

**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 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 days have passed and the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

**1. Description of decision**

- (1) To make modifications to the Cople Neighbourhood Plan in line with the recommendations set out in the examiner's report (Appendix A) and that as modified (Appendix B), the Plan meets the basic conditions.**
- (2) That the formal Decision Statement (Appendix C) be published by 25 December 2025 in order to comply with the statutory deadline, and to inform those interested about the Council's decision.**
- (3) That arrangements to progress the Plan to the referendum stage of plan preparation are made.**
- (4) That the designated Cople Neighbourhood Area represents the appropriate geographical area to be covered by the referendum.**

**2. Date of decision**

10 December 2025

**3. Reasons for decision**

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the examination of the Cople neighbourhood plan; to explain the examiner's recommended modifications to the plan and to set out the Council's response to those modifications. The Council must decide whether to progress the plan to referendum and in doing so, decide the area over which the referendum should take place.

**4. Alternatives considered and rejected**

Consideration has been given to the need for modifications not proposed by the examiner. It has been determined that no such modifications are required in order for the Cople Neighbourhood Plan to meet the basic conditions. Consideration has also been given to the need to extend the referendum area beyond the neighbourhood area but it has been determined that this is not necessary.

**5. How decision is to be funded**

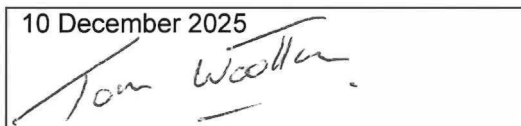
Once the date for the referendum is published, a claim for £20,000 from MHCLG can be made in the next available claim window. This represents a contribution towards the Council's costs associated with fulfilling its duty to assist the Parish in the preparation of its plan, and the costs associated with the examination process (including the examiner) and the referendum. Any costs in excess of £20,000 will need to be borne by the Council, though it is not anticipated that the examination process and the referendum combined will be more than this amount. Costs associated with assisting the neighbourhood plan group to prepare their Plan are funded from the Plans and Strategies Reserve.

**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

10 December 2025



Signed 

Date:

**10 December 2025**

Name of Decision Taker:

**Cllr. Andrea Spice**

**Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity**

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

Date decision published: .....10December2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in: .....19December2025.....

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

**Bedford Borough Council – Report to Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity**

**Date of Report: 10 December 2025**

**Report by: Head of Planning & Building Control**

**Subject:     COPLE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

**1.     EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1    Neighbourhood plans are statutory development plans produced by parish / town councils or neighbourhood forums. Cople Parish Council has produced a neighbourhood plan for the Cople parish area.
- 1.2    The Plan was submitted to Bedford Borough Council on 22 May 2025 and, in line with regulatory requirements, was subject to a six-week consultation (30 June – 11 August 2025). It has since been formally examined by an independent examiner.
- 1.3    The examiner has produced a report (**Appendix A**) which recommends that the Plan is modified in order to meet legal requirements and is then progressed to a referendum of people who live within the designated neighbourhood area.
- 1.4    Bedford Borough Council must decide:
  - Whether to progress the Plan to a referendum and
  - Whether to modify it (in the ways recommended by the examiner or otherwise) or
  - Whether to refuse the Plan.
- 1.5    Bedford Borough Council must consider each of the examiner's recommendations on the content of the Plan and decide what action to take. If the Plan is to progress to referendum, the Bedford Borough Council must also decide whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area, which in this case is Cople Parish.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity is asked to consider this report and if satisfied agree:

- (1) To make modifications to the Cople Neighbourhood Plan in line with the recommendations set out in the examiner's report (Appendix A) and that as modified (Appendix B), the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- (2) That the formal Decision Statement (Appendix C) be published by 25 December 2025 in order to comply with the statutory deadline, and to inform those interested about Bedford Borough Council's decision.
- (3) That arrangements to progress the Plan to the referendum stage of preparation are made.
- (4) That the designated Cople Neighbourhood Area represents the appropriate geographical area to be covered by the referendum.

## **3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To give information about the outcome of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan examination and to secure agreement to progress the Cople Neighbourhood Plan to referendum, which is the next stage of the plan-making process.

## **4. THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The Examiner's report has been received and this has recommended that the Cople Neighbourhood Plan proceed to referendum (subject to modifications). The next stage in the process is to obtain approval to proceed to referendum, which is subject to Executive approval.

## **5. DETAILS**

- 5.1 Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act 2011. New powers allow qualifying bodies (parish or town councils, or neighbourhood forums in areas without parish or town councils) to produce neighbourhood plans which enable communities to set planning policies for their area. Once adopted, neighbourhood plans become part of Bedford Borough Council's statutory development plan and must be taken into account alongside Bedford Borough Council's local plans and national policy when planning applications are determined.

- 5.2 Producing a neighbourhood plan allows parish and town councils to increase the amount of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds they receive from developments within their area from 15% to 25%, incentivising the production of plans, especially those that propose growth.
- 5.3 The stages of preparation of a neighbourhood plan are similar to those for the preparation of a local plan. They are summarised in the following table.

<b>Preparing a neighbourhood plan</b>		
<b>Stage</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Neighbourhood Area Designation	Application by parish council, publicity & decision by BBC	Complete
Prepare draft neighbourhood plan	NP group/parish council with assistance from others	Complete
Pre submission consultation (Regulation 14)	NP group/parish council (6 weeks minimum)	Complete
Finalise plan in light of comments made	NP group/parish council	Complete
Submit plan to the local planning authority	NP group/parish council	Complete
Pre-examination consultation (Regulation 16)	BBC (6 weeks minimum)	Complete
Examination	Examiner appointed by BBC (agreed by NP group / parish council)	Complete
<b>Consider examiner's recommendations</b>	<b>BBC and NP group / parish council</b>	<b>We are here</b>
Referendum	Organised by BBC	
Plan 'made' (part of the development plan)	BBC	

### **The Examination**

- 5.4 Neighbourhood plans must be examined by a suitably qualified independent person, appointed by Bedford Borough Council and agreed by the qualifying body.
- 5.5 The neighbourhood plan examiner's role is limited to considering whether the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other relevant legal requirements. The examiner does not consider whether the plan is sound.
- 5.6 Legislation requires that Bedford Borough Council considers each of the recommendations made by the examiner in his/her report and decides what action to take in response. This decision must be published within five weeks of the receipt of the examiner's report.

### **The Referendum**

- 5.7 Anyone who can usually vote in a local election and who is resident in the referendum area can vote in a neighbourhood plan referendum. The plan must pass by a simple majority and there is no minimum turnout. If a simple majority is achieved Bedford Borough Council will be required to ‘make’ (adopt) the plan unless it breaches EU or human rights legislation.
- 5.8 Bedford Borough Council must hold a referendum within 56 working days from the date that the decision to take the plan forward to a referendum is published. Bedford Borough Council must also publish notice that the referendum will take place not fewer than 28 days before the referendum date.

### **The Cople Neighbourhood Plan**

<b>Progress of Cople Neighbourhood Plan</b>	
Neighbourhood area designated	30 July 2015
Draft plan consultation (Regulation 14)	14 September – 31 October 2024
Post submission consultation (Regulation 16)	30 June – 11 August 2025
Submitted for examination by BBC	19 August 2025
Examiner’s report received	

- 5.9 The following extract from the examiner’s report summarises her findings. The full report can be found at **Appendix A**.

#### **Main Findings – Executive Summary**

From my examination of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan/CNP) and its supporting documentation including the representations made, I have concluded that subject to the policy modifications set out in this report, the Plan meets the Basic Conditions.

I have also concluded that:

- The Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body – Cople Parish Council;
- The Plan has been prepared for an area properly designated on 30 July 2015 – the Parish of Cople, as shown on Figure 1 (page 5) of the Neighbourhood Plan;
- The Plan specifies the period to which it is to take effect, 2024 to 2035; and
- The policies (as proposed to be modified) relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.

I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum on the basis that it has met all the relevant legal requirements.

I have considered whether the referendum area should extend beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates and have concluded that it should not.

5.10 The examiner proposes recommendations as follows:

<b>Proposed modification number (PM)</b>	<b>Submitted Neighbourhood Plan Para no/ other reference</b>	<b>Examiner's Recommended Modification</b>	<b>Reason for recommendation</b>
PM1	Page 14 Policy RC1	<p>Change the fourth bullet point to a new clause.</p> <p>Amend new clause by deleting “defined” and inserting “as listed below and shown”. Also delete “specific views”.</p> <p>Change the existing five bullet points which list the views to a numbered list from 1 – 5.</p> <p>Amend the description of each numbered view as follows:</p> <p>“1 Views from Sheerhatch Woods and Moxhill Farm towards Cople, Willington and Cardington Hangers</p> <p>2 Views from Water End across the fields to Moxhill Farm</p> <p>3 Views of Cardington Hangers across the fields from Cople Playing Fields</p> <p>4 Views from Woodlands Close across Northill Road and fields towards Sheerhatch Woods</p>	<p>In the interests of clarity.</p> <p>To identify the views which relate to the bullet points.</p>

		5 Views of the Church from Willington Road, Northill Road, Grange Lane, Cople Playing Fields and Millenium Wood are to be protected in the Neighbourhood Plan.”	
PM2	Page 37 Policies Map	Delete the current symbol for views and replace with arrows as shown on the OS Map accompanying the CPC’s response to examiner’s questions. Number the arrows from 1 – 5 in accordance with the amended Policy RC1.	So that someone unfamiliar with the area can identify the views.
PM3	Page 18 Policy NE3	In the first sentence delete “including any future development brought forward in the draft Local Plan 2040”; and change “targeting” to “targeted”.  In the first bullet point add after A603 “from Dog Farm towards Octagon Farm and the Land at Bedford River Valley Park.”	The Local Plan 2040 has now been withdrawn.  For clarification of the location of the site.
PM4	Page 21 Policy SD2	In the second clause of the Policy amend the second sentence as follows: delete after “Retrofitting” and insert “of Listed Buildings is likely to require Listed Building Consent.”	The wording relates to planning applications and the wording is not helpful.
PM5	Page 22 Policy SD3	In the second clause of the Policy delete “or use of impermeable surfaces”.  Add new sentence “All new areas of hardstanding in developments must be permeable surfaces.”	To add in an amendment put forward by Anglian Water
PM6	Page 24 Policy HE1	Delete the first clause of the Policy.	Duplicate text.



PM7	Page 25 Policy HE2	<p>Delete the second clause of the Policy.</p> <p>Retain the first five words of the first clause. Insert colon after “that”.</p> <p>In the third clause delete the first five words.</p> <p>On a new line after the colon insert a bullet point and add the third clause from “they---”.</p> <p>On a new line insert a second bullet point and add the first clause from “they---”</p>	Scheduled Monuments are subject to policy set out in the NPPF and considered unnecessary to include reference to this.
PM8	Page 29 Policy TRW2	In the first sentence of the Policy delete “keep traffic speeds low and”.	Traffic speeds are not a land use matter.
PM9	Page 30 Policy C1	In the first clause after “facility” insert “as listed below”.	To ensure the policy is clear which facilities are being referred to in the policy.
PM10	Page 33 Policy LBA1	At the end of the second bullet point delete “where relevant” and insert “where relevant” in the third bullet point after “taken”.	In the interests of clarity and a modification suggested by Cople Parish Council in response to the Examiner’s questions.

- 5.11 These recommendations serve to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions. Officers, therefore, recommend that they are agreed and the Cople Neighbourhood Plan be amended accordingly.
- 5.12 The examiner explains that it is open to the Parish Council to make minor modifications to the Plan such as attending to typographical errors (para 4.38 of the examiner’s report). A small number of these have been identified. Officers recommend however that no further changes are required in order for the Plan to meet the basic conditions and therefore if agreed, no further consultation is necessary before proceeding to referendum.

- 5.13 The Cople Neighbourhood Plan incorporating the examiner's proposed modifications and other minor modifications can be found at **Appendix B**.

### **Examination Area**

- 5.14 The examiner considered whether or not the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates. She concluded that the Plan as modified would have no policies or proposals which she considered significant enough to have an impact beyond the designated Neighbourhood Plan boundary. As a result she recommends that the boundary for the purposes of any future referendum on the Plan should be the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area. Officers agree with this conclusion and recommend that the neighbourhood area as designated should be agreed as the referendum area.

### **Next Steps**

- 5.15 Bedford Borough Council must publish a statement (**Appendix C**) setting out with reasons its decision on each of the examiner's recommendations. Preparations must then be made to hold the referendum.

## **6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

- 6.1 Consideration has been given to the need for modifications not proposed by the examiner. It has been determined that no such modifications are required in order for the Cople Neighbourhood Plan to meet the basic conditions. Consideration has also been given to the need to extend the referendum area beyond the neighbourhood area but it has been determined that this is not necessary

## **7. KEY IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Legal Issues – relevant legal power**

The scope of a neighbourhood plan examination is set out in Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The examiner must consider:

- Whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions;
- Whether the plan complies with provisions under s.38A and s.38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). These are:

- it has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body, for an area that has been properly designated by the local planning authority;
  - it sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land;
  - it specifies the period during which it has effect;
  - it does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development';
  - it is the only neighbourhood plan for the area and does not relate to land outside the designated neighbourhood area;
  - whether the referendum boundary should be extended beyond the designated area, should the plan proceed to referendum; and
- Such matters as prescribed in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

The examiner must also consider if the neighbourhood plan is compatible with the Convention on Human Rights. On receipt of the examiner's report, the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require that a Local Planning Authority must publish a decision statement setting out what actions will be taken in response to each of the examiner's recommendations.

If the authority proposes to make a decision which differs from that recommended by the examiner, it must notify relevant people and invite representations for a period of 6 weeks. The local planning authority may, if it considers it appropriate to do so (for example if Bedford Borough Council's proposed changes are significant or controversial), refer the issue to further independent examination and receive a further report. Once any period for further representations is over, the local planning authority must issue its final decision within 5 weeks and proceed to referendum.

In this case it is recommended that the examiner's proposed amendments are accepted. If this is agreed, the decision statement relating to the Cople Neighbourhood Plan must be published by 25 December 2025.

The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 (as amended) cover all aspects of organising and conducting polls. The Referendum question is 'Do you want Bedford Borough Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Cople Parish to help it decide planning applications in the Neighbourhood Area'.

Decisions to proceed to referendum and to 'make' the neighbourhood plan are taken by Bedford Borough Council's Executive rather than Full Council.

## **7.2 Policy Issues**

Neighbourhood plans are examined to ensure that they meet the 'Basic Conditions' which are set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The 'Basic Conditions' ensure, amongst other things, that appropriate regard has been had for local and national policies. In order to meet the Basic Conditions, the neighbourhood plan must:

- Have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area (in this case saved policies in the Local Plan 2002, continuing policies in the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 and the Local Plan 2030);
- Be compatible with and not breach European Union (EU) obligations; and
- Meet prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.

Regulation 32 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) prescribes a further Basic Condition for a neighbourhood plan. This requires that the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

## **7.3 Resource Issues**

The Government provides funding to assist councils to fulfil their neighbourhood planning duties. Once the date for the referendum is published, a claim for £20,000 can be made in the next available claim window. This represents a contribution towards Bedford Borough Council's costs associated with fulfilling its duty to assist the Parish Council in the preparation of its plan, and the costs associated with the examination process (including the examiner) and the referendum. Any costs in excess of £20,000 will need to be borne by Bedford Borough Council, though it is not anticipated that the examination process and the referendum combined will be more than this amount. Costs associated with assisting the neighbourhood plan group to prepare their Plan are funded from the Plans and Strategies Reserve.

## **7.4 Risks**

The recommendations in the examination report are not binding, but if Bedford Borough Council chooses not to agree with the examiner's recommendations without a sound reason, there is a risk of legal challenge which could lead to reputational damage and financial costs. Whilst there is also a risk of legal challenge if Bedford Borough Council does follow the examiner's recommendations, it must be considered that the risk is lower.

Any modifications made to the content of the plan should be done so only in order to make the plan meet the basic conditions and other legislative requirements. Making modifications for any other reasons (other than formatting or spelling corrections) could lead to a legal challenge.

## **7.5 Environmental Implications**

The Cople Neighbourhood Plan was screened for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) by Cople Parish Council with assistance from Bedford Borough Council. The SEA screening concluded that it was unnecessary to undertake SEA. The examiner supported this conclusion.

The Plan was further screened to determine if Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was necessary. It concluded that the Plan would not have a significant effect on European sites either alone or in combination. Natural England, which was consulted on the Plan, did not dispute this conclusion. The examiner found no reason to disagree.

## **7.6 Equalities Impact**

In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to Bedford Borough 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.

A relevance test for equality has been completed. The equality test determined that consideration as to whether the Cople Neighbourhood Development Plan should progress to referendum has no relevance to Bedford Borough Council's duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. An equality analysis for this decision is not needed.

However, the development of the Cople Neighbourhood Development Plan is relevant to Cople Parish Council's General Equality Duty. The Parish Council is responsible for discharging their duty. An equality analysis has been carried out by the Parish Council and is included in the Basic Conditions Statement.

## **7.7 Impact on Families**

The Neighbourhood Plan will have no direct impact on families.

## 7.8 Community Safety and Resilience

The Neighbourhood Plan will have no impact on community safety and resilience.

## 7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing

The Cople Neighbourhood Plan will not have a direct impact on health and wellbeing.

## 8. **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME**

8.1 The following Councillors, Council units, Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity  
Corporate Leadership Team  
Relevant Managers

## 9. **WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

9.1 Not applicable.

## 10. **CONTACTS AND REFERENCES**

Report Contact Officer:	Sonia Gallaher Senior Planner <a href="mailto:Sonia.gallaher@bedford.gov.uk">Sonia.gallaher@bedford.gov.uk</a>
File Reference:	None
Previous Relevant Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix A - Examiner's Report Appendix B - Cople Neighbourhood Plan showing modifications Appendix C – Decision Statement



**Intelligent Plans**  
and examinations

# **Report on Cople Neighbourhood Development Plan 2024 - 2035**

**An Examination undertaken for Bedford Borough Council with the support of Cople Parish Council on the May 2025 submission version of the Plan.**

Independent Examiner: Wendy Burden BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

Date of Report: 19 November 2025

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## Contents

Main Findings - Executive Summary .....	4
1. Introduction and Background .....	4
Cople Neighbourhood Development Plan 2024-2035 .....	4
The Independent Examiner .....	5
The Scope of the Examination .....	5
The Basic Conditions.....	6
2. Approach to the Examination.....	7
Planning Policy Context .....	7
Submitted Documents.....	7
Site Visit.....	8
Written Representations with or without Public Hearing .....	8
Modifications .....	8
3. Procedural Compliance and Human Rights.....	8
Qualifying Body and Neighbourhood Plan Area .....	8
Plan Period.....	9
Neighbourhood Plan Preparation and Consultation .....	9
Development and Use of Land .....	9
Excluded Development.....	10
Human Rights.....	10
4. Compliance with the Basic Conditions .....	10
EU Obligations .....	10
Main Issues.....	11
General Issues of Compliance of the Plan .....	11
Regard to National Policy and Advice .....	11
Contributes to the Achievement of Sustainable Development.....	12
General Conformity with Strategic Policies in the Development Plan .....	12
Specific Issues of Compliance of the Plan Policies .....	13
Rural Character.....	13
Natural Environment.....	14
Sustainable Development .....	14
Historic Environment .....	14
Transport and Rights of Way .....	15
Community Facilities.....	15
Aspirations, Implementation and Monitoring .....	16
Factual and Minor Amendments and Updates .....	16



5. Conclusions ..... 16

    Summary ..... 16

    The Referendum and its Area ..... 17

    Overview ..... 17

Appendix: Modifications ..... 18

## **Main Findings - Executive Summary**

From my examination of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan/CNP) and its supporting documentation including the representations made, I have concluded that subject to the policy modifications set out in this report, the Plan meets the Basic Conditions.

I have also concluded that:

- The Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body – Cople Parish Council;
- The Plan has been prepared for an area properly designated on 30 July 2015 – the Parish of Cople, as shown on Figure 1 (page 5) of the Neighbourhood Plan;
- The Plan specifies the period to which it is to take effect, 2024 to 2035; and
- The policies (as proposed to be modified) relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.

I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum on the basis that it has met all the relevant legal requirements.

I have considered whether the referendum area should extend beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates and have concluded that it should not.

## **1. Introduction and Background**

### **Cople Neighbourhood Development Plan 2024-2035**

- 1.1 The Neighbourhood Plan Area for Cople was approved by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) on 30 July 2015. Consultation and preparation of the CNP has been led by the Cople Parish Council (CPC).
- 1.2 The Cople Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (CNPSG) worked on the CNP between 2015 and 2018 followed by a pause, principally as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. The CNPSG was reformed in 2021 comprising volunteers from the community and Parish Councillors. The first meeting of the reformed CNPSG was held online in February 2021 and monthly meetings continued online until the first in person meeting was held in August 2021 when Covid restrictions were eased. Full details of community engagement are set out in the Consultation Statement (May 2025).
- 1.3 The Neighbourhood Plan Area comprises the Parish of Cople which covers some 864 hectares. The Parish had a population of some 783 residents on Census Day 2021.

- 1.4 Cople village is located about 3 miles east of Bedford and is surrounded by other smaller settlements. Access to Bedford is via the A603 which runs east-west from the A421. The A421 also runs east-west through the north of the Parish linking the A1 with the M1. Bedford station is about 3.9 miles away and the station at Sandy is some 6.7 miles.
- 1.5 The CNP is required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the statutory Development Plan, which includes the saved policies of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan (ADLP) 2013 and the Bedford Local Plan 2030 (BLP 2030) adopted in 2020. A review of the BLP was taken forward by BBC with the Bedford Local Plan 2040 (BLP 2040) being submitted for examination in July 2022. However, in November 2023 the Planning Inspector raised significant concerns about the soundness of the BLP 2040, and in June 2025 he advised that the submitted plan was no longer capable of being made sound, recommending that it be withdrawn. As a consequence, the BLP2040 was formally withdrawn by BBC on 8 October 2025 so will not proceed to adoption. Accordingly, the extant development plan for the purposes of assessing the Neighbourhood Plan against the Basic Conditions<sup>1</sup> remains the saved ADLP policies and the BLP 2030. Whilst I am aware that the PPG provides advice in relation to an emerging Local Plan<sup>2</sup>, given the BLP 2040 has now been withdrawn, I give limited regard to that advice.

### The Independent Examiner

- 1.6 As the CNP has now reached the examination stage, I have been appointed as the examiner of the Plan by BBC, with the agreement of CPC.
- 1.7 I am a chartered town planner and retired government Planning Inspector, with more than 50 years of experience in the private and public sectors. I am an independent examiner, and do not have an interest in any of the land that may be affected by the draft Plan.

### The Scope of the Examination

- 1.8 As the independent examiner I am required to produce this report and recommend either:
- (a) that the neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum without changes; or
  - (b) that modifications are made and that the modified neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum; or
  - (c) that the neighbourhood plan does not proceed to a referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 1.11 below.

<sup>2</sup> See PPG Reference ID: 41-009-20190509.

1.9 The scope of the examination is set out in Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)('the 1990 Act'). The examiner must consider:

- Whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions.
- Whether the plan complies with provisions under s.38A and s.38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) ('the 2004 Act'). These are:
  - it has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body, for an area that has been properly designated by the local planning authority;
  - it sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land;
  - it specifies the period during which it has effect;
  - it does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development'; and
  - it is the only neighbourhood plan for the area and does not relate to land outside the designated neighbourhood area.
- Whether the referendum boundary should be extended beyond the designated area, should the plan proceed to referendum.
- Such matters as prescribed in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended)('the 2012 Regulations').

1.10 I have considered only matters that fall within Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act, with one exception. That is the requirement that the Plan is compatible with the Human Rights Convention.

### The Basic Conditions

1.11 The 'Basic Conditions' are set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act. In order to meet the Basic Conditions, the neighbourhood plan must:

- Have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area;

- Be compatible with and not breach European Union (EU) obligations (under retained EU law)<sup>3</sup>; and
- Meet prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.

1.12 Regulation 32 of the 2012 Regulations prescribes a further Basic Condition for a neighbourhood plan. This requires that the making of the Neighbourhood Development Plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Approach to the Examination

### Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 As set out in paragraph 1.5 above, the current Development Plan for the purposes of the examination of the CNP comprises the saved policies of the ADLP and the BLP2030 (which was adopted in January 2020).
- 2.2 Planning policy for England is set out principally in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and is accompanied by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which offers guidance on how this policy should be implemented. All references in this report are to the latest iteration of the NPPF dated December 2024 and the accompanying PPG.

### Submitted Documents

- 2.3 I have considered all policy, guidance and other reference documents I consider relevant to the examination, alongside those submitted. These include the:
- Cople Neighbourhood Plan 2024-2035, May 2025;
  - Cople Neighbourhood Plan Basic Conditions Statement, May 2025;
  - Cople Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Statement, May 2025;
  - Cople Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report, June 2024
  - Cople Neighbourhood Plan Shadow Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA), April 2024;
  - Cople Design Guidance and Codes, September 2023;
  - Proposed Local Green Space Designations for Cople, July 2023;
  - Cople Parish Green Infrastructure Plan;
  - The Regulation 16 Responses;
  - Procedural matters and questions letter from examiner 28 August 2025; and

<sup>3</sup> The existing body of environmental regulation is retained in UK law.

<sup>4</sup> This revised Basic Condition came into force on 28 December 2018 through the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018.

- Response from CPC to examiner's questions with attachments on 13 September 2025 and from BBC on 2 September 2025.<sup>5</sup>

## Site Visit

- 2.4 I visited the Neighbourhood Plan Area unaccompanied by any interested party on the 1 October 2025. I carried out a general review of the area in terms of its setting and character in order to familiarise myself with it and visited relevant sites and areas referenced in the Plan and evidential documents.

## Written Representations with or without Public Hearing

- 2.5 This examination has been carried out on the basis of the written submissions (written representations). The Regulation 16 consultation responses clearly articulated the objections to the Plan and presented arguments for and against the Plan's suitability to proceed to a referendum. In addition to the Regulation 16 responses, I have received further necessary clarifications through an exchange of correspondence with CPC and BBC during the examination.<sup>6</sup> As a result, in terms of the appropriate level of scrutiny for the CNP, I consider that hearing sessions are not necessary.

## Modifications

- 2.6 Where necessary, I have recommended modifications to the Plan (**PMs**) in this report in order that it meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. For ease of reference, I have listed these modifications separately in the Appendix.

# 3. Procedural Compliance and Human Rights

## Qualifying Body and Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 3.1 The Cople Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by CPC, which is the qualifying body for an area that was designated by BBC on 30 July 2015.
- 3.2 It is the only Neighbourhood Plan for Cople Parish and does not relate to any land outside the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area.

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<sup>5</sup> View at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/cople-neighbourhood-plan>

<sup>6</sup> See paragraph 2.3 above.

## Plan Period

- 3.3 The Plan specifies the period to which it is to take effect on the front cover which is 2024 - 2035. The CNP covers a period which extends beyond that of the adopted BLP 2030. The emerging, and now withdrawn, BLP would have covered the period to 2040. Notwithstanding this, it may be appropriate to review the CNP at such time that a new BLP may be adopted.

## Neighbourhood Plan Preparation and Consultation

- 3.4 Following the approval by BBC of the designation of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan Area, as shown on page 5 of the submitted CNP, CPC is responsible for providing leadership and managing the process for the preparation of the CNP together with the CNPSG.
- 3.5 Preparation of the CNP was suspended in 2018 as a result of a lack of volunteers but work started again in May 2021 with online meetings until August 2021 once Covid restrictions were lifted. The CNP is based on evidence from surveys, expert reports and local consultations.
- 3.6 The pre-submission draft of the CNP was presented to the CPC meeting on the 19 February 2024. The Regulation 14 consultation was held from 1 April 2024 to 31 May 2024 with a second pre-submission consultation from 14 September to 30 September 2024 to allow BBC the opportunity to comment.
- 3.7 All responses were carefully considered at meetings of the CNPSG and have been used to inform the submission version of the Plan which was submitted under Regulation 15 to BBC for consultation in accordance with Regulation 16 of the 2012 Regulations. The Regulation 16 consultation ran from 30 June to the 11 August 2025. Some 16 responses were received, including a late response, which have been forwarded to me. I have had regard to all the comments made in those submissions as part of the examination process.
- 3.8 I am satisfied that a sufficiently transparent, fair and inclusive consultation process has been followed for the CNP. Due regard has been had to the advice in the PPG on plan preparation and engagement, and I consider that the CNP is procedurally compliant in accordance with the legal requirements.

## Development and Use of Land

- 3.9 With the modifications which I recommend, the Plan sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land in accordance with s.38A of the 2004 Act.

## Excluded Development

- 3.10 The Plan does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development'.<sup>7</sup>

## Human Rights

- 3.11 No issues have been raised in relation to any potential breach of Human Rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998). From my independent assessment, I see no reason to find otherwise.

## 4. Compliance with the Basic Conditions

### EU Obligations

- 4.1 The CNP has been screened to determine whether or not the Plan requires Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the outcomes are set out in the June 2024 report.<sup>8</sup> The SEA screening report concludes that the CNP is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and that a SEA is not therefore required. None of the statutory consultees disagreed with this conclusion.
- 4.2 A Shadow Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was carried out for CPC in April 2024 by AECOM.<sup>9</sup> The assessment considered likely significant impacts on those Habitats Sites which were in the closest proximity with relevant impact pathways involved. All Habitats were over 20km from the CNP area.
- 4.3 The test of Likely Significant Effect (LSE) was undertaken in relation to the 14 CNP policies. The policies do not allocate any form of development and relate to development management. It is concluded that they are not associated with potential linking pathways to Habitats Sites. Natural England concurred with this conclusion.
- 4.4 From my own review of the SEA and HRA Screening Reports, including the comments received from the statutory bodies that responded, I have no reason to disagree with the conclusions of the screening assessments. I am therefore content that the CNP is compliant with those EU obligations that are relevant to the Plan, as retained in UK law.

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<sup>7</sup> See section 61K of the 1990 Act.

<sup>8</sup> View at:

<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=r1cYM15xdhEHVnSpIWRz2w%3d%3d&name=SEA%20screening%20CopleNP%20Redacted.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> View at:

<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=HHpsgmO8UgVSvIaCqEg0Ug%3d%3d&name=Cople%20Habitat%20Regulations%20Assessment.pdf>

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## Main Issues

4.5 I have approached the assessment of compliance of the CNP with the remaining Basic Conditions as two main matters:

- General issues of compliance of the Plan, as a whole; and
- Specific issues of compliance of the Plan policies.

## General Issues of Compliance of the Plan

### Regard to National Policy and Advice

- 4.6 The CNP sets out the background and context to its preparation and provides a broad description of the history, the character and the appearance of the Plan area, with its village rich in heritage and its rural setting. The vision statement for the CNP set out on Page 10 has been developed to reflect the priorities of the community and helps set the future of the Parish.
- 4.7 This vision was developed by the CNPSG following public consultation and makes it clear what the Plan is aiming to achieve. Grounded in the vision, there are ten detailed Neighbourhood Plan Aims set out on Page 11. These provide the basis for the development of the 14 policies in the CNP.
- 4.8 The Plan policies are founded in the themes identified in the vision and generally relate to the matters identified in NPPF Paragraph 29 as appropriate matters to be addressed through non-strategic policies in neighbourhood plans. The CNP is positively prepared, with an aspirational but deliverable approach to the development of the Parish, and it has been shaped through early, proportionate and effective engagement within the local community.
- 4.9 In general, the policies of the CNP are clearly written and unambiguous.<sup>10</sup> In my letter of the 28 August, I raised some matters of clarification which include issues raised in response to the Regulation 16 consultation. CPC has provided detailed and helpful responses to my questions. I have paid close regard to all the comments which I have received both in the Regulation 16 submissions and in response to my letter.<sup>11</sup> As a result, I have concluded that recommendations for amendment or deletion are necessary to some policies in order to have due regard to national policy and advice<sup>12</sup> and to ensure general conformity with the strategic policies of the Development Plan in order that the Basic Conditions are met. I deal with matters of compliance in my commentary on each Policy later in this report.

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<sup>10</sup> PPG Reference ID: 41-041-20140306.

<sup>11</sup> See Paragraph 2.3 above with reference to these documents.

<sup>12</sup> In order to meet the Basic Conditions, the Plan must have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, as noted in Paragraph 1.11 above.

- 4.10 Having regard to the work which has been carried out and the range of policies which have been formulated to meet its vision and aims, I am satisfied that the CNP demonstrates a positive approach to the implementation of the strategic policies of the Development Plan for the area. Subject to the modifications which I recommend, the CNP has also had regard to national policy and advice.

#### Contributes to the Achievement of Sustainable Development

- 4.11 The policies of the submitted CNP have regard to the economic, social and environmental needs of the local community. Furthermore, the Plan accords with Paragraph 29 of the NPPF since it generally complements and delivers the strategic policies for the area.
- 4.12 The three overarching objectives of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are integral to the core aims of the CNP. Together with the policies of the BLP 2030, the policies and proposals of the CNP contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in accordance with national policies and advice.
- 4.13 Subject to the detailed comments and modifications which I set out below for individual policies, I am satisfied that the Plan makes a positive contribution to the achievement of the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

#### General Conformity with Strategic Policies in the Development Plan

- 4.14 I set out the planning policy context for the CNP in paragraphs 1.5, 2.1 and 2.2 above. As part of the statutory Development Plan, the BLP 2030 sets out the strategic policies to be taken into account in the CNP. The policies in the submitted CNP are required to be in general conformity with those that are strategic in the statutory Development Plan in order to meet the Basic Conditions.
- 4.15 Although a draft neighbourhood plan is not tested against the policies in an emerging local plan, the reasoning and evidence informing the local plan process may be relevant to the consideration of the Basic Conditions against which a neighbourhood plan is tested.<sup>13</sup> However in view of the abandonment of the emerging BLP 2040, I give limited regard to that advice (as set out in paragraph 1.5 above).
- 4.16 In the adopted BLP, Cople is a village with a settlement policy area (SPA) subject to Policy 5S. This allows for modest development within the SPA to help maintain the social and economic viability of the settlement. All development proposals are to be considered in terms of their impact on the character of the settlement. Outside the SPA, Policy 7S applies to development in the countryside and sets out the circumstances in which

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<sup>13</sup> PPG Reference ID: 41-009-20190509.

development might be acceptable. This includes development which is in accordance with neighbourhood development plans.

- 4.17 The strategic policies set out the conditions in which new housing may be permitted within the village of Cople and surrounding countryside. There is no requirement for the allocation of sites for residential development and the CNP does not seek to allocate new land for housing development in the Neighbourhood Plan period.
- 4.18 The adopted Local Plan at Paragraph 8.84 refers to the assessment of sites and consequent designation as Local Green Spaces (LGS). No change was made in the BLP 2030 to the four areas of Village Open Space designated through Policy AD40 of the ADLP. However, it remains open for LGS to be designated through neighbourhood plans. A detailed appraisal of six sites was carried out and the CNP designates five sites as LGS in Policy C2 which I address later in my report.
- 4.19 The CNP has generally been developed with proper regard to the strategic direction and policies of the BBC Development Plan. BBC has been involved throughout the preparation of the CNP and is generally supportive of its policies. Subject to some detailed comments and the modifications which I recommend to the Plan's policies below, I am satisfied that the CNP is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Development Plan.

## Specific Issues of Compliance of the Plan Policies

### Rural Character

- 4.20 **Policy RC1** seeks to protect the rural character of Cople Village and its surroundings. The first part of the Policy sets out the requirements to ensure that new development respects and maintains the character of the village and its surroundings. From bullet point four, the Policy is concerned with the protection of views within the settlement and its surroundings. It is clear that a high value is placed by local people on the views within and without the village. The setting of the village within an open rural landscape and the close connection between village and countryside is of particular importance, and the protection of important views accords with Policy 37 of the BLP 2030.
- 4.21 The views are listed from bullet points 5 – 9, but they are not numbered on the Policies Map which means it is difficult for someone unfamiliar with the village to identify the view which relates to each of the bullet points. In the response to my questions, CPC has included an ordnance survey (OS) map which identifies the views by means of arrows and numbers (5-9). I propose modifications to change bullet point 4 to a second clause within the Policy; to amend the wording of that new second clause of the Policy where necessary in the interests of clarity; then to number the views from 1 to 5 and amend the Policies Map to identify each view by the

number in the modified Policy and by the use of arrows as shown on the OS map **[PM1 and PM2]**.

- 4.22 Although there has been no technical analysis of the views, the Policy does not seek to prevent development within the views, but to ensure that development has no significant adverse impact on their visual quality and amenity. The identified views provide a local dimension to BLP Policy 28S Place making. With the modifications which I propose **[PM1 and PM2]**, I find that the Policy raises no issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.

#### Natural Environment

- 4.23 **Policy NE1** seeks to protect the landscape and rural character of the Parish and **Policy NE2** sets out requirements to promote biodiversity. These Policies raise no issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.
- 4.24 **Policy NE3** requires development within the Parish to contribute to Green and Blue Infrastructure as clarified in Paragraph 8.14 of the CNP. The reference in the policy text to the now withdrawn BLP 2040 should be removed. CPC clarified a spelling point in the second line of the Policy and also the content of the first bullet point. I recommend **PM3** accordingly.

#### Sustainable Development

- 4.25 **Policy SD1** relates to high quality design and raises no substantive issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.
- 4.26 **Policy SD2** regarding the provision of energy efficient buildings requires in the final sentence of Clause 2 that retrofitting relates to a planning application. CPC has agreed this is not helpful and can be deleted. I also recommend an amendment to refer only to Listed Buildings **[PM4]**.
- 4.27 **Policy SD3** deals with water management. CPC has agreed an amendment put forward by Anglian Water which I agree would ensure that the Policy contributes fully to sustainable development. I recommend a modification to the final sentence of Clause 2 and an additional sentence to incorporate the change **[PM5]**.

#### Historic Environment

- 4.28 **Policy HE1** identifies local heritage assets and seeks their protection and enhancement. There is repetition in the first and second clauses of the Policy. In the interests of clarity, I recommend that the first clause be deleted **[PM6]**.
- 4.29 **Policy HE2** deals with archaeology and Scheduled Monuments (of national significance), with sites identified in the BBC Historic Environment Record and recorded in the Green Infrastructure Plan.

- 4.30 Scheduled Monuments are subject to statutory protection and are subject to the policy set out in Paragraphs 212 – 215 of the NPPF. Paragraph 10.6 of the CNP identifies the five Scheduled Monuments within the Parish which are of national significance. In view of the protection provided by statute and national policy, it is unnecessary to include reference to these Scheduled Monuments in Clause 2 of Policy HE2. In consultation with BBC, it would be open to CPC to insert a reference to the relevant part of the NPPF in Paragraph 10.5 if considered to be appropriate. I recommend **PM7** to amend the Policy to delete the reference to Scheduled Monuments which are subject to national policy protection and to amend the remaining clauses to relate to other archaeological assets. With this modification, the Policy raises no issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.

### Transport and Rights of Way

- 4.31 **Policy TRW1** deals with the provision of car parking and raises no issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.
- 4.32 **Policy TRW2** makes reference to measures to keep traffic speeds low. Traffic speeds are not a land use matter to be included within a development plan. Traffic safety issues relating to the use of land are covered in the BLP 2030 Policy 31. I recommend **PM8** to remove the reference to traffic speeds to ensure compliance with the Basic Conditions.

### Community Facilities

- 4.33 **Policy C1** seeks to protect the use of community facilities in accordance with Policies 83 and 99 of the BLP 2030. To ensure that it is clear which facilities are being referred to in the Policy, I recommend the change put forward by CPC in their response to my questions [**PM9**].
- 4.34 **Policy C2** designates five areas as Local Green Space as shown on the Policies Map. A detailed assessment was undertaken of six sites against the criteria as set out in the NPPF.<sup>14</sup> It was considered that the site known as “Home Farm grassland area” did not meet the second of the criteria listed in the NPPF which requires that a site be “demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife;”.
- 4.35 I have visited each of the sites and considered the assessment undertaken for CPC in the preparation of the CNP. The land at “Home Farm” is clearly of some importance to those local residents who have written to object to its exclusion from the designation. However, whilst the grassland area is a pleasant green space and may well be home to wildlife, I agree with the conclusion of the assessment that it is not sufficiently special and locally significant to meet the second of the NPPF criteria. The site was

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<sup>14</sup> NPPF December 2024 Paragraphs 106 and 107.

designated for its views in the ADLP 2013 and this remains unchanged by the CNP. I find that the Policy raises no issues of compliance with the Basic Conditions.

- 4.36 **Policy LBA1** encourages the development of new small businesses and farm based operations subject to certain criteria. The Policy carries forward and accords with Policy 75 in the BLP 2030. In the interests of clarity, I include a modification as suggested by CPC in their response to my questions **[PM10]**.

### Aspirations, Implementation and Monitoring

- 4.37 Section 14 of the CNP sets out the aspirations expressed by residents in the 2022 survey; the improvements that could be made and the 21 aspirations in the Cople Green Infrastructure Plan. It then identifies the work which will be required to secure the implementation of the CNP, the funding and implementation mechanisms and future monitoring and potential timing of a review. Although I have taken note of the contents of Section 14 of the CNP, they will not form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area and are not therefore considered against the Basic Conditions.<sup>15</sup>

### Factual and Minor Amendments and Updates

- 4.38 Whilst I have not identified any typographical errors in the text of the CNP that would affect the Basic Conditions, I note that Policy C2 is not listed in the Contents (page 2) of the CNP. CPC may wish to correct this omission.
- 4.39 In addition, whilst I have recommended a formal amendment to Policy NE3 to remove the reference to the BLP 2040, there are a number of other references to the now withdrawn Local Plan in the supporting text of the CNP (I note paragraphs 1.2; 2.5 – 2.7; 8.15; 9.9; and 10.4). These can be addressed/removed as factual updates, as can any other minor non-material changes including amendments to the text consequential to the recommended modifications, in agreement between CPC and BBC.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

### Summary

- 5.1 The Cople Neighbourhood Plan has been duly prepared in compliance with the procedural requirements. My examination has investigated whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements for neighbourhood plans. I have had regard to all the responses made following consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan, together with the

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<sup>15</sup> PPG Reference ID: 41-004-20190509.

<sup>16</sup> PPG Reference ID: 41-106-20190509.

evidence documents submitted with the Plan in the course of my examination.

- 5.2 I have made recommendations to modify some of the policies to ensure that the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum.

### The Referendum and its Area

- 5.3 I have considered whether or not the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates.
- 5.4 The Cople Neighbourhood Plan, as modified, has no policy or proposals which I consider significant enough to have an impact beyond the designated Neighbourhood Plan boundary and which would require the referendum to extend to areas beyond the Plan boundary. I therefore recommend that the boundary for the purposes of any future referendum on the Plan should be the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area.

### Overview

- 5.5 The production of the CNP has undoubtedly required a high level of commitment and hard work by the Parish Council and other volunteers from the local community. This task has no doubt been made more difficult by the abnormal conditions arising from Covid-19. I commend the Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for their hard work and application in producing a well written and effective Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.6 I am satisfied that CPC has consulted with and taken into account the views of the local community, whilst seeking to protect the character and setting of Cople Parish as an attractive and historic neighbourhood within the countryside. As a result, the CNP, with the recommended modifications appended to my report, meets the Basic Conditions. The modified CNP has the potential to provide an effective Plan for the management of the future planning of Cople.

*Wendy J Burden*

Examiner



## Appendix: Modifications

The Proposed Modifications, as set out in PMs1 – 10 below, are necessary in order to meet the Basic Conditions.

Note: Some consequential renumbering, amendment to alphabetical listings etc within the Plan may be necessary as a consequence of the PMs.

<b>Proposed modification number (PM)</b>	<b>Page no./ other reference</b>	<b>Modification</b>
PM1	Page 14 Policy RC1	<p>Change the fourth bullet point to a new clause.</p> <p>Amend the clause by deleting “as defined” and inserting “as listed below and shown”. Also delete “specific views”.</p> <p>Change the existing five bullet points which list the views to a numbered list from 1 – 5.</p> <p>Amend the description of each numbered view as follows:</p> <p>“1 Views from Sheerhatch Woods and Moxhill Farm towards Cople, Willington and Cardington Hangers</p> <p>2 Views from Water End across the fields to Moxhill Farm</p> <p>3 Views of Cardington Hangers across the fields from Cople Playing Fields</p> <p>4 Views from Woodlands Close across Northill Road and fields towards Sheerhatch Woods</p> <p>5 Views of the Church from Willington Road, Northill Road, Grange Lane, Cople Playing Fields and Millenium Wood are to be protected in the Neighbourhood Plan.”</p>
PM2	Page 37 Policies Map	<p>Delete the current symbol for views and replace with arrows as shown on the OS Map accompanying the CPC’s response to examiner’s questions. Number the arrows from 1 – 5 in</p>



		accordance with the amended Policy RC1.
PM3	Page 18 Policy NE3	<p>In the first sentence delete "including any future development brought forward in the draft Local Plan 2040"; and change "targeting" to "targeted".</p> <p>In the first bullet point add after A603 "from Dog Farm towards Octagon Farm and the Land at Bedford River Valley Park."</p>
PM4	Page 21 Policy SD2	In the second clause of the Policy amend the second sentence as follows: delete after "Retrofitting" and insert "of Listed Buildings is likely to require Listed Building Consent."
PM5	Page 22 Policy SD3	<p>In the second clause of the Policy delete "or use of impermeable surfaces".</p> <p>Add new sentence "All new areas of hardstanding in developments must be permeable surfaces."</p>
PM6	Page 24 Policy HE1	Delete the first clause of the Policy.
PM7	Page 25 Policy HE2	<p>Delete the second clause of the Policy.</p> <p>Retain the first five words of the first clause. Insert colon after "that".</p> <p>In the third clause delete the first five words.</p> <p>On a new line after the colon insert a bullet point and add the third clause from "they---".</p> <p>On a new line insert a second bullet point and add the first clause from "they---"</p>
PM8	Page 29 Policy TRW2	In the first sentence of the Policy delete "keep traffic speeds low and".
PM9	Page 30 Policy C1	In the first clause after "facility" insert "as listed below".

PM10	Page 33 Policy LBA1	At the end of the second bullet point delete "where relevant" and insert "where relevant" in the third bullet point after "taken".
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# **COPLE**

## **Neighbourhood Plan**

### **2024-2035**

**~~Submission Version May 2025~~**

Version with modifications following the final Examiner's report. Deleted text shown as strikethrough and new text highlighted in yellow.

## Contents

Foreword.....	3
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Role of this Neighbourhood Plan .....	4
Process .....	4
European Legislative Requirements.....	4
Neighbourhood Area.....	5
<b>2. The Strategic Policy Context .....</b>	<b>6</b>
The National Planning Policy Framework .....	6
Sustainable development .....	6
Local Planning Documents .....	6
<b>3. Parish Description .....</b>	<b>7</b>
History and Heritage .....	7
Landscape.....	8
Education .....	9
Parish facilities .....	9
Local business, services and employment .....	9
<b>4. Consultation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Questionnaire.....	10
<b>5. Vision and Aims .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Sustainable Development .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7. Rural Character .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Natural Environment.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Policy RC1: Rural Character.....	14
Landscape.....	15
Policy NE1: Protecting the Landscape.....	15
Biodiversity.....	16
Policy NE2: Biodiversity.....	17
Green and Blue Infrastructure .....	17
Policy NE3: Green and Blue Infrastructure .....	18
<b>9. Sustainable Development .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Development within the Settlement Policy Area.....	18
Affordable Housing .....	19
High Quality Design.....	19
Policy SD1: High Quality Design .....	20
Sustainable Buildings and Construction.....	20
Policy SD2: Provision of energy efficient buildings .....	21
Water issues and infrastructure .....	21
Policy SD3: Water Management .....	22
<b>10. Historic Environment .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Heritage Assets .....	23
Archaeology .....	24
Policy HE1: Protecting and enhancing local built heritage assets.....	24
Policy HE2: Archaeology.....	25
<b>11. Transport and Rights of Way .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Car use and Parking.....	26
Policy TRW1: Car Parking .....	26
Provision for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders.....	26
Policy TRW2: Provision for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.....	29
<b>12. Community Facilities.....</b>	<b>30</b>

Community Facilities .....	30
<i>Policy C1: Community facilities .....</i>	<i>30</i>
<b><i>Policy C2: Local Green Spaces .....</i></b>	<b><i>31</i></b>
<b>13. Local Businesses &amp; Agriculture .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Policy LBA1: Local Employment and Agriculture .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<b>14. Aspirations, Implementation and Monitoring .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Aspirations .....	34
Implementation & Working in partnership.....	34
Funding and Implementation Mechanisms .....	35
Monitoring and Review .....	35
Annex 1: Maps.....	37
<i>Map 1. Cople Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Map 2. Cople Historic Environment Map .....</i>	<i>38</i>
Annex 2: Table of Aims and Policies .....	39
Annex 3: Glossary.....	40
Annex 4: Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHA) .....	45
Above Ground (Built) .....	45

## Foreword

The 2011 Localism Act has given communities the power to shape their future by putting local plans at the heart of the planning system. Under the Act, parish councils and local people can make decisions about future development, its design and location. Cople Parish Council made the decision to embrace these powers and to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan to encompass the whole Parish.

The main focus of any development is usually the visual aspect - especially in the case of new housing. Important though housing development is, our plan also includes policies that incorporate our aspirations for the future concerning issues such as green spaces, heritage assets, community facilities, the environment and economic activity - all things that directly impact our community.

The Plan, once adopted, will be a powerful document. It will enable us to make decisions for our future rather than having others decide for us. It will be legally binding and, as such, must be consulted by Bedford Borough Council and other authorities when determining future planning applications within our Parish.

Cople Parish Council applied for the designation of the parish of Cople as a Neighbourhood Area in May 2015. The application was approved by Bedford Borough Council on 30 July 2015.

A Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group worked on a Neighbourhood Plan between 2015 and 2018. The work of the Steering Group halted in 2018 as there were not enough volunteers available. A new Steering Group was formed in 2021 comprising volunteers from the community and Parish Councillors. The value and commitment of these people has been immense. Chapman Planning has advised the Steering Group throughout the process. The planning consultants AECOM produced the Design Code Report and Bedford Rural Communities Charity wrote the Green Infrastructure Plan and the Local Green Spaces Report in consultation with the Steering Group.

Thank you to all who contributed to the Cople Neighbourhood Plan, especially members of the Steering Group: Robert Bellew, Navin Sankersingh, Libby Sands, Linda Behan, Laura Saunders, Heidi Robinson, Jason Whaley, Anne Miller-Donkin and Ewa Wizesinska-Swistak.

Thank you also to Sally Chapman for her professional advice and enthusiasm.



# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. In 2011, the Localism Act introduced a new opportunity for local communities to shape their future formally as part of the planning system. Neighbourhood Plans can be produced by Parish Councils and when they have gone through all the required steps and processes, they become part of the development plan for the area. This means that any planning applications will have to take account of policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan. It also provides local people with a say on how land use and buildings can develop over time, such as protecting open spaces and improving local character.

## Role of this Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.2. This plan deals with the important land use and environmental qualities of the village that have been identified by the residents during various consultation events.
  - It sets out a clear vision for the village over the plan period, from 2025 to 2035. The end date has been chosen to give the policies in the NP a reasonable timeframe taking into account that the current Local Plan only covers up to 2030 with the emerging Local Plan up to 2040.
  - It refers to the issues raised and suggests how they can be approached through planning policies and aspirations.
  - It contains policies to protect the character of the village and Parish, to enable appropriate development.
  - It acknowledges that some development might be appropriate, provided it meets the policies in this plan and the current strategic plan for the whole district.
  - It contains maps of the Area (both in the Neighbourhood Plan and associated documents) showing the features protected for various reasons, for example, important local views, heritage assets and Local Green Spaces.

## Process

- 1.3. Producing a Neighbourhood Plan is a formal process involving several stages, governed by the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012, but critically important is that the Plan is developed with continuing community involvement. In order to rigorously test the policies of a Neighbourhood Plan, an independent Examination is carried out. The Neighbourhood Plan must conform to the following 'basic conditions':
  - consistency with local planning policy.
  - demonstrates how the plan will contribute towards sustainable development.
  - regard to national policy.
  - general conformity with strategic local policy.
  - contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.
  - compatibility with EU obligations.
  - meet prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.
- 1.4. Once the Plan has passed Examination, it is voted upon in a referendum by Parish residents and if a simple majority 'yes' vote is achieved, then the Neighbourhood Plan is 'made' by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and comes into force as a planning document with legal weight in decision-making.

## European Legislative Requirements

- 1.5. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Regulations (Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004) and the Habitats Regulations (Conservation of Habitats and Species

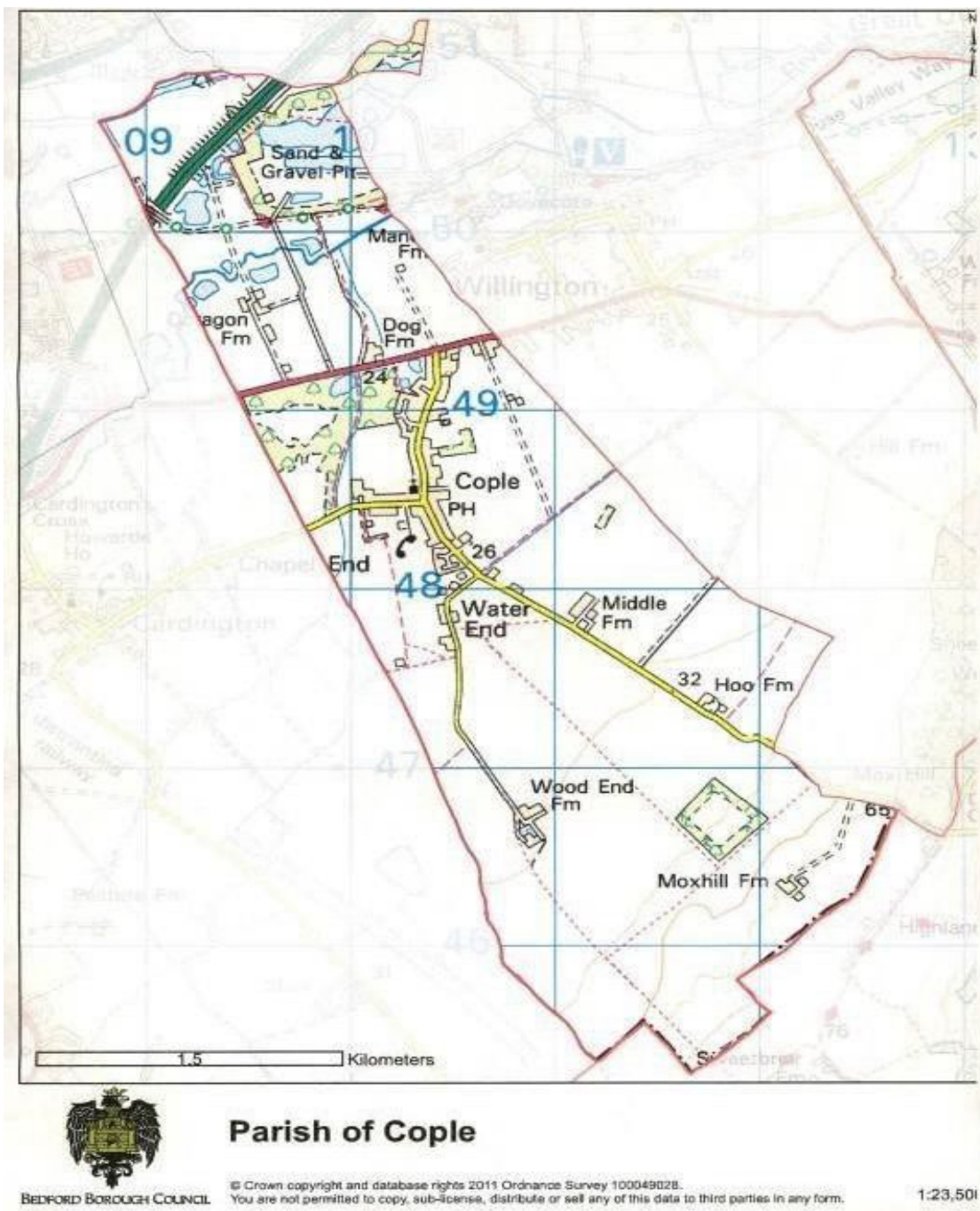


Regulations 2017) previously implemented the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directives in England. These Regulations continue to apply and have been transposed into English law. In most cases, Neighbourhood Plans do not require a full Assessment but must be screened to confirm that this is the case. For Cople, the Parish Council have undertaken screening to see if a full assessment is required for either set of Regulations and no full assessment is needed for the NP.

## Neighbourhood Area

- 1.6. Cople Parish Council resolved in May 2015 to proceed with making a Neighbourhood Plan and the Neighbourhood Area was approved as being the whole of the Parish (red line on Figure 1) on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

Figure 1





## 2. The Strategic Policy Context

### The National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (current version published December 2024, amended February 2025), sets out the Government's approach to sustainable development. At the heart of the NPPF is the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Essentially, it is about positive growth with economic, social and environmental gains being sought simultaneously through the planning system. Neighbourhood planning forms part of the NPPF approach to planning, to allow local communities to shape sustainable development within their area and to enable local communities to address their strategic needs and priorities. The NPPF states that Neighbourhood Plans should set out a positive vision for the future of the local area with planning policies to determine decisions on planning applications, including policies which set out the quality of development that should be expected for the area, based on stated objectives for the area's future and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. However, a Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Development Plan and plan positively to support these policies.

### Sustainable development

- 2.2. The Neighbourhood Plan must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development means 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (United Nations Brundtland Commission 1987).
- 2.3. The NPPF states that pursuing sustainable development, helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, ensuring a sufficient number and range of homes is provided in a well-designed, beautiful and safe built environment with accessible services and open spaces and to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.
- 2.4. Therefore, the aims, objectives, policies and proposals of the Neighbourhood Plan should be assessed against their ability to achieve sustainable development. Wherever possible the Neighbourhood Plan should actively promote the achievement of sustainable development.

### Local Planning Documents

- ~~2.5. The current Development Plan consists of the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030, Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013, Bedford Local Plan 2002, Minerals and waste local plans and made neighbourhood plans. BBC have embarked on their next Local Plan which will cover up to 2040, the Local Plan 2040 is currently at Examination.~~
- ~~2.6. The Local Plan 2030 Policy 3S – Spatial Strategy seeks to deliver sustainable growth and says the majority of rural growth will be delivered through neighbourhood plans. Policy 5S says that development within the Cople Settlement Policy Area will be acceptable in principle whilst Policy 7S sets out the strict tests required to allow development outside of the Settlement Policy Area. (Policies 5S-7S are proposed to be saved in the emerging 2040 Local Plan).~~
- ~~2.7. The emerging Local Plan 2040 includes an allocation partly within Cople Parish. Referred to as HOU11 Bedford River Valley Park, the proposed allocation includes a mix of residential, education, open space and recreational uses including the delivery of a watersports lake and strategic green infrastructure improvements. Whilst falling partially within the Cople neighbourhood plan area, the development site will be covered by its own masterplan and design code.~~

### 3. Parish Description

- 3.1. Cople is a village and a civil parish in Bedfordshire. It is located about 3 miles east of Bedford. The village is surrounded by several other small settlements. In the south of the parish there is the hamlet of Water End. There were 305 homes and 722 residents recorded at the 2011 census. As of 2021, the population had increased to 783.
- 3.2. Cople is accessed from Bedford via Bedford Road (A603), which runs east-west from the A421 to Willington, or Cople Road which runs parallel to the south. The A421 also runs east-west through the north of the parish, linking the A1 to the M1. The nearest railway stations are 3.9 miles away in Bedford and 6.7 miles away in Sandy.

### History and Heritage

- 3.3. The name COPLE is derived from the phrase “Cock Pool” which was a place where Sandy chickens were kept. Cople was mentioned in the Domesday Book. The parish of Cople lies within the ancient hundreds of Wixamtree.
- 3.4. The present Cople All Saints Church was built c.1430 and probably replaced an earlier church on the same site. It is very possible that a church was in Cople well back into Anglo Saxon times, but the earliest recorded vicar of Cople dates back to 1267 when the advowson of All Saints was granted to the Gilbertine priory of Chicksands by Simon de Beauchamp in the late 13th century and confirmed in the early 14th century by his son William. During the Civil Wars, Cople was in the Parliamentary camp as Sir Samuel Luke of Wood End was an important Parliamentarian. He raised a regiment for Parliament and commanded the garrison at Newport Pagnell. He was immortalised by Samuel Butler as Hidibras. The vicar was a staunch Royalist and was arrested on trumped up charges, fined £100 and sent to Newgate Prison.
- 3.5. During the 18th Century, John Wesley preached at Cople on 12th November 1766 and around 1770 Cople Toll House was built at the junction of the main A603 Bedford to Sandy road and the main Cople turn. It is one of only two tollhouses that exist in Bedfordshire.
- 3.6. In 1926 a new churchyard was laid out and consecrated.
- 3.7. In 1976 24 houses were built on the site of Cople House (destroyed by fire five years earlier) and the site renamed Woodlands Close. The original coach house survived the fire and has been restored and converted into three houses.
- 3.8. In 1994 Cople School celebrated its 125th anniversary with a week of celebrations including a Victorian Open Morning and a Foundation Ceremony.
- 3.9. Cople does not have a designated Conservation area, however it does have several Listed properties within the village. For further information, see section 10.6 and Policy HE2.
- 3.10. These are: -

- No. 10 Willington Road
- No. 19 Water End
- Nos 20 & 21 Water End
- No. 34A Northhill Road
- No. 47 Northhill Road
- No. 5 Northhill Road
- No. 5 Water End
- Nos. 6 & 8 Willington Road
- Bier House at No. 1, (coffin rest)
- Dog House (on A603)
- Kennel's Cottage, (No. 17 Willington Road)
- Mingalay, Water End
- Octagon Farmhouse
- All Saint's Parish Church - this was originally built soon after 1087 by the Beauchamp family and which later became part of Chicksands Priory. The list of Vicars maintained by the church dates back to 1237. All Saint's Church was rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, some parts of it a little earlier, by the families who owned the local manors. The church was extended in the first part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- The Croft, (near garage)
- The Five Bells Public House.



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- 3.11. There are five Scheduled Monuments sites in the north of the parish of Cople, (see Policy HE2 and section 10.6). There are also numerous Non-Designated Heritage Assets in the form of buildings and below ground assets, including cropmarks, across the parish (see Policy HE1 and Annex 4 for a full list).

## Landscape

- 3.12. The village is set in the centre of the Parish and is surrounded by relatively flat fields around 25m above sea level. At the southern end of the Parish, the land rises up towards the Greensand Ridge to a maximum of 70m above sea level.

## Education

- 3.13. Children in the village attend Sheerhatch Primary School but have to travel out of the village for secondary education at Bedford Academy or Mark Rutherford.



## Parish facilities

- 3.14. The village benefits from All Saints Church, and the Five Bells pub. There is also a Village Hall and the Cople Sports & Social Club, both adjacent to Cople Playing Fields which hosts sports pitches. There is no shop in Cople but there is a farm shop and a post office/convenience store in neighbouring Willington.

## Local business, services and employment

- 3.15. There are six working farms within the parish together with a second-hand car showroom, a car servicing and MOT garage and a garden machinery dealers. 15% of respondents to the survey run their own business. 45% of working people commute, primarily to Bedford, Milton Keynes and London.

# 4. Consultation

- 4.1. Two community engagement sessions were held in April 2016 to introduce villagers to the concept of a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.2. A Stakeholder Workshop was held in the Village Hall on 20th July 2016 to help create a Green Infrastructure Plan for Cople Parish. This event was followed by a drop-in session on 10th September and a 2nd Stakeholder Workshop on 28th September.
- 4.3. The Neighbourhood plan survey was distributed to all households in June 2022. The survey was completed by 104 households, representing 25% of all households in Cople.
- 4.4. The results of the survey were published on the Neighbourhood Plan webpage of the Parish Council website and were emailed to those respondents who had completed the survey online. A summary of the key responses was published in Cople News.
- 4.5. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group had a stand at the village picnic in Cople Playing Fields to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee at which maps of the parish were on display and members of the group were present to answer residents' questions and publicise progress.

- 4.6. Regular articles appear in the village magazine, Cople News, requests for additional volunteers have been made.
- 4.7. Regular progress reports are made to Cople Parish Council, including a full report at the Annual General Meeting which all villagers are invited to attend.
- 4.8. The minutes of Parish Council meetings, including the Neighbourhood Plan progress reports, are published in Cople News.
- 4.9. Minutes of Cople Neighbourhood Plan meetings are posted on the webpage of the Parish Council website.
- 4.10. Cople Parish Council held a Community Event on 16th September 2023 to promote village activities at which members of the group advised residents of progress and future developments.

## Questionnaire

- 4.11. The key responses to the questionnaire were: -
  - Over 90% agreed that Cople had good access to the countryside with attractive walks & views, felt safe with a relatively low crime rate and was quiet and peaceful.
  - 40% felt that there was currently a need for more housing in the village with 42% disagreeing.
  - 62% agreed that there would be a need for more housing over the next 20 years with 13% disagreeing.
  - If new homes were built smaller houses and starter homes were the preferred options.
  - 43% felt that it would be appropriate to build between 10 & 25 new homes, 20% less than 10, 18% between 26 & 50 with 15% wanting no new homes.
  - Not surprisingly the most used village facilities were Millenium Wood, Dog Field & Cople Pits.

## 5. Vision and Aims

- 5.1. The Vision and Aims of this Neighbourhood Plan have been carefully developed and refined by the Parish Council to reflect the priorities of the community and help set the future of the village. The Vision is the overall aim of the Neighbourhood Plan, and the Aims are more detailed, allowing the development of policies which in turn will be used to comment on and determine planning applications.

### Vision

**Cople is a small village where the community spirit and rural setting are highly valued by residents. The character of the Parish will be enhanced through well designed, controlled, small scale development which respects the landscape, natural features and linear structure of the village.**



<b>NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AIMS</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>The rural character of the village will be maintained and enhanced through appropriate small-scale developments and improvements.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The natural environment including landscape features, biodiversity and green spaces will be respected and enhanced.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>High quality design will be secured in all new development reflecting the distinctive character of Cople.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>New housing growth will meet the needs of existing and future residents.</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The historic character and heritage assets of the parish will be preserved and enhanced.</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Improvements to the road network to increase safety and provide adequate parking will be required alongside new development.</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>The rights of way network in the Parish will be retained and accessible for pedestrians and where appropriate cyclists and horse riders.</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Existing community facilities will be retained. New facilities or improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged to enhance opportunities for community cohesion.</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Formal and informal amenity spaces will be protected and enhanced and Local Green Space designated to protect those spaces of particular community value.</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Local businesses, including homeworking and rural businesses will be encouraged and an up-to-date communications network will be supported.</b>

## **6. Sustainable Development**

- 6.1. Reflecting the NPPF, new development must be sustainable, achieve high design & environmental standards, reflect local preferences in terms of location and deliver new community infrastructure.
- 6.2. The Parish has a distinctive character and new development should protect, reflect, and enhance that character. There is a need for development to contribute to the quality of life for residents, including healthy lifestyles, access to local services, green open spaces, safe places for active play, and to be accessible by walking and cycling and public transport.
- 6.3. It is generally accepted that new development is necessary but there is a strong feeling that this should meet the needs of local people - existing and future generations, applying the principles of sustainable development to reflect environmental, economic, and social needs. The policies reflect the issues facing the Parish, the Vision, and the Aims.
- 6.4. For Cople, the meaning of sustainable development is set out below.

## **Sustainable Development Principles**

Sustainable development for Cople means that development should be: -

- At an appropriate scale and in locations where it would support the community,
- Of a high standard of design, reflecting the character of the surroundings,
- Contributing towards community infrastructure,
- Ensuring that there is no increase in the risk of flooding,
- Meeting contemporary construction, energy efficiency and water management standards,
- Located and designed to enable safe walking and cycling to local services and facilities,
- Designed so as to preserve and where possible enhance, the significance of heritage assets.

The following adverse impacts must be avoided: -

- The loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land,
- The loss or inappropriate diversion of public rights of way,
- Avoidable intrusion into open countryside,
- The loss of or damage to wildlife habitats and hedgerows and trees,
- A loss of amenity for existing residential properties and reduced efficiency for nearby businesses,

Any unmitigated loss of significance of heritage assets including archaeologically significant non-designated assets.

## **7. Rural Character**

- 7.1. The defining character of the village is the linear pattern of development set within a rural landscape, with the majority of housing development set along, or just off, Willington Road. The countryside beyond the village is glimpsed through gaps between houses and the rural character is always present given the lack of standardised housing patterns and layouts. The modest scale of buildings in the village reflects its agricultural past with more modern buildings dispersed along the main routes out of the village centre. The lack of formal boundary treatments to houses also contributes to the rural feel of the village. In the context of Cople, 'modest' means that buildings are one to two storeys, not large or expensive and generally are occupied by one family.
- 7.2. Water End to the south of the village has its own distinct character and a more rural feel.
- 7.3. Responses to the questionnaire show the value that residents put on the rural setting, with the top answer (72%) for how residents feel about living in Cople being 'It has good access to the countryside with attractive walks and views.'
- 7.4. Some key open spaces and views from the village towards the east are designated in the Allocations and Designations Local Plan 2013 Policy AD40 and are shown on the Policies Map. Additionally, views from Sheerhatch Woods and Moxhill down towards the area; views up from Water End of Moxhill area; views of Cardington Hangers from Cople Playing Fields; views from Woodlands Close towards

Sheerhatch Woods; views of the Church from all directions are to be protected in the Neighbourhood Plan. These views characterise the rural setting of the village.





## Policy RC1: Rural Character

*The rural character of the village and its surroundings should be respected through new development by ensuring that: -*

- *The scale and character of new buildings are in keeping with the rural setting,*
- *The variable sense of space between and around existing buildings is retained where appropriate, particularly where views of the countryside beyond the village are available,*
- *Boundary treatment and landscaping schemes are carefully designed to maintain the rural character of the area.*

*Views of particular importance as defined listed below and shown on the Policies Map and specific views should be protected and not be obstructed by new development. These views are as follows:*

- **1. Views from Sheerhatch Woods and Moxhill Farm down towards the area towards Cople, Willington and Cardington Hangars**
- **2. Views up from Water End of across the fields to Moxhill area Farm**
- **3. Views of Cardington Hangars across the fields from Cople Playing Fields**
- **4. Views from Woodlands Close across Northill Road and fields towards Sheerhatch Woods**
- **5. Views of the Church from Willington Road, Northill Road, Grange Lane, Cople Playing Fields and Millenium Wood from all directions are to be protected in the Neighbourhood Plan.**

## 8. Natural Environment

- 8.1. Responses throughout the questionnaire indicated the high value placed on the local natural environment and landscape to village life. 97% agreed wildlife and the preservation of the natural environment was important.



## Landscape

- 8.2. The parish is set on low lying land, with the River Great Ouse and its floodplain crossing to the northern edge, covering a large proportion of the parish, there is also a flood Zone 2 area passing through the centre of the parish directly west of the built-up area of the village. The local soil is made up of clay and gravel with surrounding arable fields producing wheat, barley, onions, and sprouts.
- 8.3. The parish is relatively flat, sitting at between 23-30m above Ordnance Datum. However, to the south of the parish, land begins to rise noticeably, affording a view across the parish and westward to Cardington Hangars which are a prominent landmark in the area.
- 8.4. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the systematic division of the countryside into discrete and relatively homogenous units of land, within which the constituent physical, biological, historical, and cultural elements occur in repeating patterns and share certain aesthetic characteristics. The LCA for Bedford Borough was initially carried out in 2006 and has been amended and endorsed since then. The most up to date version was published in 2020. It is a very useful tool for establishing important characteristics of local landscapes that can then be protected and/or enhanced when new development takes place. Cople Parish falls into two areas, the Great Ouse Clay Valley north of Bedford Road and the East Marston Clay Vale for the remainder of the Parish. The landscape strategy for the Great Ouse Clay Valley is to enhance the landscape through restoring elements that have become degraded or been lost such as the hedgerows, pollarded willows, pastures and water meadows and conserving features such as the tranquil, rural sections of riverside and open water bodies fringed by woodland. The overall strategy for the mainly flat and open East Marston Clay Vale is to renew/create features of the landscape. The area should continue to provide an open, agricultural setting to Bedford and contrast to the Greensand Ridge. Renewal of features of this landscape including field boundaries, and small-scale tree and woodland planting around villages, tributary streams, and farm buildings will strengthen the pattern of the landscape.
- 8.5. In addition, the Parish of Cople falls within the Forest of Marston Vale. This area, under the Forest of Marston Vale Trust, is the site of a Community Forest. The vision for the forest is to deliver environmental regeneration by increasing tree cover to 30%. Development in Cople parish should be consistent with the Developing in the Forest of Marston Vale: Design Guidance SPD.
- 8.6. Some change that occurs in the landscape is outside planning control, but where planning permission is required for development, landscape features should be considered in a systematic way. Proposals for new development should include an appropriate landscape analysis either as a freestanding report or as part of a design and access statement.

### **Policy NE1: Protecting the Landscape**

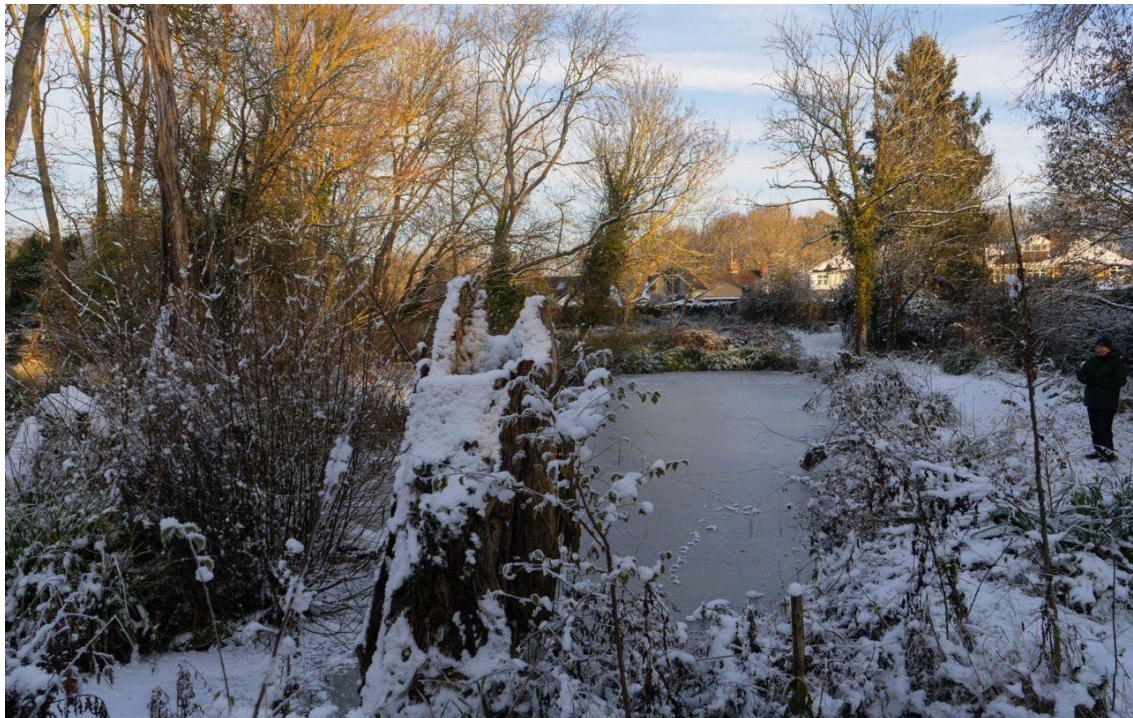
***Any proposals for development should respect the landscape and rural character of the Parish, including the flat open landscape character and features such as field ponds, mature trees, and hedgerows. Where appropriate, natural features should be protected and where appropriate, enhanced and incorporated into any landscape design schemes and their long-term maintenance ensured.***

***All development, where relevant, should recognise and support the aims of the Forest of Marston Vale.***



## Biodiversity

- 8.7. Protection of the nature conservation interest in the Parish, which is valued by local people, is critical, with reference to the important habitats and landscape identified in both the Landscape Character Assessment (2020) and the Cople Design Code. The Design Code RC 03 Green Features identifies four codes to be reflected in development proposals to project the strong green infrastructure network of Cople. To illustrate the importance of wildlife to residents, 63% of the respondents to the questionnaire said that they would support not cutting grass verges to protect wildlife.
- 8.8. Within the parish there is only one County Wildlife Site (CWS) called Cople Pits CWS, comprising three parcels of land. This was recognized as a CWS in 1990 as a collection of waterbodies containing a population of Great Crested Newts, and also areas of neutral and calcareous grassland. The River Great Ouse CWS also runs along the northern boundary of the site, recognized because it is a river and because of adjacent riparian habitats. Accessible Wildlife Sites (i.e. sites managed for the benefit of wildlife and with free public access) within the parish occur at Dog Field, Cople Pits Nature Reserve, Octagon Wood, the Grange Estate, Millenium Wood and at Water End. These total approximately 30 hectares.
- 8.9. Species records of note are mostly of birds from the collection of gravel pits in the north of the parish; amphibians and mammals around Cople village; and plants and invertebrates at the disused landfill site. There is a scattering of other notable records. Otters and badgers can often be found in the area.
- 8.10. All proposals for new development will be required to demonstrate how the design has taken into account its potential impact on local habitats and species. This will include sites and features that are locally important in Cople, including ponds, trees, hedges, and woodland. Developers will be required to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to protect wildlife and take every available opportunity to enhance biodiversity and important habitats.



- 8.11. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a concept proposed in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and mandated as a condition of planning permission in the 2020 Environment Act. Biodiversity Net

Gain requires a 10% increase in biodiversity after certain types of development, compared to the level of biodiversity prior to the development taking place. In locations such as Cople where all new development will be close to the countryside, it is really important that this principle is adopted to mitigate the impact of losing biodiversity value of undeveloped land to development.

- 8.12. All new development should seek to increase biodiversity such as incorporating bat boxes etc into new buildings, particularly at the edges of the settlement. Landscaping schemes will be required to use appropriate native species for planting schemes, particularly those found locally. Where trees are removed to make way for development, they should be replaced in a ratio of 2:1 where possible using mature saplings of an appropriate species.
- 8.13. Where Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SUDS) are required to serve new developments, every opportunity to link them into habitats should be taken.

### **Policy NE2: Biodiversity.**

***Where appropriate, new development will be required to protect and enhance existing natural features of sites and provide at least 10% net gain in biodiversity.***

***Provision of appropriate species-related measures will be required, including, for example, swift bricks, bat and owl boxes.***

***Where possible, natural hedgerow boundaries and trees should be retained and where mature trees cannot be retained, replacement trees will be expected to be planted on or near the site, preferably 2 trees to be planted for every 1 tree lost.***

***Appropriate, preferably native and locally sourced plants should be used in landscaping schemes. Opportunities should also be taken by developers and landowners to link sustainable drainage solutions in new development to complement nature conservation objectives.***

## **Green and Blue Infrastructure**

- 8.14. Green infrastructure is defined as a “network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and well-being benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021)”. Green and Blue infrastructure (GBI) covers a range of natural assets and can include public open space, country parks, playing fields, allotments, woodlands, trees, and hedgerows as well as rivers, lakes and ponds. It plays an important role in helping to halt biodiversity loss, aiding nature recovery, building resilience to climate change, promoting healthy, resilient, and safe communities as well as reinforcing the local character of areas and places.
- 8.15. In 2017, a Green Infrastructure Plan was produced for Cople Parish. This identified a number of Green Infrastructure Aspirations for the Parish including new cycleways, footpath links, additional green spaces etc. If any future housing development in the Parish is approved, ~~for example, allocations through the emerging Local Plan 2040~~, it is important that the Parish GBI is protected and enhanced.

### **Policy NE3: Green and Blue Infrastructure**

*Development within the Parish, ~~including any future development brought forward in the draft Local Plan 2040~~ will ensure that the contributions for Green and Blue Infrastructure are ~~targeting~~ targeted at improving natural features and Rights of Way within the Parish.*

*In particular: -*

- Improvements in biodiversity and green spaces between the area north of the A603 from Dog Farm towards Octagon Farm and the Land at Bedford River Valley Park.*
- Planting of appropriate native species to provide environmental benefits.*

## **9. Sustainable Development**

- 9.1. Sustainable development means ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF expands on what this means in practice and the Neighbourhood Plan must support sustainable development. For Cople village, this means small scale development over time which integrates well into the village without damaging the natural and historic environment.
- 9.2. It is acknowledged that the emerging Local Plan includes a large site HOU11 to the north of Bedford Road, which lies within the Parish but will be separate from the village itself. The intention of the allocation is for ‘enabling’ development (i.e. housing built to fund infrastructure) to facilitate the delivery of a watersports lake and associated leisure opportunities. The allocation includes an unspecified number of residential units, an education facility, and a care home. This will ‘enable’ the linking of several greenspaces together whilst enhancing biodiversity accessibility and protecting the listed buildings and scheduled monument on the site. The aim is to provide a gateway into the eastern side of Bedford. Policy HOU11 requires that a masterplan and Design Code is prepared and adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document prior to any submission for planning permission. No quantum of housing development is included within the policy, however supporting information for the allocation proposes 1,000 dwellings.

### **Development within the Settlement Policy Area**

- 9.3. In 2021 in the Parish of Cople, there were 333 households living in the following properties:
  - Detached – 116
  - Semi attached – 134
  - Terraced – 75
  - Flats – 8
- 9.4. This compares to 323 households on the 2011 census.
- 9.5. The population of 783 is broken down into the following age groups:
  - 0-15: 139
  - 16-64: 456
  - 65+: 188
- 9.6. This compares to 722 households listed on the 2011 census showing age groups:
  - 0-15: 122
  - 16-64: 455
  - 65+: 145

- 9.7. Opportunities for new small scale housing development may arise in the village throughout the plan period. Local Plan Policy 5S states that within Settlement Policy Area boundaries, development or redevelopment will be acceptable in principle provided that it is consistent with the other policies of the development plan. This means that proposals will be subject to scrutiny through the planning application process in terms of scale, design, materials and the impact on neighbours and the natural and historic environment.
- 9.8. Residents made it clear that they would be prepared to accept a small quantity of housing over the Neighbourhood Plan period. 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there would be a need for new housing over the next 20 years and a similar proportion said that between 0 and 25 would be appropriate. Only 14% said no housing should be built.
- ~~9.9. However, it is recognised that the draft 2040 Local Plan has since been published allocating 1,000 new homes at HOU11 which lies partly in the north of the Parish.~~

## **Affordable Housing**

- 9.10. Given the likelihood that any new build housing is likely to be on small infill plots, it would be difficult to require affordable units to be part of the mix. There is no substantive evidence to suggest that there is a specific housing need in the Parish although an 'exceptions scheme' which would be purely, or mostly affordable units may be supported in the future. The Local Plan 2030 Policy 58S requires 30% affordable housing units on sites of 10 or more dwellings or 0.5 hectares, HOU11.

## **High Quality Design**

- 9.11. The NPPF and the proposals for planning reform recognise that well-designed buildings and places improve the quality of life and that it is a core planning principle to secure good design. Good design is not just about appearance, but also functionality and the relationship to surroundings and it is not about copying past styles or preventing innovative modern design. The aim is to create site-specific creative design, which is contextual by referencing form and materials to surroundings.
- 9.12. The village has a wide variety of density, building date and materials, testifying to its historic past. It is important that this variety is carried through in new development whilst respecting the immediate surroundings. A Design Code for the village has been prepared and is a separate technical background document to the Neighbourhood Plan.

### ***Layout and connectivity***

- 9.13. The Code seeks to retain the linear pattern of development minimising the impact of backland development and ensuring new development faces onto the streets. It also seeks to retain a consistent building line i.e. distance between houses and the road surface, usually front gardens and gaps in between buildings. Water End is acknowledged as having a different character with a larger variety of building line and orientation to the street.

### ***Rural Character***

- 9.14. This Code recognizes the landscape context and heritage of the village and its relationship with the natural environment. It suggests that signage should also be of specific design.

### ***Built Form***

- 9.15. Cople has a wide range of architectural styles, features, and materials but there are some that are particularly characteristic of the village. These are identified in the Design Code and should be used wherever possible to reinforce the character of the built environment of the village. This includes materials, design of buildings, outbuildings, extensions to buildings, boundary treatments and parking design and surfaces.



### ***Sustainable Futures***

- 9.16. This Code covers sustainable construction, energy efficiency, water management, flood mitigation and storage for household waste.
- 9.17. Development proposals may include a Design and Access Statement, or other written statement related to the scale and complexity of the scheme, which shows that the development has been designed to specifically relate to its setting. This is essential to ensure that the special character of the village is protected, and its local distinctiveness is enhanced and reinforced. A checklist is provided within the Design Code that can be used to demonstrate compatibility of a scheme with Cople's Design Code.

### **Policy SD1: High Quality Design**

***Proposals for good quality new development (including new buildings and extensions to existing buildings) will be supported, where they are in accordance with the guidelines and design principles set out in the Cople Design Code.***

***All new development must: -***

- ***Relate to the existing development pattern (whether in Cople village or Water End) in terms of enclosure, building line and definition of streets/spaces.***
- ***Be of an appropriate scale and density in relation to its setting.***
- ***Use materials appropriate to the development's context.***
- ***Be of a design in keeping with the Cople Design Code section 2.4***
- ***New dwellings should be consistent with the existing street frontage (see Cople Design Code, section LC 02).***
- ***Integrate car parking within landscaping so that it does not dominate the street.***
- ***Incorporate Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) as the preferred method of surface water drainage for all development.***
- ***Provide facilities for household waste storage as per section SF 03 of the Cople Design Code.***

### **Sustainable Buildings and Construction**

- 9.18. The reality is that the homes built today will still be in use in 2050. Therefore, to achieve the UK carbon reduction targets cost effectively, new housing built today must be built to zero carbon standards as soon as possible. However, even if all new housing were to be carbon neutral from tomorrow, this would still not be enough to achieve the carbon emission reductions, as around 70% of buildings that will be in use in the 2050s already exist. If carbon reduction targets are to be met, and if fuel poverty is to be tackled, it is essential that the energy efficiency of existing buildings, including historic and listed buildings is also improved.
- 9.19. 90% of respondents to the questionnaire supported the encouragement of solar power with around 50% each supporting wind power and heat pumps.

- 9.20. Relevant information should be submitted, where required in relation to the scale and type of development being proposed, in an Energy Statement and/or in a Design and Access Statement accompanying planning applications.

### **Policy SD2: Provision of energy efficient buildings**

*The design and standard of any new building should aim to meet a high level of sustainable design and construction and be optimised for energy efficiency, targeting net zero operational carbon emissions. Alterations to existing buildings should be designed with energy reduction in mind and comply with sustainable design and construction standards.*

*The retrofit of existing buildings including heritage properties is encouraged to reduce energy demand and to generate renewable energy where appropriate, providing it safeguards historic characteristics. ~~Retrofitting of existing buildings will not be possible unless adaptations relate to a planning application.~~ of Listed Buildings is likely to require Listed Building Consent.*

*This includes the following measures (where relevant to the proposed development, feasible, and viable): -*

- *Siting and orientation to optimise passive solar gain. The use of high quality, thermally efficient building materials.*
- *Incorporation of on-site energy generation from renewable sources such as solar panels.*

### **Water issues and infrastructure**

- 9.21. Climate change is resulting in more extreme weather events in the UK with heavier rainfall and increasing risk of flash flooding. Changing rainfall patterns will also affect water supplies. Too much rainfall in some areas and not enough in others will contribute to both flood and drought conditions. Flooding occurs adjacent to rivers and other watercourses, but it can also occur elsewhere, such as groundwater flooding, or where buildings or other structures affect the natural drainage of the land, known as surface water flooding. Within the parish there is land at risk of flooding, including land that falls within Flood Zone 3.
- 9.22. National and local planning policy requires development to respond to climate change and flooding, including through the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). SuDS are a range of approaches to manage surface water in a sustainable way to reduce flood risk and improve water quality and the overall urban environment. They work by reducing the amount and rate at which surface water reaches a waterway or combined sewer system.
- 9.23. Development across the Neighbourhood Area, not only in flood risk areas, should consider water management strategies. SuDS should be considered early in the design process to ensure they are sensitively designed and contribute positively to the landscape.
- 9.24. Proposals for development should demonstrate that surface water will be managed effectively on site and that the development will not increase flood risk elsewhere, including sewer flooding. SuDS should be provided for development in accordance with the Local Plan Policy 93.



- 9.25. Bedford Borough, which lies within the Anglian Water supply region is in an area of 'serious water stress'. This means it has poor overall water quality and quantity of water resources. A small local contribution can be made by requiring that all new homes are provided with water butts for harvesting and storage of water for garden use and other measures designed to reduce water consumption.

### **Policy SD3: Water Management**

*Proposals must incorporate a sustainable and integrated approach to the management of flood risk, surface water (including run off) and foul drainage.*

*All development involving the loss of permeable surfaces, loss of trees, loss of soft landscaping or loss of any other feature that increases flood risk is required to use appropriate mitigation measures to prevent an increase in flood risk within the site or elsewhere. This should be proportionate to the scale of the proposal, with small interventions (such as planting ~~or use of impermeable surfaces~~) acceptable for minor developments in areas of low flood risk. All new areas of hardstanding in developments must be permeable surfaces.*

## 10. Historic Environment

- 10.1. The village has a great variety of buildings in style, age and building materials. 60% of respondents to the questionnaire stated that there were historic features that should be preserved.
- 10.2. It is essential that the location and design of new development has regard to the historic character of the local area. This protection is in accordance with the guidance contained in paragraphs 184202 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

### Heritage Assets

- 10.3. Cople has a total of 1 x Grade I and 15 x Grade II listed buildings. These are protected from harmful development by the NPPF paragraphs 200 - 208 which require that great weight is attached to the asset's conservation and that clear and convincing exceptional justification would be needed to justify any loss or harm to the asset. Local Plan Policy 41S also protects listed buildings from harmful development.
- ~~10.4. Neighbourhood Plans may identify important heritage assets which are not already protected by listing. The emerging Local Plan 2040 (Appendix 5) sets out the criteria for identifying Non-Designated Built Heritage Assets which is taken from Historic England Advice Note 7.~~
- 10.5. The list of non-designated heritage assets set out in Policy HE1 was compiled taking into account these criteria. The buildings and features identified which may not be of sufficient architectural or historic merit to justify listing, are an important part of the character of the Parish. The policy will help to ensure they are retained. Enhancements to the local features may be sought through funding bids to support their management.



## **Policy HE1: Protecting and enhancing local built heritage assets**

~~All development proposals affecting identified local heritage assets will be required to take into account the character, context and setting of the assets. Development should be designed taking account of local styles, materials and detail.~~

*All development proposals affecting identified local heritage assets set out below will be required to take into account the character, context and setting of the assets. Development should be designed taking account of local styles, materials, and detail.*

*The effect of an application on the significance of an identified local heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect a local heritage asset, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset concerned.*

*Identified Heritage Assets include: -*

- *Duke of Bedford Houses –even numbers 2 to 44 Grange Lane*
- *Duke of Bedford Houses - 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20 Northill Road*
- *The Tollgate, 1 Bedford Road*
- *The Stables, Woodlands Close*
- *Grange Farm, Hoo Farm, Middle Farm*

*See Annex 4 for further detail*

## **Archaeology**

- 10.6. The NPPF identifies the historic environment as a Core Planning Principle. Cople Parish is rich in history. There are five Scheduled Monuments in the north of the parish, all part of Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complexes. These sites represent important ceremonial and ritual monuments and are of national significance:-
- Three barrows and a rectilinear enclosure 1,000m NNW of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex
  - Mortuary enclosure 900m NNW of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex
  - Two barrows 500m NE of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex
  - A barrow 400m north of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex
  - A Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex 600m NW of Octagon Farm
- 10.7. The BBC Historic Environment Record lists a variety of sites including cropmarks, moats, ring ditches, barrows and pits. The Green Infrastructure Plan sets out the list of historic sites and maps them. A list of these sites can be found in Annex 4 of this document.

10.8. This policy will ensure that development takes account of archaeological considerations.

## Policy HE2: Archaeology

*Development proposals should demonstrate that: ~~they have considered the potential impact on above and below ground archaeology and identify mitigation strategies to ensure that evidence of past environments is not lost.~~*

*~~There are five Scheduled Monuments in the north of the parish, all part of Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complexes. These sites represent important ceremonial and ritual monuments and are of national significance.~~*

- *~~Development proposals should demonstrate that they have considered the potential impact on sites identified in the BBC Historic Environment Record and recorded on the Green Infrastructure Plan.~~*
- *they have considered the potential impact on above and below ground archaeology and identify mitigation strategies to ensure that evidence of past environments is not lost.*

## 11. Transport and Rights of Way

- 11.1. Cople is a rural village and transport is essential for residents to move between locations either for work, education, leisure, or business. Very few journeys are made for no purpose and most people want to travel efficiently and safely to their destination. Over 60% of residents who responded to the questionnaire said that they valued the good transport connections and 85% said that they liked easy access to other places. However, 56% of respondents thought that improving public transport would improve the village economy and employment.
- 11.2. The road network provides reasonable links for the village to the nearby towns of Bedford and Sandy. The A603 runs through the more northern part of the parish off which several properties gain access. Currently the A603 has a speed limit of 40mph near Dog Farm reducing to 30mph on through Willington where Average Speed cameras control the speed limit.
- 11.3. Willington Road runs from its junction with A603 Bedford Road south to the junction with Northhill Road and Grange Lane, near All Saints Church. This road has development on the majority of the whole of its length with three small developments gaining access, All Saints, The Spinney and Rye Crescent. Northhill Road continues south with connections to Woodland Close and Water End from it before it continues as a more rural road eventually leading to Northhill and Ickwell. Grange Lane runs westwards, passing the Village Hall, Vicarage and Sports & Social Club before leading into Cardington village.
- 11.4. Transport and accessibility are fundamental to the delivery of Cople Neighbourhood plan's spatial strategy. It is important that new development is in the most sustainable locations and accessible by a choice of travel modes, including walking, cycling and public transport. This will help to reduce the need for people to travel by car, minimise congestion, improve road safety and meet climate change reduction targets. This also links with the need to improve people's health by creating more opportunities for people to walk or cycle rather than using a car. This concept will be particularly important for the new development proposed at HOU11.
- 11.5. Both the 27 and the 74 bus routes service Cople. The 27 loops northwest to Willington, Great Barford, Wilden, Goldington, and back to Bedford while the 74 travels southwest to Biggleswade via Northhill.
- 11.6. The Parish Council operates Speed Watch sessions and considers other measures to slow traffic and motorists speed, and address behaviour issues.

## Car use and Parking

- 11.7. Cople's rural character makes car use necessary for many residents and so it is essential that new developments are planned from the outset to provide sufficient parking spaces for residents and visitors and are equipped with domestic charging facilities for electric vehicles. Adherence to BBC's parking standards reflect these local factors and seek to ensure that new development does not add to current levels of congestion.
- 11.8. Electric vehicles are a broadly sustainable mode of travel that is increasing market penetration and current building regulations require that every new dwelling is supplied with an electric car charging point.

### Policy TRW1: Car Parking

*Proposals for new housing developments will provide parking in line with Bedford Borough Council's parking standards and have adequate on-site parking to meet current and future needs, unless alternative and accessible car parking arrangements can be made which do not add to on-street congestion.*

*Electric charging points for cars should be incorporated in new housing development for each house.*

*New development should not result in the loss of publicly accessible off-street car parking. Developments which propose to remove off-road parking spaces will only be supported where alternative provision is made which increases or maintains the number of accessible parking spaces available on or within the immediate vicinity of the site.*

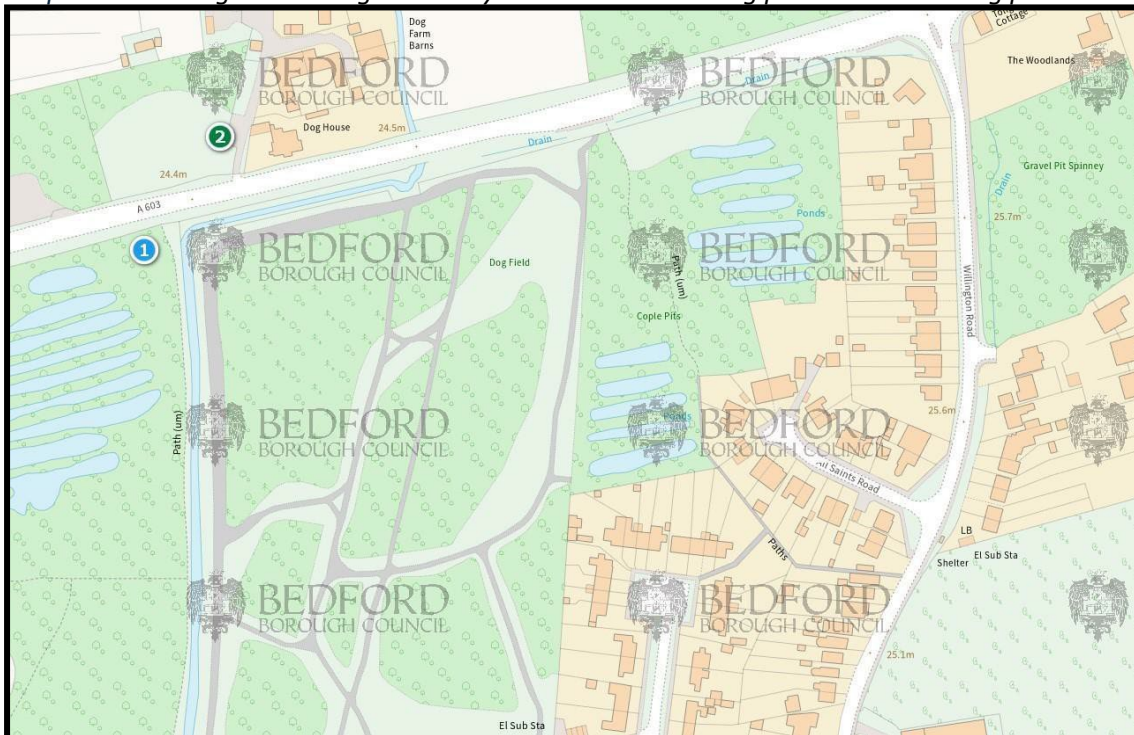
## Provision for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders

- 11.9. A partnership approach between the Parish Council, BBC and developers will be required to improve highway safety and minimise conflict between road traffic, cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians. It is intended to support new ways of managing the traffic throughout the parish by promoting pedestrian, cyclist and horse rider safety and resident well-being through lower traffic speeds and traffic volumes.



11.10. Where new development is proposed, the pavement network should be improved to assist in encouraging pedestrians. Cople is currently underserved by its existing network of pavements. A large proportion of the pavement structure leading from Bedford Road down the village along Willington Road is narrow and is not in great condition. The pavement infrastructure ends by the bus stop on Bedford Road and does not join up to Dog field. There is no pavement linking the public bridle way (located on Map A below with a number 1) with Dog Farm, (indicated on the Map A with the number 2). Any additional development should link to the existing village with a network of pavements and a controlled pedestrian crossing over the A603.

*Map A showcasing the missing bridleway link between crossing point 1 and crossing point 2*







*Bus stop on Bedford Rd indicating where the pavement currently stops.*



- 11.11. In addition to a lack of suitable pavements to the north of the village, Cople also lacks pedestrian access to the west of the village. Any development should look to support the linking of Cople and Cardington with a footpath.

- 11.12. There are numerous footpaths and bridleways in the Parish. Respondents to the questionnaire identified that equal numbers of residents felt that the existing footpaths and bridleways were adequate or not adequate., but 66% said that more public footpaths and/or bridleways should be created. The Green Infrastructure Plan sets out 21 Aspirations which are repeated at the end of this NP, twelve of these relate to new or improved footpaths and bridleways. The questionnaire also shows strong support for creating new cycleways, particularly for the A603/Willington Road Junction northwards to link to Bedford (Sandy Country Way) and on the south side of Grange Lane to link with Chapel Lane (Cardington Country Way).
- 11.13. Improvements to the network will always be encouraged, in particular provision of traffic calming measures. Where possible, 'Quiet Lanes' should be implemented.
- 11.14. Speeding traffic is a huge problem in villages and along country lanes and is set to get worse as traffic levels continue to rise. CPRE has long campaigned to protect country lanes from the adverse effects of intimidating traffic. Through our Safer Country Lanes campaign, we have helped secure an important way to tackle the problem by designating Quiet Lanes. Under the Transport Act 2000, local authorities are able to designate roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes. CPRE is one of the leading organisations promoting the concept of Quiet Lanes, as part of a wider strategy to promote environmentally sustainable transport and lower speed limits on country lanes and through villages.
- 11.15. Pedestrian or cycling routes should be given priority over motorists on any new development.

## **Policy TRW2: Provision for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders**

***As appropriate, new development should include measures that ~~keep traffic speeds low and~~ improve the provision of pavements and access for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Where they are proposed, new roads, junctions, pavements and traffic management measures should be designed to complement the rural character of the village and reflect local heritage.***

***The rights of way network will be retained. New/improved footpaths, bridleways and cycleways both within the village, to neighbouring villages and to the wider countryside will be encouraged.***



## 12. Community Facilities

### Community Facilities

- 12.1. Cople is a typical semi-rural village where the public house, The Five Bells, is the central hub of the community. There are very few facilities for villagers, with no shop, but there is a Primary School, All Saints Church, the Village Hall and the Cople Sports & Social Club, both adjacent to Cople Playing Fields which hosts playing pitches and a fenced play area and basketball hoop.
- 12.2. There is a farm shop and a post office/convenience store in neighbouring Willington, with other stores in Cardington.
- 12.3. The policy is intended to retain these facilities and services to maintain Cople as a sustainable village. Accordingly, change of use, conversion, or demolition of any of the facilities listed to a use which is not for the community will be resisted unless a replacement would prove to be more suitable for the needs of the community. The applicant will need to put forward evidence that the existing use is no longer commercially viable and prove that a genuine attempt has been made to market the enterprise as a going concern for at least a year.
- 12.4. New facilities and improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged and supported, particularly a village shop.

#### **Policy C1: Community facilities**

*Proposals for the loss of an existing community facility **as listed below** will only be supported if it can be clearly demonstrated that the facility's continued use is no longer viable and evidence that the property has been actively marketed, commensurate with its existing use at an open market value for a period of at least 12 months, other uses may be supported.*

*Proposals to improve the viability of a community facility by way of the extension, replacement or redevelopment of buildings, structures, and land, will be supported, provided the design of the scheme respects the village character in general, and the resulting increase in use is appropriate in design terms and will not have negative impact on the amenities of adjoining residential properties.*

#### **Existing community facilities**

- **The Five Bells Pub**
- **Sheerhatch Primary School**
- **All Saints Church**
- **Cople Village Hall**
- **Cople Sports & Social Club**
- **Cople Playing Fields**

### Local Green Spaces

- 12.5. People place a high value on the relationship between the village, the countryside and on the open spaces that help to define the landscape and character of the area.

12.6. Designation of Local Green Spaces (LGS) give a very high level of protection to such open spaces. In the NPPF it is stated that in Neighbourhood Plans, local communities can identify green areas of particular importance to them for special protection and to rule out new development, other than in “very special circumstances”. The proposed designations are in accordance with the requirement in Paragraph 106 of the NPPF: -

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

12.7. An audit has been carried out by BRCC of green spaces and assessed to determine which of them fulfil the Local Green Space Criteria. Six spaces were assessed and five of these fulfil the criteria for designation as Local Green Spaces, which are a mix of recreational spaces and natural areas. The assessment is included as a separate background document to the Neighbourhood Plan.



## **Policy C2: Local Green Spaces**

***The following areas shown on the Policies Map are designated as Local Green Spaces:***

- ***Cople Playing Fields***
- ***Millenium Wood***
- ***Cople Pits County Wildlife Site***
- ***Dog Field***
- ***Sheerhatch School Outdoor Learning Area***

***Development proposals which would result in the loss of part or all of a Local Green Space which would have a negative impact on the features that make it locally significant, will not be permitted unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.***

***Inappropriate development will be resisted to protect their special character and contribution to the Parish.***

## 13. Local Businesses & Agriculture

- 13.1. The Parish has limited employment opportunities within the parish with a large proportion of working people working elsewhere including Bedford, Milton Keynes, and London. Cople is a typical semi-rural village where the public house, The Five Bells, is the central hub of the community. The village is also home to a couple of commercial business units, namely a second-hand car showroom and car servicing and MOT garage. The rural nature of the village also lends itself to agriculture, with 6 farms operating within the parish boundary: Middle Farm, Octagon Farm, Grange Farm, Hoo Farm, Moxhill Farm and Wood End Farm.
- 13.2. However, the questionnaire revealed that 62 people out of the population who responded, suggested that a local shop would be the most preferred facility in the village. Currently, the nearest convenience store is in Willington village. A convenience store in Cople would be a new source of employment in the village and would make accessing essential goods easier for less able members of the community.
- 13.3. Other research suggests that there are 47 active limited companies registered at Companies House with a Cople address. The questionnaire indicated that 15 people run their own business, with 13 running their business from home and 10 as self-employed persons. For those who are employed, 42 people, at least occasionally, work from home.
- 13.4. Nevertheless, 14 people felt engagement with local business needed to be developed in the village. Current ways of advertising for businesses in the village and surrounding areas are via the Cople News magazine, delivered to all households in the parish, and Cople village social media and website pages. Other ways could potentially be explored.
- 13.5. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate employment sites, but it supports the viability of local businesses and their expansion, where this is proportionate and appropriate in the individual circumstances. Home working is also seen as a means of encouraging business and creating a sustainable community with less commuting and a more sustainable lifestyle, saving individuals the cost of travel and increasing their leisure time.
- 13.6. The diversification of agriculture and agricultural buildings is supported in principle. However, development must be of a scale and intensity appropriate to its context, must not impact detrimentally on residential amenity, and must have an acceptable impact on the character and scale of the village and its rural hinterland.

## ***Policy LBA1: Local Employment and Agriculture***

***Proposals for the development of new small businesses and for the expansion or diversification of existing businesses, including farm-based operations, will be encouraged, providing that:***

- it can be demonstrated that there will be no adverse impact from increased traffic, lighting, noise or other emissions or activities arising from the proposed development,***
- it would have an acceptable impact on the character and scale of the village, its rural hinterland and landscape; and ~~where relevant~~,***
- opportunities are taken **where relevant** to secure the re-use of vacant or redundant historic buildings as part of the development.***

***Policy 75 in the Local Plan 2030 states that an application in the countryside needs to demonstrate why a use/development needs to be in a countryside location.***

***Applications for extensions or part change of use of dwellings to enable flexible or home working within the development boundary will be supported, subject to there being appropriate parking and that the residential amenity of neighbouring properties is maintained.***

***In each instance, the provision of effective high speed broadband services will be encouraged, and appropriate measures should be incorporated into the design of workplaces.***

## 14. Aspirations, Implementation and Monitoring

### Aspirations

14.1. The summer 2022 survey showed that residents agreed that: -

- Cople has good access to the countryside with attractive walks and views,
- The village feels safe and has a relatively low crime rate,
- The village is quiet and peaceful,
- The village has good transport connections with easy access to other places,
- Cople has a good school and catchment area,
- The village is clean and tidy,
- Cople has a strong sense of community,
- Wildlife and the preservation of the natural environment is important to residents,
- Views and historic features should be preserved.

14.2. Residents believe that village life would be improved by: -

- Developing public infrastructure i.e. footpaths, walkways, cycle paths
- Improved public transport,
- Provision of a local shop,
- Health facilities,
- Provision of allotments,
- Communal electric car charging stations,
- Improved children's play areas,
- Improved leisure and community facilities,
- Encouragement of alternative energy sources, especially solar and wind power,
- Superfast broadband to all areas of Cople.

14.3. The Cople Green Infrastructure Plan identified 21 aspirations with the following being the top priorities:

- Create new cycleway on south side of Grange Lane to link with Chapel Road, Cardington
- Increase safety at A603 crossing points – including enhanced crossing points and new paths with safety fencing plus a crossing for horse riders,
- Create new cycleway westwards alongside A603 from Willington Road to meet BW4,
- Create new footpath on north, east and south sides of field, and a link to Water End (road) – south of the playing field – to formalise existing circular walk route and access Create new footpath along north side of Grange Lane from entrance of Girl's School playing field site to BW4.

14.4. Cople Playing Fields is an important and long-standing feature of the village. The aspiration of the community is to develop, modernise and generally improve the existing playing field, buildings, infrastructure and green spaces to ensure its continued use but also to expand its scope of use. Ensuring that all residents and users of Cople have up to date, modern facilities for sports, arts and community events which are safe and accessible to all.

### Implementation & Working in partnership

14.5. Cople Parish Council is committed to Localism and locally informed influence over planning decisions, and it will be the key organisation in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Council will build upon its excellent track record in engaging in planning

decisions (reactively through consultation and proactively through promoting the policies of this plan) and by delivering related projects for the local community.

- 14.6. The Plan will be used by the Parish Council to:
- guide comments on planning applications,
  - negotiate with landowners and developers to achieve the best possible outcomes from new development,
  - direct financial resources to the village in a structured way,
  - bring together groups or working parties to improve the village environment,
  - lobby local authorities to support the parishioners' wishes and aspirations.
- 14.7. However, it is recognised that partnership working is needed for the potential of the plan to be realised. Partnership and joint working will be key elements in the successful implementation of the plan. The main organisations and the roles that they can play are summarised below.
- Bedford Borough Council - Planning Policy, Development Control, Housing Management and Improvement, Economic Development, Open Spaces, Recreation and Community Facilities and unitary authority functions, including Drainage, Highways and Transport, Education, Landscape, Minerals and Waste and Social Services.
  - Adjoining Parish Councils – Assessing impact of large-scale planning applications and discussing local facilities.
  - Environment Agency The planning, design, and delivery of development, taking account of: Flood risk management; Water quality and water resources, Waste management, Land contamination and soil and other regulation.
  - Site owners and developers will need to liaise with the Parish Council as well as the other agencies involved in development.

## **Funding and Implementation Mechanisms**

- 14.8. Financial contributions will be sought from developers through Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which provides a legal framework to raise funds to provide the infrastructure needed to cope with new developments.
- 14.9. The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations of the 2011 Localism Act enable areas with a Neighbourhood Plan in place to receive at least 25% of the CIL raised in their area to direct to their own local infrastructure priorities. These contributions will be targeted on the priority need to deliver new community infrastructure.
- 14.10. In addition, the Parish Council will seek to influence annual and other budget decisions by Bedford Borough Council on housing, open space and recreation, economic development, community facilities and transport, through the Local Transport Plan.
- 14.11. The Parish Council will also work with the appropriate agencies and organisations to develop funding bids to help to achieve Neighbourhood Plan policies and objectives. This might include: The Lottery; UK Government programmes; landfill tax credits, EU Funds and LEP funding.

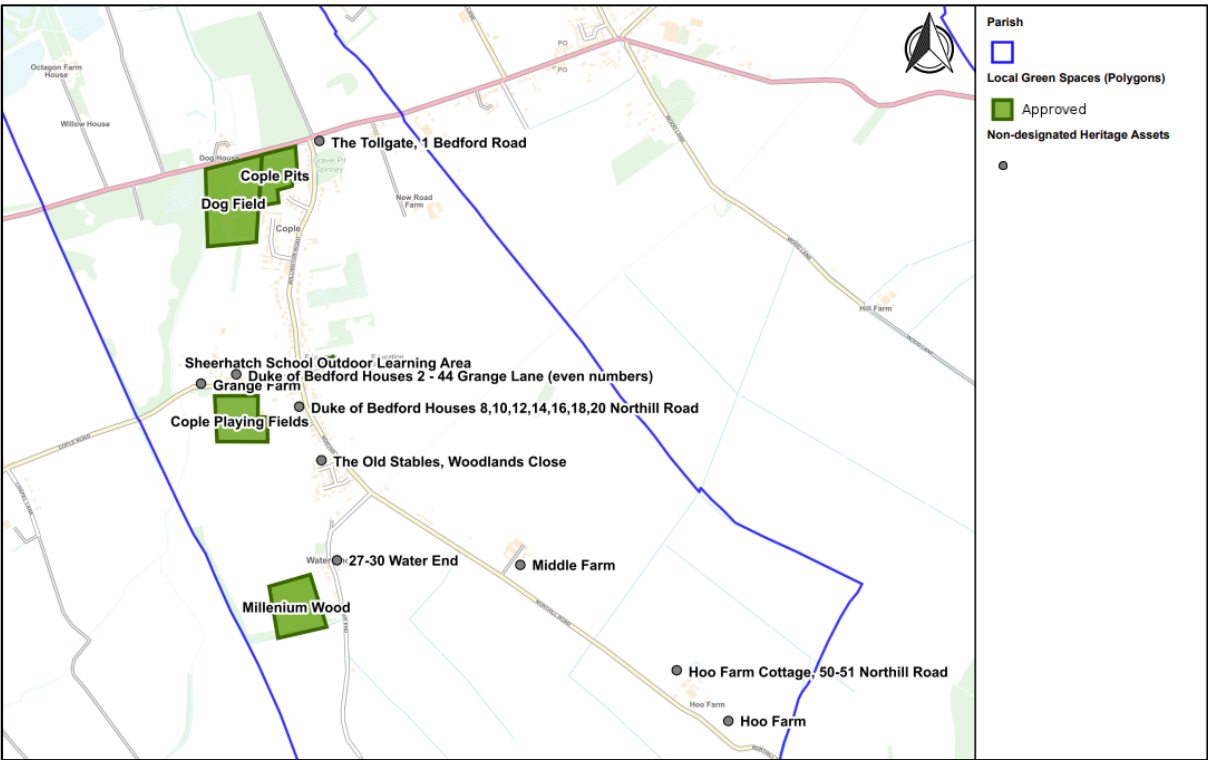
## **Monitoring and Review**

- 14.12. It is important to check that progress is made towards meeting the objectives and policies of the Plan. The Parish Council will report on the implementation of the Plan every 5 years and consider:
- if progress is being made to achieve the vision and the objectives of the Plan,
  - if progress is being made towards the implementation of the policies in the Plan,
  - if financial contributions available to the community arising from development is being targeted towards the identified plans and projects,
  - if the Plan remains based on the most up to date information,
  - if the Plan is being taken into account by BBC when determining planning applications.

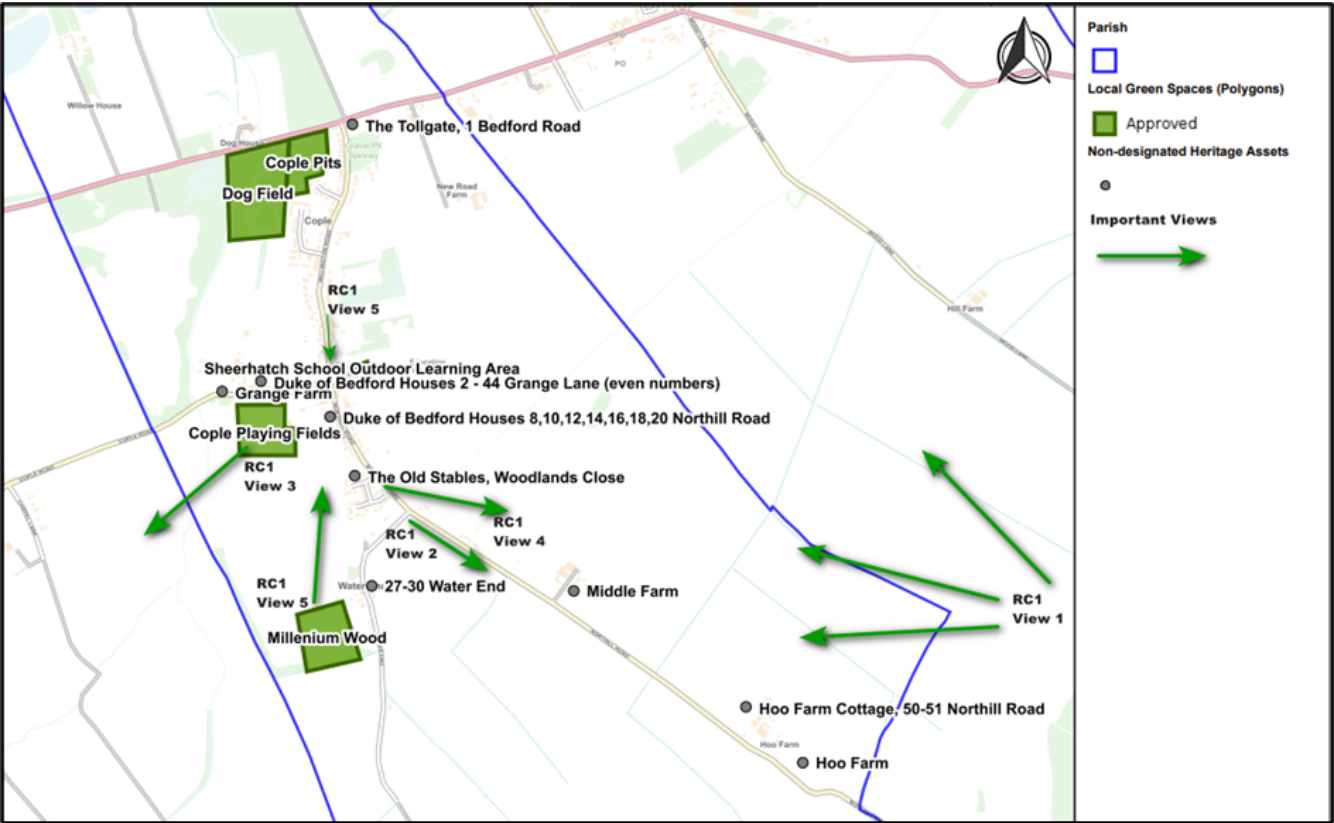
14.13. However, it may prove necessary to formally review the Plan prior to 2035, for example following the review of the Local Plan or changes in national policy. The Parish Council will conclude whether a review is required. If so, it will commence the review at an appropriate time and secure opinions of residents and stakeholders to update the Plan.

Annex 1: Maps

Map 1. Cople Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map

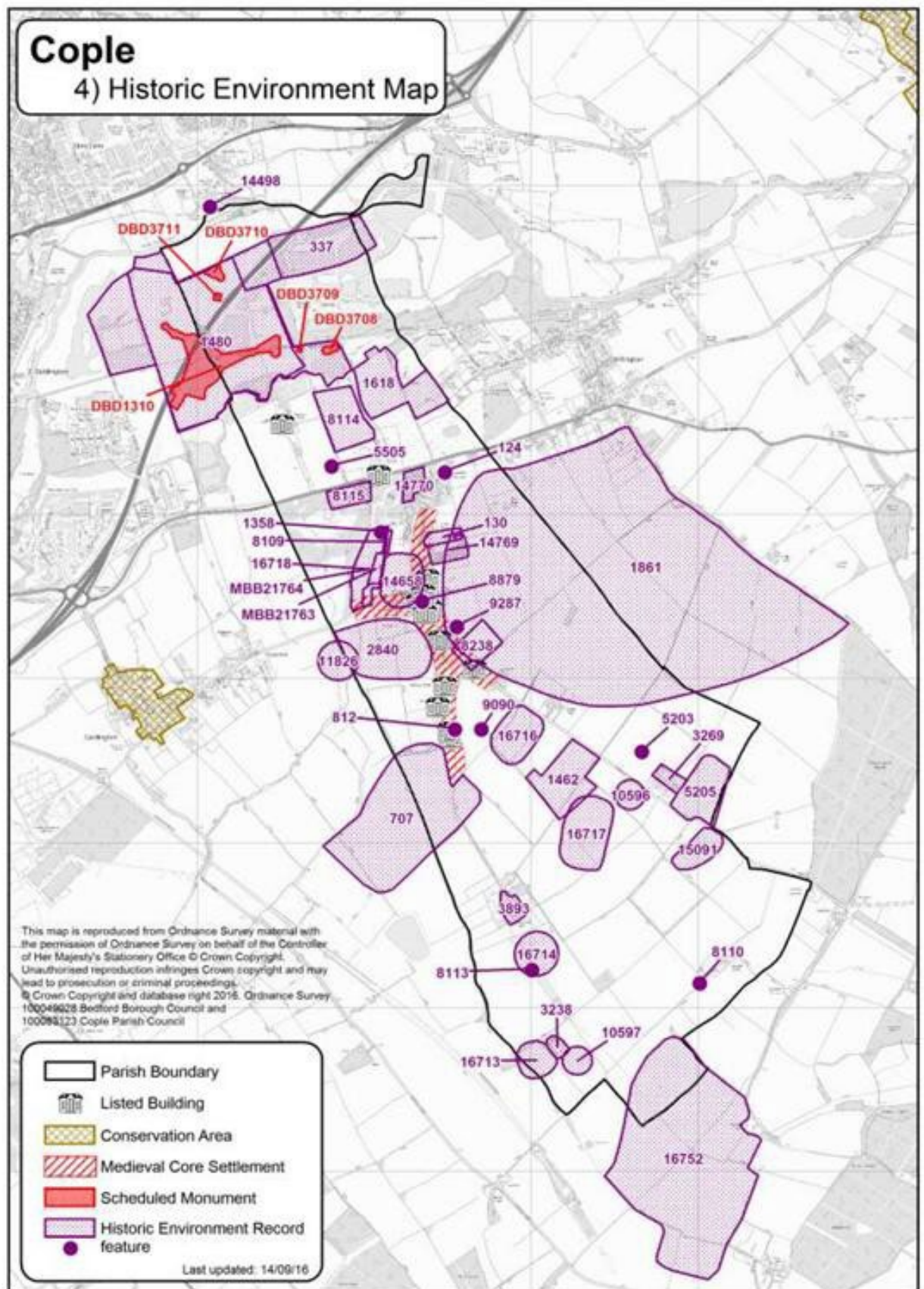


Amended map





Map 2. Cople Historic Environment Map



## Annex 2: Table of Aims and Policies

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AIMS		POLICIES
1	The rural character of the village will be maintained and enhanced through appropriate small-scale developments and improvements.	RC1
2	The natural environment including landscape features, biodiversity and green spaces will be respected and enhanced.	NE1, NE2, NE3, C2
3	High quality design will be secured in all new development reflecting the distinctive character of Cople.	SD1, SD2
4	New housing growth will meet the needs of existing and future residents.	SD1
5	The historic character and heritage assets of the parish will be preserved and enhanced.	HE1, HE2
6	Improvements to the road network to increase safety and provide adequate parking will be required alongside new development.	TRW1
7	The rights of way network in the Parish will be retained and accessible for pedestrians and where appropriate cyclists and horse riders.	TRW2
8	Existing community facilities will be retained. New facilities or improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged to enhance opportunities for community cohesion.	CF1, CF2
9	Formal and informal amenity spaces will be protected and enhanced and Local Green Space designated to protect those spaces of particular community value.	CF2
10	Local businesses, including homeworking and rural businesses will be encouraged and an up-to-date communications network will be supported.	LBA1

## Annex 3: Glossary

Word or phrase	Abbreviation	Meaning
Adoption		The procedure by which a plan becomes formal council responsibility. The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations also call this stage 'made' for the purposes of a Neighbourhood Plan.
Affordable housing		Housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision
Allocation		A piece of land that has had a particular use earmarked via a Neighbourhood Plan or Local Plan. This might be for housing, employment or another use such as open space.
Amenity		A positive element or elements that contribute to the overall character or enjoyment of an area. For example, open land, trees, historic buildings and the interrelationship between them, or less tangible factors such as tranquillity.
Biodiversity		The whole variety of life encompassing variations, including plants and animals.
Biodiversity Net Gain	BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain - or BNG for short - means leaving the natural environment in a better state than before a development or infrastructure project was built. Ensuring this happens via the planning process has now been made law through the Environment Act 2021. Essentially it means measuring a development's impact in biodiversity 'units', using a government metric created in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, reducing those impacts where possible and retaining areas within the development where appropriate, and then offsetting the residual by restoring land elsewhere.
Brownfield		Land that has been previously developed on (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings and residential gardens)

Consultation Statement		A document which details when, where and how the public and stakeholders have been consulted, issues that were raised and how they were addressed.
Countryside		Land not within settlement boundaries
Community Infrastructure Levy	CIL	An amount of money payable to the Council on new housing and other development which is used for infrastructure and community facilities and services
Design Code		A document containing a set of design principles for a specific location or site.
Developer Contributions/Planning Obligations/Section 106		Developer contributions, also known as planning obligations, can be secured via a section 106 legal agreement or planning condition attached to a planning permission. They help mitigate any adverse impacts generated by new development on infrastructure and facilities.
Employment Land		Land that is used or is proposed to be used for offices, industry and/or storage and distribution – covered by the B Class in the Use Classes Order
Evidence Base		The information and data gathered by local authorities and other plan makers to inform and support the policy approaches to be set out in a Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan
Examination		For neighbourhood planning, an independent assessment carried out by an examiner to determine whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions
Flood risk		The combination of probability of a particular flood event and its corresponding hazard and is used to refer to the scale of flood effect, combining hazard and probability, upon a particular site. Flood Zones 1-3b describes land with a specific probability of flooding with 1 being the least affected. Development may be restricted by Flood Zones.
Greenfield		Land where there has been no previous development.
Green Infrastructure or Green and Blue Infrastructure	GI or GBI	A network of multi-functional green space and other environmental features, urban and rural, including both established and new sites - which support natural and ecological processes, and are capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life

		benefits for local communities. 'Blue' refers to waterways and ponds.
Habitats Regulation Assessment	HRA	Tests the impacts of a plan or project on nature conservation sites of European importance and is required under EU legislation.
Heritage asset		A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets identified by the local planning authority or Neighbourhood Plan (sometimes called local listing).
Infrastructure		Refers to the fundamental facilities and systems serving an area, including the services and facilities necessary for its residents and economy to function, including transport.
Local Green Space	LGS	Local Green Space designation is a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities.
Local Plan		The main planning document in an area which sets out what type and how much development will occur across the area for the next 15 years or so. It also provides a suite of policies that help manage development including for design, access and amenity etc.
Local Wildlife Site (some areas County Wildlife Site)	LWS/CWS	Non statutory sites of substantive nature conservation interest determined locally according to national, regional and local biodiversity needs.
National Planning Policy Framework	NPPF	Sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
National Planning Practice Guidance	NPPG	A web-based resource, provides more detailed guidance on the contents of the NPPF
Neighbourhood Area		This is the area that the Neighbourhood Plan will focus on. For town or parish councils, the designated area is usually the boundary. Sometimes Parishes will combine to form one area.
Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood plan	NDP/NP	Will set out the vision for a neighbourhood area and the planning policies for the use and development of land. These policies will be at a local level to support the strategic policies within the emerging Local Plan. Plans should guide development rather than stop it. If

		adopted, a Neighbourhood Plan will become a statutory plan carrying equal weight with adopted local plan policies
Policy		A concise statement of the principles that a particular kind of development proposal should satisfy in order to obtain planning permission.
Policies Map (s)		Illustrates the spatial extent of the planning policies and designated areas.
Qualifying Body		Either a parish/town council or neighbourhood forum, which can initiate the process of neighbourhood planning.
Referendum		A vote by the eligible population of an electoral area who may decide on a matter of public policy. Neighbourhood Plans are subject to a referendum of the eligible voters within a neighbourhood area. There is a specific question set in Regulations which has a yes or no answer.
Settlement Hierarchy		Many Local Plans set out a hierarchy of settlements according to their population and facilities. Different levels of growth may be attributed to each tier.
Settlement Policy Area	SPA	An area designated in the Local Plan 2030 within which Policy 5S applies, allowing development in principle which complies with other policies in the development plan.
Site of Special Scientific Interest	SSSI	Designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 by Natural England they are a protected area designated as being of special interest by virtue of its flora, fauna, geological or geomorphological features.
Strategic Environmental Assessment	SEA	European requirement assesses the significant environmental impacts of plans and programmes.
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	SFRA	An assessment of the probability of flooding within a particular area.
Supplementary Planning Document	SPD	A document which elaborates upon a policy or policies of the Local Plan to provide additional guidance for a particular topic or type of development.

Sustainability Appraisal	SA	An assessment of the environmental, social, and economic impacts of a Local Plan to check that the plan accords with the principles of sustainable development.
Sustainable Development		An approach to development that aims to allow economic growth without damaging the environment or natural resources thereby development which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'
Sustainable Urban Drainage System	SuDS	An artificial drainage solution which reduces and slows the quantity and rate of surface water run-off from new development, dealing with it as close to the source as possible
Use Classes Order	UCO	The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) defines the categories of use of buildings or land for the purposes of planning legislation. In most cases, planning permission must be obtained to change the use of a building or land to another use class
Windfall Site		Sites which have not been identified as available in the Local Plan. They normally comprise previously developed sites that have unexpectedly become available.



## Annex 4: Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHA)

### Above Ground (Built)

The village of Cople has nine blocks of Bedford Estate cottages. This is a total of 36 separate homes. These cottages were built to improve the living conditions of agricultural labourers and to accommodate the demand for Cottage accommodation from the increasing number of agricultural labourers. The Bedford Estate Cottages are of historic interest and have strong communal associations.

The properties in Grange Lane are built in blocks with either yellow brick (the central two blocks of six) or red brick.

#### *2 to 8 Grange Lane*



This red brick block of three cottages was built in 1856. Number 2, [Cornflower Cottage](#), is much altered as shop premises were built on and this has its own separate entry. The other three cottages [DV1/C52/14-16] were all owned by Mark Young who bought a considerable number of former Duke of Bedford properties in Cople and Willington.



***10 to 20 Grange Lane***



This yellow brick block of six cottages was built in 1856. The block was also owned by Mark Young. Each cottage comprised a living room and a kitchen downstairs with two bedrooms above.

### ***22 to 32 Grange Lane***



This yellow brick block of six cottages was built in 1856. This block was owned by Mrs. Dynes. Again, each cottage comprised a living room, a kitchen and two bedrooms.

### ***34 to 40 Grange Lane***

This yellow brick block of four cottages was built in 1855. It was owned by Mark Young.

### ***42 and 44 Grange Lane***

This pair of red brick cottages was built in 1846. Both cottages comprised a living room, a kitchen and two bedrooms.



### ***8 to 12 Northhill Road***



This block of three homes was by 1927, the date Cople was assessed, owned by the Trustees of the Shuttleworth Estate]. It was built in 1863. Each home had a living room and a kitchen downstairs.

### ***14 to 20 Northhill Road***

This block of four homes is configured differently to 8 to 12 Northhill Road. It was built in 1865. Again, the Shuttleworth Trustees were owners by 1927.

### ***27 to 30 Water End Cople***

27 to 30 Water End are a reminder that the Dukes of Bedford were Lords of the Manor of Cople from 1779 to 1902. The row of terraced houses is built in the classic style of mid-19th century Bedford Estate houses found in such places as Husborne Crawley, Ridgmont and Woburn. The Cople row differs, however, in being built in yellow brick, with red brick edging to windows, rather than being built in red brick throughout. This row today comprises four dwellings. It originally comprised six. Number 30 and Number 29 today each occupy two of the former dwellings each. The row was owned by the trustees of the Shuttleworth Estate of Old Warden. The two end properties each had three bedrooms, the other four had two bedrooms each.

*The Tollgate, 1 Bedford Road, Cople*



1 Bedford Road is known as the Tollgate. This is because Bedford Road, the modern A603, was part of Bedfordshire's thirteenth turnpike road, known as the road from Bedford to the Great North Road. It was a dual track turnpike as it also included that part of the modern A428 between Bedford and the modern A1. Turnpike or toll roads were introduced in order to keep major roads in use. Previously road maintenance had been the responsibility of the parish through which they ran. Not surprisingly the labour and cost involved in keeping the road in good order were not popular with parishioners and so often the road became impassable. The parish would then be indicted at the Quarter Sessions to put the matter right, but prevention was clearly better than cure. The new turnpikes were designed to be self-supporting; people paid to use the road and this money went towards its upkeep. They were stopped at certain distances along the road at tollgates where the toll would be assessed and paid.

The tollgate on what is now the A603 was, to begin with, in Willington, but was later moved to Cople. The present house called The Tollgate is, in fact, the gatekeeper's lodge.

The Tollgate is of historic interest and is a rarity within the surrounding area.



### *The Old Stables, Woodlands Close*



The Old Stables is on the site of Cople House, which was destroyed by fire in 1971. Only the stable block, now three dwellings, still remains to indicate the place ever existed. The rest of the site is now occupied by Woodlands Close.

The early history of Cople House is obscure. The Barnard family, Bedford bankers, occupied it for nearly a century, between 1855 and 1947. Cople House was originally built c.1678 but was demolished in the early nineteenth century and a new one built. From 1942 to 1947 the house was occupied by the Women's Land Army as a hostel and in the latter year Mrs Barnard decided to sell the house and the estate.

*Hoo Farm Cottages, 50 to 51 Northhill Road*



These buildings are examples of Bedford Estates Cottages to be found on outlying farms within the parish.

## **Below Ground Assets**

124 GRAVEL PIT SPINNEY  
130 DOVEHOUSE CLOSE  
337 CROPMARKS, in North West of Willington Plantation  
707 CROPMARKS, Water End  
812 BUILDINGS (site of) Water End  
1358 OLD SAND PIT  
1462 GRAVELL FIELD  
1480 CROPMARKS, Octagon Farm, South of River Ouse  
1480 CROPMARKS, Octagon Farm, South of River Ouse  
1480 CROPMARKS, Octagon Farm, South of River Ouse  
1618 CROPMARKS, North of Dog Farm  
1861 CROPMARKS, South of Willington  
2840 CROPMARKS, West of Cople House  
3238 ?MOAT, South East of Wood End Farm  
3269 ?MOAT, Cople Hoo Farm  
3893 MOATED MANOR SITE & EARTHWORKS, Wood End  
5203 IRON AGE OCCUPATION, NW of Hoo Farm  
5205 CROPMARKS 5505 RIDGE AND FURROW  
8109 ?MOAT Rowsacks  
8110 FLINT AXE  
8113 QUERN STON  
8114 MULTI-PERIOD ACTIVITY; Claypit Close  
8115 CLAYPIT FURLONG  
8238 GREEN CLOSE  
8879 ALL SAINTS' PARISH CHURCHYARD  
9090 CROPMARKS, Water End  
9287 ARROWHEAD  
10596 ROMAN TILE, SW of Coplehoo Farm  
10597 ROMAN POTTERY, at S end of Cople parish  
11826 HANGMAN'S GRAVE on Cardington/Cople boundary  
14658 ROMAN COIN (Gratian?) North West of Cople Church  
14769 GRAVEL PITS 14770 GRAVEL PITS (?fishponds)  
14498 BRICK KILNS Risinghoe  
15091 LINEAR CROPMARKS, South East of Hoo Farm  
16713 CROPMARKS, adjacent to Park Lane  
16714 CROPMARKS, South of Wood End Farm  
16716 CROPMARKS, SW of Middle Farm  
16717 CROPMARKS, SW of Hoo Farm  
16718 CROPMARKS, West of Grange Farm  
16752 LINEAR CROPMARKS, ROMAN, IRON AGE & MEDIEVAL FINDS & CREMATIONS, South West of Sweetbrier Farm  
DBD1310 Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex 600m NW of Octagon Farm  
DBD3708 Two barrows 500m NE of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex  
DBD3709 A barrow 400m north of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex  
DBD3710 Three barrows and a rectilinear enclosure 1000m NNW of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex  
DBD3711 Mortuary enclosure 900m NNW of Octagon Farm: part of a Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary complex  
MBB21763 Probable prehistoric pit alignment west of Cople  
MBB21764 Evidence for post-medieval water meadow management west of Cople





# **Bedford Borough Council Cople Neighbourhood Plan POST- EXAMINATION DECISION STATEMENT**

## **Regulation 18 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended)**

This document is the decision statement required to be prepared under Regulation 18(2) of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended). It sets out the response of Bedford Borough Council to each of the recommendations contained within the independent examination report of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan (“the Plan”) by independent examiner Wendy Burden, which was received by the Bedford Borough Council on 19 November 2025.

This decision statement, the independent examiner’s report and the submission version of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents can be viewed on the [neighbourhood planning pages](#) of Bedford Borough Council’s website.

## BACKGROUND

Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), Bedford Borough Council has a statutory duty to assist communities in the preparation of neighbourhood plans and to take plans through a process of examination and referendum. The Localism Act 2011 (Part 6, Chapter 3) sets out the Local Planning Authority's neighbourhood planning responsibilities.

This statement confirms that the modifications proposed in the examiner's report have been considered and accepted and that subject to making the recommended modifications (and other minor modifications) the Cople Neighbourhood Plan may now be submitted to referendum.

The Cople Neighbourhood Plan relates to the area that was designated by Bedford Borough Council as a Neighbourhood Area on 30 July 2015. This area is coterminous with the boundary of the parish of Cople and is entirely within the Local Planning Authority's area.

Between 14 September – 31 October 2024, Cople Parish Council undertook consultation on the draft Plan in accordance with Regulation 14.

Following the submission of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan to Bedford Borough Council on 22 May 2025, Bedford Borough Council publicised the draft Plan for a six-week period and representations were invited in accordance with Regulation 16. This consultation took place between 30 June – 11 August 2025.

## INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION

Bedford Borough Council appointed Wendy Burden, with the agreement of Cople Parish Council, to undertake the independent examination of the Cople Neighbourhood Plan and to prepare a report of the independent examination.

The examiner examined the Plan by way of written representations supported by an unaccompanied site visit of the Neighbourhood Plan Area on 1 October 2025.

The examiner's report was formally received by Bedford Borough Council on 19 November 2025. The report concludes that subject to making the modifications recommended by the examiner, the Plan meets the basic conditions set out in the legislation and

should proceed to referendum. The examiner also recommends that the referendum area should be the same as the designated Neighbourhood Area, which is the same as the administrative boundary for Cople parish.

Following receipt of the examiner's report, legislation requires that Bedford Borough Council considers each of the modifications recommended, the reasons for them, and decides what action to take. Bedford Borough Council is also required to consider whether to extend the area to be covered by the referendum.

## DECISION AND REASONS

Having considered each of the recommendations made in the examiner's report and the reasons for them, Bedford Borough Council has decided to accept all of the examiner's recommended modifications to the draft Plan. These are set out in Table 1 below.

Bedford Borough Council considers that, subject to the modifications being made to the Plan as set out in Table 1 below, the Cople Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions explained in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), is compatible with the Human Rights Convention and that the requirements of paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) have been met.

The examiner recommended that the Plan should proceed to a referendum based on the designated Neighbourhood Area. Bedford Borough Council has considered this recommendation and the reasons for it, and has decided to accept it. The referendum area for the final Cople Neighbourhood Plan will therefore be based on the designated Cople Parish Neighbourhood Area.

These decisions were made by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity on behalf of the Bedford Borough Council's Executive on **date???**.

As a consequence of the required modifications, Bedford Borough Council will alter the Cople Neighbourhood Plan in order that it can proceed to referendum.

The Neighbourhood Plan document will be re-titled **Referendum Version**. The date for the referendum and further details will be publicised shortly once a date is set by Bedford Borough Council.

**Table 1: Decisions on the Examiner's Recommended Modifications to the Cople Neighbourhood Plan**

<b>Proposed Modification Number</b>	<b>Cople Neighbourhood Plan Reference</b>	<b>Examiner's Report Reference</b>	<b>Recommended Modification and Reason</b>	<b>Bedford Borough Council Decision/reasoning</b>
PM1	Page 14, Policy RC1	Para 4.21 and 4.22	<p>Change the fourth bullet point to a new clause.</p> <p>Amend the clause by deleting "as defined" and inserting "as listed below and shown". Also delete "specific views". Change the existing five bullet points which list the views to a numbered list from 1 – 5.</p> <p>Amend the description of each numbered view as follows:</p> <p>"1 Views from Sheerhatch Woods and Moxhill Farm towards Cople, Willington and Cardington Hangers</p> <p>2 Views from Water End across the fields to Moxhill Farm</p> <p>3 Views of Cardington Hangers across the fields from Cople Playing Fields</p> <p>4 Views from Woodlands Close across Northill Road and fields towards Sheerhatch Woods</p> <p>5 Views of the Church from Willington Road, Northill Road, Grange Lane, Cople Playing Fields and Millenium Wood are to be protected in the Neighbourhood Plan."</p> <p>Reasons – In the interests of clarity and to identify the views which relate to the bullet points.</p>	Agree with the modification for the reasons set out in the examiner's report.
PM2	Page 37 Policies Map	Para 4.21 and 4.22	Delete the current symbol for views and replace with arrows as shown on the OS Map accompanying the CPC's response to examiner's questions. Number the arrows from 1 – 5 in accordance with the amended Policy RC1.	

			Reason - So that someone unfamiliar with the area can identify the views.	
PM3	Page 18 Policy NE3	Para 4.24	<p>In the first sentence delete “including any future development brought forward in the draft Local Plan 2040”; and change “targeting” to “targeted”.</p> <p>In the first bullet point add after A603 “from Dog Farm towards Octagon Farm and the Land at Bedford River Valley Park.”</p> <p>Reasons – The Local Plan 2040 has now been withdrawn and for clarification of the location of the site.</p>	
PM4	Page 21 Policy SD2	Para 4.26	<p>In the second clause of the Policy amend the second sentence as follows: delete after “Retrofitting” and insert “of Listed Buildings is likely to require Listed Building Consent.”</p> <p>Reasons – The wording relates to planning applications and the wording is not helpful.</p>	
PM5	Page 22 Policy SD3	Para 4.27	<p>In the second clause of the Policy delete “or use of impermeable surfaces”.</p> <p>Add new sentence “All new areas of hardstanding in developments must be permeable surfaces.”</p> <p>Reason – To add in amendment put forward by Anglian Water.</p>	
PM6	Page 24 Policy HE1	Para 4.28	<p>Delete the first clause of the Policy.</p> <p>Reason – duplicate text.</p>	

PM7	Page 25 Policy HE2	Para 4.30	<p>Delete the second clause of the Policy. Retain the first five words of the first clause. Insert colon after “that”.</p> <p>In the third clause delete the first five words.</p> <p>On a new line after the colon insert a bullet point and add the third clause from “they---”.</p> <p>On a new line insert a second bullet point and add the first clause from “they---”</p> <p>Reasons - Scheduled Monuments are subject to policy set out in the NPPF and considered unnecessary to include reference to this.</p>	
PM8	Page 29 Policy TRW2	Para 4.32	<p>In the first sentence of the Policy delete “keep traffic speeds low and”.</p> <p>Reason – Traffic speeds are not a land use matter.</p>	
PM9	Page 30 Policy C1	Para 4.33	<p>In the first clause after “facility” insert “as listed below”.</p> <p>Reason – to ensure the policy is clear which facilities are being referred to in the policy.</p>	
PM10	Page 33 Policy LBA1	Para 4.36	<p>At the end of the second bullet point delete “where relevant” and insert “where relevant” in the third bullet point after “taken”.</p> <p>In the interests of clarity and a modification suggested by Cople Parish Council in response to the Examiner’s questions.</p>	