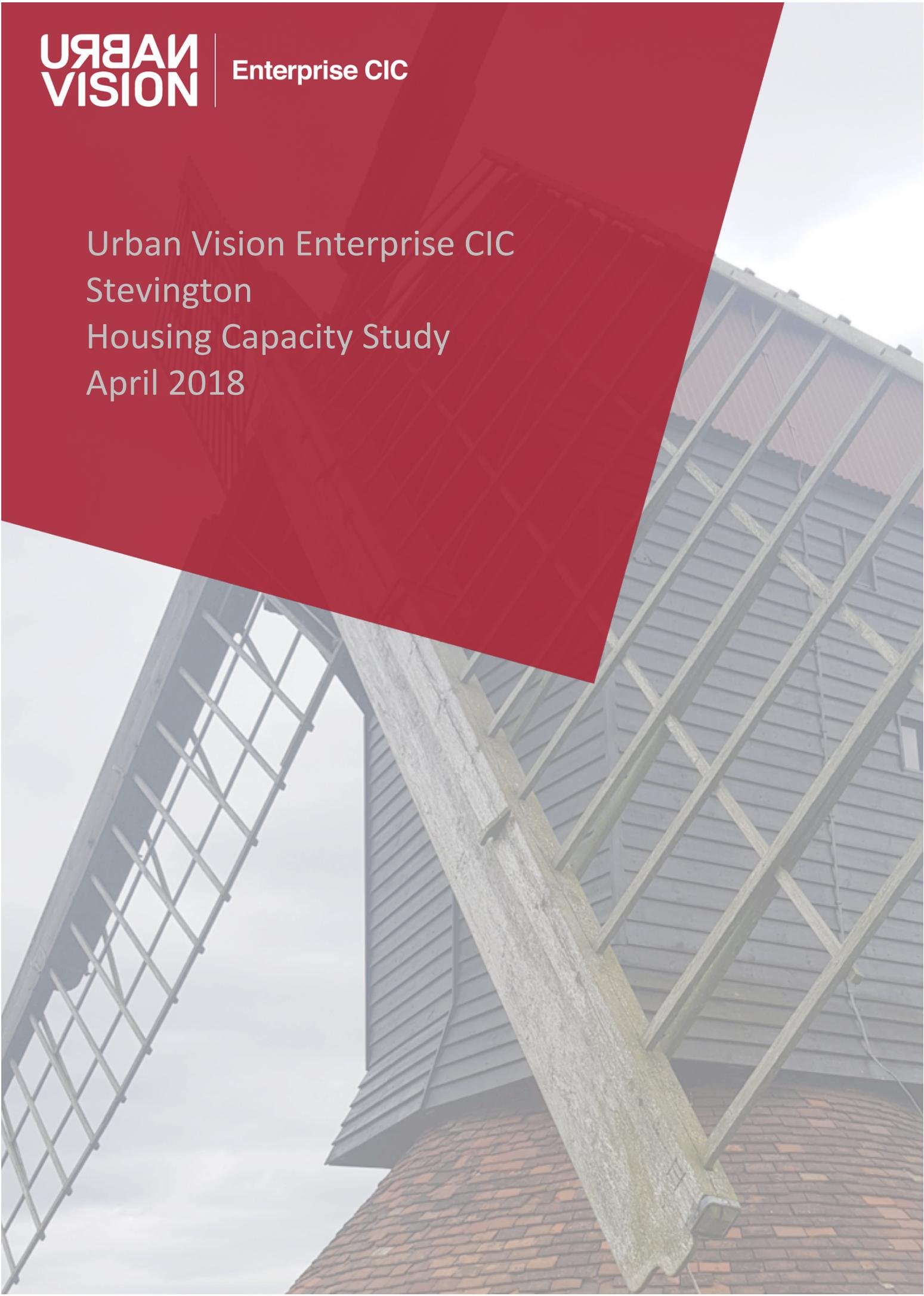


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Stevington
Housing Capacity Study
April 2018



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to assess the capacity for new housing within the Settlement Policy Area (SPA) in Stevington. The SPA is essentially a village envelope, and the report considers the potential of housing coming forward specifically within the SPA.

Options for sites outside of the SPA are also considered.

This assessment is designed to inform the Stevington Neighbourhood Plan, which is currently in preparation.

Methodology

The methodology for the study is as follows:

- Sites put forward in response to the Bedford Borough Council Call for Sites were examined. None of these were within the boundary of the SPA;
- Site visits were undertaken on 17th April 2018. These included examination of the SPA and its environs, and the potential for limited housing development within the SPA;
- The availability of sites within the SPA has been assessed. This includes clear sites, garden space of larger plots, infill sites and the potential for demolition and redevelopment. Such sites are considered not just in terms of there being land available, but also the likely impact of them being developed in terms of amenity, impact on the character of the area, and impact on the local highways network.
- Availability of sites outside of the SPA is also considered. This includes submitted sites and other options for development.

The outcome of the assessments has then informed recommendations for the Neighbourhood Plan.

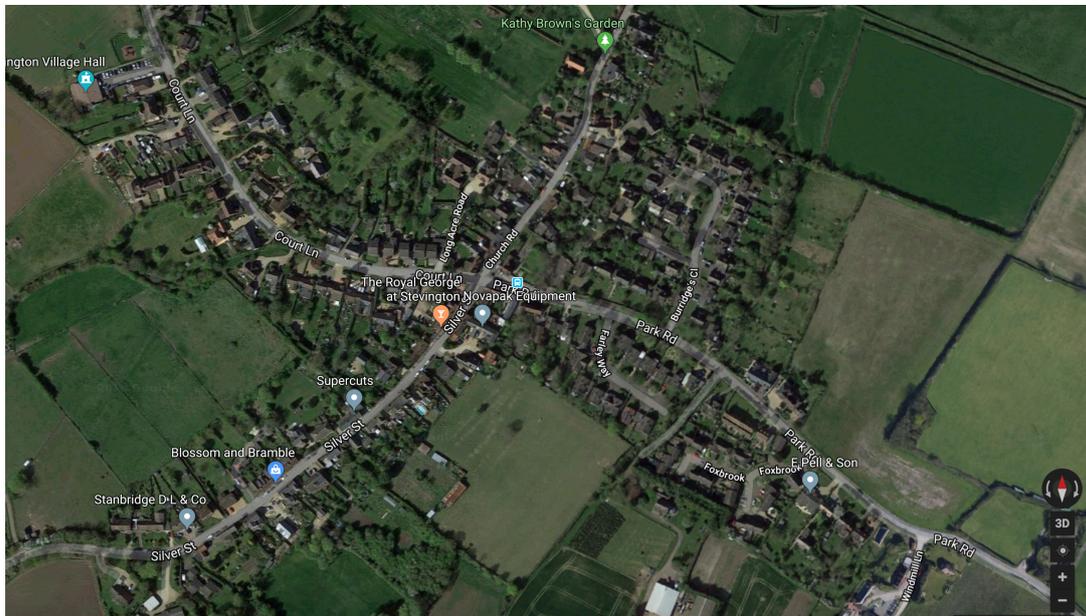
Character

Urban Form

Stevington has an overall urban layout approximating to a cruciform shape. This is augmented by a pattern of more fragmented small and separate cluster or 'ends', typical of the wider patterns of development in Bedfordshire.

The SPA is drawn tightly around the core settlement, but excludes the ends. Therefore part of the function of the SPA is preserve the character of the settlement, which is also further reinforced by the Conservation Area designation.

The cruciform layout has been subsumed to some extent in later development, especially to the northeast side of the settlement, around Burridge's Close.



Aerial View of Stevington, Google Maps, April 2018

The character of the village centre is based on rear of the footway or highway building frontages, creating a strong sense of enclosure and definition to the narrow streets.

The tendency for later periods of development is for them to be increasingly set back from the street frontages, creating a more suburban character.

Historic Environment

The historic environment is recognised and protected by the following designations:

- The village centre is designated as a Conservation Area (an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance);
- 62 buildings listed as ‘buildings of special architectural or historic interest’; and
- The landscape setting is designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value.



Crossroads at the heart of Stevington

Policy Context

Local Planning Policy

Adopted Local Plan

There are saved policies from the Local Plan 2002.

Policy H23 includes:

“OTHER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN SETTLEMENT POLICY AREAS

5.48 Within the Settlement Policy Areas, the development in addition to that identified in Policies H2 to H23 will only be allowed where there is no detrimental impact on the form and character of the village or loss of residential amenity, important open space and employment land/premises”.

Policy H24 states:

“Residential development will be permitted within the Settlement Policy Areas where the development proposed:

- i) is sensitive to the form and character of the village;
- ii) its character and scale is compatible with local building styles and materials;
- iii) is of a density appropriate to the form of the village;
- iv) has no adverse effect on the overall character of the village or setting of the defined important open spaces in the village;
- v) contributes to the range and size of housing available in the village thus maintaining a balanced social mix;
- vi) is in accordance with the other policies of the plan relating to site layout, access, drainage etc; and,
- vii) does not lead to a loss of land in classes B1-B8 unless significant environmental or community benefits would be achieved.
- viii) safeguards existing public rights of way”.

The Bedford Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan 2008 Policy CP5 sets out Rural Key Service Centres (not including Stevington).

Emerging Local Plan

Bedford Borough Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan (Bedford Local Plan 2035). The new Local Plan is designed to plan for significant growth across the Borough over the plan period, given its location within the so-called ‘Golden Triangle’, and the ‘Oxford-Cambridge Arc’. Consultation has recently concluded on the submission version of the plan.

The plan will be catering for the objectively assessed need for housing across the Borough to 2035, which is 19,000 homes, and 11,400 new jobs over the same period.

Stevington has been designated a Group 3 village in the emerging Local Plan. In Group 3 and 4 villages, the Borough Council “are not proposing to allocate any growth in the local plan,

but instead are supporting Parish Councils to prepare their own neighbourhood plans where they wish to do so. This would mean that they are able to allocate sites for development to provide opportunities for small-scale growth”.

The submission Local Plan also states that in Group 3 and 4 settlements “development will be carefully managed to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. This means that development will be limited to ‘rural exceptions’ affordable housing schemes and replacement dwellings”.

Policy 2S of the submission Local Plan addresses the spatial strategy for growth across the Borough, and establishes the preferred locations for growth. Policy 2S states that the majority of rural growth will be delivered through Neighbourhood Plans.

Policy 4 addresses development in villages with a Settlement Policy Area, one of which is Stevington, with the aim of the Local Plan being “to direct development to within the defined Settlement Policy Area boundaries and specific site allocations”. Policy 4 states “within Settlement Policy Area boundaries, development or redevelopment will be acceptable in principle provided that it is consistent with the other policies of the development plan”.

Call for Sites

As part of the preparation of the Local Plan, Bedford Borough Council made a Call for Sites, and a number were submitted within the Stevington Parish. However, all of them were outside of the Settlement Policy Area. These are considered below.

In response to the Call for Sites, 11 sites in total were submitted for consideration within the Parish, but all of them were outside the SPA. These are considered further below.

Stevington Neighbourhood Plan

The Stevington Neighbourhood Plan is at a formative stage. Considerable progress has been made on engaging with the community and stakeholders, compiling an evidence base and in drafting plan content, including draft policies. The plan is now at a crucial stage, where decisions need to be made on how to accommodate growth. This report is part of the evidence base to underpin those decisions.

Sites Within the Settlement Policy Area

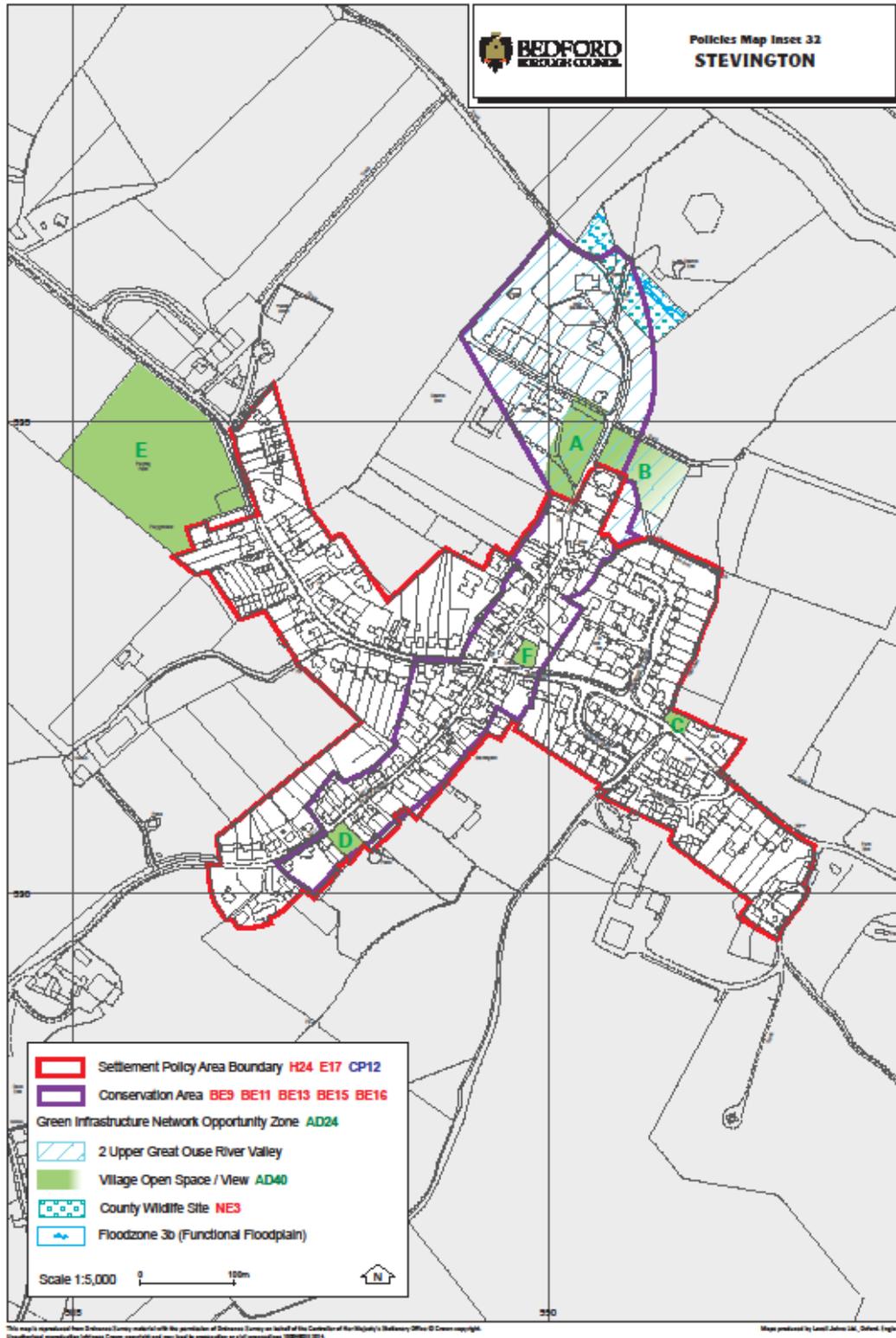
Both the SPA and Conservation Area were designated around Stevington's cruciform layout and this is key to the village's character. The Stevington SPA is drawn tightly around the existing built-up area.

Although there are no site allocations and no sites came forward through the Call for Sites process within the SPA or have otherwise been formally identified, there is the potential for sites to come forward through planning applications, as has happened in the past.

Within the SPA, there would be the potential for a range of different types of site to come forward via planning applications:

- Clear sites (though none are currently identifiable);
- Conversion and adaption of existing buildings (for example the sub-division of a large property into smaller units);
- The development of rear garden space that are part of large plots (there are examples of this type of development within the village);
- Infill sites (though none are currently identifiable);
- Demolition of single properties on large plots and redevelopment (this would need to be outside of the Conservation Area unless it was the replacement of a building that had a negative impact); and
- Ancillary living accommodation (for elderly family members or older children).

Plan 1 below illustrates both the SPA boundary, and the Conservation Area boundary.



Plan 1: Stevington Settlement Policy Area

As Plan 1 illustrates, there are no stand-alone sites within the SPA that could be considered for residential development.

Some small infill sites have come forward in the past in the form of backland development, the development of additional housing within large plots. These include:

- 25 Court Lane – new single dwelling (2017),
- 41 Park Road – expansion from a semi-detached pair of dwellings to three terraced houses (2017).
- 2a Court Lane - new building to accommodate a small business (2017).

Current commitments include the reopening of the Red Lion public house, including the development of two starter homes (currently under construction) and a dwelling in Silver Street (making 3 units in total)

- Red Lion public house: 2 units; and
- 43/47 Silver Street: 1 unit.

There are numerous properties with very large rear gardens where development could be possible (subject to access being provided), but would be inappropriate. Garden building would introduce backland development outside of the existing core pattern of buildings and new roads or drives needed to provide access would be needed. The buildings and new accesses would have the potential to cause significant harm to the character of the village, including the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

There may be scope for limited demolition and redevelopment, though obviously not including Listed Buildings or buildings within the Conservation Area that contribute to its special interest. When carrying out the site visit, it was clear that there were some larger plots outside of the Conservation Area where this could happen; however, there is no guarantee that these would come forward.

A housing target of 11-15 dwellings is to be proposed within the Neighbourhood Plan, and from the evidence gathered, this would appear to be a reasonable figure. This figure should also take into account existing commitments, and should be considered alongside any identified local infrastructure requirements.



The Red Lion, Stevington

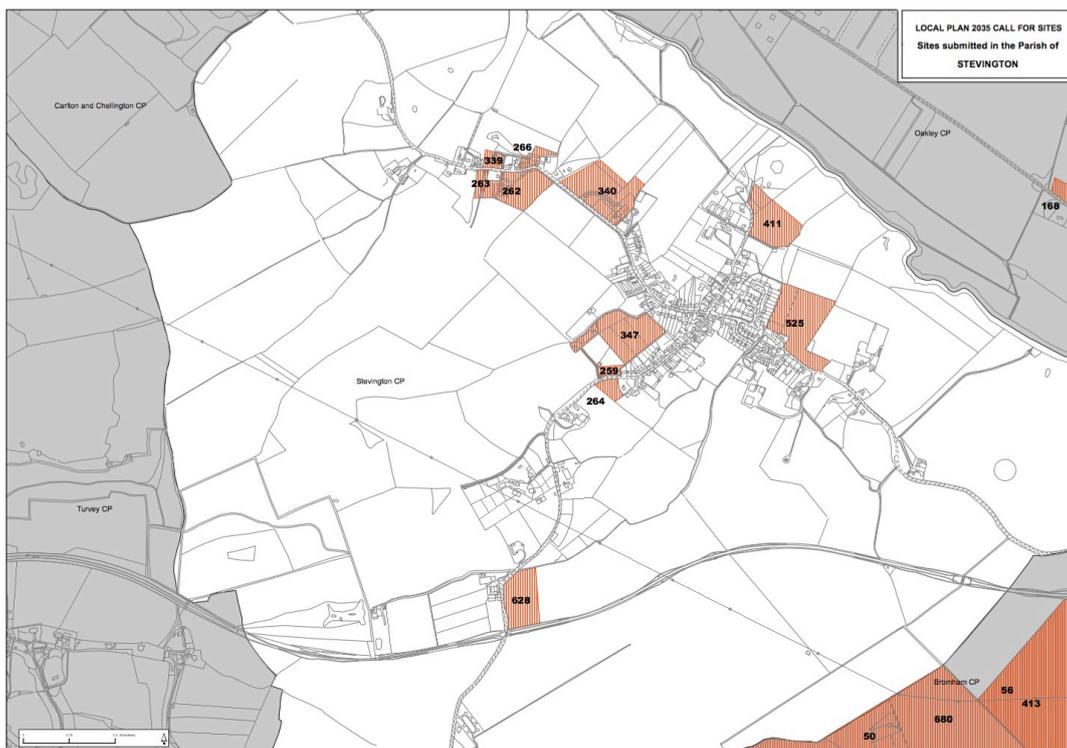
Sites Outside the Settlement Policy Area

Submitted Sites

The sites proposed within Stevington through the Bedford Local Plan 2035 Call for Sites are all located outside of the SPA. These are detailed below:

Bedford Local Plan 2035 Call for Sites			
Sites within the Parish of Stevington			
Site	ID	Size of Site (ha)	Capacity (no.)
Land North of Silver Street	259	0.2	5
Land at West End (3)	262	0.3	5
Land at West End Farm	263	1.8	15
Land South of Silver Street	264	0.4	12
Meeting Farm, West End	266	0.4	5
Land at Meeting Farm	339	0.3	5
Land at Langcroft Farm, Court Lane	340	2.91	25
Poppy's Farm, Silver Street	347	2.8	40
Land at Church Road	411	2.02	35
Land North of Park Road	525	2.58	55
Land at Silver Street	628	2	20
	Total	15.71	222

Table 1: Sites within the Parish of Stevington



Plan 2: Bedford Local Plan Call for Sites Submissions in the Parish of Stevington

None of the sites identified within Table 1 and Plan 2 above, and Plan 2 below will be needed to meet the housing requirement of the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the following provides an overview of those sites.

Sites 262, 263, 266, and 339 are all grouped together for consideration as they are all in the same location in the village (West End), and display similar characteristics. All four sites are considered to be unsuitable and unsustainable in that they are located some distance from the village and SPA. In addition, they would conflict with Local Plan policies relating to the SPA.

Site 340 is also located at West End, and again, is considered to be unsuitable due to its location outside of the SPA, though it is closer to the SPA than the other four sites at West End, being in close proximity to the boundary. However, as with the sites above, it would conflict with Local Plan policies relating to the SPA. It is also immediately adjacent to the Grade II Listed Home Close Farmhouse, and therefore the impact on the setting of this heritage asset would need to be considered.

Site 628 is some way from the village, located immediately off the A428, and is considered to be both unsuitable and unsustainable, as it would also conflict with Local Plan policies relating to the SPA.

Site 411 is considered to be unsuitable in that it would have a potentially negative impact on the setting of a number of heritage assets (principally the Grade I Listed Church of St Mary, and the Holy Well) as the openness of the site is important in framing views of the church from outside of the village.

Sites 347, 259 and 264 are considered together as they are all grouped in the same location. Although the sites are adjacent to the SPA off Silver Street, creation of safe access arrangements would be challenging given the constrained nature of Silver Street, which is extremely narrow as it passes through the village towards the sites, and often gets blocked when larger vehicles such as bin lorries attempt to pass.



Silver Street is relatively narrow.

Site 525 is directly adjacent to the SPA, and could be considered in future plan reviews if sufficient local housing need was identified. The site has the capacity for 55 units, and therefore would have clear potential to address a range of local housing needs, alongside local infrastructure improvements that would be required to address the impact of the development.

Other Development Opportunities

There are other opportunities for development outside of the SPA, which could be enabled by neighbourhood plan policies. These include conversions of barns and other agricultural buildings. Some examples from the past decade or so are:

- The Barn, West End – converted to residential, Oct 2007;
- Fir Farm, West End – converted to mixed business/residential use, May 2008-11;
- 88 Park Road – converted courtyard and barn to residential use, Jun 2013;
- 25 Court Lane – conversion of a barn to residential use as part of a new build, Mar 2014;

There had also been previous developments in Windmill Lane (five barn conversions) and a site at Manor Farm, Church Road (three new dwellings).

Other farm buildings that could be suitable for conversion include:

- Buildings to the rear of Park Farm, Park Road (currently used for storage and small business premises);
- Buildings to the rear of Langcroft Farm, Court Lane (currently used for storage);
- Buildings to the rear of Meeting Farm, West End (currently not in use);
- Buildings opposite to and to the rear of West End Farm, West End (currently used for storage or not in use);
- Buildings around Tithe Farm, Silver Street (currently used for storage)

There are three other farms located on Silver Street that have potential for conversion. However, with the exception of Tithe Farm, all are close the village envelope and would be likely to add to traffic congestion issues. Tithe Barn is further outside the village and nearer to the A428 and to local amenities in Bromham.

Land and Property

Local House Prices

The local housing market in Stevington is strong and buoyant and house prices remain high. This does provide challenges in terms of affordability, particularly amongst younger people looking to access housing locally.

Current average house prices are as follows:

House Type	Current Average Value (£)
Detached	563,076
Semi-Detached	346,057
Terraced	321,470
Flats	178,234

Zoopla, May 2018

Feasibility and Viability

Given the position in respect of the local housing market, it is unlikely that viability would prove to be an issue.

The biggest challenge, particularly with sites in the Silver Street area, will be associated with the creation of safe access. Silver Street is very narrow in places, and this can cause localised congestion issues and safety problems. This is a particular problem when larger vehicles are attempting to use the road. Addressing such constraints would have a disproportionate impact on viability of the sites in this part of the village, particularly given that any that could come forward would be small (possibly no more than 2 or 3 units).

Given that any sites that come forward would be small in nature, it is likely that they would be beneath the threshold for significant planning contributions. This could have a negative cumulative effect on local infrastructure in the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Growth

The housing number proposed within the current version of the Neighbourhood Plan is 11-15 homes. Included within this number are existing commitments, which are:

- Red Lion public house: 2 units; and
- 43/47 Silver Street: 1 unit.

This would leave a further 8-12 units to be provided over the plan period to 2035.

Implications for the Neighbourhood Plan

The options for accommodating additional growth are:

Option 1: The SPA boundary could be amended slightly to bring in additional land.

Option 2: A site allocation could be considered, taking account of the assessment made earlier in this report. This may provide an opportunity to attract smaller housing, to meet gaps in local provision.

Option 3: Policies to guide subdivision of buildings or redevelopment following demolition could be formulated.

Option 4: Policies could be formulated to guide rear garden development in appropriate locations within the SPA.

Option 5: Policies to enable residential or business conversion of agricultural buildings could be formulated.

With regard to Option 3, new homes have been developed in the village within the SPA through small infill proposals, and there is the potential for this to continue, as demonstrated by the various developments mentioned previously.

Demolition and redevelopment should be considered mainly outside of the Conservation Area, where it can be demonstrated that there is no harm to the character of the village. Buildings in the conservation area could be considered for redevelopment only where they make no contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of the area.

Development of rear gardens as backland development would be harmful to the character of the village in many instances, in particular in terms of impact on the cruciform layout. If rear garden development were to be considered, a rigorous policy would be needed to ensure it only happened in exceptional cases, where there was adequate access and there would be no harm to local character from the new dwelling(s) and associated highway works.

Enabling policies for subdivision or redevelopment could:

- Set out the type of sites where residential development could be permitted and those where it would be unlikely to be permitted;
- Ensure that new housing was well-designed, to complement the local character;
- Address local housing needs as identified within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Addressing identified local housing needs through policies would be very important given that any sites that come forward are unlikely to be of a sufficient scale to secure a mix of dwelling sizes or to trigger an affordable housing requirement to be secured via a S106 obligation.

Meeting the Basic Conditions

Options 3 and 4 would be likely to meet the basic conditions in terms of **general conformity with strategic local policy**, given that growth would be accommodated within the SPA. Options 1 and 2 could meet the general conformity basic condition, comprising limited modification to the SPA. However, this should be discussed with the local planning authority. Option 5 should be acceptable in terms of general conformity, but again should be discussed with the local planning authority.

In terms of meeting the basic conditions regarding **achieving sustainable development and having regard to national policy and guidance** (including the neighbourhood plan being based on evidence of local need), Options 3 and/or 4 in isolation could be problematical. It is far from certain that redevelopment and sub-division alone would deliver the required housing numbers. Therefore Options 1, 2 and 5 would also need to be considered. Option 3 and 5 together (possibly also with Option 4) could deliver the required levels of growth, without the need for amending the SPA or allocating sites outside of the SPA (as set out in Options 1 and 2).

With regard to **EU obligations**, amending the SPA or making a site allocation may be a factor in triggering a need for Strategic Environmental Assessment, but this is uncertain given the very limited scale. Options 3, 4 and 5 would perhaps be less likely to trigger need for SEA. Whatever options are chosen, the local planning authority would need to screen the plan for SEA.

It would be advisable to discuss the preferred options with the local planning authority prior to completing a draft plan for the Regulation 14 consultation. This will help to ensure that the draft plan does not run into difficulties at the Regulation 14, Regulation 16 and independent examination stages.

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