



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Planning Policy Briefing Note

Local Plan 2030 Policies 5S, 6 and 7S

This briefing note has been prepared following the adoption of the Local Plan 2030 (LP2030) to assist the application of new policies 5S, 6 and 7S. These are the policies that relate to the acceptability of development outside of the urban area policy boundary, in other words in the rural area.

The development strategy of the local plan recognises that the character of the rural parts of the borough is not uniform (para 6.13). In order to reflect this in the way that planning policy is applied, the Plan identifies:

Key Service Centres – those villages that contain a good range of services and are well connected to larger town centres by regular public transport. They provide a strong service role for the local community and surrounding area. They are Bromham; Clapham, Gt Barford, Sharnbrook, Shortstown, Wilstead, Wixams and Wootton. (LP2030 para 6.14)

Rural Service Centres – settlements that have fewer facilities and provide a more localised convenience and service role to meet the day to day needs of residents and businesses in the rural area. They are Carlton, Harrold, Milton Ernest, Oakley, Roxton, Stewartby, Turvey, Willington (LP2030 para 6.15).

All Key Service Centres and Rural Service Centres have settlement policy area boundaries that define the main built up part of the village. There are also several other smaller villages that have defined Settlement Policy Areas (SPA). A list of all settlements with

Settlement Policy Area boundaries is given in the box after paragraph 6.18. It is important to remember that these are policy boundaries only: they show where different policies apply and are not intended to capture all properties within a particular village. Policy 5S explains that within Settlement Policy Area boundaries, development or re-development will be acceptable in principle.

Small Settlements – these are settlements that do not have a settlement policy area boundary nevertheless they do have a recognisable built form and as a result there may be limited opportunity for development. The Plan recognises however that proposals will need to be carefully considered to guard against unacceptable impacts on the character of the settlement (LP2030 para 6.20). For that reason Policy 6 supports development (including infill) within the built form of Small Settlements where it contributes positively to the character of the settlement and is appropriate to its structure form, character and size as a whole. Whether a proposal is within the built form of a Small Settlement will be a matter of judgement on a case by case basis. Small Settlements that fall to be considered under Policy 6 are listed in the LP2030 in the box after para 6.20. The Plan recognises that this list is a snapshot and may change over the life of the Plan.

Beyond villages with a defined SPA and Small Settlements, places with a scattered development form with no reasonably definable core are considered for planning policy reasons to be part of the **countryside** even if a site lies geographically close to buildings within a SPA or the urban area boundary. Again, this is a term that enables the application of the appropriate adopted planning policy. It is not intended to apply to areas that meet any national definition of countryside, indeed it is notable that whilst the National Planning Policy Framework often references countryside in its text it does not define the term in its glossary. For planning policy purposes it is a matter for local interpretation and in Bedford borough's case it is a term applied in the development plan to the part of the borough outside both the urban area and the rural settlements that are listed (villages with SPAs and Small Settlements).

With the adoption of the LP2030 the appropriate policy that applies to this part of the borough is 7S.

The policy is in two parts. The first part reflects the types of development in the countryside that are supported by national policy:

- The reuse of rural buildings (LP2030 Policy 65)
- The replacement and extension of dwellings in the countryside (LP2030 Policy 66)
- Affordable housing to meet local needs in the rural area (LP2030 Policy 67)
- Accommodation for rural workers (LP2030 Policy 68)

The second part adds a further local exception that is included in the plan as a result of comments made during its preparation. Residents explained that on occasion they would like to support limited new development in countryside locations where there was clear evidence that it met a local need and where it would make a positive contribution to an area. Whilst a neighbourhood plan would normally be the vehicle to make allocations for such development, in some often smaller communities this route may not be an achievable option. Policy 7S therefore allows development to be supported by way of a planning application subject to **a strict list of criteria which must all be met.**

Because development under this policy is permitted exceptionally, the tests are necessarily strict otherwise it is unlikely that the policy would have passed examination. As a result, instances of development being permitted under the second part of Policy 7S are expected to be few and the kind of evidence submitted to satisfy the criteria will vary on a case by case basis and will depend on the type of development that is being proposed.

Location is important. The policy requires that to be supported, sites must be well related to a settlement policy area boundary, identified Small Settlement or the built form of another settlement in the countryside.

The proposal must respond to an **identified community need** (criterion vi). For example there may be a local study that identifies the need for a village hall, small workshop units or another use that would support the vitality of the rural community. Where the proposal is for residential use the submission of a planning application is itself not evidence of community need. Reasons why exceptionally a residential use should be allowed in such a location must be submitted with the application. Those reasons may for example refer to the particular visual benefits that would be achieved as a result of the development, or to the provision of a particular kind of housing for which there is an evidenced local need, for example bungalows (not 'affordable' as these would be considered under Policy 67).

In addition to this there must be evidence of **identifiable community support** as well as Parish Council support (criterion vii). Where there is no Parish Council, support should come from another properly constituted body which fully represents the local community. It is expected that pre-application consultation will be carried out with the local community to provide evidence of community support as part of the application submission. In a very small community in the countryside it may be possible for the applicant or the Parish Council to canvass all or most residents to get their views and present the results in support of the application when it is submitted. In other locations nearer to larger settlements it may not be possible to ask all residents, but publicity through Parish Council meetings or leafleting, putting up posters in a local village hall, on parish notice boards, in the

church or local shop encouraging householders and other stakeholders to register support or opposition to the proposal may be expected. Those gathering the evidence are encouraged to prepare a consultation strategy and discuss it with planning officers well in advance of making an application to enable sufficient time for canvassing local community support.

This is the kind of opportunity that local people would be given if a neighbourhood plan was being produced. Whilst the statutory consultation on the planning application will also provide local people with an opportunity to comment and give their support, positive engagement before this stage is an opportunity for the applicant to sufficiently explain the local need for the development to residents and answer any questions they may have, reducing the likelihood of objection once the application has been submitted.

Policy 7S enables local people to have a say on local development outside of the neighbourhood plan context. Adopted policies should not be undermined and as this policy permits development by exception the bar is intentionally high. Whilst the support of the Parish Council (or other body representing the local community) is required, this alone does not satisfy the additional need for identifiable community support. The Parish Council could however be responsible for or assist with gathering evidence of community support to submit with or in support of the planning application, especially if the Parish Council is the applicant.

The remaining bullet points of Policy 7S relate to **the impact of the proposal on the countryside location**, its character and the accessibility of the site, taking into consideration the proposed use.

Policies 5S, 6 and 7S have been scrutinised through the examination process, have been found 'sound' and are now part of the development plan, which means that applications must be determined in accordance with them unless material considerations justify a departure. Moving forward the policies (along with all others) will be monitored to see if they are being effective. In particular, Policy 7S seeks to restrict development in the countryside to exceptional situations and there are risks of unintended consequences if the policy is not applied strictly, so it will be monitored to see if it achieves its intended purpose. Future reviews of the plan will provide the opportunity to amend policies if necessary.

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