Plan:MK Topic Paper - Issues Consultation
Rural Issues

September 2014

Plan:MK

Plan:MK Topic Papers – Issues Consultation

Introduction

Plan:MK, a new Local Plan for Milton Keynes, will set out a development strategy for Milton Keynes up to 2031 with a range of detailed policies to guide development over this period.

It will replace the Core Strategy, adopted in 2013 and the existing Local Plan (2005) which together currently form the part of development plan for the Borough.

Once complete, Plan:MK and any Neighbourhood Plans, will be the starting point for planning advice, (other than for Minerals and Waste) and decisions made by the Council. It will set out how much development is expected over the plan period and the location of development sites across the Borough. It will also include detailed policies to ensure that all development is of high quality and respectful to the character of Milton Keynes, and that unplanned development only occurs where it is appropriate.

Plan:MK has to be prepared within the context of national planning policy and within the legislative framework set out by the Government. This Topic Paper is part of the first stage in the process where we are seeking initial view of the public and other interested parties on what should be in Plan:MK.

What is the purpose of the Topic Papers?

This is one of a series of Topic Papers published by the Council at this time. In total there are twelve Topic Papers covering:

- Growth in Housing
- Employment and Economic Development
- Town Centres and Retail
- Transport and Travel
- Rural Issues
- Provision of Physical and Social Infrastructure
- Quality of Place
- Culture, Recreation and Quality of Life
- Open Space and the Natural Environment
- Climate Change and Sustainability
- Duty to Cooperate
- The Way Forward: Preparing a Vision and Development Strategy for Plan:MK

Each of the Topic Papers is available on the Council website at
http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planmk

The aim of the papers is to engage everyone with a stake in the future growth and development of Milton Keynes in the preparation of Plan:MK. They cover a range of topics, sometimes interlinked, which the Council have identified as being key to the development of the Plan.

Each paper summarises the background to the topic, setting out data and policy context, before highlighting key issues and posing questions for the reader – the responses to which will help the Council in the development of Plan:MK.

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The final topic paper, "The Way Forward" draws together issues raised in the preceding papers and considers what they mean for the Vision and Development Strategy.

When we produce the final version of Plan:MK, the Vision and Development Strategy will be at the start of the Plan, setting the scene for the policies that will follow.

These Topic Papers are being published for consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 'Preparation of a local plan' of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

How to respond

The Council would appreciate any feedback you have on the Topic Papers. In particular, if you can focus on the questions posed it will help with the development of the plan. Feedback can be submitted:

- Online via our consultation portal: http://miltonkeynes-consult.objective.co.uk
- Via email: PlanMK@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- In writing: Development Plans, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ

All comments should be received by **5pm on Wednesday 3rd December 2014.**

How will the feedback be used?

The next stage of the process will be to develop a Preferred Options document, which will set out the Council's initial draft of Plan:MK.

Feedback from this Issues consultation will help to shape the options considered as part of the development of the Preferred Options. These options will evolve through further focused consultation with key stakeholders.

The Council expects to publish the Preferred Options document for consultation in 2015.

The overall aim is to get a final plan prepared by early 2016, at which time it will be submitted to the Government and be subject to independent examination.

Introduction

1 Whilst over 85% of the Borough's population live in Milton Keynes city (2011 Census), the rural area comprises about two thirds of the Borough's 308km^2 area. It contains areas of diverse and attractive landscape influenced by the river Ouse and Yardley Ridge to the north and the Brickhills Ridge to the south. Within this area there are towns of Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands and a range of smaller settlements comprising well-defined communities.

2 Some of the villages, especially in the northern parts of the Borough, still maintain their traditional rural character that is influenced by farming and land-based businesses. However, where the villages are closer to the city, their character is more influenced by that proximity, resulting in a less traditional and more hybrid character of these rural settlements. The residents of these villages will be more likely to work in Milton Keynes and will easily benefit from the facilities available in the city. Also, the businesses in these villages will aim to best exploit benefits that ensue from their close proximity to the city.

3 The majority of the rural settlements in the Borough are served by or are close to the main road network that allow residents who have access to motor vehicles, to relatively quickly access the main service centres either in Milton Keynes or in the rural towns. Bow Brickhill and

Woburn Sands are the only two rural settlements with direct access to the rail network. However, for those without access to a car, coverage of the public transport in the rural area can be very variable, with some of the villages that have a relatively good bus service and some that do not have a bus services at all. This is discussed in more detail later in this paper, and its impact on residents' abilities to access day-to-day services and facilities.

4 The Development Strategy in the Local Plan (within Policy S1) and the Core Strategy (Policies CS1 and CS9) is to concentrate new development at Milton Keynes City, and in or around existing centres. In the rural area those centres include Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands, which are classified as 'Key Settlements'. These Key Settlements have the widest range of facilities and services, and are often the places where most people in the rural area tend to go shopping and for other daily needs

5 In addition to this Hanslope, Bow Brickhill and Sherington are classified as 'Selected Villages'. Decisions to choose a selected village status (either through the

2005 Local Plan or the Core Strategy process) have been made mainly on the basis of a certain level of services and facilities being available in these villages and a local support (expressed by the Parish Council) for a very limited amount of new development to support their viability.

6 In 'Other Villages' and the 'Open Countryside' there is a restrictive approach to new development. This means that in the villages with the settlement boundaries (Other Villages) there occasionally occurs some infill development. More development is directed to the settlements that have access to services and facilities as these locations tend to be more sustainable.

7 This strategy of Key Settlements, Selected Villages, and Other Villages is based on the principle of concentrated, rather than dispersed, growth. The Key Settlements were identified by assessing facilities and accessibility by public transport. Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands are the three largest settlements and have the widest range of services. This strategy is being reviewed in the Plan:MK and will be considered in the Development Strategy Topic Paper.

8 The purpose of this paper is to start a discussion on a future framework of rural planning policies in a new local plan (Plan:MK) for the Borough of Milton Keynes. The overall aim of this new local plan is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development which is at the heart of the planning system. For the rural part of the Borough, this means dealing with issues including accessibility of facilities, rural employment and housing need. These form the key themes of this topic paper that are set out in the following sections:

- Transport and accessibility including Broadband. This section considers quality of public transport links in the rural settlements. Also, the section looks at access to the internet and high speed broadband as these services are now considered by most people as the essential requirements when buying a house or setting up a business.
- Services and facilities. The section looks at levels of service provision in the rural areas. It is recognised that in order to achieve a certain level of self-sufficiency the settlements need a range of services and facilities.
- Employment. This section of the topic paper looks at the issues related to employment in the rural areas. Some of the issues considered are related to the most common industries, residents' occupations and wages
- Housing and Sustainable Communities. The last section of the paper discusses affordability of housing, housing growth, the limits of development and the general issues related to quality and sustainability of natural and built environment in the rural area.

9 Many of the above issues are also addressed in related Topic Papers.

Figure 1 Rural Settlements in Milton Keynes Borough
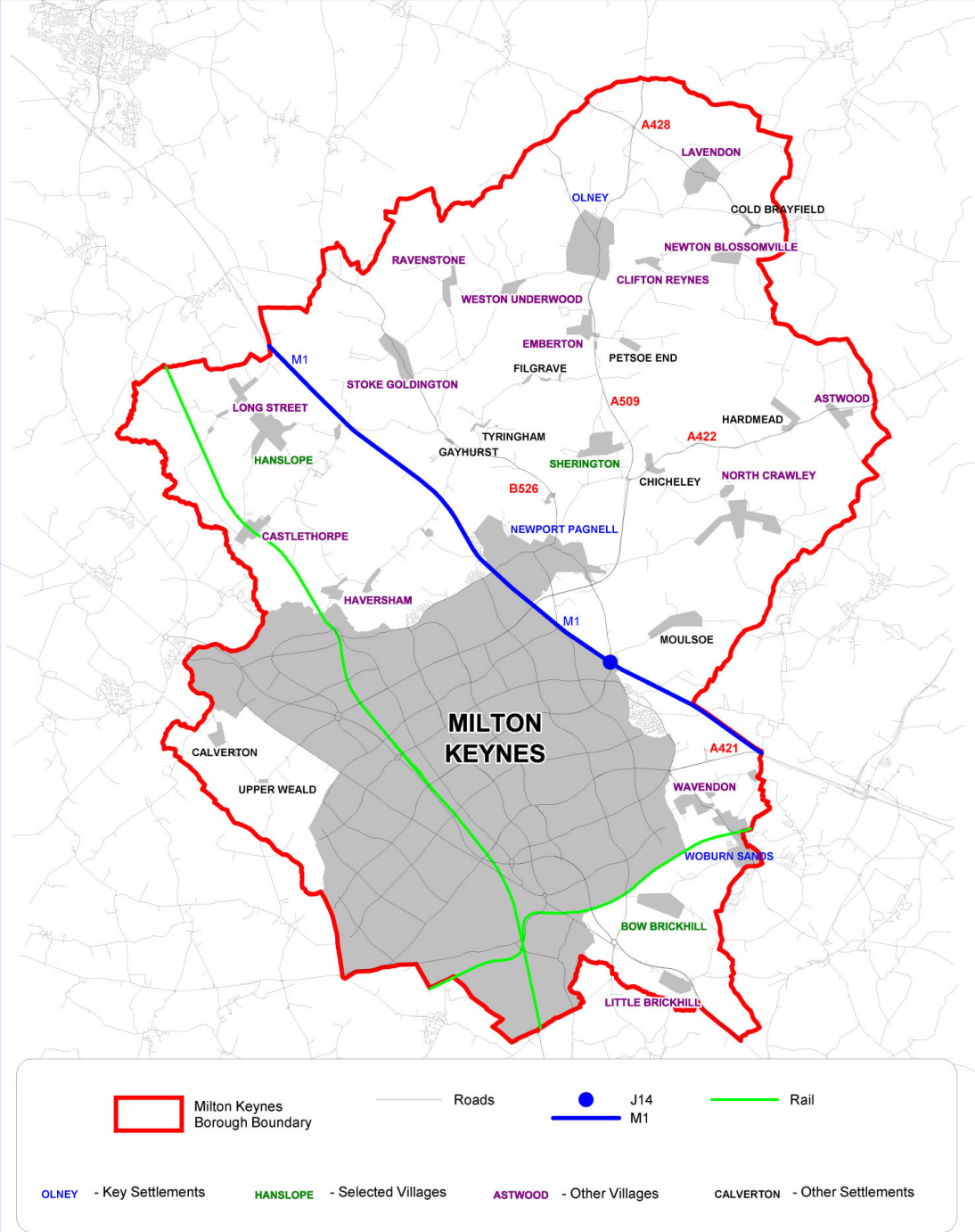
Rural Settlements

Plan by N Kingsley | Ext. 4813 | 17/07/2014

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Policy Background

10 How rural issues could be addressed by the planning system was contained in recommendations in the Taylor Review – "Living Working Countryside - The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing" (DCLG, 2008)[1]. The starting premise of the Taylor Review is that rural communities need to change, particularly to meet affordable housing targets in their communities. Housing and growth in the rural economy needs to be planned for in a way that will deliver sustainable communities that benefit from employment opportunities and enhance the natural environment. The Review recognised that different approaches are needed for rural market towns and villages but the emphasis in the document is that house building is necessary and should be managed in a way that provides the most value for existing communities.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

11 National policy in the NPPF reflects the importance of promoting a strong rural economy. Paragraph 28 of the Framework puts a strong emphasis on planning policies that support sustainable growth of all type of businesses and enterprise in rural areas. It also emphasises that policies should promote the development of agriculture and agricultural diversification and the expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres. The NPPF also emphasises that planning policies should also promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages.

12 The NPPF (para 55) seeks planning policies to promote sustainable development in rural areas through new

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1   The Taylor Review – Living Working Countryside
     http://www.wensumalliance.org.uk/publications/
     Taylor_Review_Livingworkingcountryside.pdf

housing, provided it is located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

Local Policy

13   The existing development strategy covering the rural area, as set out in the existing Local Plan (2005) and the Core strategy (2013) follow the principle of concentrated rather than dispersed growth in the rural area. Growth in the rural area of Milton Keynes has always been treated separately to the growth requirements of the city. In fact, the Core Strategy confirms that only a limited amount of development should take place in the rural area of the Borough, and any shortfall in housing completions in the city will not be offset by additional development in the rural settlements.

14   The most pertinent policies to the rural areas of the Borough include:

- Policy CS1 'Milton Keynes Development Strategy' (Core Strategy) – the hierarchy in policy CS1 continues to focus development in the rural area on the main, most sustainable towns (Key Settlements) and villages (Selected Villages)
- Policy CS9 'Strategy for the Rural Area' (Core Strategy) – confirms that an update of all village boundaries will take place through the Site Allocations Plan and Plan:MK. Conversions will not be at the expense of key rural facilities, which will be protected from redevelopment for other uses.
- Policy S10 'Open Countryside' (2005 Local Plan) – Policy S1 aims to protect the countryside and to concentrate new development within and adjoining existing settlements.

- Policy S11 'Areas of Attractive Landscape' (2005 Local Plan) – Policy S11 aims to protect and enhance those areas of countryside identified as having county-wide landscape value. In Milton Keynes Borough these are: the Brickhills and the Ouse Valley, north and west of Newport Pagnell. This is covered in more detail in the Open Space and Natural Environment Topic Paper.
- Policy VS1 and VS2 'Village Shops, Public Houses and Post Offices'(2005 Local Plan) – these policies aim to maintain and enhance village facilities and to reduce the need to travel by car to other settlements. Policy VS2 aims to protect village shops, post offices and public houses unless all means of retaining the use have been explored, and the Council is satisfied that the existing use is no longer commercially viable
- The Local Plan also has policies that are specific to the individual Key Settlements, which aim to achieve specific environmental and physical improvements that would enhance their attractiveness and viability.
- Policy H6 'Rural Housing Needs' (2005 Local Plan) – this policy allows planning permission to be granted for affordable housing to meet local needs on sites outside the development limits of rural settlements, as an exception to normal planning policies. Such proposals will only be approved where there is a need for affordable

housing which cannot be met from the development of planned sites in the locality.

- Policy E5 'Re-use of Rural Buildings' (2005 Local Plan) – this policy aims to encourage the re-use of rural buildings for employment purposes which is generally less detrimental to the fabric of historic buildings compared to conversion for residential use, and it can help to diversify the rural economic.

- Policy E6 'New Buildings for Employment Uses in the Open Countryside' (2005 Local Plan) allows for necessary new employment buildings as part of farm diversification schemes

Neighbourhood Planning

15 Several parishes in the rural area are preparing Neighbourhood Plans, which will become part of the development plan for the Borough if they are successful at a referendum. Neighbourhood Plans are prepared by a Town or Parish Council to help address the concerns of local residents or businesses in an area.

16 Woburn Sands is the first parish in the Borough to have had their plan agreed at a referendum (which took place on the 22nd May 2014), but several other rural parishes including Newport Pagnell, Olney, Bow Brickhill, Castlethorpe and Wavendon are also preparing plans.

17 Neighbourhood plans must be in conformity with our strategic planning policies, and MKC will continue to work closely with Town and Parish Councils to try and address any planning concerns they have through the Plan:MK process, as well as in their own plans.

Key Trends

18   The overarching strategy in the 2005 Local Plan and the 2013 Core Strategy was to concentrate development in the most sustainable locations – i.e. the city and settlements with the most facilities and the best public transport links. In terms of the rural areas this development strategy results in concentrated, rather than dispersed, growth since there is a limited number of developments that can sustain certain facilities including doctor surgeries, pharmacies, secondary schools or frequent bus services. In the rural area those centres include Newport Pagnell, Woburn Sands and Olney, which are classified as 'Key Settlements' and to a significantly lesser extent 'Selected Villages' of Hanslope, Bow Brickhill and Sherington.

Key Settlements

19   In 2011 over 66% of the total rural population was concentrated in Key Settlements of Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands (24,511 out of 37,022 people). By far the biggest of them all is Newport Pagnell with a population of 15,118; followed by Olney with a population of 6,477 and Woburn Sands with 2,916 residents. As stated above, within the rural areas most services and facilities are located in these Key Settlements.

Selected and Other Villages

20   The villages with a defined development boundary constitute the largest group of rural settlements. Population figures in these settlements differ considerably; the largest of them Hanslope has the population of 2,300 and the smallest Astwood has only got 195 residents. However, over 30% (11,200 out of 37,022) of the total rural population live in these settlements. The issue of village boundaries is discussed in more depth in the last section of this Topic Paper.

21   Of these villages with a defined development boundary, the 2005 Local Plan and the Core Strategy identify Hanslope, Bow Brickhill and Sherington in particular as **Selected Villages**. In these villages there is provision for small-scale development to help support and improve local facilities, in line with Parish Council support.

22   **Other Villages** are those remaining villages which also have development boundaries defined on the Local Plan Proposals Map. The Core Strategy states that there will be opportunities for infill and redevelopment in these villages.

23 There are also other small settlements and hamlets which do not have a settlement boundary, and are covered over by an 'Open Countryside' designation on the Proposals Map.

Demographic trends

24 The population of the rural area in 2011 was 37,022 which represents an increase of almost 5.7% compared to the 2001 census results (35,024). While the rural population is growing, as a proportion of the Borough's total it is decreasing (15% in 2011 compared to 17% in 2001), since most population growth occurs in the urban area.
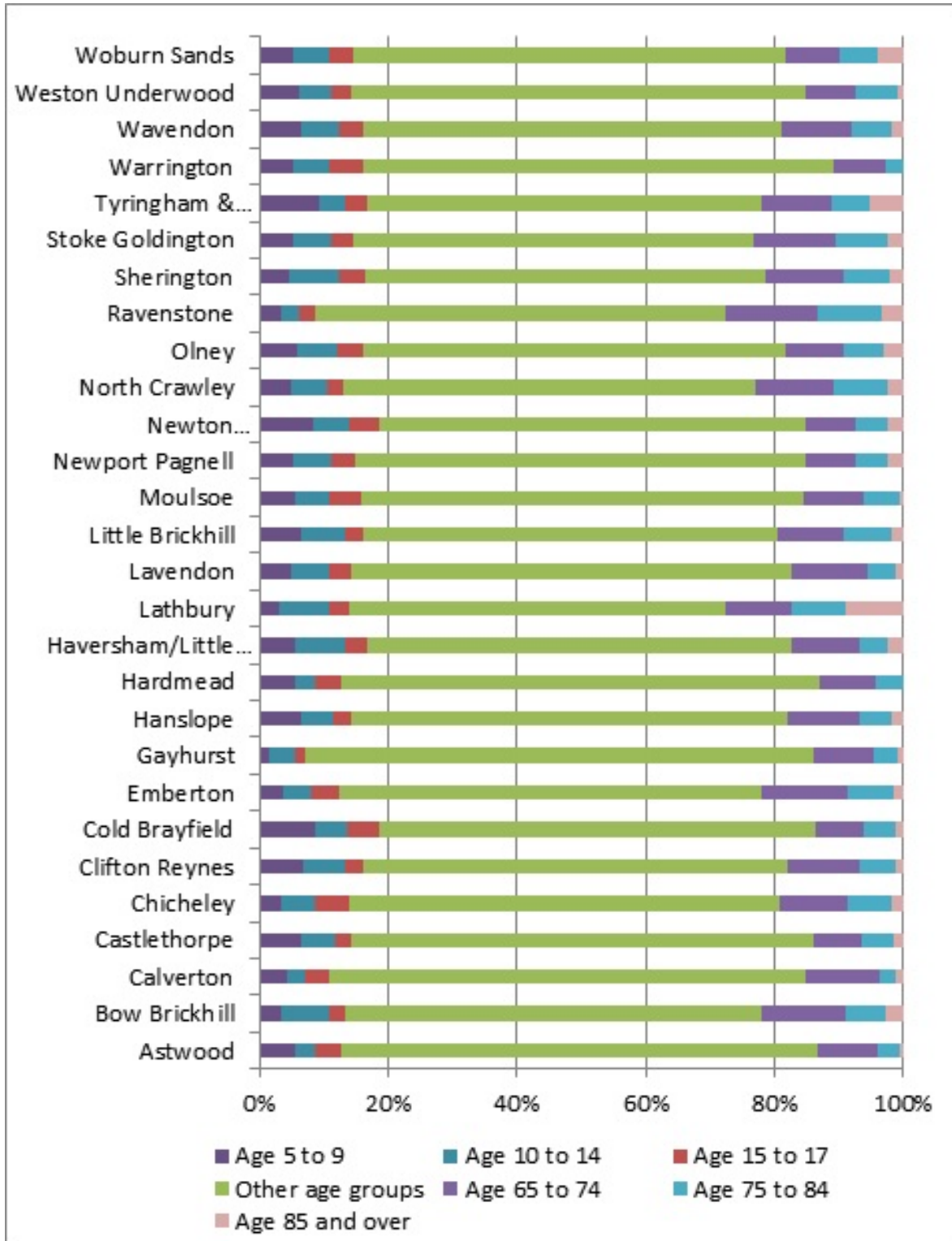
Population projections and age structure

25 In line with the Core Strategy's requirement of providing 1,750 additional dwellings each year, Milton Keynes Council has produced detailed population and household projections for the 20-year period 2011-31. These projections show an increase of 30,300 households in the urban area and 4,100 households in the rural area, equivalent to 88% and 12% of total household growth.

26 The rural population is generally older than that in the urban area, and the older population groups are growing faster too. Only 9% of the urban population was aged over 65 in 2001 compared to almost 14% of the rural population. By 2011 the proportion of the population aged 65+ had risen to 17.2% in the rural area compared to 9.9% in the urban area. Newport Pagnell historically has been classified as a rural settlement, but due to its size, number of facilities and its economic base the town has more urban than rural characteristics and the town's population structure is more similar to Milton Keynes city than the rest of the rural area. Interestingly, should Newport Pagnell be excluded from the group of rural settlements the proportion of the population aged 65+ in the reminder of the rural settlements would have risen to 18.6%.

Figure 2 Age Structure by Settlement

27 Figure 2 'Age Structure by Settlement' shows the population's age distribution in the rural settlements with a focus on two groups of residents, school age children and those of the traditional retirement age (65 years and over). The graph above shows that in 20 out of 28 rural settlements there were significant proportions of their populations (between 30% and 40%) that fall into these two categories. The villages of Lathbury and Ravenstone have a noticeably higher proportion of the retirement age residents and, in the case of Ravenstone a very small proportion of younger people. Whilst in the case of Lathbury the presence of a care home can explain the higher figures for older residents there is no evident explanation of the age structure in Ravenstone.

28 It is assumed that school children will have to rely on public transport or a family member or a friend with a car in order to access facilities that are not available in their home settlement. The second group of the retired people, in general, may be more likely to use public transport, instead of using a car, to access larger settlements.

29 As well as this reliance on public transport, there is also a similar pressure on services and facilities, importantly doctor's surgeries and community facilities.

Question 1

Population structure

- What implications does the age structure of the rural areas have for Plan:MK, and
- What policies are needed to address those challenges?

Transport and Accessibility, including Broadband

Physical distance from villages to the Key Settlements

30 Most of the villages within the Borough are located within a 5km (approximately 3 miles) radius of one of the Key Settlements (Newport Pagnell, Olney or Woburn Sands) or town centres in the main urban area of Milton Keynes (Wolverton and Bletchley). Similarly, most of the rural settlements have some level of public transport provision and therefore their physical separation to the Key Settlements or the main urban area should not have a great impact on accessing services. The most remote villages (only in terms of their physical separation to the Key Settlements) are:

- Hanslope and Long Street – located approximately 6km (3.7 miles) and 7km (4.3 miles) north of Wolverton respectively
- Stoke Goldington – located approximately 6km (3.7 miles) west of Olney
- Hardmead and Astwood – located approximately 7km (4.3 miles) and 8 km (nearly 5 miles) east of Newport Pagnell respectively

31 Whilst physical distances between the villages and the towns can influence accessibility to the services offered in these towns, it is not the only, or necessarily the major factor that impacts on people's freedom of choice in accessing the services.

32 Inevitably, there is a high reliance on the private car in the rural parts of the Borough. Indeed, nearly half of households have two or more cars. Also, compared to the urban area, a much smaller proportion of residents do not have a car (11.7% compared to 20.3%). Nevertheless, public transport is very important as those without a private car could otherwise become isolated in settlements that have few or limited services.

Accessibility by public transport

Frequency of services

33 Rural Bus Services in 1998, 2007, 2012 and 2014 shows that Gayhurst has a better level of public transport than in 2012. Between 2012 and 2013 there was no worsening of a level of public transport in any of the villages. The table shows that five of the smallest villages (population of 250 or less have a poor level of bus service, however it also shows that some of the smallest villages have a good level of public transport as they take advantage of inter town bus services that connect Northampton, Milton Keynes and Bedford. All of the largest villages (population of 850 or more) benefit from more than ten buses per day to a nearby town.

13

Table 1 Rural Bus Services in 1998, 2007, 2012 and 2014

	Population	Bus Services			
		1998	2007	2012	2014
Newport Pagnell	15,450	Good	Good	Good	Good
Olney	6,500	Good	Good	Good	Good
Woburn Sands	2,900	Good	Good	Good	Good
Sherington	950	Medium	Good	Good	Good
Hanslope	2,300	Good	Good	Good	Good
Bow Brickhill	600	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Astwood/Hardmead	150	Good	Poor	Good	Good
Calverton	200	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Castlethorpe	1,050	Good	Good	Good	Good
Chicheley	100	Good	Poor	Good	Good
Clifton Reynes	200	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Cold Brayfield	50	Good	Good	Good	Good
Emberton	600	Medium	Good	Good	Good
Gayhurst	100	Medium	Poor	Poor	Medium
Haversham	850	Good	Good	Good	Good
Lathbury	150	Poor	Poor	Medium	Medium
Lavendon	1,200	Good	Good	Good	Good
Little Brickhill	400	Medium	Good	Medium	Medium
Moulsoe	350	Medium	Medium	Good	Good
Newton Blossomville	250	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
North Crawley	750	Good	Good	Medium	Medium
Ravenstone	200	Poor	Poor	Medium	Medium
Stoke Goldington	600	Medium	Good	Medium	Medium
Tyringham/Filgrave	200	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Warrington	50	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Wavendon	600	Medium	Poor	Good	Good
Weston Underwood	200	Poor	Good	Medium	Medium

Table Notes:

- *Good - more than 10 buses per day, Monday to Saturday, to a nearby town.*
- *Medium - at least 4, but fewer than 10 buses per day, Monday to Saturday, to a nearby town.*
- *Poor - no service, or only on certain days, or limited service up to 3 buses per day.*

34   Residents of Newton Blossomville and Clifton Reynes can use two local taxi services to access the services available in the nearby towns. A shared taxi service operates on a pre-booked basis and allows to make a return journey between the two villages and Olney.

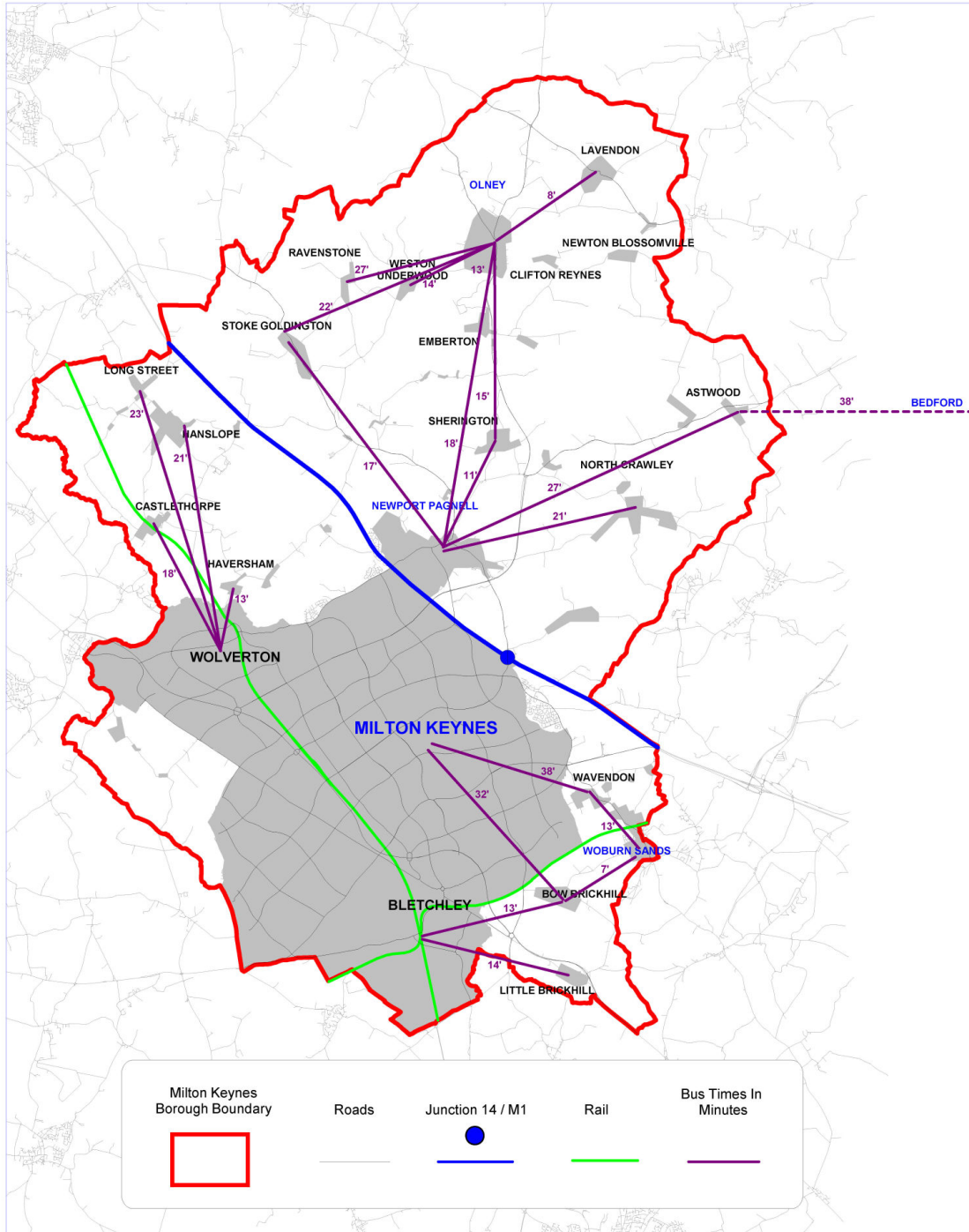**Time needed to access services in the Key Settlements or other nearby towns by public transport**

35   Figure 3 'Bus journey times Selected Villages and Other Villages and nearby times' shows that the Key Settlements of Newport Pagnell and Olney form transport hubs/destinations that can be relatively quickly accessed from most of the surrounding villages. The M1 motorway acts as a barrier between the eastern and western parts of Borough and the villages from the western side of the M1 naturally gravitate towards Wolverton and Milton Keynes, as well as Woburn Sands in terms of Wavendon and Bow Brickhill.

36   In more detail, Figure 3 'Bus journey times Selected Villages and Other Villages and nearby times' shows that villages of Lavendon, Bow Brickhill, Haversham, Emberton and Sherington benefit from a quick transport links to the Key Settlements. However, the speed of access to the Key Settlements should be considered together with the frequency of bus services which may be sporadic[2].

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2   Accessibility by public transport http://www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk. Journey times may vary depending on time of travel. Examples below indicate the shortest journey time between 7.30am and 10am on 15/05/2014. The times shown take into account an allowance for walking to and from a bus stop from a centre of a settlement. There are no regular bus services in Clifton Reynes and Newton Blossomville.

Figure 3 Bus journey times Selected Villages and Other Villages and nearby times

LAVENDON

OLNEY

RAVENSTONE

NEWTON BLOSSOMVILLE

27'

WESTON UNDERWOOD

13'

CLIFTON REYNES

14'

22'

STOKE GOLDINGTON

EMBERTON

LONG STREET

ASTWOOD

38'

BEDFORD

23'

SHERINGTON

15'

HANSLOPE

18'

NORTH CRAWLEY

21'

17'

11'

CASTLETHORPE

NEWPORT PAGNELL

27'

21'

18'

HAVERSHAM

13'

WOLVERTON

MILTON KEYNES

38'

WAVENDON

32'

13'

WOBURN SANDS

7'

BOW BRICKHILL

BLETCHLEY

13'

14'

LITTLE BRICKHILL

| Milton Keynes Borough Boundary | Roads | Junction 14 / M1 | Rail | Bus Times In Minutes |

Bus Times to Access Towns

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL

Research and Intelligence - GIS Team

Plan by N Kingsley   Ext. 4813   21/07/2014

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Broadband

37 Access to the internet and broadband is an essential part of everyday living and many would consider it as a utility. Availability of a fast broadband connection can have a positive impact on residents in terms of access to services and learning opportunities, and on businesses in terms of access to new markets, increased business productivity and international competitiveness of locations to attract new investment.

WE'RE BRINGING
SUPERFAST FIBRE BROADBAND
TO MILTON KEYNES

MILTON KEYNES
COUNCIL

38 National government policy is to support superfast infrastructure delivery to 95% of premises and a basic service of 2 Mbps to all, through a mixture of the current Rural Broadband Programme and the soon to be announced Superfast Extension project.

39 In 2013 Milton Keynes Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council signed a contract with BT Openreach in order to improve broadband speeds around the borough. The Central Superfast project is jointly funded by the three local authorities and by The Government's broadband agency, BDUK and BT. The Project aims to bring access to superfast broadband infrastructure to 90% of the homes and businesses in Bedfordshire, and 97% in Milton Keynes, during 2016.

40 Whilst it is the Council's goal is to provide access to fibre broadband infrastructure for everyone, this would depend upon funding and will need to be addressed outside of the current BDUK project.

41 Milton Keynes Council's goal is for 97% of homes and businesses to have access to broadband with a speed of at least 2Mbps by late 2016 as set out in the 'Provision of Physical and Social Infrastructure' Topic Paper.

42 Providing superfast broadband connectivity can be more difficult in the rural area because cabinets that feed local premises are often more remote from the exchange, making it difficult to achieve high speed access using current technology without significant investment.

Question 2

Transport and Accessibility

- How can planning help support the rural public transport network?
- Should development be focused on settlements that have access to public transport to help encourage sustainable travel choices?

17

Services and Facilities

Key Settlements

43 At the heart of self-sufficiency of the rural area is the need to ensure that there is a good level of local services. Each of the Key Settlements has a significant concentration and a range of services and facilities. Newport Pagnell is the largest of these settlements and this is reflected in the number of services and facilities available. Table 2 'Number of services/facilities in each type of 'town centre' use classes (2012)' shows a number of different facilities and services in the Key Settlements that often form the core 'town centre' uses such as shops, hotels, pubs, restaurants or community facilities.

Table 2 Number of services/facilities in each type of 'town centre' use classes (2012)

Use Class	Newport Pagnell	Olney	Woburn Sands	Hanslope	Bow Brickhill	Sherington
A1 Shops	92	82	35	4	0	1
A2 Professional and financial services	19	12	4	0	0	0
A3 and A4 restaurants, cafes and pubs	28	16	7	3	1	1
A5 hot food takeaways	4	5	0	1	0	0
C1 Hotels or B&B	2	3	0	0	0	0
D1 Non-residential institutions and D2 Assembly and leisure	51	34	8 (D1 only)	13	8	5
Total	196	152	54	21	9	7

44 The table shows that Newport Pagnell and Olney have significant numbers of shops (this number includes specialist shops such as antique shops), cafes and other facilities that can significantly influence people's quality of life.

45 Newport Pagnell also has a significant number of health facilities (both public and private) including a large medical centre (over 1,000 sqm) and dental surgeries. The town is the only rural settlement that has a public swimming pool.

46 Olney has also got a significant number of D1 and D2 use class facilities (non-residential institutions and assembly and leisure) including medical facilities, a library, a museum, places of worship and many others. Due to its historic heritage, proximity to tourist attractions (e.g. Emberton Country Park) and its separation to Milton Keynes the town can offer a good choice of visitors' accommodations.

47 Woburn Sands is the smallest of the three rural towns and this is reflected in the number of shops and facilities available there. Woburn Sands has a good variety of non-food shops including a hardware store, gift shop, chemists, jewellers and a store specialising in womenswear. Woburn Sands has a doctors and dental surgery, however it has a significantly smaller provision of other D1 facilities compared to Newport Pagnell and Olney.

48 Both Newport Pagnell and Olney offer secondary education.

49 Table 2 'Number of services/facilities in each type of 'town centre' use classes (2012)' shows that Newport Pagnell and Olney dominate over the remaining settlements in terms of the retail outlets, facilities and services. The table also shows that amongst the selected villages Hanslope has significantly more facilities compared to the remaining two villages.

Villages

50 While the overall level of services in the Key Settlements could be considered as good, there is a significantly different provision of services in the remaining rural settlements. The local picture in several respects is far from ideal. A Rural Services Audit (2013) showed that the smallest villages typically lack basic facilities such as shops, post offices or sometimes even pubs. In the recent years the village of North Crawley has lost its only village shop and Sherington one of the village pubs. The lack of these facilities means that the people who live in these villages must rely on public transport or more likely on a car as the most reliable form of transport in order to access services in higher order settlements.

51 The provision of schools, meeting places, play areas and playing fields in the villages has remained constant over the past years.

52 Health facilities, apart from the health centre in Hanslope, are concentrated in Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands.

19

Question 3

Services and Facilities

- How can Plan:MK support the ongoing viability of its rural towns and villages?
- How can planning help to protect against the loss of essential rural services and facilities?

Employment

53 This section of the paper looks at the issues related to employment in the rural areas. The "State of the Countryside 2008" report[3](Commission for Rural Communities) highlights that whilst the number of jobs in agriculture is on the decline, overall rural areas are supporting more employment and more companies in key knowledge sectors.

54 Between 2001 and 2011 the number of rural residents employed in agriculture nearly halved. Whilst farming and forestry was never a major employer in the Borough (employing 0.8% of the rural population in 2011), due to its inherent impact on land it always had a significant influence on the lives of rural communities. A national trend is towards an increase in the age of farm holders. In 2000, almost a quarter (23 per cent) of holders were under 45 years old and a further quarter were aged 65 or older. By 2010, almost a third of holders were aged 65 and over whilst only 14 per cent were under 45 years old[4].

55 The 2011 Census figures show that the three most common industries employing rural residents are: "Wholesale and Retail Trade" (18%), "Education" (12.3%) and "Human Health and Social Work Activities" (8.9%). Between 2001 and 2011 the employment rates in the last two industries increased by 34% and 21% respectively.

56 In comparison to the urban dwellers, the residents of the rural parts of the Borough are more likely to be in better paid and professional occupations and less likely to have elementary jobs. There is a national trend that rural jobs don't always go to rural people, as the Taylor Review "Living Working Countryside" 2008 stated "many of the people who work in the countryside increasingly cannot afford to live there, while the people who can afford to live there increasingly do not work there."

57 The overall number of jobs in the rural parts of the Borough is 13,400 (ONS, 2011) and is significantly lower than the 20,644 economically active people living in the rural areas. This could be explained by the fact that a significant number of jobs that could be filled by the rural residents are located in larger urban centres. The mismatch between the number of jobs and the workers in the rural areas often results in increased commuting to urban centres. However, it is worth noting that the rural wards have the highest proportion of homeworkers. In 2011, 15.9% of those in employment in Danesborough ward worked from home. This compares to just 6.0% in Eaton Manor ward, in Bletchley, for example.

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3   The "State of the Countryside 2008" report is available at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110215111010/ http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/The%20State%20of%20the%20Countryside2.pdf

4   DEFRA, 2012 available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/ attachment_data/file/208436/auk-2012-25jun13.pdf

Employment

58   Most of the land earmarked for employment use is located in Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands. In 2014 Milton Keynes Council commissioned an Employment Land Study which will review the previous (2007) Borough-wide employment land assessment to look at the ongoing sustainability of existing allocations and predict the future demand for employment land in the Borough. The 2007 Employment Land Study specifically considered Newport Pagnell and Olney alongside other older town centres within the city. The Study considered that it would be reasonable to expect these centres to continue to grow, and points to evidence of some strong growth in Olney particularly. The Study found that continued growth would however be dependent on sufficient capacity on existing or new sites. The 2014 Study will consider these conclusions, and help influence the policies that are prepared for Plan:MK

59   In 2014 the Government introduced new permitted development rights that allow farmers and estate owners to convert existing redundant agricultural buildings under 500m2 to a range of new business uses, to boost the rural economy whilst protecting the open countryside from development (Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2013). One of the popular ways for farmers to supplement their income has been to convert redundant barns or farm buildings into residential properties; however this

historically required planning permission. The amended permitted development rights would assist farmers in conversions of the agricultural buildings into residential properties provided the proposals meet specific conditions.

60   This relaxation of the planning system should allow farm occupiers to respond more freely to changing economic circumstances and to seek to enhance their household income from sources other than conventional farming production through diversifying their business activities.

61   The existing Local Plan Policy E5 encourages the re-use of rural buildings for employment use provided the proposals meet certain criteria. In light of the above changes to the permitted development rights, Policy E5 will not always apply. Also any future policy dealing with this issue should acknowledge the Government's intention of relaxing the planning system.

62   Local examples of farm diversifications may involve providing office and storage space (Lodge Farm in Castlethorpe; Cuckoo's Hill Farm in Hanslope, Wood End Farm in Moulsoe) that, in general, would be supported by the existing Local Plan.

63   However, some farm diversifications may lead to large scale developments (e.g.renewable energy schemes such as solar farms or wind farms) that could have significant effects on the appearance and character of the rural areas. Issues related

to renewable energy schemes are considered in the Climate Change and Sustainability Topic Paper.

Question 4

Employment

- Plan:MK should include policies to support sustainable growth of all type of businesses and enterprise in the rural area (para 28 of the NPPF). How can planning policies ensure that that businesses in the rural area grow in a sustainable manner?
- Should we encourage the conversion of redundant farm buildings for alternative uses?
- What can Plan:MK do to support the rural economy, and the viability of rural businesses?

Housing and Sustainable Communities

Housing

64 Milton Keynes Council draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment (March 2014[5]) shows that the rural area of the Borough has a larger proportion of retirement age residents and as a consequence of that household sizes tend to be smaller (given the proportion of elderly persons that live alone) with an average of 2.24 persons per household in the rural area compared to 2.45 persons per household in the urban area.

65 As previously noted, Milton Keynes Council has produced detailed population and household projections for the 20-year period 2011-31 on the basis of providing 1,750 additional dwellings each year. These projections show an increase of 30,300 households in the urban area and 4,100 households in the rural area, equivalent to 88% and 12% of the total respectively. Based on these projections the Draft SHMA suggests a possible distribution of around 1,540 dwellings on average each year in the urban area and the remaining 210 dwellings in the rural area – approximately 85 dwellings to meet local need and a further 125 dwellings to provide for migration at an equal rate across the rural and urban area.

66 This suggested rural requirement differs from the target in the Core Strategy Policy CS9 of 110 homes per year in the rural area. The draft SHMA acknowledges that future migration patterns will be shaped by planned housing provision. Given this context, it is appropriate for the Council to consider how much of the borough's migration should be accommodated in the rural area.

Question 5

Rural Housing Target

Do you agree that Plan:MK should include a separate housing target for the rural area distinct from that for the urban area? If yes, what do you think this should be? 85 houses per year, or higher to allow for migration?

67 Also, the draft SHMA identifies that in terms of the local housing stock, rural areas of the Borough have notably more detached homes and more bungalows but fewer flats than in the city.

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5   Available at http://www.mkiobservatory.org.uk/document.aspx?id=10414&siteID=1026
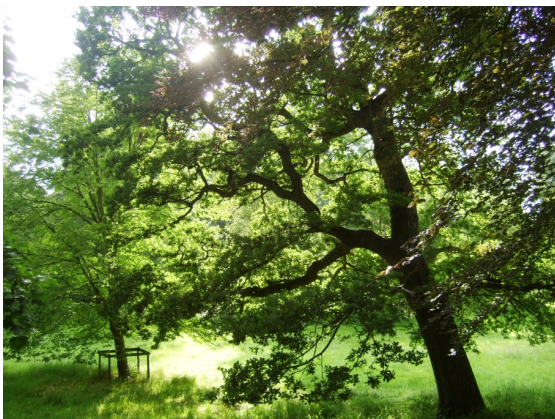
68 When considering the mix of housing in rural areas, the draft SHMA highlights that very few properties sold for less than £150,000 (end of 2012); and it is unlikely that many properties would be affordable to local newly forming households without a substantial deposit. The draft SHMA recommends that given this context, if the Council wants to provide housing in the rural area for local newly forming households then it would be necessary to maximise the amount of affordable housing that can be provided without compromising development viability. It is important to recognise that re-sales of existing stock will also tend to be at prices above £150,000 and therefore new housing provision will be particularly important in providing intermediate affordable housing in the rural area. Homes in the rural areas appear to be more desirable and as a result of that are generally more expensive. Inevitably developers end up setting higher prices for new homes in the rural areas as they know that buyers are prepared to pay a certain premium related to that specific product.

69 Figure 4 'Affordable Housing in Rural Settlements (2012)' shows percentage of affordable dwellings (Social rented, Affordable Rented and Intermediate housing) in the rural settlements (compared with the total housing stock in these settlements). It can be noted that the proportion of affordable dwellings in the rural settlements is significantly below an average borough-wide figure of affordable houses.

70 The rural area of the Borough is traditionally characterised by more development of smaller housing sites, which have different development dynamics compared to larger sites. These smaller sites are generally undertaken by smaller developers or individual housebuilders and overheads and time frames are likely to be different to a site being developed by a major housebuilder. Also, smaller rural sites may come with unforeseen or abnormal costs that are disproportionate to the value of the site and as a consequence negatively impact on housing affordability.
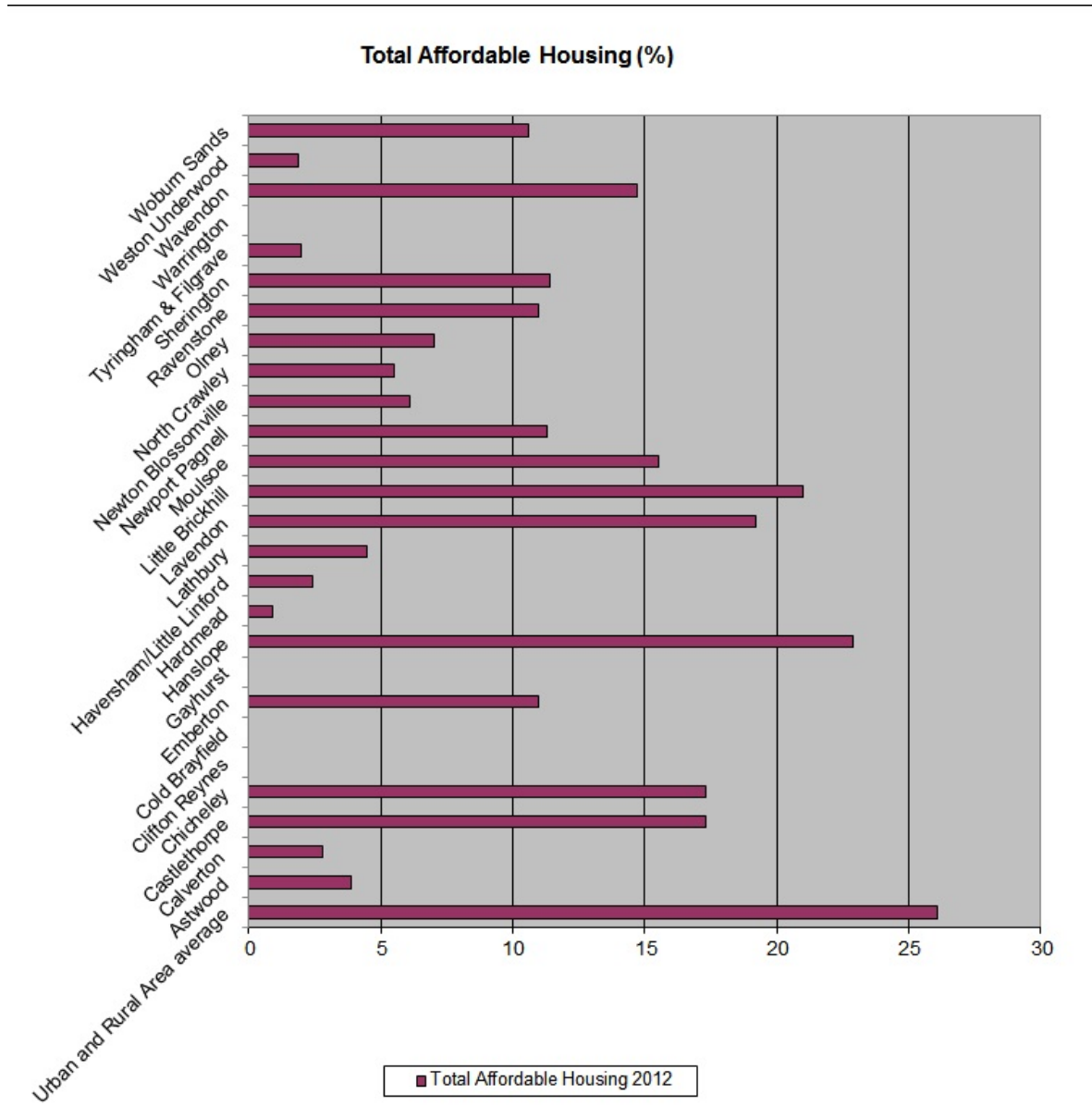
71 In addition, Policy H4 of the Local Plan sets out the proportion of affordable housing that the Council will seek and the site thresholds above which the policy will apply. The policy does not apply to smaller housing developments i.e. fewer than 15 units.

Question 6

Affordable Housing

- Should Plan:MK introduce a new threshold that would trigger the requirement for affordable housing in the rural area. Should this new threshold be smaller than 15 units?
- Should Plan:MK plan for more larger sites in the rural areas that would provide a fair share of affordable dwellings?

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Figure 4 Affordable Housing in Rural Settlements (2012)

Total Affordable Housing (%)

Wobum Sands
Weston Underwood
Wavendon
Warrington
Tyringham & Filgrave
Sherington
Ravenstone
Olney
North Crawley
Newton Blossomville
Newport Pagnell
Moulsoe
Little Brickhill
Lavendon
Lathbury
Haversham/Little Linford
Hardmead
Hanslope
Hanhurst
Gayhurst
Emberton
Cold Brayfield
Clifton Reynes
Chicheley
Castlethorpe
Calverton
Astwood
Urban and Rural Area average

Total Affordable Housing 2012

72 Policy H6 of the Local Plan allows planning permission to be granted for affordable housing to meet local needs on sites in rural settlements that might not normally be granted planning permission. Policy states that such proposals will only be approved where there is a need for affordable housing which cannot be met from the development of planned sites in the locality. There haven't been any examples of housing developments on the "exception sites" since the Local Plan was adopted.

Question 7

Rural Exception Sites

Should small numbers of market homes be allowed on Rural Exception sites, at the local authority's discretion, to enable the delivery of affordable units?

73   Sometimes, individually or cumulatively, extensions to existing dwellings result in developments that are not in keeping with the surrounding environment or the character of the settlements. Planning policies should ensure that the extension is subservient to the main house and that cumulative additions fit in well to the existing area.

Question 8

Design

Should Plan:MK have specific design policies for the rural dwelling extensions?

The limits of development in the rural areas

74   As noted earlier, some land for new development in the Borough will have to be found in the rural area. If there is further development in the rural area it is unlikely that it will be able to be accommodated within the limits of development as defined by the village boundaries in the existing Local Plan. In addition, the Core Strategy Policy CS9 states that an update of all village boundaries will take place through the Site Allocations Plan and Plan:MK.

75   The village envelopes (or town boundaries in the Key Settlements) define the limits of development and generally exclude areas in recreation use on the edge of villages. They include sites which have been committed, or granted planning permission for development or completed since the Local Plan was approved. Some villages and hamlets in the borough are so small, or are so physically disparate that a limit of development is not considered appropriate. In this case the village is shown as being within Open Countryside where development is restricted to only essential agricultural, forestry or recreational uses. Historically the development boundaries have been drawn tightly around villages to reflect a deliberate policy of restraint in the Borough outside the city.

76   The development strategy in the Local Plan and the Core Strategy determined that rural growth should be focused on the Key Settlements of Newport Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands as the most sustainable rural settlements and to a significantly smaller extent on the Selected Villages of Hanslope, Bow Brickhill and Sherington. Should this strategy be carried forward into Plan:MK then this would mean a lesser need to consider allocating new housing sites in the remaining villages, and boundary reviews could focus on those key settlements and selected villages.

77   It is paramount that the review process of the rural settlements' boundaries is done with full involvement from Town and Parish Councils. This may necessitate a separate study that will inform Plan:MK. Towns and Parish Councils could also consider reviewing their boundaries through the preparation of their Neighbourhood Plans.

Question 9

Settlement Boundaries

- What in your opinion should be the main principles that would shape the settlement boundaries review process?
- Do you think that your town/village boundary needs to be reviewed in order to support the delivery of future development?

High quality natural and built environment in the rural area

78   This section of the topic paper very broadly discusses the issues of climate change, natural and built environment that are pertinent to the rural areas of the Borough. Plan:MK will be informed by separate topic papers on Climate Change and Natural Environment which, in more depth, will look at issues related to flooding, natural environment, sustainable construction and renewable energy.

79   The rural area is particularly valued for the quality of its countryside and the attractiveness of its villages and towns, many of which have statutory listed buildings and are covered, in part, by Conservation Areas. Some of these issues are also covered in the Quality of Place Topic Paper.

80   Plan:MK, in line with national planning policies, will continue to protect the Borough's open countryside. In addition to this, there are two areas in the Borough currently designated as Areas of Attractive Landscape; the Ouse Valley, to the north of Newport Pagnell, and the Brickhills to the south of Milton Keynes. These are local landscape designations that benefit from additional policy through Policy S11 of the existing Local Plan.

81   A recently commissioned piece of work will seek to finalise the Council's Draft Landscape Character Assessment and, in addition, include a landscape capacity study. This refreshed Assessment will assist Milton Keynes Council in developing the landscape and visual impact elements of its policy approach towards a broad range of developments. In particular, the landscape capacity study will assist us in appraising wind turbines and solar photovoltaic developments. It is anticipated that the Council will run a separate consultation on this document in the autumn of 2014.

82 With the effects of global warming and climate change becoming more apparent there is a growing recognition of the wider benefits of ecosystem services[6]. Well-functioning and protected natural environment will help us both mitigate and adapt to climate change by, for example, storing carbon so it is not released into the atmosphere or improving the security of water supplies. Some farmers may decide to capitalise on this opportunity by investing in farm diversification schemes that may include opportunities such as growing alternative fuel sources (bio fuels or tree coppicing) or accepting investment related to renewable energy deployment. The latter is growing in popularity amongst some farmers and landowners but also remains highly contested by wide sections of the rural community.

Question 10

Natural Environment

What in your opinion would be an acceptable method of both improving and benefiting from the ecosystem services?

83 The Core Strategy recognises that the historic environment of the Borough makes a fundamental contribution to the distinctiveness of the area, influencing the character of the built form and natural environment and shaping its sense of place and identity. The retention, preservation and re-use of heritage assets is sustainable and can contribute to the carbon reduction since a building that achieves a long life amortises the embodied energy and use of resources over the maximum time possible (see Embodied Energy Considerations for Existing Buildings[7]).

84 As noted earlier in this paper, a phenomenon of the aging population is more prominent in the rural than urban areas. It is fair to assume that, compared to the urban area, the rural areas of the Borough have higher proportion of older people who live in older and generally

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6   Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as flood and disease control; cultural services such as spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; and supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, that maintain the conditions for life on Earth.

7   Full report is available at: http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/technicalpaper13.pdf

larger houses. A report on fuel, energy and fuel poverty in rural areas[8] highlights that in 2010

- The proportion of people with income below the poverty threshold is lower in rural areas than in urban areas, but the proportion of people in rural areas in fuel poverty is higher than in urban areas.
- Households in rural areas are more likely to be off the gas grid (i.e. not connected to mains gas), and hence reliant on potentially more expensive fuels (such as heating oils and solid fuels), than those in urban areas (36% compared with 8% of urban households).
- There was proportionally more fuel poverty in Sparse Villages and Hamlets

than in Rural Towns and Urban areas, where rates of fuel poverty are very similar (34.1% compared with 15.7% for urban towns and 15.9% of urban households)

Question 11

Sustainability

- How could Plan:MK help to improve energy efficiency of the existing rural housing.
- Could Plan:MK include policies that would support community-run renewable energy developments?

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8   Full report is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136555/Fuel_and_Energy_Jan_2013.pdf

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