Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

# Local Business & Employment Policy

***Purpose:*** To ensure Oakley is a viable place to live and work. To encourage and support the development of micro businesses based in Oakley.

***Planning rational & evidence:***

Oakley has three industrial sites with adequate capacity for expansion. In order to maintain the character of the village, these sites must be fully utilised before any other commercial development will be considered. Some of the industrial sites are close to environmentally sensitive areas and no development of these sites will be allowed. Where sites are adjacent to housing, any intrusion caused by them shall be kept as low as practical in order to maintain the character of the village.

The village has more than a hundred micro businesses which enhance its vibrancy and economic sustainability. Enterprises of this type need strong support, not only in terms of data and voice communications but also for social contact to share ideas and issues.

Oakley Neighbourhood Development Plan Businesses Study – 2015 provides further supporting information. It will also support Bedford Borough Council Core Strategy & Rural Inclusion Plan.

***Policies:***

BE1 In order to maintain the character of the village we will only support proposals both for new and existing commercial operations within the curtilage of existing commercial premises or former industrial or commercial brownfield sites which do not conflict with other planning policies.

BE2 We will support the development of infrastructure and facilities which encourage the growth of home-based micro businesses.

BE3 In order to limit the flow of large vehicles through the village we will not support any proposals to widen or otherwise upgrade access to industrial sites.

BE4 Any commercial sites which are within 100 metres of areas of high sensitivity to development, as determined by either the Bedford Borough Council or Oakley Landscape Character Assessments, or adjacent to a housing development will be limited to B1 classification.

***Evidence:*** Local businesses are a very important element of the community. 36% of those responding to the questionnaire use a local business every day and a further 55% use at least one every week, i.e. only 9% of residents do not use local businesses on a regular basis. 22% of those responding to the questionnaire who are in employment work in the village.

71% of those responding to the questionnaire highlighted broadband speed as a major requirement for new businesses in the village, followed by 55% who regarded improved mobile phone coverage as a major factor.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

# Highways & Transport Policy

***Purpose:*** To make Oakley a safer and more environmentally friendly place for residents, and to increase accessibility within Oakley and to other areas through improved transport links and better access.

***Planning rational & evidence:***

For most residents living in the Parish the car has become the principal mode of transport even for some of the shortest journeys. Better connectivity and accessibility through footpaths and cycleways will assist in reducing the number of vehicle movements that need to take place within the village.

Key issues for residents are: Volume and speed of traffic, congestion and parking, particularly around the Post Office and Schools. Peak times around school drop off and pick up are problematic. There is also the inherent danger of the narrow roads, especially when buses and larger vans are using them. An Oakley Development Plan Road Study 2016 supports residents’ concerns.

New development which potentially exacerbates the problems of congestion, parking and above all safety of both pedestrians and drivers, especially in areas where the road width is narrow and visibility is poor, will need to clearly demonstrate that problem will not increase. This will also ensure conformity with BBC Adopted Standards for Sustainable Communities SPD - 2014 *(2.0. Residential Car Parking)*.

***Policies:***

HT1 New development will be approved where there is no significant adverse impact on traffic congestion, on-street parking and road safety.

HT2 New development will keep street lighting to a minimum, sympathetic to the local setting and in line with the local identity. Excessive signage should be avoided.

HT3 New development should provide or improve roads, footpaths and cycleways in the vicinity of the development to ensure safe and environmentally friendly infrastructure.

***Evidence:*** A main concern for residents is that extra development in the village will cause an increase in congestion due to extra traffic and parking. 93% of those responding to the questionnaire stated that traffic volumes were already a major issue. In addition, 98% considered that our highways had problems with congestion, speeding and repair levels. There was also support (66%) for an urgent upgrade to a joint pedestrian and cycle path to Clapham.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

**Housing Growth Policy**

***Purpose:*** to enable growth based on local need; to maintain the rural character of the village and to enable growth in the built settlement.

***Planning Rational and Evidence:***

There are currently 974 dwellings in the parish of Oakley contained predominately within the defined settlement area. There are two small linear developments along Lovell Road and Westfield Road. The built up central area is surrounded by 4 roads. The centre of the village was developed in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The 500 houses were planned with many small open spaces, with grass verges. A village green was added later and is in the centre of the village with play equipment appropriate to toddlers and older children. There have since been 4 small developments of between 20 and 37 dwellings and they have the same open space character of the earlier 1970s development.

The 4 narrow roads surrounding the centre have a few older stone houses, 19th century estate houses of either brick or stone located in the High Street or Station Road, some of which are listed, others in the 1930s and a few again in the 1970s. These houses have hedges or trees fronting the roads giving an open green ambiance to the village. The feeling is of an open and green village with a variety of house types which meet the needs of our young and older residents. This was reflected in the results of the questionnaire and the Bedford Borough Ward Profile

Two of the entrances to the village are narrow single track roads and the further entrance is a crossroads with “no” category roads. All the roads in the village are less than ‘c’ category.

Bedford Borough Council (BBC) are working on the next iteration of the Local Plan (emerging) which is currently scheduled for public consultation in late 2017/ early 2018. As part of the analysis phase of the plan creation process BBC have devised a comparison model that ranks individual settlement areas against each other based on several criteria that includes local services, infrastructure and community assets.

Oakley has been designated a Tier 2 village and a potential growth target has yet to be set for the duration of the plan (estimated to be between 2018 and 2035) based on the BBC commissioned 2012 survey.

Oakley is looking to plan to meet its identified local housing requirement and will respond to positively to the supply of these new homes by supporting the addition of a up to a further 50 dwellings over the plan period to 2035. This is the median number most widely supported number by the residents with 23% supporting up to 20; 44% of respondents 20 – 50 dwellings and 14% between 50-100. 84% of residents felt it was important for young people to stay in the village, 66% that the dwellings should meet housing need and that 75% that dwellings should be available to enable older people to move to more suitable accommodation. The BRCC Survey identified the affordable housing need.

The best villages have growth that reflects the existing character of the village setting and build. It is essential that any future development in Oakley must adhere to that principle

Any building development should harmonise with the village within the landscape of the River Great Ouse. The results from the Oakley Questionnaire identified that the open character of the village developments and the importance of the landscape around and within the village should be retained and enhanced. (see landscape and environment policy)

Oakley already has a mixture of housing that supports a sustainable, mixed and inclusive community. It is essential that any new development or single dwellings delivers quality homes that support the ongoing viability and prosperity of the parish.

Any housing developments must provide a mixture of housing to meet the needs of the community. Residents strongly support 1, 2or 3 bedroom dwellings or homes for older people to downsize. And developments proposals that meet these needs are likely to be supported.

***Policies:***

HG 1 To enable growth within the parish

* Development should prioritise Brownfield Sites first.
* A small development (less than 20 dwellings) or medium development (20 – 40 dwellings) may be allowed in the village envelope.
* A small development adjacent to the village envelope will be allowed as long as the proposals meet the proposals for mixed dwellings based on all the policies in the Plan and is consistent with the existing structure of the village.

Over the last 15 years there has been 10 “windfall single houses”. It is envisaged that this will continue and will be supported as long the proposal meet the all the policies in the plan and is consistent with the existing structure of the village.

***Evidence***

Consultation from the emerging local neighbourhood plan and the BRCC housing survey showed that the key issues that this policy seeks to address.

* Indicative support for the housing targets of up to 20 houses – 23%; 20-50 houses 44%; 50- 100 houses -14 %. A medium of up to 50 houses for the duration of the plan.
* The BRCC Housing Survey showed support for 1, 2 or 3 bedroom houses for rent/ shared ownership for young people or families and bungalows for older residents.

This will deliver housing that conforms to the community feedback and meets the needs of the village.

HG 2To help identify the appropriate sites for development within the parish

* Development should be on small sites.
* New development should be within or adjacent to the existing settlement area(s)
* Development should prioritise Brownfield Sites first.
* Development should not have a detrimental impact on the open countryside.
* Development should not have a detrimental impact on the views from the entrances and exits to and from Oakley
* Development should not impact on the open spaces separating Oakley from adjacent villages.
* The conversion of existing redundant, empty or derelict buildings to new dwellings would be supported.
* Any proposed development on designated green spaces will not be approved.

***Evidence:***

Consultation on the emerging local neighbourhood plan showed that the key issues were

* Development should be on small sites on the edge of the village; small sites less than 20 dwellings priority 1- 36.23%, priority 2 – 42.51%; priority 3 - 21.26%. Medium sites 10-20 homes priority 1 – 13.70%, priority 2 – 37.67%, priority 3 - 48.63%.
* Development should be on brownfield sites – 86.9% agreed.
* Conversion of existing redundant empty or derelict buildings to new dwellings should be supported, priority I - 75.46%, priority 2 – 12.96%
* Development should not have a detrimental impact on the entrances and exits to and from Oakley. Concerns me a lot 73.68%.
* Development should not have a detrimental impact on the open countryside.

72.16% saw this as very important and 13.33% saw this as important.

* Development should not impact on the open spaces between Oakley and Clapham 69.20 consider this very important and 12.40 as important.

HG 3 to help identify the type and scale of development

* Housing development of 1, 2 or 3 bedroom dwellings will be approved.
* Some single story houses will be approved.
* New dwellings should complement existing building lines, front gardens and hedges where such features are important to the appearance and character of the location.
* Small site developments as in policy 3 must have green spaces and follow the open character of all previous small site developments in the village.
* Site developments or individual houses should be planted with hedging or trees on all the site boundaries to maintain the existing character of the roads in Oakley.

***Evidence:***

Consultation on the emerging local neighbourhood plan and the BRCC Housing Survey showed that the key issues were;

Oakley questionnaire with an aggregate of the 1 most important, 2 and 3 on a scale of 1 to 7 showed that 64.2% supported small family homes; 73.62% supported 1 to 2 bedroom homes for older people and 66.25% supported bungalows for older people.

The BRCC Housing Survey identified the affordable housing need as 15 units – 3x 1 or2 bed houses for rent, 6 x2 bed houses for rent/shared ownership for young adults; 3x3 houses for rent/shared ownership for families and 3x 2 bed bungalows for older people to downsize. Market housing was identified as up to 30 houses that would meet reasonable need considering the size of the village. Both surveys gave a clear indication of the number of dwellings that the residents felt the village could support and keep the open character of the existing development set within the rural landscape surrounding the village.

The Oakley questionnaire showed that 80% of residents supported the open and rural feel of our village characterised by the hedge and tree lined principal roads - the open frontages in the centre of the village and the village green.

HG 4 Ensuring good quality design

* New developments should integrate with the local surroundings, the landscape and the built environment
* All new housing should use quality materials that complement the existing palette of materials used within the surrounding area.
* Extensions should enhance and be subordinate to the scale of the building in terms of materials, design and structure.
* New developments must have suitable access to the site for people of all abilities.
* Parking must be located so that it does not dominate the street scene.
* Garages should be designed to reflect the architectural design of the house they serve.
* Hard surfaced driveways must be of a permeable material.
* Layout of all developments must have adequate footpaths that incorporate safe cycling into and through the site and should allow natural surveillance
* Lighting must be follow the same criteria as the rest of the lighting in the village.
* Layouts of all developments must have a green area.
* Layouts of all developments should follow the open aspects of the other small developments in the village with minimal planting and no fences to the frontages.
* Cycle ports should be integrated into all dwellings
* Bin storage must be integrated into all dwellings.
* All street furniture should reflect other street furniture in the village and should be as minimal as possible.

***Evidence:***

Oakley Questionnaire:

The open and rural feel of the village characterised by the hedge and tree lined principal roads – the open frontages in the centre of the village and the village greens. 80% of residents thought that this was very important or important.

Documents supporting this policy BBC Standards for Sustainable Development; BBC Landscape Character Assessment – Great Ouse Limestone Valley; Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity – Oakley Housing Survey; Oakley Questionnaire.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

**Heritage Policy**

***Purpose:*** Development will be required to protect and where appropriate enhance our historical buildings and their setting in the landscape.

***Planning Rational and Evidence***

The landscape surrounding Oakley is of historical significance. Remnants of an Iron Age village were discovered where the Lovell Homes are now sited. There is still evidence of the medieval 3 Strip farming in Judges Spinney and in the road names, Church Lane and Westfield Road. All the names of the roads in the developments from the 1960s are taken from the Pre- Enclosure Map of 1798.The Duke of Bedford successfully enclosed the village in 1803 and the 3 field system was abolished for ever. The Duke of Bedford used the Architect Henry Holland n 1803 to build the Grade 11\* Oakley House. This became the residence of the eldest son of the Dukes. The Duke of Bedford straightened the roads and the village still retains this structure today. The area from the church to and including the Oakley Bridges are of importance. St Mary’s Church is a grade 1 and has the scheduled churchyard cross, Rectory Cottage, the River bridges are grade 11 listed and the site of the mill was here. The next area of note is the Drive, which is the entrance to Oakley House where there are 5 grade 11 listed properties. The Dukes of Bedford from the 1840s to the late 1860s constructed estate cottages for their workers along the High Street and Station Road. Some are Grade 11 listed. The Station complex has listed buildings and the Pump house at Pavenham Road is testament to the industrial operation of the railway. 18 further cottages and houses are listed. The estate in the core of the village is an example of 1960s – 1970s open plan development as are the subsequent estates.

***Policies:***

H 1 New development must not impact on the settings, views or access to any of the buildings designated as village assets. (see Heritage poster)

* Development will not be permitted within the area of the Church and the River Bridges.
* Development around Oakley House and the Drive will not be permitted unless it enhances the setting of the Grade11\* house and the surrounding landscape.
* The former station should remain a commercial area to retain the industrial and historical heritage of this site

H 2

* All village assets that are to be modernised, renovated or altered should be designed with careful regard to the historical structure, architectural interest and setting.
* Any development of a village assets must enhance the historical value of the building.
* Any development of the Duke of Bedford Cottages in Oakley must retain their historical and architectural interest and setting.
* Oakley War Memorial is a unique feature of individual design and must be retained.
* Lovell Homes is a unique example of memorial houses C1930s and must retain their historical, architectural interest and setting

***Evidence:***

Historic England Asset register; Consultation on Oakley Neighbourhood Plan.

Oakley House and its environments including the Drive 79%

Oakley Bridges and St Marys Church with College Farm 97%

Lovell Homes 97%; The Old School 82%; the Duke of Bedford cottages in the High Street 90.35% and in Station Road 89.11%; Oakley Memorial 96%; The open aspect of the Core of the village and the subsequent small estates 77%

Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

**Local Green Spaces**

***Purpose:*** The purpose of this policy is to identify and protect local green spaces which are considered to be of particular value to the local community. The policy is also designed to ensure that the current balance between development and green spaces is maintained in all future development.

**Planning Rationale and Evidence**

The proposed Local Green Spaces (LGS) have been informed by the following.

1. The NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework).

This introduced a new form of special protection for green areas. It states that LGS can only be designated when a plan (Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan) is prepared or reviewed and must be capable of enduring beyond the plan period. Bedford Borough Council is currently preparing a Local Plan with an end date of 2035.

The criteria for designating a Local Green Space are as follows:

* *Where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves*
* *Where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and it holds a particular significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
* *Where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

1. BBC “Allocations and Designations Local Plan” as adopted by Full Council on 17 July 2013.

Specifically, this relates to ‘Village Open Spaces and Views’ (AD 40) and specifies the following criteria by which a piece of land may be designated as a green space.

* Part A. They must be publicly accessible and valuable to the local community for sport, recreation or as an amenity space.
* Part B. They give identity to a settlement or village by helping to retain its form and reflect past history (examples include village greens).
* Part C. They provide a gap or break in the frontage which contributes to the character of a settlement for example providing a view into the village which forms part of the village setting, or a view into open countryside establishing the relationship between the form of the village and the countryside beyond.
* Part D. The gap provides visual relief in an otherwise built up an area punctuating the street scene.
* Part E. The open space assists the transition between the village and countryside providing a soft edge to the village which is pleasing visually.

1. Bedford Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley.

Specifically, this relates to the Landscape Strategy, Landscape Management Guidelines and Development Guidelines to be adopted when assessing the future character of the village landscape.

Taking into account the above guidelines, the following areas have been designated as local green spaces.

1. **Grange Close Green, bounded by Station Road, Reynes Drive**

Grange Close is an important green space at the junction of Reynes Drive and Station Road, providing an “open” feel to this part of the village as well as a break in the frontage of housing along the west side of Station Road. It also provides a view into open countryside, establishing the relationship between the form of the village and the countryside beyond.

Ref. BBC “Allocations and Designations Local Plan”, sections C, D and E.

Bedford Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley. Specifically, Landscape Strategy page 73; Landscape Management Guidelines 3B.1.19; 3B.1.121 and Development Guidelines 3B.1.22.

1. **Oakley Sports and Social Club, Church Lane**

This land has been used as a sport field since the middle of last century and is used by a large proportion of local village residents for a variety of activities. It is the location of the Oakley Sports and Social Club which frequently hosts events for the local community, ranging from quiz evenings to firework displays, and is a central hub for the

community. It houses a very active club house which has a children's playground and is regularly used by the local community as a meeting place. The ground is used for a variety of sports, including cricket and football, and is used by the AFC Oakley Football team

and the Pilgrims Cricket Club. It has tennis court, which can also be used for Basketball, and a Boules Pitch. It is also the location of Oakley Motorcycle Club which has nearly 500 members. Due to its very nature, the recreational facility is accessible to the public and it is extremely valuable to the local community for sport, recreation and as an amenity space.

It is also adjacent to Oakley House a grade 1 building.

Ref. NPPF2012 particularly par. 8 ‘Promoting Healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76,77 also par. 11

BBC “Allocations and designations Local Plan” – AD 40, sections A and B

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley - Landscape Strategy page 73 ‘to conserve the Historic limestone villages’, Landscape Management Guidelines 3B.1.19 3B.1.21 and Development Guidelines 3b.1.22.

1. **Linch Furlong Nature Reserve, Pavenham Road**

Linch Furlong Nature Reserve is a community resource regularly used by walkers and picnickers, including young families, contributing to their health and wellbeing.

It is a tranquil spot by the River Great Ouse enjoyed both by people and the wildlife that inhabits it. A wide variety of trees have been planted and the hedges and land sensitively managed to benefit birds and encourage wildflowers. Amongst other things, this management has encouraged a number of species of wild orchids, e.g. bee and pyramidal orchids. An artificial otter holt has been installed in the river bank to allow the animals to “stay over” safely. Willow trees along the river side have been pollarded to encourage healthy growth and bird and bat boxes installed.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly par. 8, ‘Promoting Healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76,77, par. 11 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’, par. 12 and 112 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’ 126 to 141.

BBC “ Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley, Landscape Strategy page 73 ‘to conserve the historic limestone villages, the riverside features such as stone bridges and mills and the tranquil river corridor’, Sensitivities 3b.1.15 ‘views to the open pastoral views across the floodplain’ and 3B.1.16 ‘corridor views down the River Great Ouse’, Landscape Management guidelines 3B.1.17;3B.1.18 and 3B.1.19, Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23,24,25,27.

1. **Land Adjacent to the Great River Ouse (See Maps)**

This area provides iconic views of the listed parish church from the west, south west and south and incorporates very important areas of land which contribute to the rural and open setting of the church and the historic limestone Oakley Two Bridges. The land is maintained by Oakley Parish Council as a public access area, sensitively managed to allow the growth of wildflowers and give the feel of meadows, providing a haven of tranquillity right along the river side. These areas of land are either partially or entirely within the flood plain of the River Great Ouse as it passes through the southern end of the village of Oakley. It incorporates the Oakley weir and the remains of an old mill which once stood on a site near the two bridges and also ensures that the broad views along the length of the river valley, as viewed both from the east and west, are maintained.

Ref. NPPF 2012 particularly par. 8 ‘Promoting Healthy Communities’ 73, 74, 75, 76, and 77, ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’, par. 12 and 112 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’, 126 to 141.

BBC “Allocations and designations Local Plan” – AD 40, sections A and B

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley and Pavenham Wolds. - Landscape Strategy page 73. Sensitivities 3B.1.12; 3B.1.14 .’Views to Historic built elements and Church towers’; 3B.1.15 ‘views to open, pastoral views across the floodplain’; 3B.1.16 ‘corridor views down the River Great Ouse’. Management Guidelines 3B.1.17; 3B.1.19; 3B.1.20; 3b.1.21, Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23; 3B.1.26; 3B.1.27; 3B.1.28.

1. **Judges Spinney, Highfield Road**

Situated 50 metres from Oakley and 1,000metres from Clapham and served by footpaths and bridleways, Judges Spinney is situated on the highest ridge in Bedford Borough with extensive views to the north over the River Great Ouse River valley and south towards the Greensand Ridge. Planted between 1826 and 1831, the trees include ash, beech (unusual in clay lands, due to the Dewponds on the ridge), elm, hornbeam, field maple and wild cherry. There are Ridge and Furrow, and rods and furlongs are clearly recognisable in the eastern section of the spinney. Friends of Browns Wood regularly work on this woodland to maintain its excellent condition. Walkers from both Oakley and Clapham, as well as motorists who stop and have their lunch there, take advantage of the views from the edge of the spinney. Judges Spinney is a County Wildlife site due to its rich flora that can be seen in the wood and fauna that can heard whilst visiting the spinney.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly paragraph 8 ‘Promoting Healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76,77 and para 11.

BBC “Allocations and designations Local Plan” – AD 40, section A.

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley and Pavenham Wolds. - Landscape Strategy page 73 Landscape Management Guidelines 3B.1.19 and 3B.1.21 and Development Guidelines 3B.1.22.

**6) Allotments and Community Orchard, Pavenham Road**

The importance of allotments in terms of sustainability, developing a sense of community

and community cohesion, is recognised by the Bedford Borough Council. Their “Open Space Supplementary Planning Document” September 2013 details a requirement for allotment space to be provided for populations in excess of 1,000 people. This land has historically been used for allotments providing the only such allocations within the village boundary. Gardening is recognised as being recreational, contributing to people’s health and wellbeing. The allotments also provide an important softening of the edge of the village housing development that extends to close proximity to the River Great Ouse at this point. The Planning Inspector at the inquiry noted when commenting on the housing development, that it should mark the limit to northern development towards the River Great Ouse.

Ref. NPPF 2012 particularly, paragraph 8 Promoting healthy Communities 73, 74, 75, 76, 77 also para11.

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 highlights the importance of this entrance to the village and the landscape setting of the Stafford bridge, see particularly 3B.1.25 and 3B.1.23. Also, Landscape Strategy page 73 ‘to conserve the historic limestone villages, the riverside features such as stone bridges and mills and tranquil river corridor’. Landscape Management guidelines 3B.1.17; 3B.1.18; Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23, 3B.1.24; 3B.1.25

**7)** **Copse/woodland in Westfield Road. OS Map Reference SP999537**

This copse adds to the beauty and tranquillity of the village and is covered by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) 7/190/2/052. It is a haven for Birds and animals and is also an important part of the wildlife corridor around the bow of the River Great Ouse stretching from Oakley around to Stevington and then Pavenham. Westfield Road is popular with those village residents who are seeking a quiet stroll sometimes with dogs, children who are learning to ride bikes or horse riders. It is a long cul de sac noted for its tranquillity.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment para12 and 112.

The BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 3B.1.21 ‘conserve the rural character of the network of minor roads’. 3B.1.28 ‘Ensure the landscape context is respected... and there should be enhancements to the landscape around Oakley’.

**8)** **The field to the rear of Church Lane, north of the River**

This field ensures a rural, open setting to the entrance of the village from the river and the river valley. It also provides a distinct separation to the western edge of the village. Farmed for hundreds of years, the field is surrounded by wooded areas that house a wide range of natural habitat, and provides uninterrupted views of the Oakley Two bridges (Grade 1 Structure), the site of an ancient mill as well as views of the Grade 1 Church. To the west there are broad, open views including the historic Stevington Windmill. field has a footpath running through the middle of it, linking the village to the tranquillity of the river, enabling the village community to have direct, safe access to the river avoiding busy roads. This footpath also links the village to the two Oakley Bridges and hence footpaths along the river bank.

Ref. NPPF 2012 particularly, paragraph 8 ‘Promoting Healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76,77 par. 11, ‘Conserving and enhancing the Natural Environment’ par. 12 and 112 and ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’ 126 to 141

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone valley and Pavenham Wolds. Landscape Strategy page 73; Sensitivities 3B.1.12 3B.1.14 ‘views to historic built elements and church towers’; 3B.1.15 ‘views to open, pastoral views across the flood plain’;3B.1.16 ‘corridor views down the River great Ouse’; Management Guidelines 3b.1.17; 3B.1.19; 3B.1.20; 3B.1.21 Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23; 3B.1.26; 3B.1.27;

**9)** **The field adjacent to houses and schools in Station Road, next to the Midland main line railway line and also Lincroft New Field**

This field provides a clear separation between Oakley and neighbouring Clapham, providing long views to Browns Wood and Judges Spinney, which are part to the back drop to Pavenham Wolds, and across to Clapham Village. The hedges surrounding the field are ancient, the field being part of the 3 field system in use before being enclosed by the Duke of Bedford in 1804. The field has a permissive path around it which is frequently used by walkers and also by school children for cross country, providing healthy recreation and enjoyment of views by the local population. Wildlife such as sparrows, greenfinches and all the tit family nest and use the cover of the hedges alongside the road.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly paragraph 8 Promoting healthy communities 73,74,75,76 and 77.

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley and Pavenham Wolds. Landscape Strategy page 73 – No Coalescence between settlements and views to the wooded back drop to Pavenham Wolds. Landscape Management Guidelines 3B.1.19; 3B.1.21. Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23; 3B.1.24 3B.1.28 BBC “Allocations and Designations Local Plan on 17 July 2013.

**10)** **Browns Wood**

Located 1.000 metres from Oakley, Clapham and Milton Ernest, Browns Wood is situated on the highest ridge in Bedford Borough, with beautiful views north across the River Great Ouse, where many church spires and towers can be seen. To the south there are views of the Greensand Ridge and over Bedford Urban area. Different parts of the wood are designated as an Ancient Wood, Nature Reserve and a County Wildlife site whilst 26,000 trees were planted over another 31 acres of the wood to mark the Millennium. Served by footpaths, (FP1 and 5 and bridleways BW7,8, 9,11,13 and 31; BW A2 from Clapham and Oakley and FPA4 from Milton Ernest) many walkers use it from the surrounding villages. It is also accessed from High Field Road, Oakley; Milton Road and Twinwood Road Clapham as well as the A6 Milton Ernest. A quiet area with amazing views this wood has many very quiet areas for contemplation. Trees are Oak, ash, field maple, beech and, of particular note, Hornbeam. There are many species of wild flower typical of an ancient wood including orchids. Woodpeckers, thrushes, hawks and red kites are frequent visitors as are different species of bats. Many butterflies and moths are seen.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly par. 8 ‘Promoting healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76 and 77 also par. 11 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’ 126 and 141.

Bedford Borough “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone valley and Pavenham Wolds. Landscape Strategy page 73 Sensitivities – 3B.1.12 and 3B.1.14 ‘views to historic built elements and church towers’; 3B.1.15 ‘views to open, pastoral across the floodplain’. 3B.1.16 ‘corridor views down to the River Great Ouse’ and it is also part of the Pavenham Wolds, the wooded back drop. Management Guidelines 3B&gt;1.17; 3b.1.19; 3B.1.20; 3B.1.21. Development Guidelines 3B.1.22; 3B.1.23; 3B.1.26; 3B.1.27; 3B.1.28.

**11) Paddock and Orchard Associated with Middle Farm**

The site is part of Oakley’s agricultural heritage, it has been grazing land for decades and adds to the village history and character of the village. It sits in the centre of the village and has been associated with agriculture for over 100 years. The paddock and orchard help provide an open space between more built up parts of the village. It is home to the yellow meadow ant, an increasing rare species in Bedfordshire. The paddock was originally part of Middle Farm estate and is currently used to graze sheep. The east and west end of this land is wooded and it is planned that, as the existing orchard located in the grounds of Middle farm dies out, a new orchard will be planted in the paddock.

Ref. NPPF 2012, particularly par. 8 ‘Promoting healthy Communities’ 73,74,75,76 and 77

BBC “Allocations and designations Local Plan” – AD 40, section B

**12) Village Green**

Situated in the middle of the village, the village green is one of the most popular recreational areas in the village. Containing a children’s play area as well as multi-sports area and an outdoor table tennis table, it is in almost constant use. Whilst being used by people of all ages, it is particularly popular with young people and young families who use it as a place to relax and to play sport such as basketball, football and cricket. The green also provides a break in the housing which helps to provide Oakley with a more open, rural feel. As such, it is an extremely important feature for the local community.

Ref. NPPF 2012 particularly par. 8 Promoting Healthy Communities 73,74,75,76,77 and par. 11.

BBC “Allocations and designations Local Plan” – AD 40, sections A and B.

BBC “Landscape Character Assessment” May 2014 – Oakley Great Ouse Limestone Valley

Landscape Strategy page 73 Landscape Management Guidelines 3B.1.19 and 3B.1.21

Development Guidelines 3B.1.22

***Policies:***

GS 1 Future development should not take place on the Local Green Spaces detailed on the policy poster and identified on Map 3 (Green Spaces)

GS 2 Any new development should provide sufficient green spaces, in keeping with the current village design.

***Evidence:***

The village community were consulted via the Neighbourhood Planning Questionnaire (October 2015) as to how much importance they attached to each of the above green spaces. Two particular areas showed the greatest significance to the village, namely the land adjacent to the Great River Ouse (88% of respondents strongly agreed that this should be retained as a green space) and the field to the rear of Church Lane (83% strongly agreed). The land adjacent to the Great River Ouse was also designated as a Green Open Space under the BBC Local Plan up to 2021.

The responses to the questionnaire showed that the remaining areas varied in significance as green spaces, ranging from the paddock and orchard at Middle Farm (where 57% of respondents considered it an important green space) up to the village green (where 73% considered it is an important green space).

Neighbourhood Plan Policy Areas

**Landscape and Environment Development Policies**

***Purpose:***To determine the key landscape and environmental guidelines that will influence the future development of Oakley Village over the Plan period.

To protect the important landscape areas.

***Planning Rational and Evidence:*** The planning rational and evidence base for determining the Landscape and Environmental Policies was established as follows:

The **Bedford Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (April 2014) pages 69-73 “3B Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley”** was takenas an “umbrella” document for the wider area see

<http://www.forms.bedford.gov.uk/planning/BBCLCAFinal2014-11-28.pdf>

A more detailed local assessment of the village and its setting within the surrounding landscape was then carried out by the NDP team.

This local assessment is called the **Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment (see attached)**

The Oakley Village LCA read together with the Bedford Borough LCA is therefore intended to provide a comprehensive evidence base and the development guidelines for the policies which will underpin future planning and development decisions in the village.

**2.1 Bedford Borough LCA**

**The Landscape Strategy** for the Oakley - Great Ouse Limestone Valley in the Bedford Borough LCA is as follows:



**The Landscape Management and the Development Guidelines are:**



**2.2 Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment**

***Policies:***

**LE 1**

**Development within Oakley Parish boundary will conform to the development guidelines laid out in the Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment supported by the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment.**

**Development Guidelines in the Oakley Village LCA are as follows:**

1. **The River Valley**

The River Great Ouse and its valley are the most dominant and important features of the surrounding landscape. Not only are these features important in terms of natural beauty but the river and its valley are also crucial in terms of biodiversity (BBLCA – Landscape Strategy).

The BBLCA landscape management guidelines state that it is important to “conserve, enhance and create areas of floodplain landscape with flood meadows and marshes where appropriate” (3B.1.17). Similarly, the same guidelines recommend the need to “conserve and enhance the riparian vegetation that defines the course of the Great River Ouse, with opportunities for enhanced habitat management and restoration” (3B.1.18).

It is of particular importance therefore that the entire river and river valley areas in the parish are protected from development and that positive action is taken to enhance the area in terms of woodland planting and habitat management in line with the recommendations in the Landscape Strategy.

1. **The Limestone Bridges**

**2.1)** **The ‘Two Bridges’ approach into Oakley from Bromham.**

This distinctive entrance to the village, with the lovely views across the meadows to Oakley Church (Grade 1 Listed), epitomises the village. Taken together with the long views up and down the river, these bridges form a key part of the character of Oakley.

**2.2) Stafford Bridge.**

The BBLCA states, “Consider views to, and the landscape setting of the limestone bridges e.g. the instance of Stafford bridge, where linear extension out of Oakley extends to within close proximity of the crossing point” (3B.1.25). With this in mind, the landscape setting of the area surrounding Stafford Bridge should be protected from further development. This area should encompass both Linch Furlong and the allotments as well as the immediate area surrounding the bridge.

**LE 2 The River Valley**

**The river and river valley area throughout the parish will be protected from development.**

1. **The approach into Oakley from Bromham and Pavenham**

The BBLCA states; “consider views to, and the landscape setting of the limestone bridges” (3B.1.25) and also “conserve views to the church towers” (3B.1.26).

When coupled with the need to maintain the river and surrounding landscape highlighted in 1) above, these statements identify a distinct requirement to both conserve and enhance the approaches to the village from both Bromham and Pavenham.

With regard to the approach from Bromham, it should include the floodplains and fields on both sides of the river on the approach to St. Mary’s Church, as well as the views both to and from the Church. Also included should be the views to and from Oakley House, located further along the same stretch of the river.

We would urge that consideration be given to this area being designated a conservation area.

**LE 3 The Limestone Bridges**

**3.1 The ‘Two Bridges’ Approach into Oakley from Bromham**

**No development will be allowed which impinges upon the views between St. Mary’s Church and the Two Bridges to/from Bromham or upon the long views up and down the river from the Bridges as described above.**

**3.2 The Stafford Bridge**

**The landscape settings surrounding the Stafford Bridge, including Linch Furlong and the allotments, will be protected from development.**

1. **Long Views to and from Oakley**

The protection of long views to and from the village is highlighted in section 3B.1.24 of the BBLCA, which states, “conserve the natural floodplain landform and long views – avoid further introduction of embankments in the landscape which interrupt the landform and restrict views”.

The escarpment that runs along the village east from Westfield Road, behind the High Street and along Highfield Road up to Browns Wood, provides superb views in both a northerly and southerly direction of the north Bedfordshire villages and back towards Bedford itself and the Greensand Ridge. These views are particularly stunning from the east end of the escarpment from areas such as Judges Spinney.

From the north, the majority of the village lies unseen behind the escarpment, leaving clear

uninterrupted views of the river Great Ouse and surrounding countryside.

Similarly, the open countryside to the west offers beautiful views across the river valley.

It is strongly recommended that future development is not permitted that will spoil these views.

**LE 4 Long Views to and from Oakley**

**Development will not be permitted that will impact upon the Long Views to and from Oakley.**

1. **Coalescence with Neighbouring Villages**

The need to maintain Oakley as a separate entity, avoiding coalescence with other villages is highlighted in BBLCA (3B.1.23), which states, “improve settlement edges to maintain separation between settlements”.

The current area of open landscape east of Station Road opposite the schools, extending from the Old Station in the north, to Lovell Road in the south, should ideally be protected from development to prevent coalescence with Clapham.

**LE 5 Coalescence with Neighbouring Villages**

**To prevent coalescence with neighbouring village Clapham, no development will be permitted on the area of land east of Station Road opposite the schools, extending from the Old Station in the north, to Lovell Road in the south.**

1. **Linear Extension of Oakley**

The BBLCA clearly states that any future development should “conserve the nucleated stone built villages and avoid linear extension along roads which may threaten the individual identity of the villages” (3B.1.22).

This statement would question any further development of the village towards Stafford Bridge, particularly since the Planning Inspector, when agreeing to the recent Furlong housing development in Pavenham Road, said that “this should mark the most northerly point of linear development”.

The same principle should apply to Church Lane between St. Mary’s Church and the Two Bridges, where any development would clearly detract from the entrance to the village.

With regard to the approach from Highfield Road, any development there would not only damage the long views highlighted above but would also only add to an already busy traffic flow.

Similarly, any developments along Lovell Road towards Clapham could be regarded as a threat to the separate identity of Oakley.

**LE 6 Linear Extension of Oakley**

**The linear extension of Oakley along the entrance roads will be restricted for the reasons identified in the Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment above.**

1. **Conserve Rural Village Identity**

The village of Oakley is situated in a rural setting and has many features that cause it to have a distinct identity. In order to conserve this identity, the following areas need to be protected.

**7.1)** The BBLCA (3B.1.19) states that the village should, “conserve the hedgerow and hedgerow trees, enhancing the network where hedgerow has become degraded or damaged”.

Hedgerows are a distinct feature of the village and need to be both protected and encouraged. Any attempt to replace hedgerows with for example walls or fencing should be actively discouraged.

Similarly, the trees in the village should be maintained and replaced as necessary. The tree-lined nature of Church Lane is a particular feature of note.

**7.2)** The BBLCA (3B.1.21) also states that the village should, “conserve the rural character of the minor roads”.

It has long been recognised that the roads in the village are narrow and, at times, very busy. Despite this, it is recommended that, should development occur in the village or surrounding villages, the character of the minor roads is protected.

**7.3)** The BBLCA (3B.1.21) continues, “discourage the introduction of suburban style materials e.g. kerbs and extensive lighting”.

The use of excessive signage, often associated with suburban locations should be avoided where possible. In addition, where new features such as lighting are introduced, these should be sympathetic with the local setting, in line with the village identity.

**7.4)** When considering any potential development of the village, it is important that the character of the nucleated stone built village is conserved (BBLCA – 3B.1.22).

This should also take into account the very open, semi-rural character of the centre of the village, especially around the village green. The open plan front gardens and the areas of public open space e.g. Grange Close also contribute to the character of the village.

Elsewhere, semi-wooded areas of the village and the hedges lining the principal roads and enclosing front gardens provide a more rural feel to the village and should be conserved.

**LE 7 Conserve Rural Village Identity**

**To preserve the rural identity of the village, the following policies will be adopted:**

**7.1 New development will conform to the local vernacular with respect to boundary identification, i.e. hedges, walls and fencing.**

**7.2 Future development of the village will incorporate the following:**

**a) Excessive signage will be avoided,**

**b) Street lighting will be minimal, sympathetic with the local setting and in line with the village identity,**

**c) New development will conserve the rural character of the roads in the village.**

**7.3 The following will be protected:**

**a) Hedges lining the front gardens on principal roads,**

**b) The open, semi-rural character of the centre of the village and village green.**

**c) The semi-wooded areas of the village and the hedges lining the principal access roads.**

1. **Wooded Areas**

There are 2 important wooded areas within the Parish of Oakley which provide open access to the public. Both are managed by Bedford Borough Council with the support of “The Friends of Browns Wood”, a group of local volunteers.

**8.1)** **Browns Wood**

Located approximately 1.000 metres from the centre of Oakley on the eastern edge of the parish boundary, Browns Wood and its millennium extension is situated on the highest ridge in Bedford Borough, with beautiful views west and north across the River Great Ouse. Many church spires and towers in the surrounding villages of north Bedfordshire can be seen from this vantage point. To the south there are views to the Greensand Ridge and over the Bedford urban area. Different parts of the wood are designated as an Ancient Woodland, Nature Reserve and a County Wildlife site.

Browns Wood and its setting is recognised in the BBLCA as part of the important Wooded Wolds a recognised landscape feature in North Bedfordshire very sensitive to development. The immediate setting around the perimeter of the woodland is also important to protect. It is accessible from Oakley by public footpaths running along the banks of the River Great Ouse and from Highfield Road. There are also footpaths and bridleways from other surrounding villages which allow access to the woodland.

Browns Wood is extremely important in terms of biodiversity with many different varieties of birds, wildflowers, butterflies and moths. Regularly frequented by residents of Oakley and by walkers from surrounding villages, it is highly valued as a place of beauty, quiet relaxation and tranquillity.

**8.2) Judges Spinney**

Situated on the southern edge of Highfield Road, Judges Spinney is a small but important area of woodland accessed by a footpath from Oakley. It is situated on the same ridge as Browns Wood with similarly impressive views to the north over the River Great Ouse valley towards Milton Ernest, Sharnbrook and Pavenham. Long views to the south take in Bedford and the Greensand Ridge.

Planted between 1826 and 1831, the trees include ash, beech (unusual in clay lands, due to the Dewponds on the ridge), elm, hornbeam, field maple and wild cherry.

Friends of Browns Wood regularly work on this woodland to maintain its excellent condition. Walkers from both Oakley and Clapham, as well as motorists who stop and have their lunch there, take advantage of the views from the edge of the spinney. Judges Spinney is a County Wildlife site due to the rich flora that can be seen in the wood and fauna that can heard whilst visiting the spinney.

**LE 8**

**8.1 No development will be allowed which will damage the woodland areas or the setting of Browns Wood and Judges Spinney.**

**8.2 No development will be allowed which will damage the long views to or from Browns Wood and Judges Spinney.**

***Evidence:***

Whilst the Oakley LCA was being developed, residents of Oakley were asked for their views on the landscape that they considered to be important.

This consultation took place in two ways:

1. Firstly, through a Consultation Event in the Village Hall, where residents were asked to identify their views (either on a map of the parish or by writing on post-it stickers) along with the details of landscape features that they considered important.
2. The main areas identified in the Consultation Event were incorporated into the Landscape section of the village Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire, which was delivered to every household and also available for residents to complete online.

The five landscape areas identified in the questionnaire were as follows:

1. The river, river bridges and river valleys that surround much of our village and the associated fields and meadows.
2. The views to and from the village over open countryside.
3. Wooded areas such as Browns Wood and Judges Spinney.
4. Open spaces separating Oakley from Clapham and other villages.
5. The open and rural feel of our village characterised by the hedge and tree lined principal roads – the open frontages in the centre of the village and the Village Green.

Respondents were asked to identify the level of importance they attached to each area and also to indicate areas not included in the list but which they considered important.

The results from the questionnaire showed that all five areas were important/very important to the residents of the village.

The percentage of people who thought an area was important/very important ranged from 80% for area 5 (“The open and rural feel of our village ...”) up to 91% for area 1 (“The river, river bridges and river valleys ...”).

**Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment**

A Landscape Character Assessment is an accepted and recognised method for understanding what the landscape is like today, how it came to be like that, and how it may change in the future. As such, it describes and classifies the recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that differentiate one landscape from another. It is its character that makes each landscape distinct and gives each area its particular sense of place.

The landscape character approach considers that all landscapes are valuable and seeks to protect their essential character. The purpose of landscape character assessment is to help ensure that change and development does not undermine whatever is characteristic or valued about a particular place, and ensure that ways of improving the character of a place can be considered.

In order to determine the Oakley Village Landscape Character Assessment, the NDP group used the principles identified in the Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Landscape Character Assessment (April 2014) pages 69-73 “**3B Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley”**.

Using this as an “umbrella” document a more detailed local assessment was carried out of the village and its setting within the surrounding landscape.

The **Oakley Landscape Character Assessment** read together with the Bedford Borough LCA is therefore intended to provide a comprehensive landscape evidence base and development guidelines which will underpin future planning and development decisions in the village.

**Introduction**

Situated approximately 4 miles north-west of Bedford, Oakley village consists of approximately 900 dwellings, with a population of 2,500 people.

The village lies on the River Great Ouse which meanders in a large oxbow to form the northern, western and much of the southern parish boundary. Meanwhile, the eastern boundary is formed by the main A6, which separates Oakley from the neighbouring village of Clapham.

To the north east, the parish boundary crosses the A6 to incorporate Judges Spinney and the southern and eastern edge of Browns Wood before returning to re-join the River Great Ouse.

As such, Oakley is the gateway to many lovely walks along the Ouse valley.

The village is currently of sufficient population to sustain a well-used Post Office/village shop, a beauty salon, an upholsterer, a local pub, a very active sports and social club, two churches, a café, a day centre for the elderly plus a pre-school and both lower and middle schools.

Over the past 10 years, the parish council has encouraged limited growth of small industrial units at various locations in the parish which help to provide local employment for some residents.

In addition, significant additional housing development has taken place and approximately 60 new dwellings have been built in the village – a +7% increase. These developments have incorporated a number of social and low cost housing units.

**Development Guidelines**

The Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment (BBLCA) adopted in May 2014 states that ‘The overall landscape strategy for the *Oakley – Great Ouse Limestone Valley* character area is to **conserve** the historic limestone villages, the riverside features such as stone bridges and mills and the tranquil river corridor flanked by woodland belts.’

It continues, ‘Elements to be **enhanced** would be the field boundaries ..., the management/restoration of the riverside pastures/grassland ..., and the integration of recent development with the surrounding rural landscape...’.

The conservation and enhancement of the character of Oakley village and surrounding area is clearly a key priority when considering future development. The areas identified for special mention are as follows.

1. **The River Valley**

The River Great Ouse and its valley are the most dominant and important features of the surrounding landscape. Not only are these features important in terms of natural beauty but the river and its valley are also extremely important in terms of biodiversity (BBLCA – Landscape Strategy).

The BBCA landscape management guidelines state that it is important to ‘conserve, enhance and create areas of floodplain landscape with flood meadows and marshes where appropriate’ (3B.1.17). Similarly, the same guidelines recommend the need to ‘conserve and enhance the riparian vegetation that defines the course of the Great River Ouse, with opportunities for enhanced habitat management and restoration’ (3B.1.18).

It is of particular importance therefore that the entire river and river valley areas in the parish are protected from development and that positive action is taken to enhance the area in terms of woodland planting and habitat management in line with the recommendations in the Landscape Strategy.

1. **The Limestone Bridges**

**2.1)** **The ‘Two Bridges’ approach into Oakley from Bromham.**

This distinctive entrance to the village, with the lovely views across the meadows to Oakley Church, epitomises the village. Through both their picturesque setting and their historical value, with their lovely views across the meadows to Oakley Church and up and down the river, these bridges form a key part of the character of Oakley.

**2.2) Stafford Bridge.**

The BBLCA states, ‘Consider views to, and the landscape setting of the limestone bridges e.g. the instance of Stafford bridge, where linear extension out of Oakley extends to within close proximity of the crossing point’ (BBLCA 3B.1.25). As such, the landscape setting of the area surrounding Stafford Bridge should be protected from further development. This area should encompass both Linch Furlong and the allotments as well as the immediate area surrounding the bridge.

1. **The approach into Oakley from Bromham**

The BBLCA states, ‘consider views to, and the landscape setting of the limestone bridges’ (BBLCA 3B.1.25). Similarly, it also states, ‘conserve views to the church towers’ (BBLCA 3B.1.26).

When coupled with the need to maintain the river and surrounding landscape highlighted in 1) above, these statements identify a distinct need to both conserve and enhance the approaches to the village from both Bromham and Pavenham.

This area should include the floodplains and fields on both sides of the river on the approach to St. Mary’s church, as well as the views both to and from the church. Also included should be the views to and from Oakley House, located further along the same stretch of the river.

We would urge that consideration be given to this area being designated a conservation area

1. **Long Views to and from Oakley**

The protection of long views to and from the village is highlighted in section 3B.1.24 of the BBLCA, which states, ‘conserve the natural floodplain landform and long views – avoid further introduction of embankments in the landscape which interrupt the landform and restrict views’.

The escarpment that runs along the village east from Westfield Road, behind the High Street and along Highfield Road up to Browns Wood provides superb views in both a northerly and southerly direction of both the north Bedfordshire villages and back towards Bedford itself. These views are particularly stunning from the east end of the escarpment from areas such as Judges Spinney.

From the north, the majority of the village lies unseen behind the escarpment, leaving clear uninterrupted views of the river and surrounding countryside. Similarly, the open countryside to the west offers beautiful views across the river valley.

It is strongly recommended that future development is not permitted that will spoil these views.

1. **Coalescence with Neighbouring Villages**

The need to maintain Oakley as a separate entity, avoiding coalescence with other villages is highlighted in BBLCA (3B.1.23), which states, ‘improve settlement edges to maintain separation between settlements’.

The current area of open landscape east of Station Road opposite the schools, extending from the Old Station in the north, to Lovell Road in the south, should ideally be protected from development to prevent coalescence with Clapham.

1. **Linear Extension of Oakley**

The BBCA clearly states that any future development should ‘conserve the nucleated stone built villages and avoid linear extension along roads which may threaten the individual identity of the villages’ (BBLCA – 3B.1.22).

This statement would question any further development of the village towards Stafford Bridge, particularly since the Planning Inspector, when agreeing to the housing development in Pavenham Road, said that “this should mark the most northerly point of linear development”.

The same principle should apply to Church Lane between St. Mary’s church and the two bridges, where any development would clearly detract from the entrance to the village.

With regard to the approach from Highfield Road, any development there would not only damage the long views highlighted above but would also only add to an already busy traffic flow.

Similarly, any developments along Lovell Road towards Clapham could be regarded as a threat to the separate identity of Oakley.

1. **Conserve Rural Village Identity**

The village of Oakley is situated in a rural setting and has many features that cause it to have a distinct identity. In order to conserve this identity, the following areas need to be protected.

**7.1)** The BBLCA (3B.1.19) states that the village should, ‘conserve the hedgerow and hedgerow trees, enhancing the network where hedgerow has become degraded or damaged’.

Hedgerows are a distinct feature of the village and need to be both protected and encouraged. Any attempt to replace hedgerows with e.g. walls or fencing should be actively discouraged.

Similarly, the trees in the village should be maintained and replaced as necessary. The tree-lined nature of Church Lane is a particular feature of note.

**7.2)** The BBLCA (3B.1.21) also states that the village should, ‘conserve the rural character of the minor roads’.

It has long been recognised that the roads in the village are narrow and, at times, very busy. Despite this, it is recommended that, should development occur in the village or surrounding villages, the character of the minor roads is protected.

**7.3)** The BBLCA (3B.1.21) continues, ‘discourage the introduction of suburban style materials e.g. kerbs and extensive lighting’.

The use of excessive signage, often associated with suburban locations should be avoided where possible. In addition, where new features such as lighting are introduced, these should be sympathetic with the local setting, in line with the village identity.

**7.4)** When considering any potential development of the village, it is important that the character of the nucleated stone built village is conserved (BBLCA – 3B.1.22).

This should also take into account the very open, semi-rural character of the centre of the village, especially around the village green. The open plan front gardens and the areas of public open space e.g. Grange Close also contribute to the character of the village.

Elsewhere, semi-wooded areas of the village and the hedges lining the principal roads and enclosing front gardens provide a more rural feel to the village and should be conserved.

1. **Wooded Areas**

There are 2 important wooded areas within the Parish of Oakley which provide open access to the public. Both are managed by Bedford Borough Council with the support of “The Friends of Browns Wood”, a group of local volunteers.

**8.1)** **Browns Wood**

Located approximately 1.000 metres from the centre of Oakley on the eastern edge of the parish boundary, Browns Wood and its millennium extension is situated on the highest ridge in Bedford Borough, with beautiful views west and north across the River Great Ouse. Many church spires and towers in the surrounding villages of north Bedfordshire can be seen from this vantage point.

To the south there are views to the Greensand Ridge and over the Bedford urban area. Different parts of the wood are designated as an Ancient Woodland, Nature Reserve and a County Wildlife site.

Browns Wood and its setting is recognised in the BBLCA as part of the important Wooded Wolds a recognised landscape feature in North Bedfordshire very sensitive to development. The immediate setting around the perimeter of the woodland is also important to protect.

It is accessible from Oakley by public footpaths running along the banks of the River Great Ouse and from Highfield Road. There are also footpaths and bridleways from other surrounding villages which allow access to the woodland.

Browns Wood is extremely important in terms of biodiversity with many different varieties of birds, wildflowers, butterflies and moths.

Regularly frequented by residents of Oakley and by walkers from surrounding villages, it is highly valued as a place of beauty, quiet relaxation and tranquility.

**8.2) Judges Spinney**

Situated on the southern edge of Highfield Road, Judges Spinney is a small but important area of woodland accessed by a footpath from Oakley.

It is situated on the same ridge as Browns Wood with similarly impressive views to the north over the River Great Ouse valley towards Milton Ernest, Sharnbrook and Pavenham. Long views to the south take in Bedford and the Greensand Ridge.

Planted between 1826 and 1831, the trees include ash, beech (unusual in clay lands, due to the Dewponds on the ridge), elm, hornbeam, field maple and wild cherry.

Friends of Browns Wood regularly work on this woodland to maintain its excellent condition. Walkers from both Oakley and Clapham, as well as motorists who stop and have their lunch there, take advantage of the views from the edge of the spinney. Judges Spinney is a County Wildlife site due to the rich flora that can be seen in the wood and fauna that can heard whilst visiting the spinney.

1. **Village Enhancement.**

As well as conserving the identity of the village, it is important that the benefits of living in Oakley are enhanced. With regard to landscape issues, there is a clear need to enhance access to local attractions, as stated by BBLCA (3B.1.27), ‘Enhance access and recreation including new river crossings, links with parks, nature reserves and local attractions’.

Specifically, the following areas should be considered.

**9.1) Provide pedestrian access across the river, near to the ‘two bridges’.**

Currently, the only way for pedestrians to cross the river at the two bridges is via the bridges themselves. Since these are narrow, frequently very busy and have no footpath, this can be extremely dangerous. It also makes it almost impossible for a disabled person or a mother with a pushchair to cross.

A pedestrian bridge would allow safe access to the walks on the west side of the river for both villagers and ramblers who want to cross the river at this point.

**9.2) Provide access to nature reserves and local attractions.**

Currently, both Judges Spinney and Browns Wood are under-used as village attractions since they cannot be easily accessed on foot by a direct route from the village. The use of these natural attractions could be significantly increased through the introduction of an access path along Highfield Road up to Browns Wood.

G. Sansom

January 2017