

**Bedford Borough Design Guide SPD
Scoping Document
July 2021**

Introduction

- 1.1 Recent guidance and information from the government is placing a new emphasis on place-making, design and the creation of beautiful places through the planning system. The government expects local planning authorities to prepare design guides and codes to help those engaged in the built environment to understand what shape, pattern and design of development in particular areas would be acceptable.
- 1.2 The government has published a national design guide and has recently concluded a consultation on a national model design code. Together, these documents provide advice on preparing design guides and codes for local authorities. There is an expectation now that local planning authorities will have design guidance and coding in place to address the government's aim of building more beautiful, better quality and well-designed places.
- 1.3 Bedford Borough Council adopted its Local Plan 2030 in January 2020. The Local Plan 2030 contains updated policies on place-making and design. To help demonstrate how these policies should be implemented, the council is preparing a borough-wide design guide to improve design quality across the borough. The borough will see significant development in the coming years and the design guide will provide a means of ensuring it integrates well with the existing built and natural environment.
- 1.4 The first step to producing the design guide is to agree what it should cover. The design guide will need to set out the existing distinctive characteristics of the borough and use these to provide general guidance on what would be expected of new development in particular areas.

Bedford Borough

- 1.5 Bedford Borough contains urban and rural communities, whose physical characteristics are unique. Similarly to most places, there is no one characteristic that can be used to define Bedford Borough. The diversity of character in its towns and villages is part of what makes it an interesting place to live. In order to understand what these characteristics are, an assessment of the borough is needed. The design guide will look at different parts of the borough and determine the defining features in these particular areas that can be used as 'sign-posts' for future development.

Local Policy and Guidance

- 1.6 The design guide will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and must work within existing policy and guidance. The Local Plan 2030 contains several policies that relate to place-making and design including:

Policy 28S – Place making

Development will be expected to contribute to good place-making. This will be achieved by requiring development proposals:

- i. To be of a high quality in terms of design and to promote local distinctiveness, and
- ii. To have a positive relationship with the surrounding area, integrating well with and complementing the character of the area in which the development is located, and
- iii. To contribute to provision of green infrastructure, and
- iv. To enhance the landscape, and
- v. To take a proactive approach to sustaining and where appropriate enhancing the historic environment, and
- vi. To avoid adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity assets including, but not limited to, the Natura 2000 sites outside Bedford borough listed in the Habitats Regulations Assessment (Appendix 1) and
- vii. To respond to the unique character and importance of the River Great Ouse and its setting, and
- viii. To include appropriate landscaping, and
- ix. To contribute to the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale (when within or close to the Forest of Marston Vale area).

Policy 29 – Design quality and principles

All new development should:

- i. Be of the highest design quality and contribute positively to the area's character and identity, and
- ii. Respect the context within which it will sit and the opportunities to enhance the character and quality of the area and local distinctiveness, and
- iii. Protect and where appropriate, enhance heritage assets and their settings and successfully integrate with the historic environment and character, and
- iv. Have particular regard to the environment and biodiversity within it and ensure there are no significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (notably Portholme (SAC), The Ouse Washes (SAC/ SPA, Ramsar), Eversden and Wimpole Woods (SAC), Upper River Nene Gravel Pits (SPA/Ramsar)) designated species or habitats, and
- v. Promote accessibility and permeability for all by creating safe and welcoming places that connect with each other, and
- vi. Promote a sense of place to include attractive streets squares and other public spaces with a defined sense of enclosure, with multifunctional green spaces and corridors, and

- vii. Incorporate measures to promote community safety ensuring that private and public amenity spaces are clearly defined and are designed to be inclusive, useable safe and enjoyable, and
- viii. Integrate functional needs such as refuse / recycling storage and collection points, car and cycle parking.

Proposals meeting the following criteria will be expected to be guided by a design code to be agreed with the local planning authority as part of the application process:

- ix. Proposals for residential developments of 200 dwellings or more.
- x. Proposals for residential developments of 50 dwellings or more in areas with a historic urban form or where the landscape interface with the built form is of importance.
- xi. Other large scale developments. The need for a design code should be discussed with the Council pre-application.

Policy 30 – The impact of development – design impacts

Development proposals should take account of the principles of good design. Planning applications should give particular attention to all of the following considerations:

- i. The relationship of the development with the context in which it is placed, including overdevelopment; the contribution buildings will make to the townscape and landscape qualities of the area; and where appropriate, the extent to which local distinctiveness is reinforced or created.
- ii. The quality of the development in terms of scale, density, massing, height, materials and layout, including the provision of private space where appropriate.
- iii. The quality of the public spaces created by new buildings in terms of public safety, hard and soft landscaping, and how buildings interact with public space.

Developers will be required to implement or contribute towards measures to mitigate adverse impacts. Planning permission will not be granted where proposals fail to improve the character and quality of an area.

- 1.7 The Local Plan 2030 also contains design policies that relate specifically to the impacts of highway access, disturbance and pollution impacts, infrastructure impacts and advertisements.
- 1.8 The Council has various supplementary documents relating to design for specific issues or specific sites. These include:
 - Sustainable Drainage System SPD 2018
 - Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities SPD 2014
 - Open Space SPD 2013
 - Shopfronts and Advertisements in Conservation Areas SPD 2005

- Achieving Quality in Residential Layouts SPG 1997
- Residential Extensions, New Dwellings and Small Infill Developments SPG 2000 (RENDSID)

The new design guide will replace the Achieving Quality in Residential Layouts SPG 1997.

Future Development

- 1.9 The Borough Council is currently working on a new local plan to make provision for development requirements beyond the period covered by the Local Plan 2030. The annual housing requirement for the new plan will be calculated in accordance with the government's standard method which at the moment is 1,275 dwellings per annum. This is 305 dwellings a year or 31% higher than in the current plan.
- 1.10 Bedford Borough also sits at the heart of the Oxford – Cambridge Arc. The East-West Rail line will be coming through Bedford, with the purpose of increasing connectivity between towns and cities along its route. Bedford will be a key stop on the line and this will mean large infrastructure development, including upgrading the current train station. The government sees East-West Rail as an economic priority for the region.
- 1.11 This all means that the borough is expected to accommodate major development. The character assessments and resulting design principles will help to ensure that this future development will be better integrated into the surrounding area.

Consultation

- 1.12 This document sets out the draft scope of what we expect the design guide to cover and we want to hear your views before it is finalised. A draft layout has been prepared to demonstrate what the design guide could look like and what might be included.
- 1.13 To provide a foundation for the assessment of the character of the borough, it is envisaged that it will be geographically divided into local distinctiveness areas. The draft layout below explains that the Bedford Borough Landscape Assessment (2020) provides a ready-made sub-division and could be used as the basis for assessing design characteristics in the rural part of the borough. It also embeds the idea of promoting and integrating development with the natural environment as a key design principle in the borough from the very beginning. We would be interested in your views on this as an approach.
- 1.14 The urban area of Bedford and Kempston will also be considered, with local distinctiveness areas based on existing design characteristics.

- 1.15 The consultation on this scoping document will run alongside the consultation of the draft Local Plan 2040. **We are particularly interested in whether you consider the scope of the document is appropriate and the draft layout is suitable.** Please send your comments by email to planningforthefuture@bedford.gov.uk or by post to (please use a stamp):

Planning Policy Team
Bedford Borough Council
Borough Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford, MK42 9AP

PROPOSED CONTENTS OF DESIGN GUIDE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

A brief explanation of the national design context.

Bedford Borough design context.

An introduction to the geographical area covered by the Design Guide; i.e. Bedford Borough as a whole.

How to use this Guide. An explanation of its use to improve design quality in Bedford Borough

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES (RURAL) /LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS AREAS (URBAN)

Introduction to the landscape character types and how they are sub-divided into landscape character areas.

Explanation of how a settlement will be selected for each landscape character area for analysis and the development of design features for that area.

Explanation of local distinctiveness areas for the urban area.

CONCLUSIONS

KEY FINDINGS

An overall summary of the key findings of the Design Guide.

Explanation of its relationship to design coding on specific sites.

EXPLANATION OF EACH SECTION

2.2 INTRODUCTION (Scope)

This will set out the national design context and new National Design Guide and Model Design Code. The introduction will then progress to the local (Bedford Borough) design context, referring to existing design guidance including 'Achieving Quality in Residential Layouts (Sept 1997)' and 'RENSID 2000'.

An explanation of why design guidance is needed to analyse the qualities and distinctiveness of existing settlements and buildings will be included and that further design coding will follow on with the design guidance providing a source on the qualities and characteristics of existing homes for Borough coding.

It will establish that the geographical area covered by the Design Guide will be Bedford Borough as a whole and that it is intended to provide an holistic understanding of the Borough's built environment qualities and characteristics.

2.3 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES (Scope)

The Bedford Borough Landscape Assessment (2020) sub divides the rural area of the borough into six distinct landscape types. These character types are further sub-divided into landscape character areas like so:

- TYPE 1: CLAY FARMLAND
 - Cranfield to Stagsden Clay Farmland
 - Riseley Clay Farmland
 - Thurleigh Clay Farmland
 - Renhold Clay Farmland
- TYPE 2: WOODED WOLDS
 - Hinwick Wooded Wolds
 - Pavenham Wooden Wolds
- TYPE 3: LIMESTONE VALLEYS
 - Harrold – Great Ouse Limestone Valley
 - Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley
- TYPE 4: CLAY VALLEYS
 - Great Ouse Clay Valley
- TYPE 5: CLAY VALES
 - North Marston Clay Vale
 - East Marston Clay Vale
 - Biggin Wood Clay Vale
- TYPE 6: WOODED GREENSAND RIDGE
 - Mid Greensand Ridge

2.4 The Design Guide will use these character types to analyse different areas of the rural part of the borough.

2.5 To provide analysis and guidance, a settlement in each landscape character area will be selected and reviewed (see appendix A for a list of proposed settlements). We would appreciate comments on whether the proposed settlements in appendix A are suitable as an example of the landscape character areas for analysis.

2.6 For each settlement there will be a brief introduction to the settlement pattern and built character and analysis of housing character and materials. The purpose of the settlement analysis is to provide guidance for future development in that landscape character type. The analysis of each of these settlements will adhere to the following structure:

Page 1: Landscape Character Assessment used as a framework for design guidance in the Borough.

Within each of the six Landscape Types there will be commentaries on:

- **Visual and perceptual character**
- **Cultural pattern and historic character &**
- **Settlement pattern and built character.**

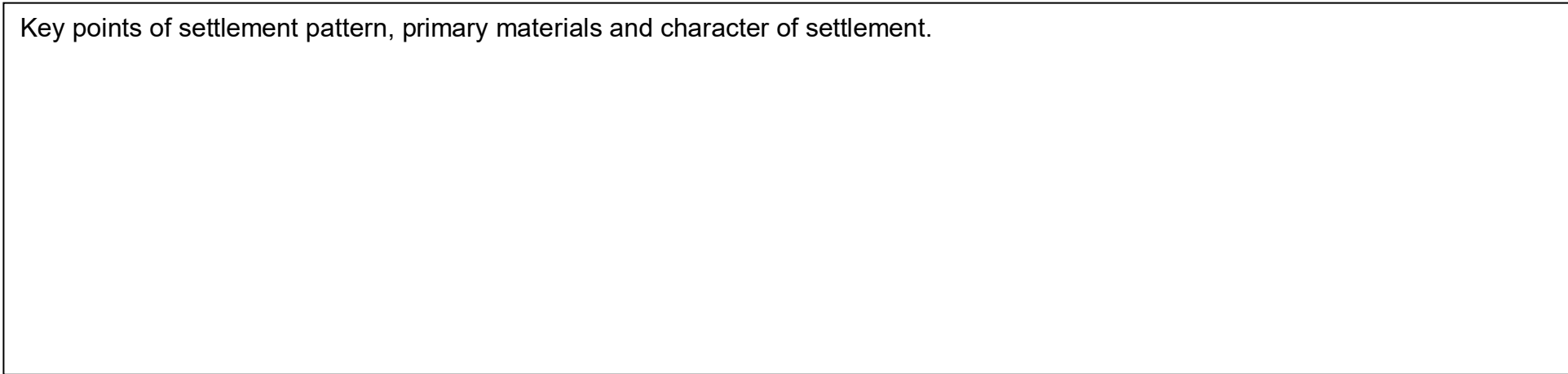
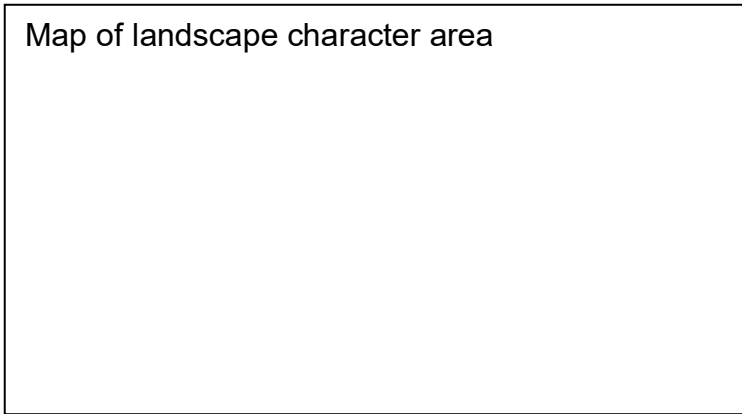
These commentaries will provide a high-level indication of the qualities and characteristics of the historic built environment as a starting point for the Design Guide to build on.

Pages 2 & 3: The Design Guide will provide a lot more detail on the specific built environment qualities of each of the six areas covered in the six Landscape Types (2.1 to 2.6). This will use images and text to describe existing palettes of materials and qualities of existing housing.

Page 4: A final page will analyse more recently built homes within each of the settlements.

An example of this four-page format for each settlement analysed is given in figure 1 below. Comments on the proposed template for the analysis of settlements are welcome.

Figure 1. Template of rural settlement analysis
Page 1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA: xx
SETTLEMENT: xxxxxxxx



Pages 2 and 3

Analysis character traits, built environment qualities and patterns, materials and colour palettes.
Architectural detail, roof lines and windows

Photograph examples of specific and distinctive built environment qualities that contribute to the character of settlement including:
Architectural detail
Materials (types and quality)
Green space
Housing types (detached, semi-detached, terraced, single storey, etc)

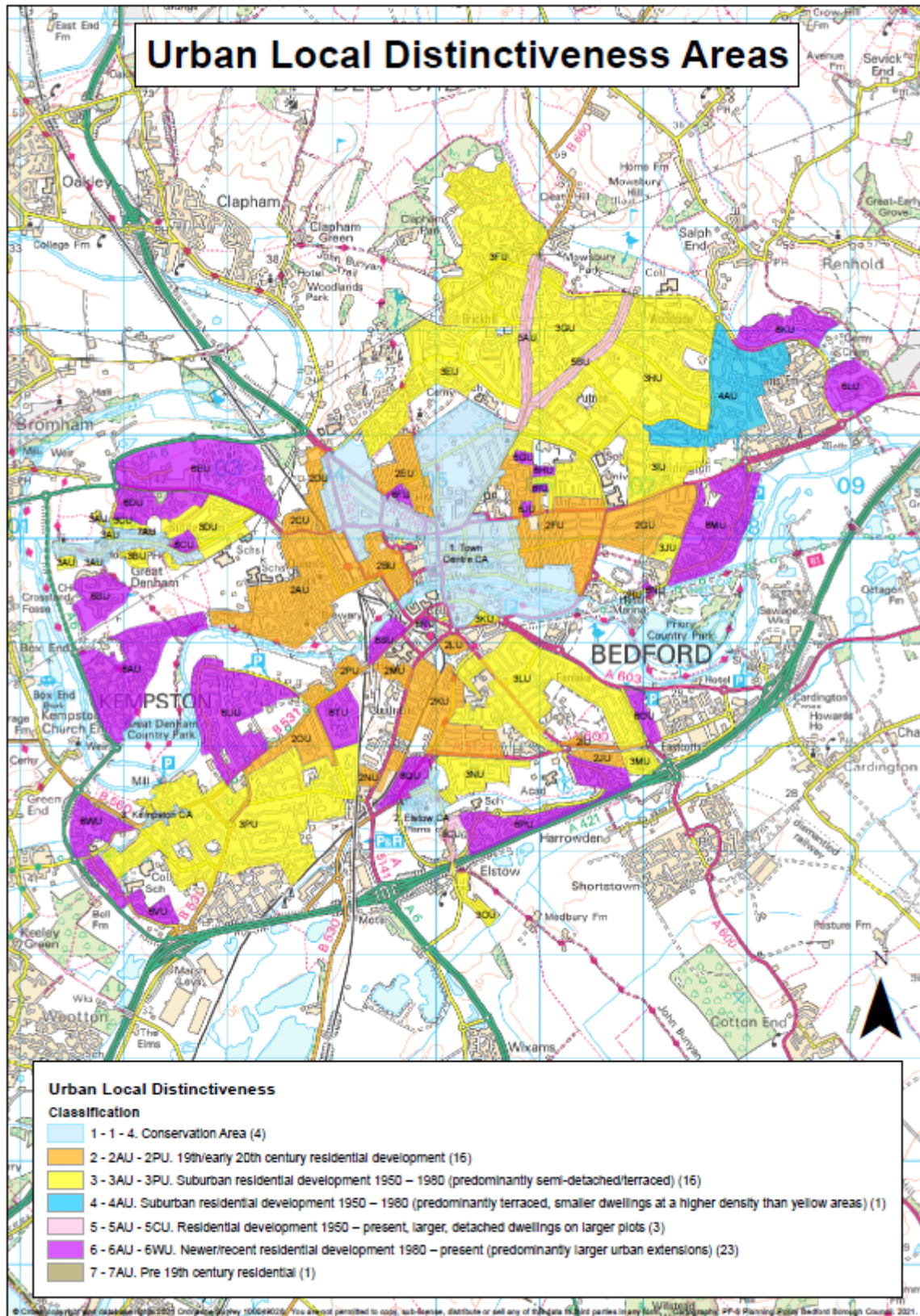
Analysis of recently constructed homes in the settlement area.

2.7 LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS AREAS

The Bedford urban area has been analysed and divided into local distinctiveness areas. These local distinctiveness areas have been further sub-divided, much like with the rural area. The design guide will provide general principles for each of the local distinctiveness areas. A large, central part of the urban area is designated a Conservation Area. This has already been analysed in detail in the [Conservation Area Character Appraisal](#) (2008). Because this analysis has already been completed, no further analysis will be required in the Design Guide.

2.8 Figure 2 below is a map of how the urban area has been divided. Each coloured area represent a local distinctiveness area, with the codes representing sub-areas. We are seeking comments on the accuracy of the map or whether adjustments are needed to ensure a broadly consistent character in each area.

Figure 2: Map of urban area with draft areas of local distinctiveness



2.9 A more detailed analysis will be provided on the specific qualities of the sub-areas. These will be the design characteristics specific to that area. Figure 3 is a template of how this analysis might look.

Figure 3. Template of urban area analysis
Local distinctiveness area code:

<p>Map of local distinctiveness area</p>	<p>Photograph examples of built environment qualities with additional analysis</p>
<p>Analysis of character of local distinctiveness area with focus on layout, green/open space, type of houses, architectural detail etc.</p>	

CONCLUSIONS (Scope)

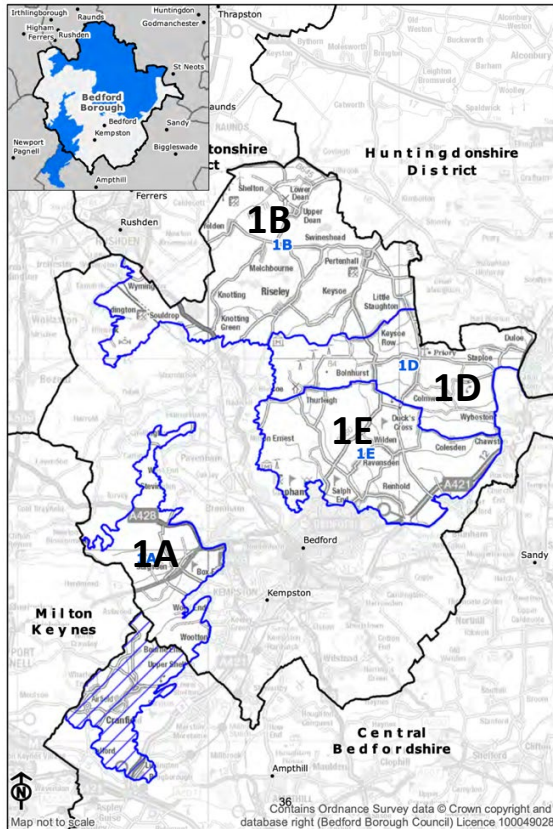
2.10 A brief summary of the key findings of the Design Guide analysis work and how it should inform subsequent design coding work.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF SETTLEMENTS INCLUDED

The choice of settlements for analysis is guided by the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment (May 2014 updated July 2020). It is not possible to analyse all settlements within every Landscape Type, so we have prepared a draft list of settlements for each Landscape Character Area (which are sub-divisions of each of the six Landscape Types) that we feel broadly represent the local character.

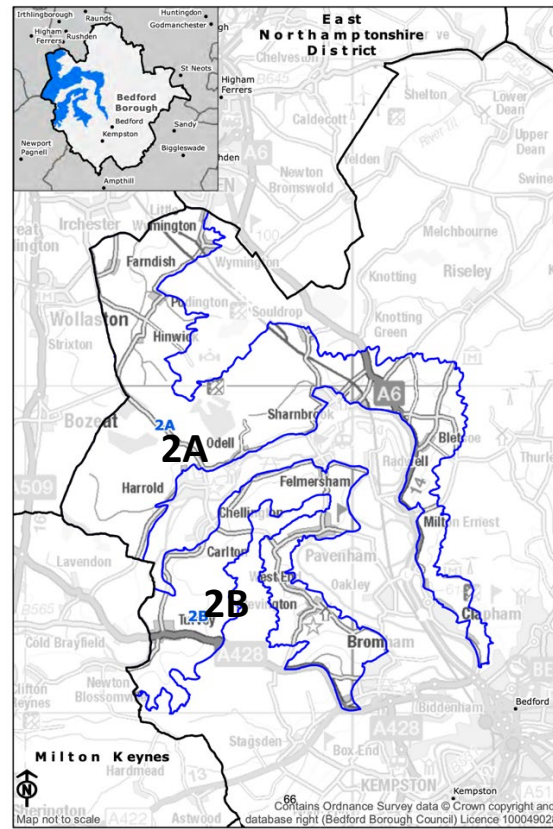
These are the settlements that will be considered in detail in the Design Guide and we invite your views on the list before it is finalised. Please comment on whether you agree or disagree with the draft list of settlements with alternative suggestions if required.

(Note: number & letter align with Landscape Character Assessment Report)



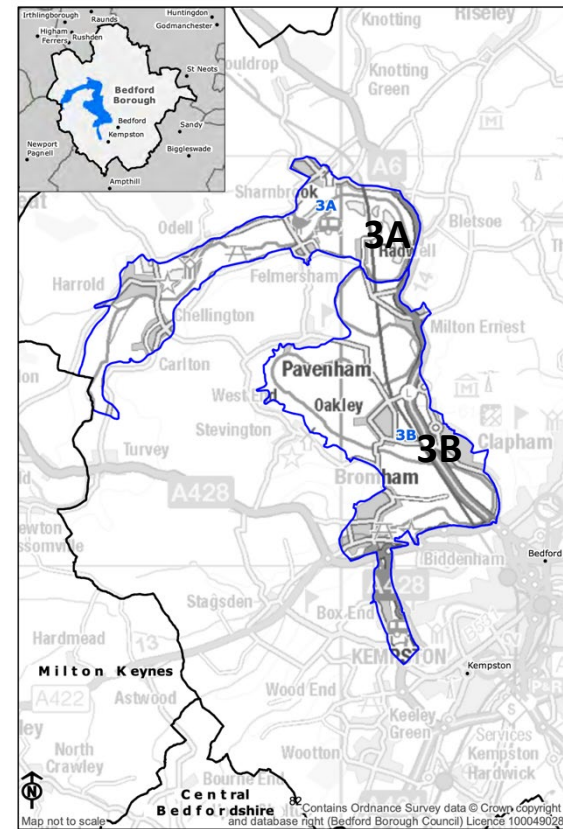
TYPE 1: CLAY FARMLAND

- 1A Stagsden
- 1B Riseley
- 1D Thurleigh
- 1E Renhold



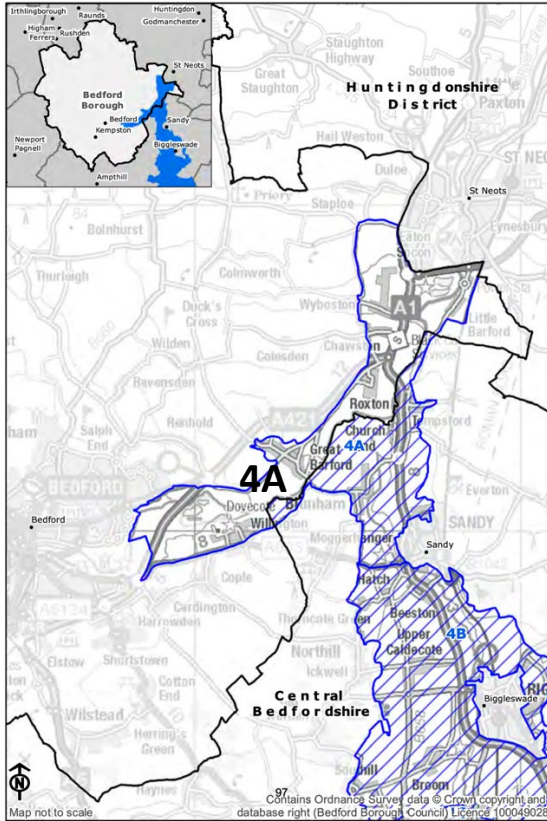
TYPE 2: WOODED WOLDS

- 2A Hinwick
- 2B Pavenham



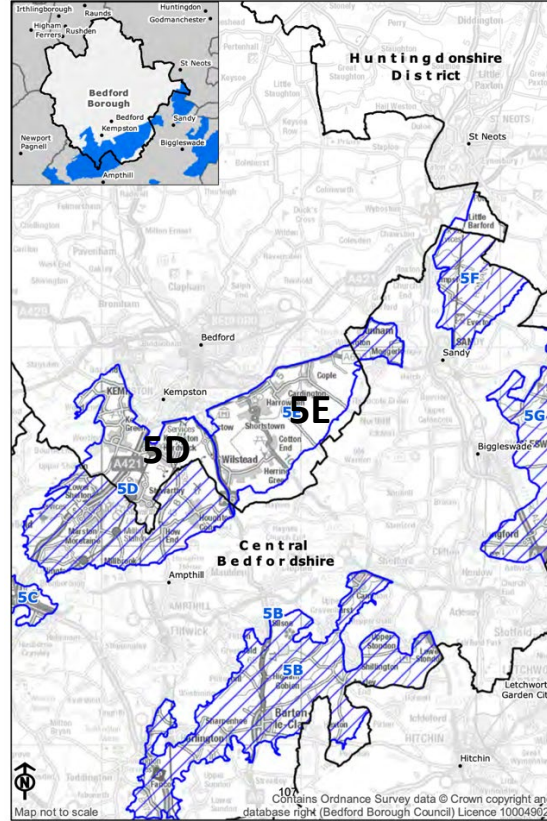
TYPE 3: LIMESTONE VALLEYS

- 3A Harrold
- 3B Oakley



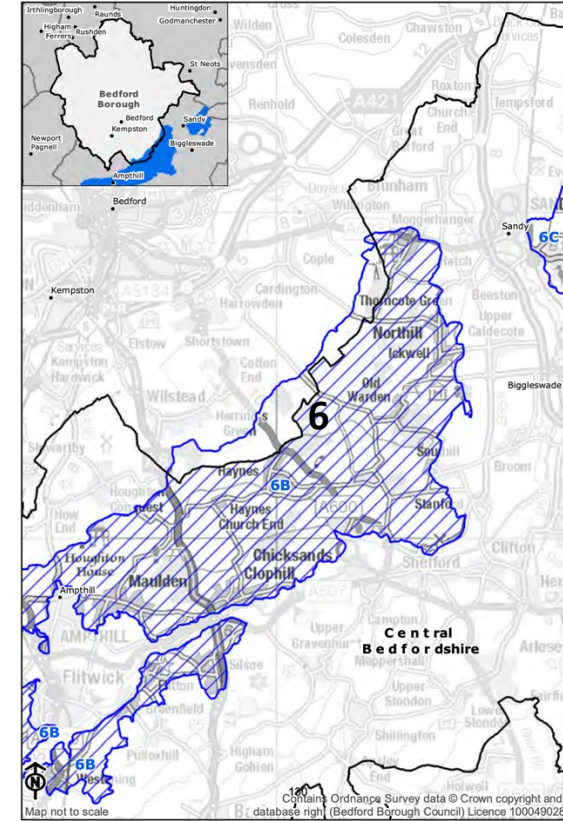
TYPE 4: CLAY VALLEYS

4A Great Barford



TYPE 5: CLAY VALES

5D Wootton
5E Shortstown



TYPE 6: WOODED GREENSAND RIDGE

There are no existing settlements in Bedford Borough in this landscape type.