanced pedestrian and cycle paths to connect the sites and the village centre services.
- 6.2.28 On balance, Scenario 2 stands out as weakest performing on the basis that it would direct major growth to a location at which the road network has existing capacity issues, anticipated to be exacerbated by delivery of around 500 new homes which would also use the same road network. In contrast, Scenario 1 appears able to deliver effective mitigation in relation to road capacity, whilst also directing growth to a location which would avoid loading additional traffic onto the constrained village centre road network.

7 Selecting a preferred scenario

- 7.1.1 This section presents the NPSG's reasons for supporting the preferred approach - Scenario 1 - in light of alternatives assessment. The Parish Council has stated: -

"In considering the various options, we referred to the emerging planning policies in the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Development Plan. In particular, in this document, we refer to the policies S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S11, S12, S16 and S17. The numbers following each Scenario indicate which policies could be met by these options.

Scenario 1 (Site 901) contains sufficient land to provide both the required dwellings and a space for a new primary school, and ancillary retail provision. It also provides for a new access off the A6, and reduces traffic flow through the village. It does not affect the views of the River Great Ouse, or any key views. It also will cause less pollution in the village being an advantage to parishioners as well as helping preserve the conservation area. Retail provision in this area would address the day to day needs of the new residents and would not prejudice the retention of the existing retail establishments on the High Street. (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,16,17).

Scenario 2 (Sites 620 and 527) involves sufficient land to provide both required dwellings and space for a new primary school with potential for ancillary retail provision. This scenario would provide car parking for the existing secondary school and a new primary school but does concentrate all education provision in one part of the parish, as well as using the restricted junctions at High Street/Church Street for the majority of journeys to the educational establishments. This scenario has worse traffic impact on the village, which already struggles at this junction. Our traffic study showed that it was over capacity at peak times, along with the roundabout junction at School Approach/Odell Road. In addition, development along the Odell Road affects key views and will impact on the River Great Ouse and Felmersham Gravel Pits Nature Reserve (SSSI). Proximity to Santa Pod would be an issue for noise for future residents. (4,6,8,9,17).

It is the opinion of the Neighbourhood Plan Group that the best and only real option is Scenario 1."

Part 2: What are the assessment findings at this stage?

8 Introduction to Part 2

8.1.1 This part of the report presents an assessment of the pre-submission SNDP.

Assessment method

8.1.2 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' of the SNDP on the baseline, drawing on the SEA topics identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1**) as a methodological framework.

8.1.3 For each topic 'significant effects' of the current version of the plan on the baseline are predicted and evaluated. Account is taken of the criteria presented within Schedule 2 of the Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects as far as possible. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

8.1.4 Every effort is made to identify / evaluate effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the high level nature of the plan. The ability to predict effects accurately is also limited by understanding of the baseline and the nature of future planning applications. Because of the uncertainties involved, there is a need to exercise caution when identifying and evaluating significant effects and ensure all assumptions are explained. In many instances it is not possible to predict significant effects, but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) in more general terms.

8.1.5 The draft Neighbourhood Plan contains 17 policies, organised into 5 broad themes – see Table 8.1

Table 8.1 List of proposed policies in the draft Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan

Policy theme	Policy
General	Policy S1: Design Principles
	Policy S2: Provision of well-designed energy efficient buildings and places
	Policy S3: Construction Activity
Housing	Policy S4: Housing Delivery
	Policy S5: Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road
	Policy S6: Local Housing Needs
	Policy S7: Housing Density
Transport and Access	Policy S8: Residential Parking in New Developments
	Policy S9: Pedestrian Footpaths and Cycleways
Environment and Heritage	Policy S10: Local Green Spaces
	Policy S11: Protection of Views
	Policy S12: Protection of Heritage Assets
	Policy S13: Supporting the Development of Small Businesses
	Policy S14: Working from Home
Village Facilities	Policy S15: Village Facilities
	Policy S16: Provision of New Community Facilities
	Policy S17: Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure

9 Assessment of the pre-submission version of the SNDP

9.1 Biodiversity

- 9.1.1 The biodiversity SEA objective seeks to protect and enhance all biodiversity features within the plan area. In the context of Sharnbrook, this includes supporting the protection of nationally designated features (specifically, the Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI, the Odell Great Wood SSSI), as well as County Wildlife Sites, and important habitats and species. Additionally, there is a need to seek a net gain in biodiversity and support enhancements to multifunctional green infrastructure networks where possible.
- 9.1.2 Policy S1 (Design Principles) directly refers to the protection of biodiversity assets through 'incorporat(ing) high quality landscaping within and around new developments together with protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats'. Recognition of the potential to seek habitat enhancement is positive, particularly as the wording appears to implicitly cover both designated and non-designated wildlife habitats.
- 9.1.3 Additionally, the text supporting Policy S10 (Local Green Spaces) extends local protection to the village playing field, the Felmersham Nature Reserve and Castle Close which are all considered to be high value green spaces, based on the results of the Residents and Businesses Questionnaire. Whilst this is not explicitly a recognition of the biodiversity value of these spaces, there are likely to be positive effects associated with preserving open green spaces, such as helping contribute to habitat corridors.
- 9.1.4 Further, although Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road) emphasises that development should 'respect the surrounding natural (...) environment', the policy may be strengthened by more directly acknowledging its proximity to Radwell Pits County Wildlife Site (CWS), and the potential implications for this designation from future development. The CWS is around 300m from the site, though the large scale of development could have potential to give rise to additional recreational pressure.
- 9.1.5 Overall, it is anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan will lead to **minor positive effects** in relation to the biodiversity objectives.

9.2 Climate change (mitigation and adaptation)

- 9.2.1 The climate change SEA objectives have a dual focus of reducing the contribution of the Neighbourhood Plan area to climate change and also supporting resilience to the potential effects of climate change, particularly flooding. In practice, development plans can contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change by minimising greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment, whilst adapting to the effects of climate change means ensuring development is directed away from areas at greatest risk of flooding.
- 9.2.2 Policy S2 (Provision of well-designed energy efficient buildings and places) is key in relation to climate change mitigation, as it sets an ambitious requirement for new development to "be optimised for energy efficiency, targeting zero carbon emissions". The policy includes measures which should be deployed to help achieve this requirement, including siting development to optimise solar gain, using thermally efficient building materials and installing energy efficiency measures in new homes.
- 9.2.3 Other policies are likely to have indirect effects in relation to reducing emissions. For example, by supporting remote working, Policy S14 (Working from home) may help to enable some residents to avoid or reduce commuting by car, reducing emissions from transport. Similarly, Policy S17 (Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure) seeks "improvements to communications infrastructure" which could help build further capacity for home working in the village.
- 9.2.4 In terms of adapting to the effects of climate change, the key Neighbourhood Plan policy is Policy S1 (Design Principles), which reinforces the position set out in local and national policy, stating that development proposals should "not be in areas at risk of flood, or increase flood risk elsewhere". Correspondingly, the site allocation made through Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road) directs development to a location away from areas of fluvial and surface water flood risk.

- 9.2.5 Although surface water flood risk elsewhere in the village is relatively limited, the Neighbourhood Plan establishes that SUDs will be required in new development in order to “adequately control run-off from residential parking” (Policy S8 – Residential Parking in New Developments) and to form part of the landscape buffering within and around the site allocation proposed via Policy S5.
- 9.2.6 Overall, **neutral effects** are anticipated in relation to climate change.

9.3 Landscape

- 9.3.1 The landscape objective focuses on the protection and enhancement of the character and quality of landscapes and townscape within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 9.3.2 Policy S11 (Protection of Views) recognises the importance of avoiding harm to the village’s landscape setting, stating that ‘the development on prominent sites on the edge of Sharnbrook should be avoided to protect the profile and skyline of the village’. The supporting text for the policy identifies nine key views supported by evidence from the Landscape Character and Built Environment Assessment, identified for their contribution to “countryside views and vistas” from Sharnbrook as well as their role in retaining Sharnbrook’s “village feel” and importance in helping “avoid coalescence with adjoining settlements”. Identification and protection of these view corridors will therefore help ensure new development avoids harm to the integrity of the countryside setting of Sharnbrook.
- 9.3.3 Policy S1 (Design Principles) establishes the key principles in relation to protecting Sharnbrook’s landscape and villagescape character from adverse effects from poor quality design. Policy S1 highlights the importance of development being designed in line with the current characteristics of the natural and built environment, including being designed to ‘reflect the prevailing pattern and scale of development in the immediate location’, and to deliver high quality landscaping ‘within and around new developments’, to help embed new development more naturally into the existing landscape setting of the village.
- 9.3.4 Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road) specifies that sensitive landscaping through ‘informal open space, SUDS systems, landscape buffering and sensitive boundary treatment’ around the proposed site will be required, as this will benefit ‘the surrounding natural, built and historic environment’. However, Policy S5 proposes delivery of around 500 new dwellings on 38ha of greenfield land at the village fringe and whilst mitigation is proposed, it is likely that development of this scale will have potential for significant effects on the way Sharnbrook is perceived within the landscape and on the character of the village as a whole.
- 9.3.5 Policy S10 (Local Green Spaces) and its supporting text identifies a number of Local Green Spaces (LGS) for protection from loss. Whilst these are not primarily landscape designations, LGS can play an important role in the street scene, contributing to the character of the settlement and avoiding over-densification of development.
- 9.3.6 Overall, the policies and proposals of the Neighbourhood Plan seek to minimise the effects on Sharnbrook’s landscape setting and character through the protection of key views, the delivery of high quality design and through appropriate landscape and boundary treatment at new development. However, the quantum of growth proposed is considered to give rise to the potential for **minor negative effects** in relation to the landscape SEA objectives, even once mitigation measures have been implemented.

9.4 Historic environment

- 9.4.1 The Historic Environment theme focuses on the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the rich variety of cultural and built heritage within and adjacent to the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 9.4.2 Policy S12 (Protection of Heritage Assets) specifies two key constraints for development: development ‘within the Sharnbrook Conservation Area that lies within the Settlement Policy Area’ which do not ‘enhance the character or appearance’ of the Conservation Area and alterations to ‘important character buildings and sites’. Specifically, Policy S12 highlights preserving the ‘character’ of buildings and their ‘distinctive and important’ features, which accommodates the variety of cultural and built heritage within the Plan area. The importance of the village’s historic environment is further underlined in the supporting text of the policy, which recognises the ‘special character’ of the is due in part to the contribution made by Sharnbrook’s heritage assets.

- 9.4.3 Additionally, clause c of Policy S12 notes the importance of considering the setting of heritage assets through their relationship to the 'immediate surroundings' of the villagescape. The supporting text notes that considering impacts from new development on the setting of heritage assets should extend to both 'designated and non-designated' assets. Similarly, the supporting text for Policy S10 (Local Green Spaces) draws on Paragraph 100 of the NPPF for the designation of Local Green Spaces 'because of (their) beauty and historic significance'. Importantly, Policy S12 notes the subjectivity of historic value, noting that some assets may carry greater individual weight to members of the community than conveyed through literature or objective evidence which 'contribute much towards the character of the village'.
- 9.4.4 Policy S16 (Community Facilities) and its supporting text makes specific reference to the need to protect the 'significance' of Sharnbrook's heritage assets, specifically 'cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship'. Finally, in considering more detailed matters of design, Policy S1 (Design Principles) acknowledges the need for development to accommodate for existing local characteristics, respecting the 'distinctive built, historic and natural environment'.
- 9.4.5 Several other policies also reference the wider landscape of Sharnbrook in adding value to the overall cultural and historic setting of the Plan area. Policy S11 (Protection of Views) identifies views for protection in order to retain the 'village feel' of the area, including the wider countryside and the Ouse Valley, which provides key cultural and historic landscape significance in the Plan area. Additionally, Policy S10 (Local Green Spaces) proposes continued safeguarding for landscape features identified in the Village Open Space and Views (Policy AD40 of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan).
- 9.4.6 Overall, the draft Neighbourhood Plan includes policies likely to mitigate potential effects of development whilst also preserving the settlement's historic character. It is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to lead to **minor positive effects** in relation to the Historic environment SEA theme.

9.5 Land, soil and water resources

- 9.5.1 Objectives for the Land, Soil and Water Resources theme focusses on ensuring the effective and efficient use of land in the Plan area.
- 9.5.2 Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road) will deliver significant new development of around 500 dwellings on 38ha of greenfield land, resulting in the loss of productive agricultural land. The land appears to be Grade 3 so has potential to be best and most versatile. In the context of the village, where there is very limited opportunity for brownfield development, greenfield land take is unavoidable to deliver development. However, the scale of the loss of agricultural land is significant and cannot be mitigated through the policy provisions of the plan.
- 9.5.3 Therefore, on balance it is considered that **minor negative effects** are likely in relation to the land, soil and water resources SEA objectives.

9.6 Population and communities

- 9.6.1 The population and community SEA theme focuses on catering for the needs of existing and future residents, access to local services and facilities and the provision of housing to meet identified needs.
- 9.6.2 The key policy in this regard is Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road) as it proposes delivery of the entire housing target for Sharnbrook, along with associated infrastructure improvements, community facilities, local retail and enhanced active travel opportunities.
- 9.6.3 The quantum of growth proposed means that there is likely to be significant opportunity to seek affordable housing at scale, as well as a broad mix of housing types to meet a range of needs within the community.
- 9.6.4 It is considered that this scale of growth is likely to give rise to **significant positive effects** in relation to the population and communities SEA objectives.

9.7 Economy and employment

- 9.7.1 The focus of the SEA economy and employment objectives is on supporting Sharnbrook's economic vitality, including through its existing employment offer at Colworth Science Park and through the delivery of new employment opportunities.

- 9.7.2 The key policy in this regard is Policy S13 (Supporting the Development of Small Businesses), which provide support in principle to “the development of small businesses within and beyond the Settlement Policy Area”, subject to the degree to which this would affect criteria such as residential amenity and traffic.
- 9.7.3 Additionally, Policy S14 (Working from Home) provides support in principle to proposals which enable working from home, including the running of small businesses from home, as long as this would not result in unacceptable harm to “residential amenity and the character of the surrounding area”. The policy specifically supports the “operation of the business activity” as long as it is confined to “the existing curtilage of the premises”. The policy therefore appears quite broad in its scope, as the term “business activity” is not defined and could be interpreted broadly. Although this is considered positive in principle in the sense that the plan is seeking to enable flexible working, it is considered the policy may inadvertently be lending support to employment which may not be compatible with C3 residential use and could therefore potentially be in conflict with Bedford planning policy and the NPPF. It is recommended that the policy be supplemented by text which more explicitly recognises that some forms of business activity may require planning permission from Bedford Borough Council.
- 9.7.4 Overall, it is considered that plan will give rise to **neutral effects** in relation to the economy and employment SEA theme.

9.8 Health and wellbeing

- 9.8.1 The SEA health and wellbeing objective is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area. In practice, Neighbourhood Plans can have a role to play in achieving this objective by seeking to protect and enhance opportunities for residents to make healthy behaviour choices, particularly in terms of walking and cycling.
- 9.8.2 Policy S9 (Pedestrian Footpaths and Cycleways) is the key policy in this regard, establishing a requirement for all new development to “provide safe pedestrian access to link up with existing or proposed footpaths and cycleways, ensuring that residents can safely access bus stops, schools or other facilities”. Positioning healthy modes of travel as accessible, safe and convenient is a key pillar of any strategy to boost active travel, and it is particularly notable that the policy recognises that the scale of development offers opportunities to build and enhance walking and cycling networks within the village, rather than simply linear point-to-point access. It is considered that such an approach is appropriately holistic in scope for the scale of development proposed and offers good potential to deliver walking and cycling infrastructure which is well connected with the range of services and facilities in the village.
- 9.8.3 Policy S17 (Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure) reinforces the focus on delivering attractive, viable and functional active travel infrastructure by identifying “improvements to cycleways, footpaths and bridleways” as the foremost priority for investment in local community infrastructure. However, further aspects of health and wellbeing are also likely to be positively affected by other strands of the policy. This includes a focus on securing enhancements to the village’s leisure offer through development, particularly “enhancement to community facilities” and “supporting the promotion and improvement of Parish Walks”. Additionally, enhancing the village’s primary healthcare capacity is also sought through the policy, via “upgrading medical facilities” to reflect and accommodate the rise in number of local residents through development proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 9.8.4 The Neighbourhood Plan is mindful of other aspects of health and wellbeing likely to be affected by its proposals. Policy S3 (Construction Activity) recognises that the significant construction activity associated with development allocated through the plan could be disruptive for existing residents. Consequently, the policy requires all new development proposals to minimise impacts on “public health through dust and emissions, light pollution, noise and vibration during construction”, explaining that mitigation for these issues will be sought via planning condition.
- 9.8.5 Overall, the Neighbourhood Plan is considered to be ambitious in its policy approach to health and wellbeing, placing walking and cycling at the centre of its vision for the plan area to enable residents to make healthy lifestyle choices whilst simultaneously seeking the enhancement of primary healthcare through the development process. This reflects the scale of development proposed through the plan, though is considered to effectively leverage the opportunity to deliver health and wellbeing improvements provided by development of substantial scale. Therefore, **minor positive effects** are anticipated in relation to the health and wellbeing SEA objectives.

9.9 Transport

- 9.9.1 The transport SEA theme seek to promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel overall, whilst maintaining and improving the transport infrastructure within the Neighbourhood plan area where possible.
- 9.9.2 The scale of growth proposed through the Neighbourhood Plan gives rise to potential opportunities to seek financial contributions towards delivering or enhancing active travel networks within Sharnbrook, and there are natural synergies in this respect between the SEA transport objectives and those the health and wellbeing SEA theme. Therefore, Policy S9 (Pedestrian Footpaths and Cycleways) again performs positively on the basis that it seeks to privilege walking and cycling as modes of transport mode for accessing local services within the village. The supporting text of the policy is clear that this is to “encourage more walking and cycling as well as enhance connectivity to local facilities”.
- 9.9.3 Policy S16 (Provision of Community Facilities) supplements this, requiring community facilities delivered through new development to be designed and located in such a way as to be “conveniently accessible for residents of the village wishing to walk or cycle”. Policy S17 (Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure) adds detail in relation to improvements to existing facilities, saying “improved surfaces and lighting” for the Parish’s “cycleways, footpaths and bridleways” will be a priority focus for investment.
- 9.9.4 Clause H of the site allocation policy, Policy S5 (Land at Hill Farm, Mill Road), includes provision of “pedestrian cycling access along Mill Road to the village centre” as a requirement of support being provided.
- 9.9.5 Policy S15 (Village Facilities) demonstrates that opportunities to promote walking and cycling are a thread running throughout the plan, even where the main policy intent is not transport-related. The policy identifies 26 community facilities for protection from loss, though caveats this with the requirement that loss may be acceptable if replacement facilities are provided which, among other criteria, are “accessible by public transport, walking and cycling”. This is consistent with Policy S8 (Residential Parking) which seeks to “avoid the creation of car-dominated environments”.
- 9.9.6 In terms of improvements to other forms of transport infrastructure, Policy S8 (Transport and Access) and Policy seeks to, whilst Policy S16 (Provision of New Community Facilities) recognises the potential for new development to result in increased road users and seeks to ensure that new development will not “result in unacceptable traffic movements, noise, fumes, smell or other disturbance”.
- 9.9.7 Additionally, in recognition of the potential for significant new traffic movements associated with around 500 dwellings, the Policy S5 states that new development must deliver “provision of vehicular access from Mill Road and a new roundabout off the A6 together with a secondary vehicular access off Templars Way”. This is notable, as traffic modelling evidence indicates that the scale of development proposed would be unsuitable for the capacity of the existing local road network in the village.
- 9.9.8 On balance, **minor positive effects** are anticipated in relation to transport. A sustained, cross-cutting focus on promoting and enabling walking and cycling as both recreational and functional transport options is evident throughout the policies of the plan, performing well in relation to the SEA objectives. Additionally, the inevitable increase in traffic flows resulting from around 500 new dwellings is recognised and mitigated through the provisions of the plan’s policies.

9.10 Conclusions

9.10.1 Overall the assessment identifies the potential for significant positive effects in relation to the 'Population and community' SEA topic, on the basis that it has potential to deliver in full the ambitious housing target of around 500 dwellings set by Bedford Borough Council. The assessment does not predict significant negative effects in respect of any SEA topic, though the potential for minor negative effects is identified in terms of 'Landscape', and 'Land, soil and water resources'.

9.10.2 Specific findings are:

- In relation to landscape, a key concern is the extent to which proposed development will alter the landscape setting and context of the village. The plan will direct around 500 dwellings to a greenfield site which appears peripheral to the village and is perceptually severed from the village centre by the presence of the Midland railway line. However, the policies as applied to the proposed site allocation are likely to have some effect in mitigating potential harm to landscape character, by ensuring boundary treatment and landscaping softens the site's visual impact whilst seeking to enhance connectivity with the village centre to bring it perceptually 'closer' to the main settlement.
- In relation to land, soil and water resources the key concern is that the proposals of the Neighbourhood Plan will result in the loss of 38ha of land which is largely in productive agricultural use. The site is underlain by Grade 3 quality land, which has potential to be 'best and most versatile' (BMV), though it has not been subdivided into Grade 3a (i.e. BMV) and 3b (i.e. poorer quality).
- The potential for significant positive effects has been identified in relation to population and communities on the basis that the plan proposes delivery of the full housing target for Sharnbrook with associated positive effects in relation to access to a broad range of types and tenures of housing, delivery of new community facilities and enhanced walking and cycling accessibility within the village.
- Minor positive effects are anticipated in relation to the biodiversity, historic environment, health and wellbeing and transport SEA themes.
- Neutral effects are anticipated in relation to the 'climate change' and 'economy and employment' themes.

Cumulative effects

9.10.3 There is also a need to consider the potential effects of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan in combination with effects from other development proposals in the area and other plans and programmes as relevant.

9.10.4 Given Sharnbrook's relatively sensitive location in relation to the habitat corridor of the River Great Ouse, as reflected by the presence of the River Great Ouse County Wildlife Site within the plan area, there could be some potential for in-combination effects with other strategic growth elsewhere along the River Great Ouse corridor. Notably, the emerging Clapham Neighbourhood Plan is also proposing to allocate 500 dwellings in close proximity to the River Great Ouse a few miles downstream of Sharnbrook. Additionally, a further 500 dwellings are proposed at Bromham which is also adjacent to the Great Ouse and is slightly further downstream again. There may be some potential for adverse effects in relation to the River Great Ouse habitat corridor and County Wildlife Site from the cumulative effect of this scale of growth.

9.10.5 Additionally, it is noted that the adopted Local Plan includes a discussion in relation to "*New settlement opportunities for the future*", including reference to Colworth having "*potential to deliver a new railway station*". If Colworth was to be considered for future strategic growth in subsequent plan periods there would clearly be significant potential for cumulative effects in addition to growth proposed through the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

10 Plan finalisation

- 10.1.1 This Environmental Report accompanies the pre-submission version of the Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Development Plan for Regulation 14 consultation.
- 10.1.2 Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, when finalising the plan for submission.
- 10.1.3 The 'Submission' version of the plan will then be submitted to Bedford Borough Council (alongside an Environmental Report Update, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then submitted for Independent Examination.
- 10.1.4 At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.
- 10.1.5 If the subsequent Independent Examination is favourable, the SNDP will be subject to a referendum, organised by Bedford Borough Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the SNDP will become part of the Development Plan for Bedford Borough, covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

11 Monitoring

- 11.1.1 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report.
- 11.1.2 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Bedford Borough Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- 11.1.3 The SEA has not identified any potential for significant negative effects that would require closer monitoring, led by the Parish Council.

Appendix I: Meeting the Regulations

As discussed in Chapter 1 above, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. Table AI.1 links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst Table AI.2 explains this interpretation. Table AI.3 identifies how and where within the Environmental Report the regulatory requirements have/ will be met.

Table AI.1: Questions answered by this report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

	Questions answered		As per regulations... the Environmental Report must include...
Introduction	What's the plan seeking to achieve?		▪ An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
	What's the SEA scope?	What's the sustainability 'context'?	▪ Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level ▪ Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What's the sustainability 'baseline'?	▪ Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan ▪ The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected ▪ Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What are the key issues and objectives that should be a focus?	▪ Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment
Part 1	What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?		▪ Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) ▪ The likely significant effects associated with alternatives ▪ Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives assessment / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan
Part 2	What are the SEA findings at this current stage?		▪ The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan ▪ The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan
Part 3	What happens next?		▪ A description of the monitoring measures envisaged

Table AI.2: Questions answered by this report, in-line with regulatory requirements

Schedule 2	Interpretation of Schedule 2		
The report must include...	The report must include...		
(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i>	i.e. answer - <i>What's the scope of the SA?</i>
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>	
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>	
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'		
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected		
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i>	
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal		
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information	An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach')	i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report]	
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	The likely significant effects associated with alternatives, including on issues such as... ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.		
	The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan	i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report]	
	The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan		
	A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring	i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report]	

Table AI.3: 'Checklist' of how (throughout the SEA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements have been, are and will be met.

Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the Env Report	
Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 ('What is the plan seeking to achieve') presents this information.
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report. The 'SEA framework' – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 ('What is the scope of the SEA?'). More detailed messages, established through a context and baseline review are also presented in Appendix II of this Environmental Report.
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	
4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	
5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 ('What is the scope of the SEA'). Also, Appendix II presents key messages from the context review. With regards to explaining " <i>how...considerations have been taken into account</i> ", Chapter 7 explains the Steering Group's 'reasons for supporting the preferred approach', i.e. explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives assessment.
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Chapter 6 presents alternatives assessment findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a 'stand-out' plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an assessment of the draft plan. With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions, e.g. timescale.
7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned when finalising the plan. Also, specific recommendations are made in Chapter 9.
8. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Chapters 4 and 5 deal with 'Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with', in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 explains the Steering Group's reasons for selecting the preferred option (in-light of alternatives assessment).
9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.
10. A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.

The Env Report must be published alongside the Draft Plan	
Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
Authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)	At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 14 consultation.
The report must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan	
Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.	This Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, will be taken into account by the Steering Group when finalising the plan.

Appendix II: The scope of the SEA

Introduction

This appendix presents additional information on the SEA scope, namely key issues under each of the SEA framework, headings. As set out in the Scoping Report, these key issues were identified following a review of the context and baseline.

Additionally, this appendix presents a summary of responses received as part of the scoping consultation.

Biodiversity

- The Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI and Odell Great Wood SSSI are of notable biodiversity sensitivity, and have the potential to be affected by development within the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- The Felmersham Gravel Pits SSSI contains areas of habitat restoration and creation which require appropriate mitigation from development.
- There are several County Wildlife Sites within the Plan area.
- Key (BAP) habitats identified within the area include areas of ancient, semi-natural, deciduous and conifer woodland.

Climate change (mitigation and adaptation)

- Sharnbrook is partially affected by Flood Zone 3, the highest fluvial flood risk zone. Areas of risk are broadly confined to corridors of land adjacent to the plan area's main watercourses: the River Great Ouse in the southern region, with the exception of a small ribbon stemming from the Sharn Brook that has the potential to affect adjacent dwellings within the settlement. Surface water flood risk follows a similar network of narrow areas within the settlement, but also extends northwards to Colworth Science Park.
- Bedford Borough's emissions are falling steadily over time and have dropped by 31.8% since 2005.
- Bedford District Council has recently declared a climate emergency and has resolved to support local authorities (and, by extension, Neighbourhood groups) to help tackle climate change through plan-making where possible.

Health and wellbeing

- Current health and wellbeing outcomes indicate that general health in Sharnbrook is stronger than for Bedford Borough more widely. The plan area itself is served by its own healthcare facility in the form of a doctor's surgery and a pharmacy.

Historic environment

- The historic village core of Sharnbrook has the highest density of listed buildings within the Neighbourhood Plan area and is also protected by the Sharnbrook Conservation Area. The village centre therefore appears to have the greatest density of historic environment sensitivity.
- However, there are also a range of historic assets, both designated and undesignated, throughout the Neighbourhood Plan area. These include a Grade II*-listed building at the Colworth Science Park and scattered Grade II-listed agricultural buildings outside of the main built area.
- The southern boundary of Sharnbrook parish is adjacent to Felmersham Conservation Area in neighbouring Felmersham parish. Development within Sharnbrook could have potential to affect the setting of the Felmersham Conservation Area.

Landscape

- New development has the potential to lead to incremental but small changes in landscape and villagescape character and quality in and around the Neighbourhood Plan area. This includes from the loss of landscape features and areas with an important visual amenity value.
- In the absence of the Neighbourhood Plan, inappropriate development within the open countryside or countryside setting could place increased pressure on local landscapes/ townscapes and their settings. This may negatively impact upon the landscape features which contribute to the distinctive character and setting of the LCAs which define the Neighbourhood Plan area.

Land, soil and water resources

- Of the numerous water bodies within the Great Ouse operational catchment which cannot demonstrate 'good' ecological status, there is only one which flows through the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- A large amount of land within the Neighbourhood Plan area is underlain by Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' agricultural land.
- The entirety of the Neighbourhood Plan area falls within a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ).

Population and communities

- The predominant age group within the population are aged 60 or over (27.78%), which has the potential to lead to an ageing population to the medium-to-long term.
- There are a number of community services and facilities which serve the current Neighbourhood Plan area, and the village hub in particular. However, the development of new development could put greater strain on current services in the longer term without enhancement. However, there could also be opportunities to secure new or improve community infrastructure through the development process.

Economy and employment

- Educational attainment in Sharnbrook is comparatively high in relation to the district, region and country as a whole, particularly with regard to the number of residents achieving Level 4 qualifications or above.
- The largest employment centre within the Plan area is Colworth Science Park, which currently employs over 600 individuals.

Transport

- The majority of residents who travel to work do so by driving a car or van which is higher than comparative figures for the local authority, district, and England as a whole. Conversely, a low number of residents travel to work by foot and via public transport. However, high car dependence likely reflects the fact that Sharnbrook is a rural settlement and many residents will commute elsewhere for work.
- Public transport links within the Neighbourhood Plan area are variable. Whilst bus services are available to nearby larger settlements, the nearest train station is several miles further south at Bedford.

Scoping consultation responses

The draft SEA scoping report was shared with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for formal consultation between the period 15th June 2020 and 20th July 2020.

The responses received and how they have been considered and addressed are presented in Table II.1 below.

Table II.1: SEA scoping consultation responses

Consultee	Consultation response summary	How the response was considered and addressed
Environment Agency	No specific comments received on the scoping report.	n/a
Historic England	• HE is pleased to note the scoping report refers to Historic England Advice Note 8 and Advice Note 11, both of which contain information which may be useful at this stage; • HE note that the Parish Council has undertaken a recent Landscape Character and Built Environment Assessment which will be important evidence given that there has not been a recent Conservation Area appraisal completed. • The Heritage Gateway is not the most appropriate source of information on non-designated historic assets and the Bedford Historic Environment Record should be engaged directly.	• No specific action required. • No specific action required. • Unlike many HERs, the Bedford HER is accessible only for a fee. The Heritage Gateway provides a high-level alternative overview of non-designated assets.
Natural England	No specific comments received on the scoping report.	n/a