

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 working days have passed and the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

- (1) That the transfer of the former Riseley Lower School Playing Field, Church Lane, Riseley to Riseley Parish Council on a 99-year lease, under the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy, be approved on the basis outlined in the attached report prepared to accompany the decision.**
- (2) That the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy be authorised to finalise the details of the lease in conjunction with the Head of Legal Services.**

2. Date of decision

20 November 2025

3. Reasons for decision

To return surplus, unused land to productive use for the benefit of the community and to address unmet needs identified by the Parish Council.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

1. Do nothing – The Council does not have the resources to develop, maintain or manage these playing fields and they have remained unused since being handed back to the Council in 2017. The Parish Council proposal will ensure that the playing fields are made available for the benefit of the community and satisfy unmet needs in the village.
2. Sell the land – As a playing field with limited potential for development, the land has minimal value and is currently a financial liability for the Council. The community benefit exceeds the value of the land and the Parish Council's proposals may support the Council's proposal to dispose of the former Margaret Beaufort Middle School playing fields for development by providing enhanced playing fields that are better located for the village.

5. How decision is to be funded

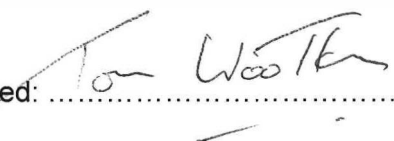
Responsibility for the maintenance and development of the playing fields to meet community need will transfer to Riseley Parish Council.

6. Conflicts of interest

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision

Not Applicable

Signed: 

Date: **20 November 2025**

Name of Decision Taker: **Mayor Tom Wootton**

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published:20 November 2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:1 December 2025.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

Bedford Borough Council – Report of the Mayor

Date: 20 November 2025

Report by: Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy

Subject: COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER: FORMER RISELEY LOWER SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD, CHURCH LANE, RISELEY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes the transfer of the former Riseley Lower School Playing Field to Riseley Parish Council on a 99-year lease under the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy for use as a playground and public open space.
- 1.2 It further sets out the Parish Council's plans for developing the site to improve the sports and recreation facilities for the village as and when funding becomes available.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayor is requested to consider and, if satisfied, to:

- 2.1 **Approve the transfer of the former Riseley Lower School Playing Field, Church Lane, Riseley to Riseley Parish Council on a 99-year lease under the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy.**
- 2.2 **Delegate authority to the Head of Regeneration, Property and Local Economy to finalise the details of the lease in conjunction with the Head of Legal Services.**

3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To return surplus, unused land to productive use for the benefit of the community and to address unmet needs identified by the Parish Council.

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The former Riseley Lower School closed in 2017 as part of the 3-2 tier reorganisation of schools when the new Church of England primary school on the northern edge of Riseley opened. The site of the school buildings was owned by the Diocese of St. Albans and have been sold for residential redevelopment. The playing fields comprising and total area of 0.5ha are in the Council's ownership and were leased to the Diocese until the school closed.
- 4.2 The car park attached to the field was temporarily used by the developers of the adjoining school land, but the field has been unused since closure of the lower school.
- 4.3 There has been interest from the community in taking over the land since shortly after closure of the school; however, this did not develop into a serious proposal until late 2024.

5. DETAILS

- 5.1 Riseley Parish Council has submitted a formal request for the Lower School playing field and car park to be transferred on a 99-year lease as a Community Asset Transfer, with the goal of benefitting the community, particularly its younger residents
- 5.2 In its request, the Parish Council stated that the transfer of this asset would offer the following benefits and opportunities:
 - (a) Enhancing community facilities – The transfer presents a strategic opportunity to merge the school playing field with the 1.8ha Riseley Village playing fields, creating a more expansive communal open space. The redundant school car park could serve as additional off-road car parking for visitors to the village playing field, and the Church addressing parking congestion issues in the area.
 - (b) New Right of Way – The Parish Council proposes creating a new right of way that would provide residents of Church Lane and Kings Close with direct access to the playing field and children's play areas thus improving access to community facilities.
 - (c) Youth-focused development – Riseley's current playing field supports football and cricket, predominantly for adult use, but provision for young adults is limited. The aim will be to use the former school playing field as an area that meets their needs more fully. Potential provision includes an outdoor gym, outdoor table tennis table and an all-weather 5-a-side pitch.

- (d) Maintaining and enhancing open spaces – Improvement of the school playing field provides an opportunity to compensate for the potential loss of open space in the village through the development of the former Margaret Beaufort school playing. This space is not available for general community use, and neither is the all-weather pitch and the new primary school. The Parish Council's plan will, therefore, constitute a gain for the community.
- (e) Provision for future community development – The Riseley Neighbourhood Plan and community consultations have indicated that strong support for a new community centre or hub, particularly with a focus on young adults, The former lower school playing field will serve as a future location for such a facility, potentially accommodating the Riseley Children's Centre and Community Hub that currently operates from a small converted garage showroom.
- (f) Community engagement and support – The Riseley Neighbourhood Plan also points to a strong community interest in new facilities. A focus on young adults could complement the established offering for children at the existing playing field and contribute towards community cohesion. A [website](#) has been set up which provides young people with the opportunity to shape the plans for the former school playing field.

5.3 The Parish Council's request has been assessed against the criteria established in the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy 2012. The land in question meets the definition of an asset used for community benefit and the Parish Council is an eligible organisation. Officers have concluded that the Parish Council's proposals will ensure that the land is developed and managed for the benefit of the community and that they have demonstrated the need for the proposed facilities. The improvements will be funded by the Parish Council or external funding and, if the development of the former Margaret Beaufort playing fields proceeds, s106 contributions may provide resources to develop some of the right of way and facilities. The Parish Council could also direct any CIL receipts into the proposed improvement of the playing field. Detailed business plans for the proposed facilities will develop as funding opportunities arise and holding the lease will put the Parish Council into a stronger position in respect of grant applications. As the playing field has been unused for several years, there is work required to bring it up to and keep it at a usable standard and the proposal is to do this through use of volunteers. The regular grass-cutting will be added to the existing contract for the existing village playing field and the cost of this will be marginal.

5.4 The former lower school playing field is designated as Village Open Space in the Bedford Borough Council Allocations and Designation Local Plan 2013 and given protection through Policy AD40. Policy CF2 of the Riseley Neighbourhood Plan states that:

- Existing designated open spaces as shown on the Policies Map will be protected from development.
- Proposals which would reduce the quality or quantity of recreational facilities will only be permitted where the existing facilities are re-provided to a better quality or quantity in an appropriate location.

- The provision of new recreational facilities and spaces will be encouraged and supported. Priority should be given to the equipment and facilities preferred by residents in the consultation, particularly those for children and those that promote activity and well-being

The Parish Council's proposals are consistent with this policy.

5.5 Since the Parish Council has demonstrated a long-term vision for the former playing fields it is recommended that the Council grants a 99-year lease as requested in the original proposal. The lease would be consistent with the Council's standard community asset transfer lease and the key terms to note are as follows:

- Rent – £1, if demanded.
- Permitted use – playground and public open space, multi-use games area and community building all for use by the general public.
- Alienation – Assignment, sub-letting and charging will be prohibited; however, the tenant will be permitted to share occupation with community associations and other organisations using the premises under temporary hire agreements.
- Repairs and Insurance – The lease will be granted on a full-repairing and insuring basis.
- Alterations – Will be permitted with consent not to be unreasonably withheld. Construction of a building will be permitted subject to prior approval of the plans by the Council as landowner and obtaining all necessary statutory consents such as planning permission and building control approval.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 Do nothing – The Council does not have the resources to develop, maintain or manage these playing fields and they have remained unused since being handed back to the Council in 2017. The Parish Council proposal will ensure that the playing fields are made available for the benefit of the community and satisfy unmet needs in the village.
- 6.2 Sell the land – As a playing field with limited potential for development, the land has minimal value and is currently a financial liability for the Council. The community benefit exceeds the value of the land and the Parish Council's proposals may support the Council's proposal to dispose of the former Margaret Beaufort Middle School playing fields for development by providing enhanced playing fields that are better located for the village.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Legal Issues

Under s123 of the Local Government Act 1972, any disposal by the Council of an asset in excess of 7 years (including leasehold interests) must obtain “best consideration”; however this was subsequently amended under the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent Order (England) 2003, which gave Council’s wider powers to dispose of land and property assets at less than market value where it could be demonstrated that they promoted the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area; and provided that the unrestricted undervalue of the asset to be disposed of and the consideration for the disposal does not exceed £2,000,000 (two million pounds). Riseley Parish Council’s proposal meets the ‘well-being test’ and, as a playing field with limited development potential, the value of the former Riseley Lower School playing field does not exceed £2,000,000.

The Council’s Legal Services team will be instructed to put the lease in place, and the form of lease will be consistent with the requirements of the Community Asset Transfer Policy 2021. This lease will ensure that the Parish Council is obliged to use the site for the purposes set out in its proposal.

7.2 Policy Issues

The grant of the lease to Riseley Borough Council is proposed under the Council’s Community Asset Transfer Policy 2021. In the introduction, the Policy states that ‘since the Quirk Report 2007 and the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, there has been a growing interest by both local Councils and the CVS in transferring property assets into community ownership. Councils and central government have recognised that community assets can provide better outcomes, offer better value as well as create greater freedoms for partner organisations to tailor services and draw down external investment.’

The proposal is also consistent with the following priorities set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan, 2024/2025 – 2027/2028:

- Supporting individuals and families.
- Protecting the environment.
- Promoting health and well-being

The former lower school playing field is one of seven areas designated as Village Open Spaces in the Bedford Borough Council Allocations and Designation Local Plan 2013 and given protection through Policy AD40 which states *'Development will not be permitted on land designated as a village open space or view unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for designation are not compromised or that other material considerations outweigh the need to retain the Village Open Space or View undeveloped.'* This policy is reiterated in Policy CF2 of the Riseley Neighbourhood Plan, which is set out in paragraph 5.4 above. The Parish Council's proposals for the land are consistent with requirement that *'the provision of new recreational facilities and spaces will be encouraged and supported. Priority should be given to the equipment and facilities preferred by residents in the consultation, particularly those for children and those that promote activity and well-being'*

7.3 Resource Issues

The Council does not have the resources to develop, manage and maintain these play fields in the way proposed by the Parish Council, which is in a significantly stronger position to raise the required funding and the has the resources to manage the facilities alongside the existing village playing field.

7.4 Risks

The key risk is that the Parish Council will not have the resources to develop, manage and maintain the playing fields. The lease will include obligations on them to ensure that the property is used for the purposes and the Council's Estates team will monitor the lease as part of its day-to-day duties. If the Parish Council defaults on its obligations or ceases to exist, the lease will include forfeiture provisions that will result in the playing field reverting to the Council. Property Services will be responsible for monitoring use of the playing fields which will be achieved through periodic site inspections and checking websites.

By granting the lease, the Council will be managing the risks of continuing to hold the land by transferring responsibility for management and maintenance. The Parish Council will be responsible for insuring against risks of holding the land, e.g. third party and public liability insurance together with ensuring that appropriate cover and safety inspections are arranged for any play equipment installed on the site. They will also be responsible for arranging buildings insurance for any buildings erected on the land.

7.5 Environmental Implications

The Parish Council states that maintaining and enhancing the site as public open space is one of the objectives of the project, therefore, the proposal will have positive impact on the environment.

7.6 Equalities Impact

In preparing this report, consideration has been given to the Council's statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

The Community Asset Transfer Policy states that applicants must be 'open to and able to demonstrate an inclusive approach to the wider community that embraces diversity, works to improve cohesion and reduce inequalities'.

The Parish Council is subject to the same statutory obligations as the Council and has recently reviewed its Equality Policy Statement. In its proposal, the Parish Council has stated that the facilities will be available to the whole community and the proposal demonstrates the following set out in the Policy:

- That the asset will be accessible to all sections of the community.
- How the community will be involved in the delivery of the project.
- How the use of the proposals for the land and building will encourage community cohesion.
- The contribution the proposal will make to community safety.

7.7 Impact on Families

Meeting the unmet needs of young people and families is a key objective of the Parish Council's proposal.

7.8 Community Safety and Resilience

Improving Community cohesion is a key objective of the proposal and the plan for a footpath and additional parking will support community safety.

7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing

The Parish Council's proposal will have a positive impact on health and well-being in the village

8. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME

8.1 The following Councillors and Officers have been consulted in preparing this report:

Members of the Executive
Corporate Leadership Team
Service Director - Public Realm, Highways & Waste Management
Head of Planning and Building Control
Community Engagement Officer
Finance
Legal Services

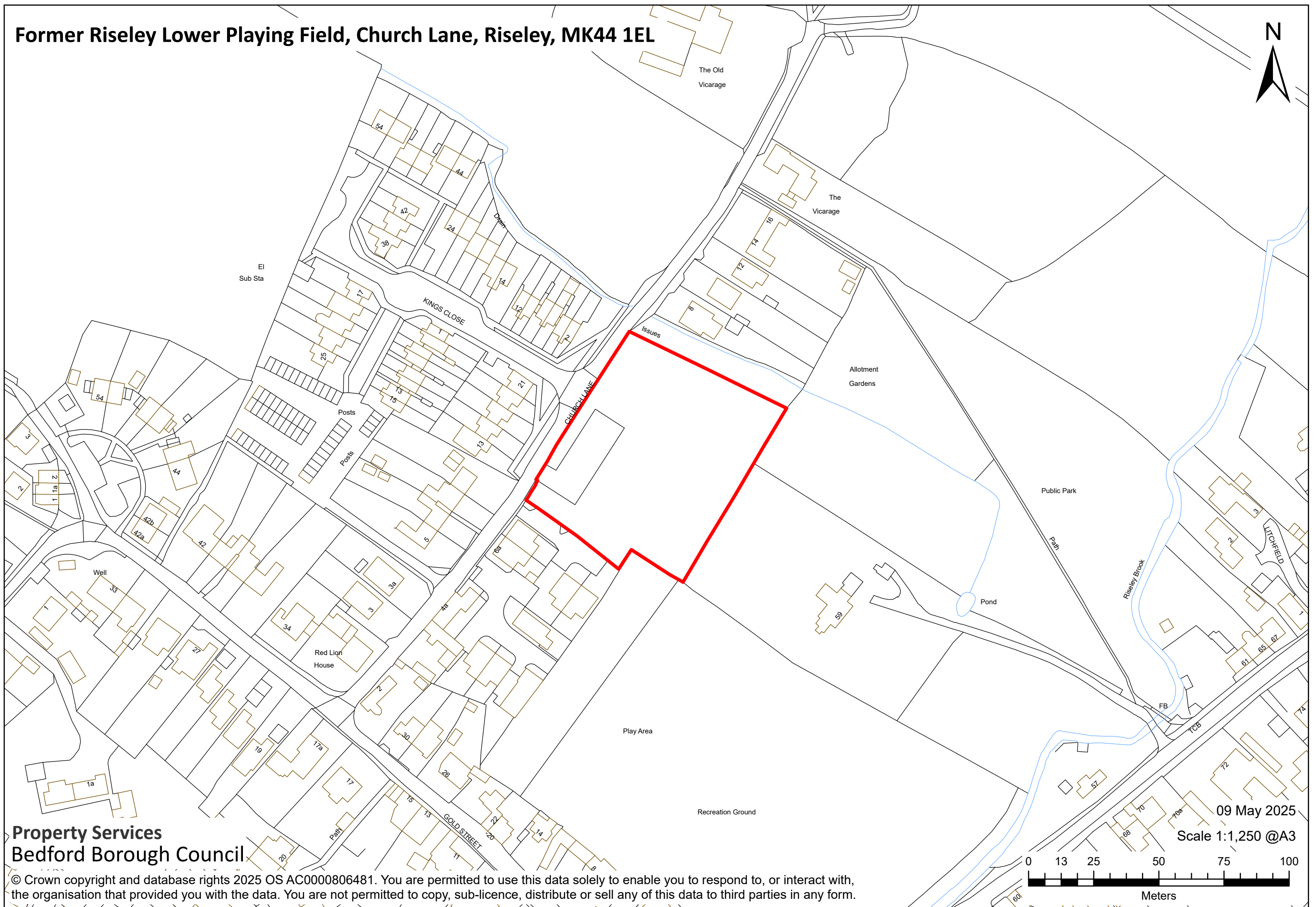
9. WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS

9.1 Cllr Martin Towler has been consulted as Ward Councillor as well as a member of the Executive and has confirmed his support for the recommendations contained in this report.

10. CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

Report Contact Officer:	Margaret Birtles, Manager for Asset and Development
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	None
File Reference:	None
Previous Relevant Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	Community Asset Transfer Policy 2021
Appendices:	A: Former Riseley Lower School Playing Field Location Plan

Former Riseley Lower Playing Field, Church Lane, Riseley, MK44 1EL



Property Services
Bedford Borough Council

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09 May 2025

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